




Chen Yuan and Ying Lianzhi: A Chronicle of Their Association

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Abstract: Chen Yuan, the president of Fu Jen Catholic University, was a famous scholar in the field of religion studies. Ying Lianzhi, a distinguished educator and philanthropist, founded *Ta Kung Pao* and Fu Jen Catholic University. They had been acquainted with each other for nearly ten years until Ying Lianzhi died in 1926. They collected, collated and published the Catholic works written in late Ming and early Qing periods. Chen Yuan, together with Ying Lianzhi not only promoted the academic research of Chinese Catholic history, but also participated in the localization of Chinese Catholicism actively.

Keywords: Catholic, "Yuan Yeli Kewen Kao", Fu Jen Catholic University

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Introduction

Chen Yuan (1880-1971), a prominent historian and educator, was a trailblazer in the study of religious history in modern China. His scholarly contributions include seminal works such as *Yuan Yeli Kewen Kao* (*An Inquiry into the Yuan-era Yeli Kewen*), *Kaifeng Yicileye Jiao Kao* (*A Study on the Kaifeng Jews*), *Huihui Jiao Ru Zhongguo Shiliue* (*A Brief History of Islam in China*) and so on. Alongside his academic pursuits, Chen Yuan served as president of both Fu Jen Catholic University and Beijing Normal University, leaving a lasting impact on Chinese education. Ying Lianzhi (1867-1926), a distinguished educator, philanthropist, and founder of *Ta Kung Pao* and Fu Jen Catholic University, was equally influential. His notable writings, such as *Yeshe Ji* (*Is Too Collection*) and *Wansong Yeren Yanshanlu* (*Worthy Words by Wansong Yeren*), reflect his intellectual vigor and dedication to cultural preservation.

The two scholars first met in 1917 and maintained a close association until Ying Lianzhi's death in 1926. During this period, they collaborated in collecting, collating, and publishing Catholic works from the late Ming and early Qing dynasties. Their partnership not only advanced the academic study of Chinese Catholic history but also played a significant role in the localization of Catholicism in China. This article explores their intellectual and personal interactions, shedding light on their shared contributions to scholarship and cultural exchange in early 20th-century China.

Part I

In 1913, at the age of 33, Chen Yuan left Guangzhou for Beijing to attend the First National Assembly. From then on he settled in the capital. Chen Yuan maintained a deep interest in historical texts. During his time in Beijing, he attempted to employ the textual criticism methods of the Qian-Jia School (a Qing Dynasty philological tradition) in his biblical studies. He wrote, "Whenever I made a discovery, I would jot it down immediately. Over the past eight years, these notes have accumulated into a substantial volume."¹

Chen's strong interest in Christianity can be traced back to his childhood, when reading *Siku Quanshu Zongmu Tiyao* (*The Annotated Catalogue of the Complete Library of the Four Treasuries*), he learned that Jesuit missionaries in China during the late Ming and early Qing dynasties had authored numerous books. "As a child, reading *Siku Quanshu Zongmu Tiyao*, I came across mentions of such works," he recalled, "The editors of *Siku Quanshu* had categorically

¹ Chen Yuan, "A Textual Study of Variants in the Three Histories of the Old Testament," *Truth Weekly*, No. 2, April 8, 1923.

excluded them, retaining only their titles and harshly denouncing them.”² Ironically, it was precisely this exclusion that aroused his curiosity.

There are evaluations of 37 works related to missionaries who came to China in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties in *Siku Quanshu Zongmu Tiyaoyao*. Some of these works were included in the *Siku Quanshu*, while others were only listed by title. For example, *Tianxue Chuhan* (*First Collection of Studies on Heavenly Learning*), compiled by Li Zhizao, one of the famous Catholics in the late Ming, consists of 19 volumes, divided into two categories which were nine under “Li” (*Principles*) and ten under “Qi” (*Instruments*). The volumes categorized under *Qi*, which introduced western science and technology, were accepted into the collection. The *Li* volumes, which expounded Catholic doctrine, were for the most part excluded, leaving only their titles. The *Siku Quanshu Zongmu Tiyaoyao* explicitly explains the rationale for this selective inclusion, “We have chosen the ten volumes under *Qi* useful for mathematical and scientific reference and recorded them separately. As for the *Li* volumes, only *Zhifang Waiji* has been listed to broaden knowledge of the world. The rest have been categorically excluded as a sign of total rejection. The list of the entire compilation by Li Zhizao is preserved solely to highlight his guilt in promoting heterodoxy.”³ Following this rejection, the *Li* volumes were neglected by publishers and eventually scattered. Although Chen Yuan took note of these titles, he lamented that “not a single original copy could be found in Guangdong.”⁴

