



## Between Scriptural Language and Devotional Translation:

### Chinese Rosary Manuals in Seventeenth-Century China

Zhemeng XU  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4910-2003>

KU Leuven

*zhemeng.xu@kuleuven.be*

**Abstract:** This article examines Chinese Rosary manuals produced between 1616 and c. 1665 as a case study in early modern Chinese Christian translation and Sino-European cultural encounter. Focusing on the Rosary, an explicitly devotional text rather than a formal biblical translation, the study argues that prayer manuals nonetheless constituted an important site for the transmission and transformation of scriptural language in late Ming and early Qing China. While not biblical translations in the strict sense, these texts incorporated biblical narratives and formulae in ways that confronted many of the same linguistic, conceptual, and doctrinal challenges faced by Bible translation.

The analysis proceeds in two stages. First, it compares the Portuguese Rosary original with the earliest Chinese translation (1616), highlighting shifts in intended audience, pastoral needs, and local cultural sensibilities as the text was rendered intelligible within a Chinese literary and religious framework. Second, it compares three extant Chinese versions (1616, 1628, c. 1665), tracing their evolution in style, layout, and translation strategies for liturgical concepts, divine titles, and Catholic personal names. Across these versions, Catholic personal names tend to remain transliterated with relative consistency, while divine titles and liturgical concepts increasingly rely on neologism and semantic extensions, drawing on classical and Neo-Confucian vocabulary.

These textual developments reveal a growing orientation toward literati's intellectual framework and aesthetics, which may have created a gap between literary ambitions and the major devotional audiences according to missionaries' reports. By situating Chinese Rosary manuals alongside contemporaneous Chinese versions of the Hail Mary and contrasting them with a Rosary text and critiques from other Catholic orders, this study highlights a persistent tension between concerns for doctrinal accuracy and the pragmatic need for cultural accommodation. It argues that devotional texts functioned as a distinctive mode of scriptural mediation, shaped by missionary strategies, literary norms, and pastoral realities in the early Sino-Christian encounter.

**Keywords:** early Chinese biblical translation, Chinese Rosary manual, translation and cultural negotiation



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## Biblical Translation Efforts in the Late Ming and Early Qing

From the late sixteenth century to the mid-eighteenth century, when European Catholic missionaries were active in China, the Jesuits' commitment to the "Apostolat des Presse" fostered sustained collaboration with Chinese literati, giving rise to a vibrant sphere of cross-cultural intellectual exchange and a substantial corpus of Chinese Christian texts.<sup>1</sup> A wide variety of Chinese translations of Western learning thus emerged, covering subjects such as mathematics, mechanics, astronomy, and natural philosophy. Nevertheless, endeavors to translate the highest Catholic canon, the Bible, seemed comparatively limited. No complete Bible translation appeared during this period; instead, missionaries produced only partial translations of biblical passages or adaptations derived from scriptural content (Song 2024, p. 58). Confronted with a culture profoundly grounded in its own textual and canonical traditions, the Jesuits ultimately entered into only a constrained dialogue with the Chinese canonical *jing* 經 (scripture, canon) tradition.<sup>2</sup>

Such a situation of biblical translation in China cannot be separated from developments in Europe. In the wake of the Protestant Reformation, which promoted *sola Scriptura* (by Scripture alone) and widespread vernacular Bible reading, the Catholic Church reaffirmed the authority of the Latin Vulgate at the Council of Trent (1545–1563). Out of pastoral caution rather than doctrinal objection, the Church placed restrictions on vernacular Bible translation and circulation, especially after the publication of the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* (*The Index of Forbidden Books*) in 1564 under Pius IV.<sup>3</sup> As a result, Catholic

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1 The Jesuits who first arrived in China were impressed by the highly developed printing culture and the widespread reverence for books, and consequently placed greater emphasis on written materials in their mission work, though oral preaching continued to play an important role in spreading the Gospel. See Standaert (2001, pp. 600–632). For a comprehensive examination of Chinese Christian texts produced at the time, see Standaert and Van den Bosch (2022, pp. 130–91). For the more recent Chinese translation of this article, see Standaert and Van den Bosch, trans. Xu and revised. Chen (2023, pp. 1-67).

2 See Standaert (1999, pp 46–47, 53–54). Chen Yanrong 陈妍蓉, on the other hand, elaborates on the birth of a Christian biblical tradition in the Chinese culture of *jing*, which she translates as 'sacred texts'. She emphasizes that from the late sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries, the Chinese Christian texts which conveyed biblical words and messages collectively laid a textual foundation of Chinese reception of the Bible. See Chen (2021, pp. 661–681).

3 "As a matter of fact, the Sacred Congregation of the Index, in 1559 with Pope Paul IV and then in 1564 with Pius IV, by promulgating the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum*, prohibited printing and keeping a Bible in vernacular language without a special

missionaries arriving in China since 1583 did not consider the production of a complete Chinese Bible to be an immediate priority. Their primary pastoral concern was to introduce essential elements of the Christian faith and doctrine which included biblical passages, through vehicles such as concise catechisms, small prayer books, and Sunday readings (Marchioron 2023, p. 44).

Even against this background, the Jesuits were granted permission by Rome to translate the Bible in 1615, yet objectively speaking, they missed this valuable opportunity by prioritizing other projects. From the late seventeenth century onward, the restrictive policy of the *Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* (Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples), which deemed new Bible translations unnecessary, further prevented such endeavors. Consequently, despite the efforts of several missionary individuals to render the Bible into Chinese at their own initiative, their works were never permitted to be printed (Standaert 1999, pp. 38–39). These efforts included several valuable attempts before c. 1800. In the late seventeenth century, Jean Basset [M.E.P] (Bai Risheng 白日升, 1662–1707) translated most of the Vulgate New Testament into Chinese, including the Gospels, Acts of the Apostles, and Paul's Epistles. In the early eighteenth century, Antonio Laghi [O.F.M.] (Mei Shusheng 梅述圣, ?–1727) rendered Genesis and parts of Exodus into colloquial Chinese. His translation was later revised by Francesco Jovino [O.F.M.] (Mai Chuanshi 麦传世, 1677–1737), who considered the original too literal; moreover, Jovino also continued translating, reaching as far as the Book of Judges and possibly Tobit and Daniel. Finally, at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Louis Antoine de Poirot [S.J.] (He Qingtai 贺清泰, 1753–1831) completed a full translation of the New Testament and a partial translation of the Old Testament, titled *Guxin shengjing* 古新圣经 (*Old and New Holy Scripture*, 1803) (Standaert 1999, pp. 31–33).

The entire printed version of the Scriptures did not appear until 1822, translated by Johannes Lassar (1771–c. 1835), an Armenian born and raised in Macau, and Joshua Marshman (1768–1837), a British Baptist missionary in India. This absence of full Bible translations in the earlier period likely contributed to a tendency noted by Song: scholarship on the history of the Bible in China has largely centered on Protestant translations of the nineteenth century and beyond, whereas Catholic efforts in the preceding two centuries have remained marginal and understudied in the literature (Song 2024, p. 59).

Although European missionaries were relatively slow to undertake direct Bible translation and failed to produce a complete version of the Scriptures between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, they nonetheless composed a

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permission. This measure contributed particularly to restrict the use of the Holy Scripture". See Marchioron (2023, p. 43).

range of texts that conveyed biblical narratives and teachings “in the concrete context of pastoral application: catechetical teaching, prayer life, meditation, preaching and liturgy”, which were often used in practical preaching (Standaert 1999, p. 53). The rich and diverse collection of Chinese biblical and para-biblical texts, alongside images, played a crucial role in facilitating the Chinese reception of the Bible.<sup>1</sup> Two well-known examples from the 1630s are Giulio Aleni, S.J. (Ai Rulüe 艾儒略, 1582–1649)’s *Tianzhu jiangsheng yanxing jilüe* 天主降生言行纪略 (*Short Record of the Words and Deeds of God’s Incarnation*, 1635), a chronological account of Jesus’ life based on the Gospels, and Manuel Dias, Jr., S.J. (Yang Manuo 阳玛诺, 1574–1659)’s *Sheng jing zhi jie* 圣经直解 (*A Direct Explanation of the Holy Scripture*, 1636–1642), an exegetical work combining translation and commentary on the Sunday Gospel readings (Standaert 1999, pp. 39–48). Building on this, Song has identified a wider body of Chinese Christian texts which incorporate biblical material, including Alfonso Vagnone, S.J. (Gao Yizhi 高一志, 1568–1640)’s *Shengmu xingshi* 圣母行实 (*The True Deeds of the Holy Mother*, 1631), the first biographical account of the Virgin Mary’s life, which, though based on the Gospels, underwent intentional changes and anonymous manuscripts like *Sheng shi* 圣史 (*The Sacred History*, 1582–1840) and *Shansong xingshi* 衫松行实 (*The True Deeds of Samson*, 1700–1800), adapted respectively from the two Books of Maccabees and the *Book of Judges* in the Catholic Old Testament. His analysis, which is conducted from the three perspectives of key concepts, narrative patterns, and terminology, reveals that missionary translators tended toward interpretive and adaptive renderings (*yishu* 译述, to translate and expound) rather than faithful renderings, reflecting both practical needs for preaching and cultural negotiation (Song 2025, pp. 172–177; Song 2024, pp. 57–83).

### Scripture in Devotion: Prayer as a Medium of Biblical Transmission

Within this landscape, prayer occupies a distinctive position. Many essential Catholic prayers are themselves scriptural compositions: the Our Father, the Hail Mary, and the Psalms, among others. The first two were translated soon after the Jesuits’ arrival, appearing in Michele Ruggieri, S.J. (Luo Mingjian 罗明坚, 1543–1607)’s *Tianzhu shilu* 天主实录 (*The True Record of the Lord of Heaven*, 1584), reflecting the understanding that the formation of faith begins with learning what to pray and how to pray. In addition, prayer

1 Chen Yanrong’s book clearly demonstrates that in the context of the lack of an authorized Chinese Bible, “the biblical content was verbalized in the Chinese language at the levels of words, verses, and accounts, and the Chinese Christian books communicated biblical messages to Chinese audiences from the late sixteenth century through the eighteenth century”. Please refer to Chen (2021, p. 221 ff).

books such as the series of *Shengjiao rike* 圣教日课 (*Daily Exercises of the Holy Teaching*) combined translated prayers, prayer guides, and biblical passages like the Ten Commandments and the Passion narrative. The prominence of prayer-based biblical translation was also closely tied to pastoral realities. As the number of Chinese Christians grew rapidly within two decades of the Jesuits' first arrival, which far outpaced the number of missionaries, it became increasingly necessary to translate the scriptural passages required for Sunday Mass, major feasts, oral preaching, and daily devotion. The purpose was pedagogical: to lead catechumens and newly baptized believers into the core of Christian life, and the means included the elaboration of useful guidebooks of prayers (Marchioron 2023, pp. 44–45).

Prayer-based biblical translation was therefore not incidental, but a historically conditioned strategy shaped both by Catholic Church policy in Europe and by the pastoral needs of a rapidly growing Christian community in China. Although less studied than the partial Bible translations of Basset and de Poirot, or the catechisms and biographical narratives of Christ, the Virgin Mary, and the saints, Chinese prayers and prayer books offer a valuable lens to examine how scriptural language, translated with cultural adaptation and reshaped into a ritual, became woven into the everyday devotional lives of converts.<sup>1</sup>

Notably, it is likely that these prayers were utilized particularly by Chinese female converts during the period in question. In this context, their relationship with translation did not lie in producing a translated text, as is typically seen in the collaboration between Chinese (male) literati and missionaries, but in “practicing” a translated text as a ritual. According to missionaries’ accounts, Chinese Christian women were more pious and eager to practice rituals than men. Ricci noted that his fellow missionaries diverted their attention to converting women, as many were more devout than men, which could be supported by numerous incidents. He gave an example of a literatus surnamed Zhong, whose mother, grandmother, and sister-in-law were all baptized. After that, the three women invited their neighbors to have gatherings in their household (Ricci and Trigault 2010, p. 313). The Portuguese Jesuits André Ferram and António de Gouveia (He Dahua 何大化, 1592–1677)

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1 There has been an increase in recent scholarship on efforts of translating Bible in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but much of it centers on the works of Jean Basset and de Poirot. Relevant studies include Zheng (2012), Li (2013), Song (2015), Yu (2023), and Chien (2024). Other than that, studies on this topic have also examined the biblical content in catechetical works and biographical accounts in print or in manuscript. For example, see Standaert (1999), Song (2024) Song (2025), and Dudink (2008).

repeatedly mentioned in their reports the great number of women's confessions, which easily outnumbered men's confessions (Ferram 1659 and de Gouveia 1995–2005, cited in Amsler 2018, p. 108). Annual letters by Francisco Furtado and André Ferram indicated that women attended congregational meetings organized for pious activities with great zeal and suggested that women in many places were more ardent participants than men were in congregations (Ferram 1656 and Furtado 1640, cited in Amsler 2018, p. 108).

This phenomenon was also reported by missionaries from other orders. In the seventeenth-century Mindong (Fujian, China), Dominicans and Franciscans found that women were enthusiastic while men were resistant to the faith (Menegon 2002, p. 213). Missionaries often "complained about the colder reception of their religion among men, while praising women's interest in Christianity and piety" (Menegon 2002, pp. 185–186). Dominican sources also suggested that in Fu'an, a county in Mindong, "although women were probably only 40% of the total population of Mindong, they made up over half of the baptisms" (Menegon 2002, p. 186). Jean Basset, a missionary from the Paris Foreign Mission Society (*Les Missions étrangères de Paris*, MEP) who worked in Sichuan from 1702 to 1707, praised Chinese Christian women for their great innocence and fervor in life (*dans une grande innocence et ferveur*) when they were free to attend gatherings where Mass was celebrated and when they had a missionary who lived nearby. He also felt pity for the lack of education among these women. He believed that if they had as much knowledge as their fervor, the religion would be preserved and propagated much more effectively than it then was. Moreover, he stated that it was important for women to engage with religious texts like the Bible (*elles ne pourront mieux faire que de s'appliquer à lire et à méditer l'Écriture*), beyond just memorizing prayers (Basset 2012, p. 103, 160). The last source in particular implies that female converts devoted considerable energies to offering prayers.

This phenomenon may be partly due to Chinese women's long-standing role in presiding over rituals. The strict segregation between men and women in traditional Chinese society established two distinct spheres: *nei* 内, the internal or domestic realm, and *wai* 外, the external or public realm. Women, expected to remain within the home and fulfill familial duties, were traditionally responsible for performing rituals within the *nei*-sphere. For instance, according to the *Book of Rites* 礼记 (*Liji*), which outlines the ceremonial practices from the Zhou through the Han dynasties, a girl would cease going out and begin observing and assisting with domestic rituals as early as the age of ten.<sup>1</sup> Such "division of religious labor" still endured in late

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<sup>1</sup> "女子十年不出, 姮教婉婉听从, 执麻枲, 治丝茧, 织纴组𬘓, 学女事以共衣服。观于

imperial China, where women oversaw most religious activities, while men primarily participated only in occasional large-scale community rituals (Amsler 2018, p. 104). In a similar fashion, once women converted to Christianity, they often became active agents in promoting faith and religious devotion within the *nei*-sphere of the family (Standaert 2001, p. 395).<sup>1</sup> Therefore, they developed a strong oral tradition when dealing with translated prayers, which were internalized through recitation or chanting, rather than through reading.

Despite widespread illiteracy that inhibited female converts from reading prayer texts, they still managed to learn them, mostly through oral transmission, and actively participated in Christian devotion. For example, a woman might have initially received instruction from her husband and, following her conversion, transmitted what she had learned to her children, female family members, or even women outside her household. Similarly, prayers could be passed from mother to daughter, between female relatives, from a female master to her servant, or even between neighbors, forming a network of oral transmission among women. They would passionately recite prayers on various occasions and in different settings, either individually or in groups (Amsler 2018, Chapters 5–8). The prayers they learned were mostly found in translated Chinese prayerbooks circulated at the time. Praying, which was interwoven into their everyday life, helped form, reinforce, and preserve their Christian identity.<sup>2</sup>

Among the prayer genres, the Rosary manuals stand out as particularly significant. Rooted in scriptural prayers (the Hail Mary and the Our Father) and meditations on the mysteries of Christ's life rooted in the Bible, Rosary manuals do more than reproduce scripture: they frame, structure, and interpret these scriptural passages, telling believers when, how, and what to pray, with adaptations to local cultural contexts. Therefore, they function as

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祭祀，纳酒浆、笾豆、菹醢，礼相助奠。”（“A girl at the age of ten ceased to go out [from the women's apartments]. Her governess taught her the arts of pleasing speech and manners, to be docile and obedient, to handle the hempen fibres, to deal with the cocoons, to weave silks and form fillets, to learn [all] woman's work, how to furnish garments, to watch the sacrifices, to supply the liquors and sauces, to fill the various stands and dishes with pickles and brine, and to assist in setting forth the appurtenances for the ceremonies.”）

- 1 In addition, as for the intermediaries for women's evangelization and the organization of women's religious practice within the gendered spatial arrangements of Chinese households, see Amsler (2018, pp.51–55).
- 2 The author of this present paper has collected materials to elaborate on the space, time, mode and pursuit of these female converts' practices of praying. This topic may deserve a separate paper.

devotional literature anchored in scripture, mediating between the Scripture and the lived practice of devotion.

Because the Rosary is fundamentally a Marian devotion and the most popular form of it, understanding these manuals requires us to situate them within broader traditions of Marian piety in both Europe and late Ming–early Qing China. The following section therefore contextualizes the place of Mary and Marian devotion in these intersecting religious worlds.

### **The Context of Marian Devotion and the Rosary in Europe and China**

Marian devotion held a prominent place in both European and Chinese Catholic communities of the period. In Europe, within the post-Tridentine Catholic Reformation from the mid-sixteenth century onward, the Rosary and Marian piety came to symbolize a revitalized Catholicism, especially during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Marian devotion not only endured but often thrived under conditions where the public practice of Catholicism was suppressed (Mitchell 2009, p. 20). The Rosary itself had medieval origins, but it underwent significant development before reaching its early modern form: meditations on the cyclical “life of Christ”, combined with repetitive prayers of mainly the Ave Maria (Hail Mary) and the *Pater Noster* (Our Father), recited with the aid of beads that served as counters. These prayers were grouped into sets of ten Hail Marys, or “decades”, with a complete rosary comprising fifteen decades. From early on, the Rosary gained wide popularity. Its portability, accessibility to both clergy and laity, ease of memorization, and reliance on imaginative meditation rather than on literacy made it especially appealing. It also became closely associated with visual and material culture, as well as with the growing print culture of the late fifteenth century, when Rosary books with illustrations circulated widely (Mitchell 2009, pp. 18–19). These same characteristics that contributed to the Rosary’s popularity in Europe appear to have been retained in its transmission to China and may help account for its appeal there, especially among ordinary believers with limited literacy. Notably, the Chinese reception of the Rosary also included illustrated editions, suggesting both continuity with European practices and adaptation to local devotional contexts.

The Virgin Mary holds a particularly esteemed position in Chinese Catholic communities, and the practice of reciting the Rosary was introduced as early as the 1580s, when Jesuit missionaries first settled on the Chinese mainland. A notable early adopter was the father of Wang Pan 王泮 (1535–?), the local official who invited Ruggieri and Matteo Ricci, S.J. (Li Madou 利玛窦, 1552–1610) to Zhaoqing, Guangdong, in 1583. Reportedly, Wang’s father recited the Rosary daily, kneeling before a picture given by the two missionaries (Bernard 1937, cited in Yang 2024, p. 2). Scholarship on early

Marian prayers and Mariological texts in Chinese has revealed a complex interplay between the culturally adapted image of Mary and its reception by different audiences. A comparison of different Jesuit translations of the *Ave Maria* from 1584 to c. 1665 demonstrates that missionaries consciously sought to “establish a model image of Mary in line with both the Catholic veneration of the Mother of God and the Chinese concern about ideal womanhood” (Song 2018, pp. 325–326). In the same vein, in Mariological texts, Jesuits “consciously modified and reinterpreted these concepts to accommodate the dominant Chinese ways of thinking, especially Confucian ideology and morality” (Song 2018, p. 329).

Among the educated elite literati, this strategy was effective: Mary was often portrayed in literary texts as a model of Confucian moral perfection. This portrayal was shaped through mutual influence, as literati formed their impression from Jesuit writings, while Jesuits simultaneously adapted their depiction to align with Confucian ideals. These prayers thus reveal not only how Christianity was understood, but also how it was deliberately framed to appear acceptable to its intended elite audience, an adaptation that in turn influenced the reception of Christianity among these readers. In contrast, among commoners, Mary was worshipped less as a Confucian exemplar and more as a goddess with miraculous power, reminding one of Buddhism, Daoism, and popular religious traditions (Song 2018, p. 337). The divergence highlights a tension: while the Jesuit translations aimed to appeal to elite literati by presenting Mary as a figure with Confucian moral values, many ordinary believers received and venerated her in ways shaped by their own religious frameworks. The devotional practices of female converts further complicate this picture. As Amsler notes, Chinese Christian women venerated Mary as a child-granting goddess, driven by their personal desire for offspring rather than by Jesuit strategies of cultural accommodation. For these devotees, the distinction between the Catholic Virgin Mary and local fertility deities was often blurred, as both were believed to possess miraculous powers to grant children. The Jesuits, however, maintained a clearer boundary, ensuring that Mary retained recognizable Christian attributes while still adapting her image to the Chinese cultural and religious context (Amsler 2018, pp. 91–94).