After relocating to Beijing, Chen Yuan began to systematically collect Christian texts from the late Ming onward. In early 1917, he resolved to write *A History of Christianity in China*, and also planned to compile *A Record of Christianity in the Qianlong Era*, aiming to systematically catalog Catholic literature in China and fill in the gaps left by the *Siku Quanshu Zongmu*. However, at that time, northern Catholic dioceses were under the control of Lazarists (Congregation of Priests of the Mission). They neglected academic pursuits and kept many valuable historical documents in the Beitang (North Church) Library⁵, hidden from Chinese scholars. Notably, Ma Xiangbo and Ying Lianzhi, two prominent Chinese Catholics, were aware of these issues but were still unable to access the Beitang collection. Fang Hao, a famous historian,

² Chen Yuan, “Postscript to *Wansong Yeren Yanshanlu*,” in *Wansong Yeren Yanshanlu*, Tianjin: Ta Kung Pao Press, reprint (1919).

³ *Siku Quanshu Zongmu Tiyaoyao*, vol. 134, Subsection: Philosophy, Miscellaneous Writers, No. 11.

⁴ Chen Yuan, “Postscript to *Wansong Yeren Yanshanlu*,” in *Wansong Yeren Yanshanlu*, Tianjin: Ta Kung Pao Press, reprint (1919).

⁵ Beitang, originally built by French Jesuit missionaries in 1693 near Canchikou inside Xi’anmen, was completed in 1703. It housed the largest collection among Beijing’s four major Catholic churches, with holdings on religion, science and culture.

commented, “In the early Republic, senior Catholic scholars Ma Xiangbo and Ying Lianzhi were the first to pay attention to the Chinese books in Beitang, but even gaining access proved extremely difficult. Later, Mr. Chen Yuan learned about them, but never got a glimpse of the hidden collection. He heard that a Chinese translation of *Misa Jingdian* (the *Roman Missal*) from the late Ming was housed there and tried several times to obtain a copy through intermediaries—but to no avail.”⁶

Ma Xiangbo and Ying Lianzhi, both prominent Catholic intellectuals, opposed the prevailing disdain among Western missionaries for Chinese language and culture. They advocated for Catholic higher education and academic evangelization, which made them unpopular with foreign missionaries. They hoped to organize and publish Jesuit writings from the Ming-Qing era but could not access the conveniently located Beitang collection. Instead, Ma Xiangbo had to borrow manuscripts from the Xujiahui Library in Shanghai and entrusted Ying Lianzhi with proofreading them. Ying, deeply engaged in Catholic studies, published *Wansong Yeren Yanshanlu* in 1916, quoting not only from Chinese traditional philosophers such as Confucius, Mencius, but also from western missionaries such as Matteo Ricci, Adam Schall von Bell, Diego de Pantoja and so on, to promote moral self-cultivation.

In April 1917, after much effort collecting Christian texts, Chen Yuan read *Wansong Yeren Yanshanlu* and was overjoyed to discover that many of the sources it cited were precisely those he had long sought in vain. He immediately wrote to Ying Lianzhi requesting to borrow these books. Ying promptly replied, “I am honored to read your letter. Your humility and earnestness are truly admirable. I shall soon return to the city and hope for the chance to receive your instruction. Please let me know by phone when it would be convenient for you. If you are able to come to the Peigen Library, that would be even more convenient. I await your decision respectfully.”⁷ Ying promptly replied, expressing admiration for Chen’s scholarly humility. Although Ying was in poor health and living at Xiangshan, the countryside of Beijing, he was eager to meet Chen and discuss their shared interests—or even more, to welcome Chen for a visit. At the end of the letter, Ying included his phone number.

As a younger scholar eager to access the materials, Chen gladly visited Ying at Xiangshan. Their conversation on the history of Christianity in China

⁶ Fang Hao, “Catalogue of the North Church Library,” in *Fang Hao’s Self-Compiled Works at Sixty* (Vol 2), Taipei: Taiwan Student Book Company (1969):1840.

⁷ Chen Zhichao, ed., *Collection of Chen Yuan’s Correspondence*, Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Publishing House (1990):2.

was so congenial that they quickly became kindred spirits. Ying was deeply impressed by Chen's talent, while Chen was moved by Ying's sincerity. Both of them felt they had met too late in life. Chen Yuan recalled, "I was deeply touched by Ying Lianzhi, and he in turn was pleased to find someone who could understand his collection. He hoped that I would one day take charge of compiling and collating these works. That was the beginning of our friendship."⁸ Ying hoped Chen would assist in the collection and editing of Jesuit writings and showed him the curriculum and research topics at Furen Society.

Part II

Furen Society was a small educational institution founded by Ying Lianzhi at Xiangshan in 1913 after his retirement from *Ta Kung Pao*. It aimed to train young Catholics to serve the church in China. The name "Fu Ren" which meant "making friends through literature and assisting virtue through friendship" was derived from the *Analects*. It reflected Ying's commitment to reviving Chinese traditional culture. He prepared a large collection of classical and modern books, along with famous calligraphy rubbings, and regularly engaged in discussions with his students, assigning them to write essays and give speeches in stages, in order to instill socially relevant knowledge that could serve the world in the future⁹. Students at Furen Society were required to regularly submit written assignments, known as *sheke* (papers).

It was somewhat unfortunate that although some young men were sent from parishes across China, their numbers were small and their foundation in classical studies was weak. As a result, there were no particularly outstanding individuals. It was Chen Yuan, with his ambition to write *A History of Christianity in China*, who became deeply interested when he saw topics such as "A Study of the Tang Nestorian Stele," "Yuan Yeli Kewen Kao," and "An Analysis of the *Siku Quanshu Zongmu's* Critiques of Early Catholic Writings." Inspired by the topics and student essays, Chen quickly completed *Yuan Yeli Kewen Kao* within about ten days. Encouraged by Ying and polished under Ma Xiangbo's guidance, Chen published the paper. The work was an immediate success and established his academic reputation. It also marked the decisive turning point in Chen's life from politics to historical scholarship.

Chen Yuan had not initially planned to publish *Yuan Yeli Kewen Kao*. Besides his personal interest, he also saw it as a way to repay Ying Lianzhi's

⁸ Chen Yuan, "Postscript to *Wansong Yeren Yanshanlu*," in *Wansong Yeren Yanshanlu*, Tianjin: Ta Kung Pao Press, reprint (1919).

⁹ Ying Lianzhi, "Charter of the Furen Society Affiliated with Beijing Catholic University," *Furen Life*, Issue 5, March 25, 1940.

trust and support. As he wrote in the preface, "I touched upon the thread of inquiry, was occasionally inspired, returned to open my book chest, and after ten days of cross-checking, gathered over a hundred supporting evidences. Supplemented by materials from the students of Furen Society, I arranged the topics and composed a single volume to repay the gentleman."¹⁰ Since Chen was newly settled in Beijing with limited access to books, his research was inevitably imperfect. Some sections, such as the discussion of the Beitang stele, relied on Ying's firsthand observations rather than Chen's own inspection.

Nevertheless, Ying highly appreciated Chen's work and encouraged him, "You may make additions and corrections at a later date."¹¹ He even agreed to fund the publication through Furen Society. Ying Lianzhi encouraged Chen Yuan to publish the paper as soon as possible, because the list of society paper topics showed that Ying had already begun to form a general framework for the development of Christianity in China. He had long been puzzled by the term *Yeli Kewen* and initially hoped his students might resolve it. However, the students' work fell short. Thus, when Chen Yuan was able to "draw upon various sources and trace the origins clearly, making a term that had remained obscure for centuries suddenly transparent," Ying was overjoyed¹². Despite the initial edition's limitations, Ying praised Chen's research as clear and accurate and personally funded its publication through Furen Society. He wrote, "Mr. Chen first gathered evidence related to *Yeli Kewen*, arranging it into twelve categories. The structure is clear, and the conclusions are sound. I was completely convinced upon reading it and thus promptly arranged for its publication."¹³ Just over three months after the first edition, Chen Yuan had already gathered several times more material which included several strong pieces of evidence.¹⁴ Upon reissuing the expanded version of *Yuan Yeli Kewen Kao*, Ying enthusiastically arranged for a second printing.

Chen's *Yuan Yeli Kewen Kao* was his first academic paper in historiography. By applying Chinese historical methodology to the study of Christianity during

¹⁰ Chen Yuan, "Preface to *Yuan Yeli kewen Kao*" (May 10, 1917), *Jianzhai Shengmo*, mimeographed edition (1926):20.

¹¹ Chen Yuan, "Preface," *Jianzhai Shengmo*, mimeographed edition (1926):20.

¹² Ying Lianzhi, "Postscript to *Yuan Yeli Kewen Kao*," *Jianzhai Shengmo*, mimeographed edition (1926):20. Fang Hao believed this postscript was written in the third lunar month of the year Dingsi (1917), two months before the book's first publication. However, I believe that the third lunar month refers to the lunar calendar and corresponds to May 1917 in the solar calendar, since Ying's first letter to Chen Yuan inviting him to Xiangshan was dated April 20, 1917. Thus, it is unlikely Ying wrote the postscript before that time.

¹³ Ying Lianzhi, "Editorial Note to *Yuan Yeli Kewen Kao*," *Jianzhai Shengmo*, mimeographed edition (1926):20.