These observations suggest that within the Chinese context, different social groups emphasized different attributes of the Virgin Mary. Certain aspects of her image found resonance in the translated *Ave Maria*, but the reception varied according to class, gender, and devotional needs.

Building on this scholarship, the present study turns to the Chinese Rosary as another case of Marian prayer in translation. In seventeenth-century China, it typically appeared in the form of a Rosary manual, which instructed believers how to pray, what to recite or meditate on, when to perform this

devotion, and what benefits this practice would bring. The main body of this paper thus examines four Rosary manuals: one Portuguese edition and three Chinese translations produced in the seventeenth century. It first compares the Portuguese source with its earliest Chinese version, thereby revealing strategies of adaptation that shaped these texts: where its first Chinese translation expands or omits Gospel details or source notes, where it adopts semantic or lexical adaptation for local concerns, and where it introduces the dialogical form to instruct new readers. It then compares the three Chinese manuals to trace how later versions reconfigured earlier ones in terms of textual style, liturgical concepts, and divine titles, among other features. By attending to these differences, one can better understand how prayer texts served as a vital site where biblical narrative, Marian devotion, and Chinese religious sensibilities converged.

The original Portuguese work on the Rosary is *A Maneira de Rezar o Rosario de Nossa Senhora*, a guide to properly praying the Rosary, composed by Inácio Martins (1531–1598). This text, along with an illustration for each mystery, appears at the end of the expanded edition of the Portuguese catechism *Doctrina Christam Ordenada a Maneira de Dialogo, para ensinar os meninos* (*Christian Doctrine Arranged in the Manner of Dialogue to Teach Children*, 1592) authored by Marcos Jorge (1524–1571).<sup>1</sup> Since it was the catechism that was translated into Chinese at the time, this study discusses it as the original. The three translated manuals of the Rosary in Chinese, on the other hand, are João da Rocha, S.J. (Luo Ruwang 罗儒望, 1565–1623)'s *Song nianzhu guicheng* 诵念珠规程 (*Regulation for Reciting the Rosary*, 1616),<sup>2</sup> Gaspar Ferreira's *Song nianzhu guicheng* 诵念珠规程 (*Regulation for Reciting the Rosary*, 1605–1625), which is included in the prayer collection *Nianjing zongdu* 念经总牍 (*Compendium of Recited Prayers*, 1628), and another version of it in the c. 1665 standard prayer collection *Shengjiao rike*, titled alternatively as *Shengmu meiguijing shiwu duan* 圣母玫瑰经十五端 (*Fifteen Points of the Rosary for the*

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1 See JI Fu (2016, p. 106ff) that identifies the link. This Portuguese book was reprinted in 1653. The full Rosary guide in the reprinted version can be accessed on National Library of Portugal, while merely a small part of the Rosary can be found in the original edition via the National Library of the Czech Republic. Due to this, the reprinted edition will be mainly quoted in the following text.

2 According to the CCT Database, the date, which is often referred to as 1619–1622, and authorship are contested. Some scholars attribute this work to Gaspar Ferreira rather than da Rocha. The date is indicated as “1616 [?], (1619–1622) or after 1623: 1628” in the database. In this study, I adopt the year of 1616. For a detailed description, see: <https://www.arts.kuleuven.be/chinese-studies/english/cct/database/index.php/Detail/objects/1919>.

*Holy Mother*).<sup>1</sup> These three versions were chosen for several reasons.

First, since primary sources hardly specify which edition of the Rosary manual was used by Chinese Catholic women, an important reason for selecting da Rocha's text is its likely connection to Candida Xu 徐甘第大 (1607-1680)'s devotion to the Rosary. Da Rocha had baptized Xu Guangqi 徐光启 (1562-1633) and remained a close friend of the Xu family, making it plausible that his version was used in their religious practices (Amsler 2018, pp. 123-124). Candida Xu, granddaughter of Xu Guangqi, was an influential Chinese Catholic who saw herself as a missionary. She actively supported the Catholic mission in China, not only through generous donations to missionaries but also by providing financial assistance to new Chinese converts. This study also includes two versions of Ferreira's guide on the Rosary: the *Regulation for Reciting the Beads* included in the 1628 prayer collection *Nianjing zongdu* and *Fifteen Points of the Rose Prayer to the Holy Mother* included in the c. 1665 standard prayer collection of *Shengjiao rike*.<sup>2</sup> Examining these versions allows for an exploration of how an important Marian prayer like the Rosary evolved over time, from an earlier form to its standardized version. Additionally, comparing Ferreira's versions with da Rocha's possibly widely circulated version provides insight into how different Jesuit authors shaped the prayer's textual development. Other Rosary works attributed to Jesuits also existed before the standard version, such as Aleni's *Shengmu*

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1 The three Chinese Rosary manuals used in this study are: (1) Da Rocha's *Song nianzhu guicheng* (1616), BnF, Chinois 7382; (2) Ferreira's *Song nianzhu guicheng*, included in *Nianjing zongdu* (1628), in *Fandigang tu shu guan cang Ming Qing Zhong Xi wen hua jiao liu shi wen xian cong kan: Di yi ji* 梵蒂冈图书馆藏明清中西文化交流史文献丛刊：第一辑 Vatican Apostolic Library Series on Sino-Western Cultural Exchange in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, First Series (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 2014), vol. 16, pp. 1-478; and (3) Ferreira's *Shengmu meiguijing shiwei duan*, included in the *Shengjiao rike* (c. 1665), BnF, Chinois 7353-IV.

2 Fundamental prayers such as *Ave Maria* and *Pater Noster* were translated as early as not long after Ruggieri and Ricci had entered the Chinese mainland. The Chinese versions were included in Ruggieri's catechism dated 1584. Since then, separate prayerbooks and collections of Chinese prayers were constantly produced. Among them, the series under the same title *Shengjiao rike* deserves special attention. This title refers to a comprehensive compilation of various kinds of prayers intended for the use of Chinese Catholic converts. According to the CCT database, nine editions of *Shengjiao rike* were published between c. 1602 and c. 1800. The third edition, attributed to Buglio and Verbiest and published around 1665 (though the exact date remains debated), became the standard (*ne varietur*) version and remained so for subsequent editions. For more relevant research results, see Brunner, (1964, p. 84). See also H. Busch's review of Brunner's book in Busch (1965, p. 467).

*meiguijing shiwu duan tuxiang* 圣母玫瑰经十五端图像 (*Images of Fifteen Points of the Rosary for the Holy Mother*, 1637). During the same period, there were also works to propagate the Rosary attributed to non-Jesuit missionaries, such as *Renlei zhen'an* 人类真安 (*The True Peace of Humankind*, c. 1680), a manuscript written by the Dominican missionary Arcadio del Rosario (Ou Jialüe 欧加略, 1641–1686), the first comprehensive book on the Rosary in Chinese.<sup>1</sup> However, due to the limited scope of this paper, the comparison is confined to the three Chinese Rosary guides listed earlier.

### Comparison Between Portuguese Original and Chinese Translation

As mentioned earlier, da Rocha's Rosary manual, *Song nianzhu guicheng* (1616), is adapted from Martins' Rosary guide, *A Maneira de Rezar o Rosaryro de Nossa Senhora*, which appears in the Portuguese catechism *Doctrina Christam Ordenada a Maneira de Dialogo, para ensinar os meninos* (Christian Doctrine Arranged in the Manner of Dialogue to Teach Children, 1592). This study thus uses Martins' text in *Doctrina Christam*.<sup>2</sup> Regarding the extratextual factors of the catechism, it was published in late-sixteenth-century Catholic Portugal, aimed at reinforcing Catholic devotional practices and supporting catechetical instruction in the context of Counter-Reformation and post-Tridentine reforms. As indicated by the title, the primary recipients of this work were Catholic children who were expected to learn the foundations of Catholic doctrine. As for intra-textual factors, the main body is a catechism in dialogue form teaching Christian doctrine, with supplementary devotional material. It presupposes minimal doctrinal knowledge, guiding learners through the basics. The illustrations, providing paratextual visual guidance, serve as crucial non-verbal elements in the work, which help learners to comprehend and memorize the gospel scenes attached to each mystery, making the Rosary prayer more accessible. The inclusion of catechetical instruction and devotional material in this work suggests its function as both referential as teaching doctrine and prescriptive as guiding practice.

When Jorge's *Doctrina Christam* was adapted for the Chinese context, it resulted in two translations: a catechism titled *Tianzhu shengjiao qimeng* 天主圣教启蒙 (Primer on Holy Teaching of the Lord of Heaven) and a Rosary manual titled *Song nianzhu guicheng*. Published around 1616, these two texts were often bound together according to the CCT Database.<sup>3</sup> The Chinese

1 See more about this manuscript in Yang (2024). As for what Marian prayers were available before 1722, please refer to Yang (2024) and Song (2018).

2 A digital version of Jorge's *Doctrina Christam* (1653) is accessible on <https://purl.pt/24091>, and Martins' Rosary guide can be found in 78a–95a.

3 This was mentioned under both entries of the two works in the database. Pl

catechism and the beginning of the Chinese Rosary follow the dialogue form in the original Portuguese catechism between the master and the disciple. The non-verbal illustrative elements alongside each mystery in the original are also present in the Chinese version. However, they were rather adapted from Jerónimo Nadal's S.J. (1507-1580) *Evangelicae historiae imagines ex ordine evangeliorum, quae toto anno in missae sacrificio recitantur*, a collection of 153 large folio prints of gospel scenes which was published posthumously in Antwerp in 1593.<sup>1</sup> The Chinese texts were primarily addressed to neophytes to equip them with a systematic introduction to the fundamentals of Catholic doctrine and ground them in concrete devotional practices. Unlike the case in the Portuguese original, the Chinese translations were not specifically targeted at children. Given the short timespan between 1616 and 1583 when European missionaries first arrived in the Chinese mainland, the new Chinese Catholics at the time were mainly adults. Moreover, they were mostly commoners with basic literacy, male and female included. In terms of the function, like Jorge's *Doctrina Christam*, the Chinese translations provide both systematic theological knowledge and practical spiritual formation.