¹⁴ Chen Yuan, "Preface of *Yuan Yeli Kewen Kao*" (August 28, 1917), 1917, held by the National Library of China.

the Yuan dynasty, he drew considerable attention in both China and Japan. In a letter dated December 8, 1917, during a visit to Japan, Chen wrote to his friend Mu Yuanfu, noting that his work was well-received by Japanese scholars and that further achievements could be expected, "My humble work, *Yeli Kewen Kao*, has been quite well received by scholars here. It is likely to draw the attention of academics in this country. What I may gain in the future will likely be more than this."¹⁵

As anticipated, Chen went on to publish other major works, such as *A Study on the Kaifeng Jews*, *A Study on the Introduction of Zoroastrianism into China*, and *A Study on the Introduction of Manichaeism into China*, thus pioneering the field of religious history in China and filling significant gaps in official historical records. The renowned historian Chen Yinke once pointed out, "During the Yuan, Ming, and Qing dynasties, historians' knowledge was inferior to that of the Song period. Therefore, strictly speaking, in the B-category of Chinese historiography, there are hardly any comprehensive works on religious history. However, the emergence of such works truly began with the writings of Mr. Chen Yuan in recent years."¹⁶

Part III

The book *Wansong Yeren Yanshanlu* led to the acquaintance between Chen Yuan and Ying Lianzhi. Chen Yuan later recalled, "I came to know Wansong Yeren [Ying Lianzhi's pen name] because of the *Wansong Yeren Yanshanlu*."¹⁷ Thus began a celebrated friendship between the two. Although Chen Yuan initially sought out Ying Lianzhi with the intention of compiling the *Qianlong Jidujiao Lu* (*Record of Christianity during the Qianlong Era*), he ultimately noted that "due to the scarcity of materials, it remained unfinished for a long time."¹⁸ Nevertheless, they embarked on the work of proofreading and publishing Catholic writings from the Ming and Qing periods. It can be said that thanks to their joint efforts, the early Republic of China saw significant achievements in the collection, collation, and publication of these Catholic texts from the Ming and Qing dynasties.

On May 8, 1917, Chen Yuan wrote to Ying Lianzhi specifically about the plan to reprint *Tianxue Chuhan*. Ying had spent over a decade collecting the

¹⁵ Chen Zhichao, ed., *Collection of Chen Yuan's Correspondence*, Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Publishing House (1990): 3.

¹⁶ Chen Yinke, "Preface to Chen Yuan's Study of Buddhism in Yunnan and Guizhou during the Late Ming," in *Collected Essays from the Jinming Studio, Second Series*, Beijing: Sanlian Bookstore (2009): 272.

¹⁷ Chen Yuan, "Postscript to *Wansong Yeren Yanshanlu*," in *Wansong Yeren Yanshanlu*, Tianjin: Ta Kung Pao Press, reprint (1919).

¹⁸ Chen Yuan, "A New Field for National Clergy," in *The Complete Works of Chen Yuan* (Vol. 2), Hefei: Anhui University Press (2009): 633.

complete set of this work and wished to reissue it to "broaden its dissemination and allow people to know the truth."¹⁹ In his letter, Chen Yuan suggested that instead of transcribing the texts by hand, it would be better to borrow the originals for direct photographic reproduction, since "upon careful consideration, this is preferable to manual copying. Copying requires proofreading, then typesetting, and another round of proofreading – altogether too labor-intensive." He proposed following the format of the recently published *Sibu Congkan* from Hanfenlou: to first reproduce *Chaoxing Xueyao* (*The Essentials of Supernatural Theology*) (21 volumes) translated by the missionary Louis Buglio, under the title *Tianxue Erhan* (*Second Collection of Studies on Heavenly Learning*), and to select other important works for a third volume. If resources permitted, *Tianxue Chuhan* could then also be reproduced. "This approach would not be too costly, would be relatively easy to accomplish, would avoid the labor of copying and proofreading, and would achieve effective circulation—thus, it seems feasible."²⁰ Chen hoped Ying Lianzhi would consult with Ma Xiangbo and agree to his proposal, observing that had they adopted photographic reproduction earlier, the publication project would already have been a great success.

In October 1917, Chen Yuan traveled to Japan with Liang Shiyi²¹. While stopping in Shanghai, he visited Ma Xiangbo and consulted rare books at the Xujiahui Library. In a letter to Ying Lianzhi dated November 8, 1917, Chen wrote, "I spent four days reading at the Xujiahui Library and gained quite a lot. Many notable works from the late Ming and early Qing survive there, but alas, I lacked time to read them all."²²

On December 8, in a letter to his friend Mu Yuanfu, Chen mentioned that while in Kyoto, he had found the *Zhenyuan Shijiao Mulu* (*Zhenyuan Catalog of Buddhist Teachings*), a text confirming the historical connections between Nestorianism and Buddhism, lamenting that "no copies are extant in China; only Japan and Korea have preserved it."²³ In Osaka, he unexpectedly discovered *Poxie Ji* (*Collection on the Refutation of Heresy*), a Ming-era anthology of anti-Christian writings compiled by monks and laymen alike. This text was

¹⁹ Ying Lianzhi, "In Response to Mr. Zhang Jizhi of Tongzhou," in *Anjianzhai Cong Cangao: Selected Poems*, lead-printed edition (1917): 5.