The two introductions above provide profiles of the Portuguese source text and the Chinese target texts. Their differences and similarities are more clearly demonstrated after comparing them according to five categories following Christiane Nord's model of text analysis: Intended text functions, addressees, time and place of text reception, medium, and motive (Munday 2016, pp. 131-134).

The profiles point to hypothesized textual outcomes in translation, according to which the two texts share the same intended function and medium. Their divergences, however, concern addressees, time and place of reception, and motive. The shared catechetical function indicates that translations would consistently retain a didactic, instructive tone across contexts. The differences, by contrast, suggest the kinds of shifts likely to have occurred when the Portuguese source text was rendered into Chinese.

The Portuguese original, intended primarily for children, employed simple, child-oriented language to facilitate memorization. The main body of the work, consisting of catechetical instruction, was dialogical and pedagogically oriented, and thus easily comprehensible. However, the supplementary Rosary section is more sophisticated in style and appears to

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ease refer to <https://www.arts.kuleuven.be/chinese-studies/english/cct/database/index.php/Detail/objects/1919> and <https://www.arts.kuleuven.be/chinese-studies/english/cct/database/index.php/Detail/objects/2611>.

1 See <https://www.arts.kuleuven.be/chinese-studies/english/cct/database/index.php/Detail/objects/1919>.

target adult readership. Ideally, since the Chinese version was directed at adults, its register needed to be elevated compared with the Portuguese text. However, whereas Portuguese children were Catholic insiders, born and raised in the faith, the Chinese addressees were often adult commoners with only moderate literacy who were entering the faith for the first time. This shift implies that explanations would have to be expanded in translation, while the style would need to remain accessible and less literary. Moreover, differences in time and place of reception shaped potential translation choices as well. In 1592 Portugal, Catholicism was the dominant religion, whereas in 1616 China it was a marginal, foreign faith within a culture characterized by the interplay of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. Thus, knowledge that could be assumed in the Portuguese catechism could not be presupposed in Chinese. Translating the original therefore amounted to translating a different worldview. The translator might “move the reader toward the author” or “the author toward the reader” or adopt a middle ground (Bernofsky 1997, pp. 176–177). In this process, presupposed Catholic concepts and terms may be removed, or, if not removed, be translated through tactics such as transliteration, semantic extension, and neologism creation.

Finally, divergent motives also conditioned the translations. In Portugal, within the Post-Tridentine context, the catechism sought to emphasize doctrinal uniformity among young learners already born within the Catholic faith. In China, by contrast, the catechism and Rosary served primarily to introduce the faith and persuade potential converts. Accordingly, adaptation could be employed to map Catholic elements onto Chinese conceptual frameworks, thereby rendering the religion more intelligible, familiar, and acceptable to Chinese recipients. This process overlaps with the translation tactics mentioned above to introduce new Catholic concepts and terms.

The following table illustrates the comparison between the Portuguese original and the Chinese translation, assessing whether the hypothesized preservation and changes elaborated previously can be confirmed. Since this study focuses on prayer texts, the translated catechism *Tianzhu shengjiao qimeng* will not be examined; only the translated Rosary *Song nianzhu guicheng* falls within the scope of this study.

Before turning to the broader patterns summarized in the table below, one example may serve as a good illustration. The Portuguese text begins with a brief narrative explanation of the fifteen mysteries of the Rosary, arranged in the sequence of *Os cinco glozozos...* *Os cinco dolorosos...* *Os cinco gloriosos* (The five joyful [mysteries]...The five sorrowful [mysteries]... The five glorious [mysteries]...), followed by a straightforward introduction to how to

pray (*Hase de rezar desta maneira*).<sup>1</sup> In the Chinese translation, however, this opening is reshaped into a dialogue between a teacher and a pupil. At the very beginning, the teacher asks: “What daily practice do you undertake to nourish the life of your anima (*ni ya-ni-ma de shengming* 你亚尼玛的生命) and to preserve your virtue of loving the Lord of Heaven (*ni ai Tianzhu de de* 你爱天主的德)?” The pupil responds: “Each day I recite one full Rosary of the Lord and the Holy Mother (*Tianzhu Shengmu quan nianzhu yichuan* 天主圣母全念珠一串), and I meditate on the fifteen supernatural deeds (*shiwu chao xing zhi shi* 十五超性之事) that constitute the life of our Lord Jesus.”<sup>2</sup> The dialogue then continues by explaining the composition of the fifteen mysteries and the proper method of praying the Rosary.

Table 1: Comparison between Martins’ *A Maneira de Rezar o Rosário* and da Rocha’s *Song nianzhu guicheng*

Category	Original Portuguese Rosary Manual (1592/1653)	Translated Chinese Rosary Manual (1616)
Form	Narrative introduction; main text in offering–petition structure	Dialogue-form introduction; main text in offering–petition structure
Style	Adult-oriented	Overall colloquial, intelligible
Additions	Concise narration of mysteries; assumes biblical knowledge	Expanded Gospel details
Omissions	Inclusion of religious terms and Gospel source notes	Omission of certain religious terms, Gospel source notes, and certain Gospel details
Semantic adaptation	Often found in the translation of petitions	Petitions reshaped with different effects
Lexical adaptation (word choice/imagery)	Catholic terminology	Adoption of translation strategies including transliteration, semantic extension, neologism creation

In terms of form, the main text of both the Portuguese original and the Chinese translation remains consistent: after the title of each mystery, the text is divided into two parts: *offereamento* (offering) and *oração* (petition), which

1 *Doctrinam Christam* (1653), 78a–79a.

2 *Song nianzhu guicheng* (1616), 1a.

are rendered as *xian* 献 (dedication, offering) and *qiu* 求 (petition, prayer) in the Chinese Rosary.<sup>1</sup> The offering consists of a dedication to the Virgin Mary together with a description of a biblical scene connected to her or viewed from her perspective (e.g., *vosso filho*, “your son”). The petition presents the requests directed to Jesus, made through Mary’s intercession. Some have speculated that the offering-petition structure in the Chinese Rosary may have derived from traditional Chinese worship rituals (Wang 2015, p. 42). The Portuguese original, however, clearly contradicts this view.

The speculation likely arises from the cultural and religious connotations carried by the two Chinese terms *xian* and *qiu*. In Daoism, for instance, the five ritual objects presented to the gods—incense, flowers, lamps, water, and fruit—are collectively called *wu xian* 五献 (five offerings) (Hu 1998, p. 176). In Buddhism, supplicating the Bodhisattva is commonly phrased as *qiu Pusa* 求菩薩 (to petition the Bodhisattva). The verb *qiu* further recurs in popular devotional practice, as in *qiu zi* 求子 (praying for offspring), *qiu cai* 求财 (praying for wealth), and *qiu hunyin* 求婚姻 (praying for marriage). Comparable patterns are also observed in Confucian state rituals. According to *Da Ming ji li* 大明集礼 (Collected Rites of the Great Ming), a compilation published in 1530 of all kinds of official ceremonies down to the early Jiajing period 嘉靖 (1522-1566), the Great Sacrifice to Heaven (*jitian* 祭天) includes four phases concerning the presentation of offerings, each titled with the term *xian*: *chu xian* 初献 (First oblation), *ya xian* 亚献 (Second oblation), *zhong xian* 终献 (Final oblation), and *fen xian* 分献 (Separate oblation).<sup>2</sup> The term *qiu* also appears in the text of *Da Ming ji li*, indicating the invocation of gods. For instance, when explaining the type of jade ritual objects to be offered to Heaven, the text notes: “For the rite of honoring the gods takes place at the beginning of invoking them” (*gai li shen zai qiu shen zhi chu* 盖礼神在求神之初).<sup>3</sup>

The resemblance between the pair *offereamento-oração* and the pair *xian-qiu*, both denoting acts of dedication and supplication in a religious sense, is thus evident. In this sense, these familiar terms were drawn on by the translator(s) not because they dictated the structure, but because they allowed Christian devotional practice to be framed within an existing Chinese

1 For example, see the first joyful mystery in *Doctrina Christam*, 80a-80b and that in da Rocha’s *Song nianzhu guicheng*, 4a-4b.

2 Nicolas Standaert listed these phases with translations in his article which compares the Chinese Great Sacrifice to Heaven and the European Catholic Mass where the sacrifice is offered to God. See Standaert (2007, pp. 521-543).

3 *Da Ming ji li*, volume 2, para. 23. Accessible on <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=233599&remap=gb>.

religious vocabulary already understood by the Chinese audience.

Where the two texts differ, however, is the form of the introduction. The Chinese Rosary begins in the form of a dialogue between a teacher and a pupil, mirroring the catechetical section of the original Portuguese catechism. This dialogue introduces the benefits of praying the Rosary, outlines the fifteen mysteries, and explains both the method and the appropriate times for prayer. The translator may have adopted this format to follow the dialogical, instructive tone characteristic of the catechism. In contrast, the Portuguese Rosary opens with a purely narrative style, presenting only the content of each mystery and the manner of prayer. While both introductions share the same basic purpose, the Chinese text often expands upon the Gospel scenes of the mysteries, adding details absent from the Portuguese version. It also specifies the function and timing of the Rosary, which are not found in the source text. For example, in the Portuguese version, the scene of the first sorrowful mystery was introduced as *A Oração de Christo N. Senhor quando suou sangue no Horto* (The Prayer of Christ Our Lord when He sweated blood in the Garden), whereas in the Chinese version it reads: *Ye-su shounan qian yi xi zai Aliwa shan yuan zhong daogao Tianzhu Ba-de-le sanci* 耶稣受难前一夕在阿利瓦山园中祷告天主罢德肋三次 (On the eve before the Passion of Jesus, he prayed to *Pater* the Lord of Heaven three times in a garden on the Mount of Olives). The origin of these additions, however, remains uncertain.

In terms of the style of the Chinese Rosary, the text appears overall colloquial and easy to follow. This is in contrast to, for example, the literary, philosophical, and apologetic approach of *Tianzhu shiyi* 天主实义 (*The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* by Matteo Ricci, 1603). Such a difference suggests that the Chinese Rosary targeted mainly common believers with basic literacy rather than elite literati. This feature will be discussed later in detail in the comparison of the three Chinese Rosary versions. Moreover, the profile analysis above suggests that the Chinese translation would need to provide more explanations than the Portuguese original, since Catholicism was the dominant religion in Portugal but a new faith in China. A comparison of the Chinese and Portuguese Rosary texts confirms this expectation: instances of additions frequently appear in the translation of offerings. For example, in the second joyful mystery concerning Mary's visitation to Elizabeth, The Portuguese offering covers only the routine offering of prayers (10 *Ave Marias* + 1 *Pater Noster*), Mary's joy in visiting Elizabeth, John's sanctification in the womb, Mary's recognition as the Mother of God, and the intonation of the *Magnificat*.<sup>1</sup> By contrast, the Chinese translation, while retaining the same

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1 “Offereimento. O Virgem singular, beata entre todas as mulheres, eu vos ofereço humilmente dez Ave Marias, e hum Padre nosso à honra do gozo, que vossa alma

prayer offering and basic visitation narrative, expanded the description with many details, including the specific identification of Elizabeth as Mary's "elder cousin" (*biaojie* 表姐), explicit mention of Elizabeth's six months of pregnancy, John's recognition of Jesus, and Jesus' act of forgiving him of original sin.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, it integrates direct biblical quotations of Elizabeth's exclamations: "Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!" and "But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Luke 1:42–43, NIV), which are inexplicit in the Portuguese text.<sup>2</sup> The explicit quotation of Elizabeth's words seems to assume readers' unfamiliarity with the biblical story, a reasonable assumption for Chinese converts at the time, who were often unacquainted with biblical narratives and thus needed explicit explanations. Similarly, the addition about Jesus forgiving John's original sin in the womb reinforces Catholic doctrine on original sin and God's grace for this new audience.

However, it appears to have been relatively common for certain Gospel

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sentio quando com abraço da charidade fostes apressadamente te visitar vossa parenta S. Isabel, em cuja visitação o menino S. Ioam no vente da māy com prazer se aluroçou, & ficou santificado. E vós Senhora, sendo por māy de Deos conhecida, & louvada, entoastes o ditissimo cantico da Magnificat." ("Offering. O singular Virgin, blessed among all women, I humbly offer you ten Hail Marys, and one Our Father in honor of the joy that your soul felt when, with an embrace of charity, you went hastily to visit your cousin Saint Elizabeth, in whose visitation the child Saint John, in the mother's womb, with joy leapt, and was sanctified. And you, Lady, being by Mother of God known and praised, intoned the most worthy hymn of the Magnificat."), in *Doctrina Christam* (1653), 81a–81b.

1 "谙若嘉俾轭尔。又以尔表姊意撒伯尔。受娠的奇事。奉报于尔。尔乃大发热心的圣爱。速往看他。在他家内管顾。他的受孕有六个月。天神报说。该唤名为若翰。是时若翰在胎。就知尔在他母之前。又知尔已怀胎是将生救世的天主。其在胎中。不胜欣跃。尔子耶稣。在尔胎中。即便赦其所负原祖之罪。" ("The angel Gabriel informed you about your cousin Elizabeth's miraculous conception. Out of fervent holy love, you hastened to visit and care for at her household. As the angel had announced, she was already six months pregnant, and the child was to be named John. Though still a fetus in the womb, John knew you were present before her mother and that you carried the world's Savior. He was overwhelmed with joy in the womb, and at that moment, your son Jesus, while still with you, absolved him from his original sin."), in *Song nianzhu guicheng* (1616), 6a–6b.

2 "意撒伯尔荷蒙天主赐他认识尔为天主之母。不胜欢呼称赞。说道女中尔为殊福。尔胎中子。尤为殊福。我何德能。而使吾主之母。远来顾我。" ("Elizabeth, thanks to divine favor, recognized you as the Mother of God and joyfully proclaimed, 'Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?'"), in *Song nianzhu guicheng* (1616), 6b.

elements to be phased out in the translation process. In some instances, this seems to reflect a shift in emphasis, where one element is substituted for another. For instance, in the same offering, the *Magnificat* (*cantico da Magnificat*) is missing in the Chinese translation. Instead of Mary's song of praise to God, the text highlights Elizabeth's recognition and proclamation of Mary and Jesus, an additional emphasis not explicitly stated in the Portuguese original. In other cases, key terms central to Catholic theology and spiritual practice in the Portuguese Rosary, such as *Messias* (Messiah), *graça* (grace), and *recolhimento* (recollection), were omitted in the Chinese version. Moreover, all the notes that precede the offering of each mystery and identify the Gospel sources of the scenes (e.g., *Luc.* 2, *Mat.* 26) were also left out of the Chinese text. Regarding the instances where Catholic concepts and terms were preserved rather than removed, these involved translation strategies of transliteration, semantic extension, and neologism creation. These strategies will become more apparent when comparing the three Chinese Rosary texts and will be addressed in the subsequent analysis.

Finally, cultural adaptation can be examined on semantic and lexical levels. At the semantic level, this adaptation is most evident in the translation of petitions. Many petition translations demonstrate limited correspondence to the Portuguese original. For instance, in the petition from the second joyful mystery, the Portuguese text begins by asking the Virgin Mary to intercede with her precious Son, followed by requests to "seek good conversations, walk on good paths, and have fervent charity toward neighbors" (*buscar sempre boas conversações, & andar em bons caminhos, & ter fervente charidade para com meus próximos*), all "for the satisfaction of my soul" (*em satisfação da minha alma*).<sup>1</sup> While the Chinese text similarly opens with the request for Mary's intercession with her Son Jesus, the remainder was reshaped to different degrees. The original's simple, practical requests for "good conversations" and "good paths" in the source text were omitted entirely and replaced with petitions that tied more closely to interior moral and spiritual self-cultivation: a fervent heart to love people (*airen de rexin* 爱人的热心), forgiveness of sins for my *anima* (*wo de ya-ni-ma zuiguo zhi she* 我的亚尼玛罪过之赦), accumulation of holy grace (*sheng'en zhi ji* 圣恩之积), and knowledge of God's matters and understanding of supernatural matters (*xiao Tianzhu shili chao xing zhi shi* 晓天主事理超性之识). The original's final request for "fervent charity toward neighbors" was generalized as fervent love of all the others. Additionally, the Chinese version concludes with "Amen", which is absent from the Portuguese original.<sup>2</sup> This shift from external practical conduct to inner faith and salvation suggests that

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1 *Doctrina Christam* (1653), 81b.

2 *Song nianzhu guicheng* (1616), 7a.

the translator favored catechetical reinforcement over literal equivalence.

This adaptive strategy is also visible in the devotional invocations to the Virgin Mary at the beginning of each offering. In many cases, the modifiers used in the Portuguese originals were reinterpreted in the Chinese translations, shifting the emphasis of Mary's virtues or constructing a localized Marian image. One example of the first kind of change appears in the fourth joyful mystery. In the Portuguese text, Mary was praised as "most pure and mirror of humility" (*O Virgem puríssima, espelho de humildade*), highlighting her purity and humility. The Chinese version, however, renders it as "of exceptional grand beauty" (*feichang shengmei Ma-li-ya* 非常盛美玛丽亚), redirecting attention from concrete moral virtues to the more general physical or moral beauty. Concerning adaptations that introduce a localized Virgin Mary, one example appears in the fourth glorious mystery. In the Portuguese original, Mary was described as "*O Soberana Virgem, senhora do gene humano, fermosura do Ceo*" (*O Sovereign Virgin, lady of mankind, splendor of Heaven*). The Chinese version translated it into "high-above mother-lord" (*gao shang mu zhu* 高上母主) and "supreme queen of heaven and earth" (*tiandi yuanhou* 天地元后). The honorific title *yuanhou* 元后 (supreme queen) originally denoted the emperor or the sovereign, and later also the emperor's primary, legitimate wife or the sovereign's principal consort. Its use here highlights Mary's exalted status while imparting an archaic tone. In the same vein, the term *tiandi* 天地 (heaven and earth), a familiar compound in Chinese thought immediately recognizable to Chinese recipients, expands the Portuguese reference to "Heaven" alone.<sup>1</sup> This adoption of the compound situates Mary in the Chinese cosmological and philosophical traditions and infuses the translation with a sense of cultural resonance.

At the lexical level, adaptation manifests in two primary ways. First, Chinese culturally loaded concepts were sometimes adopted, such as translating *obediēcia* (obedience) as *xiao* 孝 (filial piety) in the fifth joyful mystery's petition.<sup>2</sup> Second, the source text imagery unfamiliar to the target

1 The compound of *tiandi* often refers to nature in Chinese philosophical traditions. It appears in the discussions of different philosophical schools. Please refer to the entries that contain this term in Fang (1991, pp. 79–80).

2 The Portuguese original is "A leçaime Senhora minha, buscar a meu Deos cõ prâde dor, & sentimento de o ter perdido, e graça pe nunca mais o perder, & perfeita obediēcia a todos meus superiores. Amen" (Grant me, my Lady, to seek my God with heartfelt sorrow and deep regret for having lost Him, and the grace to never lose Him again, and perfect obedience to all my superiors. Amen), whereas the Chinese translation is "今我虔恭求尔。为我转求尔子耶稣。与我患难之时。赐我神慰。使我时时事事。合于圣旨。成谦成孝。能事天主。亚孟。" (Now I piously and respectfully beseech you: intercede for me with your Son Jesus. In times of affliction,

audience was sometimes removed. For instance, in the third sorrowful mystery, the *cana* (reed) which Roman soldiers placed in Jesus' hand as a scepter and used to strike his head was removed and replaced with "shabby garments worn by kings" (*wangzhe suo chuan de po yi* 王者所穿的破衣). These adaptations reveal a translation strategy that prioritizes cultural comprehension and doctrinal clarity over strict formal equivalence.

### Comparison of the Three Chinese Translations

Beyond the original-translation comparison, the study also investigates how the later Chinese Rosary versions evolved from the foundation laid by the 1616 text. The comparison of the three versions of the Rosary guide is presented below. The major differences are analyzed from the following perspectives: layout, presence of illustrations, style and rhythm, person, translation of certain Catholic names, titles, and concepts, and time schedule of praying the Rosary. An overview can be found in Table 2.

Table 2: Comparison of the Three Chinese Rosary guides

Category	<i>Song nianzhu guicheng</i> (1616)	<i>Song nianzhu guicheng</i> (1628)	<i>Shengmu meiguijing shiwu duan</i> c. 1665
Format	Introduction in dialogue form; main text in offering-petition structure	Introduction in narrative prose; main text in offering-petition structure	Introduction in narrative prose; main text in offering-petition structure
Layout	Additional space before religious names and divine titles; a separate column for "offering" and "petition"; the heading "offering" placed before the title of each mystery	No additional space; no separate column for "offering" and "petition"; the heading "offering" placed after the title of each mystery	The same as the 1628 edition
Illustrations	Fifteen woodblock illustrations	No illustrations	No illustrations

grant me with divine grace, so that at all times and in all matters, I may conform to the divine will, practice humility and filial piety, capable of serving the Lord of Heaven. Amen). For Portuguese, see *Doctrina Christam* (1653), 84a-85a. For Chinese, see *Song nianzhu guicheng* (1616), 12b.