²⁰ Chen Zhichao, ed., *Collection of Chen Yuan's Correspondence*, Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Publishing House (1990): 2–3.

²¹ Liang Shiyi (1869–1933), also known as Yifu and Yansun, was born in Sanshui County, Guangdong Province. He was a politician, renowned economist, and banker during the late Qing Dynasty and early Republic of China.

²² Chen Zhichao, ed., *Collection of Chen Yuan's Correspondence*, Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Publishing House (1990): 3.

²³ Chen Zhichao, ed., *Collection of Chen Yuan's Correspondence*, Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Publishing House (1990): 3.

critical for studying the interactions between Christianity and Buddhism. Chen had searched for it without success in China, Tokyo, and Kyoto, so finding it in Osaka was a major and happy surprise.

Starting in 1919, with financial support from Ying Lianzhi and Ma Xiangbo and Chen Yuan's editorial leadership, a number of Jesuit works were successively published. In May, they completed the proofreading and publication of François Sambiassi's *Lingyan Lishao* (*A Scoopful of Divine Words*). Chen Yuan composed a preface, describing the work's significance and the process of its republication. He wrote, "Among the many works, *Lingyan Lishao*, *Xixue Fan* (*Western Studies Essentials*), *Lun Youyi* (*On Friendship*), and *Ershiwu Yan* (*Twenty-Five Sayings*) had long been out of print. Of these, *Lingyan Lishao* is the most eloquent in reasoning. I borrowed a manuscript copy from Wansong Yeren, loved it dearly, and wished to republish it. Recently, I found a copy from the Chongzhen-era Shenxiu Hall reprint of *Tianxue Chuhan* and had Mr. Fan Shouzhi meticulously collate it for movable-type printing."²⁴

In August, they proofread Matteo Ricci's *Bianxue Yidu* (*Debates on Learning*) and Giulio Aleni's *Daxi Li Xiansheng Xingji* (*The Life of Fr. Matteo Ricci*). Chen Yuan wrote introductions for both books. In the preface to *Bianxue Yidu*, he supplemented it with an epilogue by Yang Tingyun, another famous Catholic in late Ming China. He explained, "At that time, Catholic talent flourished. Many Westerners and Chinese scholars were capable of writing such works... When Wansong Yeren ran the Tianjin *Ta Kung Pao*, he published this volume in the newspaper. Now, wishing to reprint it, he asked me to revise it. I retained the original title and added the missing epilogue by Yang Tingyun, which was found in a Fujian print from the Chongzhen era but absent from the *Tianxue Chuhan* version."²⁵

In October, Chen Yuan wrote a postscript for the third edition of *Zhu Zhiqunzheng* (*Mastering the Testimonies of the Faith*), edited by Ying Lianzhi, stating, "Wansong Yeren greatly admired this work and reprinted it in Tianjin in 1915. He has recently planned another reprint, appending a collection of congratulatory writings from early Qing literati to Fr. Schall von Bell, whose poems had not appeared in earlier editions but were newly transcribed from the Xujiahui Library. This reflects the flourishing culture of that era."²⁶ *Zhu Zhiqunzheng*, authored by Schall von Bell, was highly praised by Ying Lianzhi,

²⁴ Chen Yuan, "Preface to the Republication of *Lingyan Lishao*," in *The Complete Works of Chen Yuan* (Vol. 2), Hefei: Anhui University Press (2009): 409.

²⁵ Chen Yuan, "Preface to the Republication of *Bianxue Yidu*," in *The Complete Works of Chen Yuan* (Vol. 2), Hefei: Anhui University Press (2009): 410–411.

²⁶ Chen Yuan, "Postscript to the Third Edition of *Zhu Zhiqunzheng*," in *The Complete Works of Chen Yuan* (Vol. 2), Hefei: Anhui University Press (2009): 423.

who called it "a profound and unparalleled work in China's history."²⁷ Even early in his Christian life, Ying had expressed admiration for Schall von Bell. He wrote in his poem, "I often loved reading the sayings of Fr. Schall von Bell. Today, as I open this book, it feels like meeting him again. My friend is deeply moved, urging me many times to visit and weep at his tomb."²⁸