<b>Style &amp; Rhythm</b>	Colloquial; longer sentences	Colloquial; longer sentences	Literary and elegant; shorter sentences with more four-character phrases
<b>Person</b>	Second person ("you")	Second person ("you")	Third person ("Holy Mother")
<b>Religious Names</b>	<i>Maria: Ma-li-ya</i> 玛利 亚 <i>Jesus: Ye-su</i> 耶稣 <i>Gabriel: Jia-bi-e-er</i> 嘉俾 轭尔	<i>Maria: Ma-li-ya</i> <i>Jesus: Ye-su</i> <i>Gabriel: Jia-bi-e-er</i>	<i>Maria: Ma-li-ya</i> <i>Jesus: Je-su</i> <i>Gabriel: Jia-bi-e-er</i>
<b>Divine Titles</b>	<i>Christus: Ji-li-si-duo</i> 基利斯多 <i>Deus: Tianzhu</i> 天主 (Lord of Heaven) <i>Pater: Tianzhu Ba-de-le</i> 天主罢德肋 (Lord of Heaven pater) <i>Spiritus Sanctus: Si-bi-li-duo-san-duo</i> 斯彼利 多三多	<i>Christus: Ji-li-si-duo</i> <i>Deus: Tianzhu</i> (Lord of Heaven) <i>Pater: Tianzhu ba-de-le</i> (Lord of Heaven pater) <i>Spiritus Sanctus: Si-bi-li-duo-san-duo</i>	<i>Christus: Ji-li-si-du</i> 基利斯督 <i>Deus: Tianzhu</i> (Lord of Heaven) <i>Pater: Tianzhu ba-de-le</i> (Lord of Heaven pater) <i>Spiritus Sanctus: Si-bi-li-duo-san-duo, Shengshen</i> 圣神 (holy spirit)
<b>Liturgical Concepts</b>	<i>amen: ya-meng</i> 亚孟 <i>gratia: e-la-ji-ya</i> 额辣 济亚 <i>anima: ya-ni-ma</i> 亚尼 玛, <i>sheng ya-ni-ma hun</i> 圣亚尼玛魂 (holy <i>anima</i> soul) <i>angelus: an-ruo</i> 谳若	<i>amen: ya-meng</i> <i>gratia: e-la-ji-ya</i> <i>anima: ya-ni-ma,</i> <i>linghun</i> 灵魂 (spirit-soul), 圣灵 魂 (holy spirit-soul) <i>angelus: an-ruo</i> · <i>tianshen</i> 天神 (heavenly god)	<i>amen: ya-meng</i> <i>gratia: e-la-ji-ya, sheng</i> <i>chong</i> 圣宠 (holy grace) <i>anima: linghun</i> (spirit- soul), <i>zhisheng linghun</i> 至圣灵魂 (most holy spirit-soul), <i>sheng xing</i> 圣性 (holy nature) <i>angelus: tianshen</i> (heavenly god)
<b>Prayer Schedules</b>	First 5 decades: 2nd & 5th day; Second 5 decades: 3rd, 6th, 7th day; Third 5 decades: 4th day & Sunday	First 5: 4th & 7th day; Second 5: 3rd & 6th day; Third 5: 2nd, 5th day & Sunday	First 5: 2nd & 5th day; Second 5: 3rd & 6th day; Third 5: 4th, 7th day & Sunday

Layout differences are among the most visible features of the Chinese Rosary editions. Changes appear between the earliest 1616 edition and the 1628 edition, while the standard c. 1665 edition follows the 1628 format. The main differences concern spacing before certain terms, the use of separate columns for the headings “offering” (*xian* 献) and “petition” (*qiu* 求), and the placement of the heading “offering”. In the 1616 edition, an extra space of one character was reserved before religious names such as Jesus (*Ye-su* 耶稣) and divine titles such as *Deus* (*Tianzhu* 天主). This practice disappears in the later editions. In addition, in the 1616 text both “offering” and “petition” occupy their own column, followed respectively by the mystery title and the prayer text. By contrast, in the 1628 and c. 1665 editions these titles are embedded directly into the body of the text rather than set off in a separate column. Lastly, the placement of “offering” also differs, In the 1616 edition it precedes the mystery title, while the offering content comes after the mystery title, with the introductory instruction (to recite ten *Ave Marias* and one *Pater Noster*, and to meditate on the mystery) place before the heading “offering”. The later editions reverse this order: the mystery title is placed above the instruction, and title “offering” is set directly above the offering content. Another change in the later two editions is the addition of the word “point” (*duan* 端) to mystery titles: for example, “the first sorrowful mystery” (*tongku yi* 痛苦一) in 1616 became “the point of the first sorrowful mystery”.

Another difference, also related to visual presentation and parallel to layout features, is the use of illustrations. The 1616 edition includes fifteen woodblock illustrations, one for each mystery, whereas they were omitted entirely in the later two editions.

Regarding stylistic differences, the c. 1665 standard version appears more elegant and concise with a sophisticated use of classical Chinese compared with the earlier two versions which appear more colloquial. For example, at the beginning of the first joyful mystery, the Virgin Mary was described as “most virtuous, most blessed” (*ji you de ji you fu* 极有德极有福) in the 1616 and 1628 texts. These two attributes were alternatively rendered as “with abundant virtues and supreme blessings” (*sheng de chong fu* 盛德崇福) in the c. 1665 text.<sup>1</sup> They convey the same meaning but differ in style. The latter feels more sublime and literary than the former. With two precise and well-chosen adjectives, it becomes brief yet expressive, eliminating the need for repetitive emphasis using the word “most”. The third joyful mystery in the earlier two versions contains another instance of oral repetition in what the angels say

<sup>1</sup> *Song nianzhu guicheng* (1616), 4a; *Song nianzhu guicheng* (1628), 2b; *Shengmu meiguijing shiwu duan* (c. 1665), 32a.

when announcing Jesus' birth. They proclaim "perpetual, perpetual glorious blessings" (*yong yong rongfu* 永永荣福) alongside the Lord of Heaven (God) high above, and "perpetual, perpetual peace" (*yong yong heping* 永永和平) among all the good people down on the earth.<sup>1</sup> This repetitive structure creates a grammatical issue due to the lack of main verbs to anchor the sentences. In contrast, verbs are supplemented in the standard version, where angels declare that God "receives and enjoys" (*shou xiang* 受享) glorious blessings in heaven" and that righteous men "receive and enjoy" peace on earth.<sup>2</sup> The repetition is removed and these sentences read more compact.

The colloquialism of the earlier version is further evident in the fourth sorrowful mystery, where the language closely resembles later written vernacular Chinese (白话). In the 1628 text, the introduction to this mystery's gospel scene states that "Jesus himself carrying the cross, went up the mountain to receive his death" (*Ye-su ziji bei zhe shizijia wang shanshang shousi* 耶稣自己背着十字架往山上受死). The standard version, however, renders it as "Jesus burdened with the cross ascending the mountain to receive his death" (*Ye-su fu shizijia zhi shan shousi* 耶稣负十字架陟山受死).<sup>3</sup> The verb *fu* 负 (to shoulder or bear) is more concise and literary in tone than the phrase *ziji bei zhe* 自己背着 (himself carrying), which sounds more accessible and familiar to modern Chinese readers. The use of the word *beizhe* already implies that he is carrying the cross on his own, making the explicit use of *ziji* redundant. The employment of the single character *fu* in the standard version avoids this problem. Moreover, *fu* carries the connotation of "being burdened with", thereby emphasizing the weight of Christ's suffering in a more evocative and poetic manner.

The earlier two texts are also characterized by the overuse of the possessive marker *de* 的 (of) and the possessive pronoun *ta* 他[的] (his). In the standard version, however, *de* is either replaced by the more classical word *zhi* (之) or is deleted. As for the pronoun *ta*, the sentences containing it are in the former two versions are often restructured in the later version so that it is no longer necessary. From a modern perspective of translation practice between Chinese and English, the frequent, even excessive use of possessive articles and possessive pronouns is seen as a sign of the Europeanization of the Chinese language. In classical and traditional Chinese, the subject of a sentence is often omitted, particularly if it is inferable from the preceding context. Similarly, possessive pronouns are not always necessary.

The increased use of the possessive marker *de* is closely tied to the

1 *Song nianzhu guicheng* (1616), 8b; *Song nianzhu guicheng* (1628), 5b.

2 *Shengmu meiguijing shiwu duan* (c. 1665), 34b.

3 *Song nianzhu guicheng* (1628), 11a; *Shengmu meiguijing shiwu duan* (c. 1665), 38b.

vernacular movement of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, which has contributed to a growing sense of redundancy in modern Chinese writing (Tsai 1998, pp. 242–248; Yu 1994, pp. 267–283). The more often such possessive structures appear in a Chinese text, the more it tends to resemble European syntactic patterns, often resulting in language that feels cumbersome and aesthetically less refined. Thus, the frequency of possessive constructions has become a key stylistic marker in evaluating the quality of a Chinese translated text. Applying this standard to the three versions of the Rosary, we may conclude that the standard version, compared to the other two, preserves a more traditional syntactic structure, reflects a more refined vocabulary, and shows a reduced influence from European languages, achieving greater clarity and stylistic elegance.

Changes can also be found in rhythm: Many expressions are adapted into a four-character format in the standard c. 1665 version compared to the earlier two versions, making the text sound more rhythmical when reading. For instance, as with the offering in the first joyful mystery on the Annunciation in all three versions, there is a depiction of the Virgin Mary's humble attitude in her reply upon hearing the news from the Archangel Gabriel. In the earlier two versions, it is rendered as “At such moment, you replied in a humble and respectful manner, saying...” (*er yu shi shi qiangong chouda shuodao* 尔于是时谦恭酬答说道). In the later c. 1665 version, however, this phrase became more compact and rhythmical with the latter half being adapted as another four-character expression: “At such moment, you bowed humbly and said...” (*er yu shi shi fugong qian yan* 尔于是时俯躬谦言).<sup>1</sup> By producing more four-character expressions in a row, rhythm is enhanced, making the narration more emphatic, with key details emphasized in fewer words.

Another notable shift lies in person. The second person is adopted in both offering and petition of each mystery to refer to the Virgin Mary in the earlier 1616 and 1628 versions. In the c. 1665 version, the second person remains largely the same in each offering. However, the exception is that the first sentence of each offering, which serves as a dedicatory statement to the Virgin Mary, is shifted from the second person to the third person. That is to say, every “I humbly dedicate this offering to you” (*qian gong bai xian yu er* 虔恭拜献于尔) becomes “I meditate on the sorrow of the Mother’s heart” (*mo si mu xin tongku* 默思母心痛苦). Furthermore, in each petition, every ‘you’ (*er* 尔) is replaced by the third person ‘the Holy Mother’ (*Shengmu* 圣母). The use of the second person suggests intimacy between the faithful and the Holy Mother they pray to, while the third person creates greater distance but at the same

<sup>1</sup> *Song nianzhu guicheng* (1616), 4b; *Song nianzhu guicheng* (1628), 3a; *Shengmu meiguijing shiwu duan* (c. 1665), 32a–32b.

time underscores her exalted status.