In addition to the aforementioned works, they also transcribed and collated numerous other Catholic historical texts, such as *Mingli Tan*, *Shengjing Zhijie* (*Direct Explanation of the Bible*), *Tianxue Juyao* (*Essentials of Heavenly Learning*), *Zhenzhu Lingxing Juyao* (*Proofs of God's Spirit and Nature*), *Linghun Daoti Shuo* (*On the Soul and the Tao*), *Duo Shu*, *Tianjiao Mingbian* (*Clear Defense of the True Faith*), *Zhengjiao Fengbao* (*Commemorations of Right Doctrine*), *Shengjiao Shilüe* (*Brief History of the Holy Religion*), *Huanyu Lun* (*Universal Commentary*), *Shengmeng Ge* (*Holy Dream Song*), *Tongyou Jiaoyu* (*Education for Children*), *Chaoxing Xueyao* (*Essentials of Supernatural Theology*), *Wang Juesi's Poems for Schall von Bell*, *Jiaoyao Xulun* (*Introduction to Christian Essentials*), *Daiyi Lun* (*Discussion on Addressing Doubts*), *Tianshi Mingbian* (*Clear Defense of Catholicism against Buddhism*), *Huoyi Lun* (*Refuting Misconceptions*), *Pi Wang* (*Collected Responses to Doubts*), *Daiyi Bian* (*Supplement to Responses to Doubts*), *Da Kewen* (*Questions and Answers with Guests*), *Tianjiao Mengyin* (*Primer for Christian Instruction*), *Zhengshi Lueshuo* (*Outline for Saving the World*), *Zhuanshi Jinshu Zhijie* (*Direct Explanation of the Book of Rebirth*), *Guxin Jing* (*Ancient and New Scriptures*), *Sanshan Lunshuo* (*Three Mountains Discourse*), *Zunzhu Shengfan* (*Following the Holy Examples of the Lord*) and so on²⁹.

The collection and collation of these materials greatly assisted Chen Yuan's scholarly research. In 1918, he began compiling a *Bibliography of Chinese Christian History*, although he never fulfilled his original plan of completing the *Record of Christianity in the Qianlong Era*. Nevertheless, in 1927, in the transcript of his lecture *History of Christianity's Introduction into China*, he appended a "Current Bibliography of Missionary Translations during Ming and Qing dynasties," listing over 150 works.

Part IV

According to the statistics, Chen Yuan authored over thirty articles and books on Christianity. "Among them, one was published in 1917, two in 1918, and as many as nine appeared in 1919 alone"³⁰. These academic

²⁷ Ying Lianzhi, "In Response to Mr. Zhang Jizhi of Tongzhou," in *Anjianzhai Cong Cangao: Selected Poems*, lead-printed edition (1917): 5.

²⁸ Ying Lianzhi, "In Praise of Master Daowei's Collection," *Yiwenlu*, January 28, 1891.

²⁹ Zhang Xiping, "A Hundred Years of Ricci Studies," *World Religious Studies* (2010), No.3.

³⁰ Liu Xian, *Scholarship and Faith: A Study of the Religious Historian Chen Yuan*, Beijing: China Social Sciences

accomplishments indirectly fulfilled the Fu Jen Society's research project on "An Analysis of the *Siku Quanshu Zongmu's* Critiques of Early Catholic Writings." For this, Ying Lianzhi praised him, stating, "Compared to the judgments made by the compilers of the *Siku Quanshu*, theirs are hardly worth a laugh"³¹.

So impressed by Chen Yuan's historical expertise that Ying greatly valued his scholarship. For instance, Xu Gandida, the granddaughter of the famous late-Ming Catholic Xu Guangqi, was a devout believer and her son Xu Zanzeng was described in church history as a zealous Catholic. Chen Yuan, after detailed research, concluded that Xu Zanzeng had no connection to Catholicism. When Chen presented this conclusion to Ying, the latter was "initially delighted, but ultimately stunned"³². Obviously, Ying Lianzhi was delighted by Chen Yuan's precise research, though he also regretted that Xu Zanzeng was not a Catholic. Ying thus placed high hopes on Chen and enthusiastically supported his research in every possible way.

Chen Yuan had once planned to study Catholicism through non-Christian sources, because "the learning and character of believers are rarely recorded in church history"; "Catholics should engage with the world outside the church. And to do so, they must have writings beyond purely religious content"³³. With this in mind, Ying Lianzhi introduced Chen to Fr. Franz Xaver Biallas. Chen later recalled, "Around 1922 or 1923, Mr. Ying Lianzhi introduced me to Fr. Biallas, saying he was translating the book *Chu Ci*"³⁴. Fr. Biallas, a German Divine Word missionary and expert in Qu Yuan's literature, got his PhD from the University of Leipzig and lived in Qingdao after arriving in China. Chen was surprised to learn from Ying that a Catholic priest excelled in *Chu Ci* studies, initially assuming Catholicism had little connection to such texts. However, he later discovered that "in the late Ming, Jesuit Emmanuel Diaz wrote *Tianwen Lüe* (*An Abridged Inquiry into Heaven*), which was later included in *Yihai Zhuchen* (*Jewels from the Sea of Learning*). The term *Tianwen* itself originates from the book *Chu Ci*. In the Yongzheng era, *Shandaige Zhu Cuci* (*Commentaries from the Shandaige Studio on the Chu Ci*), Yuan You and *Tianwen* cited the views of Matteo Ricci, Emmanuel Diaz, Francisco Furtado, and Schall von Bell, marking the beginning of Catholic engagement with the *Chu Ci*. That

Press (2013): 61.