The translation of Catholic terms also witnesses continuities and changes. These terms are divided into three categories: religious names, divine titles, and liturgical concepts. As shown in Table 2, more than half of the Chinese translations of these terms result from transliteration, also called phonetic translation, which means to render the sound of the original word. Meanwhile, a trend can be observed toward alternative translations that rely on semantic extension, adopting an existing Chinese word and broadening its meaning; or on neologism creation, that is, coining a new term to render the foreign concept. Ultimately, in some cases in the c. 1665 version, the transliteration is abandoned in favor of neologism or semantic extension.

In the 1616 version, the prevailing method for translating these terms is transliteration. Exceptions are with the translation of *Deus*, *Pater*, and *anima*. *Deus*, the Latin word for God, is translated as *Tianzhu* 天主, a neologism which means the Lord of Heaven.<sup>1</sup> *Pater*, the Latin word to denote God the Father, is rendered in Chinese through a combination of transliteration and neologism as *Tianzhu Ba-de-le* 天主罢德肋 (Lord of Heaven father). *Anima*, the Latin word for the Christian soul, has two translations. The first, *ya-ni-ma* 亚尼玛, is a transliteration. The second, *sheng ya-ni-ma hun* 圣亚尼玛魂 (holy *anima* soul), combines transliteration with an explicative element that marks *anima* as holy, and further employs semantic extension by adopting the existing Chinese term *hun* and imbuing it with an extra Christian sense. Compared to the 1616 version, the majority of Chinese renditions remain the same in the 1628 version, with the exceptions of the translation of *anima* and *angelus*. The transliteration of *anima*, *ya-ni-ma*, still stays in the latter version, whereas the “sacred *anima* soul” gives way to two alternative translations: *linghun* 灵魂 (spirit-soul), a neologism; and *sheng linghun* 圣灵魂 (holy spirit-soul), a blend of neologism and the explicative element of “holy”. Similar to *anima*, the transliteration of *angelus*, *anruo*, remains in use, but a new translation also appears: *tianshen* 天神 (heavenly god), a coined neologism.

The c. 1665 Rosary manual shows more variations than the earlier two editions. A notable example is a slight adjustment in character choice within

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<sup>1</sup> The translation of God aroused a term controversy in China since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, which lasted for over a century. There appeared mainly three types of translation of the word: firstly, *dousi* 陡斯, the transliteration of *Deus*; secondly, words such as *shangdi* 上帝(supreme sovereign) that have appeared in ancient Chinese classics whose meanings were semantically extended with another Christian sense; thirdly, *tianzhu* 天主 (Lord of Heaven), a neologism created to render the term. In the end, the neologism was approved by Rome as the standard translation of God. It is still used by Chinese Catholics today.

the transliteration strategy, a special case not found between the 1616 and 1628 texts. In the earlier two texts, *Christus* is rendered as *Ji-li-si-duo* 基利斯多, while in the later text it appears as *Ji-li-si-du* 基利斯督. This latter form more closely anticipates the modern standard translation of Christ as *Ji-du* 基督. Other shifts are related to *Spiritus Sanctus*, *gratia*, *anima*, and *angelus*. The c. 1665 text preserves the transliteration of *Spiritus Sanctus* as *Si-bi-li-duo-san-duo* 斯彼利多三多, already present in the earlier two texts, while also adding a neologism, *shengshen* 圣神 (holy spirit). Similarly, while the transliteration of *e-la-ji-ya* 额辣济亚 for *gratia* continues from the earlier texts to the c. 1665 text, this version also introduces a new neologism: *shengchong* 圣宠 (holy grace).

However, the transliterations of *ya-ni-ma* for *anima* and *anruo* for *angelus* completely disappear in the c. 1665 version. In the end, on the one hand, the neologisms *tianshen* (heavenly god) and *linghun* (spirit-soul), introduced in the 1628 edition to render *angelus* and *anima* respectively, are retained. On the other hand, two additional translations of *anima* appear in the c. 1665 text: *zhi sheng linghun* 至圣灵魂 (most holy spirit-soul), which builds on the previous translation *sheng linghun* (holy spirit-soul) by adding an emphatic modifier, and *shengxing* 圣性 (holy nature), a neologism whose meaning diverges somewhat from the other new coinages for *anima*.

Finally, discrepancies appear in the guidance on the appropriate timing for praying the Rosary among the three versions. As listed in Table 2, the 1616 version instructs that the first five decades, the Joyful Mysteries, should be recited on the second and fifth days of feast celebrations; the second five decades, the Sorrowful Mysteries, on the third and sixth days; and the final five decades, the Glorious Mysteries, on the fourth day and on Sundays.<sup>1</sup> The 1628 version partly reverses the schedule for the first and final sets while leaving the second largely unchanged: it assigns the first five decades to the fourth and seventh days; the second five decades again to the third and sixth days, and the final five decades to the second and fifth days, as well as Sundays.<sup>2</sup> By contrast, the c. 1665 version fully reverses the allocation for the first and final sets in relation to the 1628 text, while once again leaving the second unchanged: it prescribes the first five decades for the second and fifth days, and the last five decades for the fourth and seventh days, along with Sundays.<sup>3</sup> At first glance, such inconsistencies raise questions about the rigor of the translation and review processes that produced these manuals. However, similar guidance on the exact dates to pray the Rosary is absent from the original Portuguese version itself. In this light, it would be an

1 *Song nianzhu guicheng* (1616), 3a.

2 *Song nianzhu guicheng* (1628), 1b.

3 *Shengmu meiguijing shiwu duan* (c. 1665), 31b.

oversimplification to dismiss these phenomena as mere “mistakes”. The observed inconsistencies may instead reflect efforts to reconcile the Catholic prayer schedule with the local calendar, to accommodate the devotional practices and daily rhythms of particular groups of converts, or to emphasize certain mysteries on specific days in response to local circumstances. A detailed investigation of these possibilities lies beyond the scope of the present article, but it remains a promising avenue for future research.

The table and analysis above indicate that between 1616 and c. 1665, Chinese Rosary manuals evolved from a colloquial, direct second-person address to a more literary and refined style with a third-person devotional perspective centered on the Holy Mother. Although the translations of the same Christian terms remain broadly consistent across the three Rosary texts (as shown in the table above), variants in transliteration (*Christus* from *ji-li-si-duo* to *ji-li-si-du*) and semantic refinement (e.g., *anima* as *linghun* [spirit-soul], *sheng linghun* [holy spirit-soul], *zhi sheng linghun* [most holy spirit-soul], and *sheng xing* [holy nature]) reveal a trend toward increasing localization and sophistication. The key conceptual terms such as *hun* 魂 (soul), *shen* 神 (spirit), and *xing* 性 (nature) constitute shared terminology and cultural resources across Chinese thought, utilized by various schools since the Warring States Period (c. 475–221 BC). Notably, the term *xing*, which already appeared in *Zhuangzi* (specifically the Outer Chapter “Correcting the Nature”, *shanxing* 缮性) during that same period, later became one of the most debated topics in Chinese Buddhist writings, and ultimately attained central importance in Song dynasty (960–1279) Neo-Confucian thought, particularly within the Cheng-Zhu school, which is famously known as the “School of Nature and Principle” (*xing li xue* 性理学). Notably, liturgical concepts, compared to other categories of terms in the table above, underwent major adaptations, reflecting the deepest extent of cultural negotiation. One important reason for this may be that how liturgical concepts are expressed makes a clear difference to believers regarding their understanding about essential Christian doctrines, their spiritual cultivation when they announce words like *gratia*, and their practical life where their perception of Christian concepts would guide their ultimate behavior.

These changes in the rendering of all these Christian terms suggest that over time, transliteration was not always the preferred method for rendering foreign words and concepts. Instead, Chinese translations of Christian terms increasingly relied on interpretative strategies, especially neologism creation, coining new terms, and semantic extension, which adapts existing words with expanded meanings. Consequently, the Chinese vocabulary was enlarged or nuanced with new layers of Christian connotations, allowing for greater cultural accessibility. Still, when Christianity was only in its embryonic stage

at the time in China, this approach carried the risk of evoking meanings shaped by the recipient culture, potentially diverging from the original Christian doctrines.

Before moving on to the next section, to give readers a sense of the textual character of all four Rosary guides (one in Portuguese and three in Chinese), I offer an appendix that includes the first joyful mystery from each version. This concludes the preceding two-tiered comparison, which centers on the analyses of the categories derived from the comparison between Portuguese and Chinese versions, as well as among different Chinese texts.

### Parallels and Tensions in Early Chinese Prayer Translation

The evolution of Chinese Rosary manuals parallels the development of Chinese translations of the *Ave Maria*. Song Gang compares Ruggieri's earliest version with five subsequent translations found in works by Ricci around 1610,<sup>1</sup> by Alfonso Vagnone [S.J.] (Wang Yiyuan 王一元/Wang Fengsu 王丰肃/Gao Yizhi 高一志, 1568-1640) in 1615, by da Rocha in 1619, by an anonymous author between 1650 and 1700, and by Lodovico Buglio [S.J.] (Li Leisi 利类思, 1606-1682) around 1665. According to his observations, the Daoist and folk religious elements in Ruggieri's incipient translation gradually disappeared. In their place, later Jesuit versions "used classical Chinese to imbue the text with elegance and erudition" (Song 2018, p. 328). Notably, the four translations that followed Ricci's version are nearly identical to his. This suggests that Ricci's translation likely set a stylistic and lexical model for later Jesuits: the prayer should be rendered in an elegant style using classical Chinese terms that catered to elite Confucian scholar-officials' literary tastes. As Brunner points out, Matteo Ricci, though heralded as the pioneer of the missionary adaptation (*le grand champion de l'adaptation*), nonetheless exercised caution in adopting existing Chinese terms to translate theological concepts, such as the Holy Spirit or the Holy Trinity. Instead, he adopted the prevailing missionary practice at the time (*la méthode des missions d'alors*), transliterating the corresponding Portuguese sounds into Chinese characters (Brunner 1964, p. 22). He also acknowledges that Ricci's translations possess "such exactitude and elegance that no one since was able to do better" (*avec tant d'exactitude et d'elegance que personne depuis n'a encore pu faire mieux*) (Brunner 1964, p. 23).