³¹ Ying Lianzhi, "Annotation to *Yuan Yeli Kewen Kao*," in *Jianzhai Shengmo*, mimeograph(1926): 21.

³² Chen Yuan, "Observations on Ming-Qing Catholicism Based on Non-Christian Sources," in *Collected Academic Essays of Chen Yuan* (Vol. I), Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company (1982): 199.

³³ Chen Yuan, "On the Secular Writings of Believers," in *Collected Works of Chen Yuan* (Vol. II), Hefei: Anhui University Press (2009): 602–603.

³⁴ Chen Yuan, "On the Secular Writings of Believers," in *Collected Works of Chen Yuan* (Vol. II), Hefei: Anhui University Press (2009): 603.

was over 200 years ago”³⁵. Thanks to Ying’s introduction, Chen befriended Biallas and composed two poems in his honor. In 1933, after the Society of the Divine Word took over the administration of Fu Jen Catholic University, Chen appointed Fr. Biallas as director of academic affairs and professor of sociology. In 1934, Fr. Biallas founded the prestigious journal *Monumenta Serica* and served as its first editor-in-chief.

In November 1924, when the last Qing emperor Puyi was expelled from Beijing, Chen Yuan—then a member of the “Qing Court Aftercare Committee”—sought to organize archival materials related to Catholicism within the former imperial palace. In July 1925, he discovered two documents originally stored in the Maoqin Hall of the Forbidden City, both closely linked to the Rites Controversy during the Kangxi reign. He immediately informed Ying Lianzhi, who replied with a letter suggesting, “Please write annotations for the two memorials and send them quickly. Adding them as printed appendices would be ideal”³⁶. The facsimile of the documents was preceded by Ying’s note: “One papal decree and one Kangxi edict were retrieved by the Qing Court Aftercare Committee from imperial archives in the Three Southern Courtyards (historically housing imperial princes). Now reproduced in facsimile for public viewing”³⁷. In 1932, these two texts and several related documents were collectively published under the title *Documents on Kangxi’s Relations with the Roman Embassy*.

In early 1926, due to the strain of establishing Fu Jen Catholic University, Ying Lianzhi fell gravely ill and passed away. Shortly before his death, he entrusted Chen Yuan with the university’s future. Although Chen was not a Catholic³⁸, Ying had full confidence in him and entrusted him with the Catholic institution he had founded through immense personal sacrifice. This selfless decision stemmed from Ying’s clear understanding of Chen’s integrity and capabilities. Their long acquaintance had shown him that Chen not only possessed profound mastery of Chinese classical learning but also had a humanistic vision capable of synthesizing Chinese and Western traditions. This very quality aligned with Ying’s original vision of founding Fu Jen University

³⁵ Chen Yuan, “On the Secular Writings of Believers,” in *Collected Works of Chen Yuan* (Vol. II), Hefei: Anhui University Press (2009): 603–604.

³⁶ Chen Zhichao (ed.), *Collection of Chen Yuan’s Correspondence*, Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Publishing House (1990): 3.

³⁷ Chen Zhichao (ed.), *Collection of Chen Yuan’s Correspondence*, Shanghai: Shanghai Classics Publishing House (1990): 3, footnote.

³⁸ On whether Chen Yuan was a Christian, see Liu Xian, *Scholarship and Faith: A Study of the Religious Historian Chen Yuan*, Beijing: China Social Sciences Press (2013), Chapter 1, “On Chen Yuan’s Christian Beliefs,” where the author concludes based on historical records that Chen was baptized in the winter of 1919.

based on the ideals of “making friends through literature and assisting virtue through friendship,” promoting evangelism through scholarship.

Chen later reflected on the university's founding and his own role in its development in an article titled *Three Points for Fu Jen University to Strive Toward*, where he wrote, “Mr. Ying Lianzhi, grieved by the estrangement between China and the West and the difficulties facing the true faith, looked back fondly on the achievements of Matteo Ricci and Adam Schall von Bell, as well as those of Xu Guangqi and Li Zhizao. He wrote *Quanxue Zuiyan* (*Encouragement to Study in the Face of Persecution*) to express his convictions. By the grace of the Holy See, Fu Jen University was established in Beijing. As I succeeded him in academic affairs, I sought to carry forward the aspirations of our forebears and proposed three goals for our university. First, to adopt new Western academic methods to reorganize Chinese historical studies. Second, to compile and translate various reference works for the benefit of scholars at home and abroad. Third, to disseminate new Sinological research in the service of international academic cooperation. These three aims should be pursued equally and in tandem. They will not only bridge the divide between East and West but also advance the mission of the true faith, possibly even surpassing the accomplishments of Ricci, Schall, Xu Guangqi, and Li Zizao. This is my modest aspiration, and I hope it will gain the support of scholars worldwide”³⁹. It is evident that Chen Yuan faithfully upheld Ying Lianzhi's founding vision which was rooted in Chinese tradition while integrating Western thought. He developed Fu Jen University into a vital center for classical Chinese scholarship and modern academic research in Republican China.

In November 1926, Fang Hao, who aspired to study Catholicism, wrote to Chen Yuan requesting books. In his letter, Fang Hao expressed admiration for the good fortune Chen had in meeting Ying Lianzhi and hoped he too might be so lucky as to receive Chen's support. Fang wrote, “Sir, you were fortunate to encounter Mr. Ying and thus achieved your aspirations, whereas I, coming later and missing the opportunity to meet Mr. Ying, cannot fulfill my ambitions and can only lament endlessly! Then I reflect that now you have received Mr. Ying's trust and carry on his work; surely your compassion for humanity and desire to save and uplift the people must align with Mr. Ying's. Thus, I rejoice in the good fortune of encountering you and need not fear disappointment... Moreover, my request to you today is no different from your own request to

³⁹ Chen Yuan, “*Three Points for Fu Jen University to Strive Toward*”, in *Collected Works of Chen Yuan* (Vol. 22), Hefei: Anhui University Press (2009): 526–527.

Mr. Ying seven or eight years ago. Just as Mr. Ying generously granted your request back then, I trust you will be equally generous today."⁴⁰

At the time he wrote this letter, Fang Hao was only 15 years old. Likely worried that the busy Chen Yuan would not pay attention to him, he invoked Ying Lianzhi's name—a reflection of both the boy's innocence and sincerity and a testament to Ying's crucial role in Chen's early career. Naturally, Chen Yuan did not neglect this eager young scholar. Among the books he sent Fang were *Lingyan Lishao*, *Zhuzhi Qunzheng*, as well as Ying Lianzhi's *Jianzai Shengmo* and *Wansong Xinhua*, along with a pair of calligraphic couplets, thus paying homage to Ying Lianzhi's memory and influence.

On February 3, 1946, Chen Yuan wrote to his eldest son Chen Lesu, "For a person, the first requirement is ability and the second is mentorship. Without mentorship, even great ability may never find a stage; with mentorship but no ability, even if one ascends the stage, one will not stand firm."⁴¹ Here, the "mentorship" clearly refers to figures like Ying Lianzhi and Ma Xiangbo. Although these words were addressed to his children, they also summarized Chen Yuan's own experience in academic achievement and his long tenure as president of Fu Jen Catholic University.

Conclusion

The acquaintance and friendship between Chen Yuan and Ying Lianzhi is undoubtedly one of the remarkable episodes in modern Chinese history. Ying Lianzhi advocated for saving the nation through religion. After converting to Catholicism, he hoped to transform Western Christianity into a faith suited to the Chinese people, thereby addressing the national crisis and healing the societal spirit. Throughout his life, he devoted himself to integrating Christian faith with Chinese culture. When Ying met Chen Yuan, he not only cherished his talent—hoping Chen would study the history of Christianity in China and help the Church trace its origins—but also highly valued Chen's humanistic spirit, capable of bridging Chinese and Western cultural traditions. He hoped Chen would shoulder the responsibility of revitalizing Catholic education in China, nurturing talent, and advancing the indigenization of Catholicism.

⁴⁰ Chen Zhichao, ed. and annotated, *The Collected Correspondence of Chen Yuan* [Expanded Edition], Beijing: Sanlian Publishing House (2010): 308.

⁴¹ Chen Zhichao, ed. and annotated, *The Collected Correspondence of Chen Yuan* [Expanded Edition], Beijing: Sanlian Publishing House (2010): 1136.

For Chen Yuan, Ying Lianzhi became an immensely influential figure. Though Chen was not a Catholic, he greatly advanced the academic study of Catholic history in China and actively participated in the localization of Chinese Catholicism. He contributed to the collection, organization, and collation of Ming and Qing Catholic texts, supported the academic missionary methods promoted by the Jesuits in China, and during his tenure as president of Fu Jen Catholic University, he promoted Chinese classical studies, established a distinctive program in Sino-Western cultural exchange history, and oversaw the publication of influential journals such as *Monumenta Serica* and *Furen Xuezhì*, ushering Fu Jen University into what became known as the "Chen Yuan era." In 1939, Chen Yuan was awarded the title of "Commander of the Order of St. Gregory the Great with Badge" by the Pope in Rome, in recognition of his outstanding contributions to Catholic education in China.

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