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<sup>1</sup> This refers to *Shengjing yue lu* 圣经约录 (A Synopsis of the Holy Scriptures), which is the reprint of Matteo Ricci's *Tianzhu jiaoyao* 天主教要 (Essentials of the Teachings of the Lord of Heaven, 1605) with minor revisions. There seems only copy of the original 1605 text, discovered by Pasquale D'Elia in the Propaganda Fide Archives in Rome in 1934 and described in his *Fonti Ricciane* (1942-1949) For further details, see Dudink (2002, pp. 38-50).

However, discordance in translation style and strategy has existed across Catholic orders. As discussed previously, Jesuit Mariological texts were adapted to Confucian morality, the dominant Chinese mode of thought, especially among elite literati. By contrast, in Dominican missionary del Rosario's work on the Rosary, *The True Peace of Humankind*, the essential Confucian virtue of filial piety (*xiaodao* 孝道), which Jesuits had emphasized since Ricci's time by associating it with Catholic devotion, is not given the same prominence (Yang 2024, p. 7). For another example, the MEP missionary Jean Basset, who held a critical attitude towards the Jesuit accommodation strategy, sharply criticized the Chinese prayers then in circulation, probably composed by Jesuits. In his well-known *Avis sur la Mission de Chine* (Viewpoints on the Chinese Mission), Basset expressed his concern about additions and alterations in some common prayers.<sup>1</sup> For Basset, these translation issues may have not only caused problems for devotional practice, but also have fostered misunderstandings that strayed into heresy. He lamented, for example, cases where some Christians claimed that Mary surpassed God in importance.<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore, there was also tension within the Jesuits themselves. Compared to Ricci's "model", which favored the use of transliteration to preserve the authentic theological concepts, the Chinese Rosary manuals still deviate from it since they increasingly rely on semantic extension and neologism creation, likely an adaptive and pragmatic response to local pastoral realities. This approach would make translations more intelligible to Chinese recipients, but at the risk of compromising doctrinal accuracy. The latter was precisely the concern raised by Basset in the early eighteenth century. The creative grafting of Christian concepts onto existing Chinese vocabulary, and the doubt and criticism this practice provokes, suggest a broader pattern observable when a new religion enters a culture with a rich and well-established philosophical tradition: a perpetual tension emerges between the pursuit of doctrinal purity and the practical necessity of

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<sup>1</sup> « quelques prières des plus communes comme le Pater, l'Ave, le Credo, le Salve Regina, les commandements de Dieu et de l'Église, les litanies des saints, de la Vierge, plusieurs autres litanies et prières ad libitum où il y a bien des choses qui n'y devraient pas être » (Some of the most common prayers such like the Our Father, the Hail Mary, the Creed, the Hail Holy Queen, the [Ten] Commandments of God and [the Six Precepts] of the Church, the litanies of the saints, of Virgin Mary, several other litanies and prayers at random, in which there were indeed things that should not be there). See Basset (2012, p. 112).

<sup>2</sup> « la Sainte Vierge est plus grande que Notre Seigneur » (Mary the Saint is more important than Our Lord). See Basset (2012, p.153).

accommodating local cultural sensibilities.

## Conclusion

To summarize, the comparison between the Portuguese original and the earliest Chinese translation dated 1616 highlights the kinds of shifts that proved inevitable when a Catholic devotional text was transplanted into a markedly different cultural milieu. These shifts were shaped not only by linguistic constraints, but also by pastoral considerations, assumptions about readers' doctrinal knowledge, and Christianity's marginal position within the Chinese religious landscape. The subsequent comparison of the three Chinese versions (1616, 1628, c. 1665) further reveals a clear trajectory of stylistic and lexical development, with the later versions displaying greater literary refinement, rhythmic balance, and reliance on classical Chinese terms. Across all three versions, Catholic personal names are consistently rendered through transliteration, though with minor variations that became standardized over time. Divine titles and liturgical concepts, however, are translated less through transliteration than through semantic extension and neologisms, drawing on terms with established cultural resonance in early Chinese classics and Neo-Confucian discourse. These strategies reflect Jesuit efforts, starting with Ricci, to render Christian devotion intelligible and respectable within elite literary culture.

These findings point to a persistent tension between stylistic development and devotional functionality. While the evolution of the Chinese Rosary manuals appears increasingly oriented toward the tastes and expectations of educated readers, their devotional use was likely shaped by audiences whose engagement with the texts may not have aligned with the literary ambitions embedded in them, among whom ordinary female converts played a major role. Although terminological variation may have carried theological implications, the present study cannot determine how such differences were understood or internalized by this specific group of believers.

All the observations so far invite us to reconsider what Bible translation meant in the earlier phase of Sino-Christian encounter before the nineteenth century. Rather than the production of a stable full scriptural text, biblical transmission often occurred through excerpted and adapted translations, including devotional texts that incorporated, recontextualized, and adapted scriptural language. The Chinese Rosary manuals examined here illustrate how scripture was mediated through prayer, and how translation was shaped by shifting cultural alignments and pastoral priorities, outcomes of negotiation between self and other. In this sense, devotional translation emerges not as a subsidiary activity, but as a central arena where Christian texts with biblical references were rendered meaningful within a new cultural,

intellectual, and religious milieu.

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### Appendix:

The First Glorious Mystery in Portuguese and Chinese Rosary Manuals, Divided into "Introduction", "Offering", and "Petition"<sup>1</sup>

	<i>Doctrina Christam</i> (1592/1653)	<i>Song nianzhu guicheng</i> (1616)	<i>Song nianzhu guicheng</i> (1628)	<i>Shengmu meiguijing shiwu duan</i> (c. 1665)
Introduction	MYSTERIOS GOZOSOS. O <i>primeiro mysterio. Consideraçāo da Anunciaçāo, &amp; Encarnaçāo. Luc. 1.</i> (JOYFUL MYSTERIES. The first mystery. Consideration of the Annunciation and Incarnation.	诵念珠首一分的规程 诵念第一次。亚物十遍。在天一遍。讫。略停片时。默想圣母欢喜条内的第一件。然后献祈如左。 (Regulations for the First Decade of Reciting and saying the	欢喜首一分 欢喜一端 天神嘉俾轭尔。朝拜圣母。报说天主选他为母。念亚物十遍。在天一遍。 (The First Decade of the Joyful Mysteries	欢喜首一分 欢喜一端 (天神朝拜童贞玛利亚。报曰。天主特选为母。诵亚物十遍。在天一遍) (The First Joyful Mystery:

<sup>1</sup> The punctuation was included in the text and replicated in this table. So was the seemingly extra blank space between the words. See the four quotes respectively in *Doctrinam Christam* (1653), 91a–91b; *Song nianzhu guicheng* (1616), 24a–24b; *Song nianzhu guicheng* (1628), 12a–13a; *Shengmu meiguijing shiwu duan* (c. 1665), 40a–41a.

	Luke 1.)	Rosary The First Recitation. Ten times of <i>Ave Maria</i> and ten times of <i>Pater Noster</i> . When finished, rest briefly. Meditate in silence on the first item under the Joyful Mysteries of the Blessed Virgin. Offer the following prayer.)	Joyful Mystery: The Angel Gabriel visits the Holy Mother and announces that the Lord of Heaven has chosen her to be His mother. Say ten <i>Ave Marias</i> and one <i>Pater Noster</i> .)	The angel visits the Virgin Mary and announces that the Lord of Heaven has particularly chosen (her) to be His mother. Recite ten <i>Ave Marias</i> and one <i>Pater Noster</i> .)
Offering	<i>Offereamento.</i> <i>O Virgem Santíssima chea de graça, eu vos offereço humilmente dez Ave Marias, &amp; hū Padre Noso. A hora do gozo que recebestes, quando estando em vosso recolhimento, do Anjo S. Gabriel fostes saudada com aquellas doces palavras: Deos vos salve chea de graça, o Senhor he com vosco. E vos anūciou como o Filho de Deos vinha fazerse</i>	献 欢喜— 极有德。极有福。童贞玛利亚。我念这亚物十遍。在天一遍。虔恭拜献与尔敬祝尔欢喜。昔日天神嘉俾轭尔。奉天主的命。来报于尔。致恭致敬说道。亚物玛利亚。满被额辣济亚者。主与尔偕焉。又奉报于尔。说道。天主费略。选尔为母。将降孕于尔最净最纯的圣胎为人救世。尔于是	献 极有德。极有福。童贞玛利亚。我念这亚物十遍。在天一遍。虔恭拜献与尔敬祝尔欢喜。昔日天神嘉俾轭尔。奉天主的命。来报于尔。致恭致敬说道。亚物玛利亚。满被额辣济亚者。主与尔偕焉。又奉报于尔。说道。天主费略。选尔为母。将降孕于尔最净最纯的圣胎为人救世。尔于是	献 盛德崇福。童贞玛利亚。我献此经。敬祝尔圣宠无涯之喜。昔日天神嘉俾轭尔。奉天主之命。恭报于尔云。亚物玛利亚。满被额辣济亚者。主与尔偕焉。又云天主费略。选尔为母。将

	<p><i>homem em vossas virginaes entranhas pera remedio dos homens. E vós, Senhora assegurando o voto de vossa virginal pureza cõ profunda humildade deste contentamento dizendo: Eis aqui a Serua do Senhor, faça-se em mim segundo vossa palavra.</i></p> <p>(Offering.</p> <p>O Most Holy Virgin, full of grace, I offer you humbly ten Ave Marias and one Our Father. At the hour of joy that you received, when being in your recollection, by the Angel St. Gabriel you were greeted with those sweet words: God save you, full of grace, the Lord is with you. And he announced to you how the Son of God came to make himself man in</p>	<p>圣胎。为人救 世。尔于是 时。谦恭酬 答。说道我乃 主之婢女。愿 赐成于我。如 尔之言。</p> <p>(Offering</p> <p>O Mary, most virtuous and most blessed, I recite this Ave Maria ten times and the Pater Noster once, offering them</p> <p>devoutly and humbly to you in honor of your utmost joy.</p> <p>On that day, the Angel Gabriel came to you at the command of the Lord of Heaven to make an announcemen t. With deepest respect and reverence, he said: "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee." He then proclaimed</p>	<p>时。谦恭酬答 说道。我乃主 之婢女。愿赐 成于我。如尔 之言。</p> <p>(Offering</p> <p>O Mary, most virtuous and most blessed, I recite this Ave Maria ten times and the Pater Noster once, offering them</p> <p>devoutly and humbly to you in honor of your utmost joy.</p> <p>On that day, the Angel Gabriel came to you at the command of the Lord of Heaven to make an announcemen t. With deepest respect and reverence, he said: "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee." He then proclaimed</p>	<p>降孕于尔 最净最纯 之圣胎。 为人救 世。尔于 是时。俯 躬谦言。 我乃主之 婢女。愿 赐成于 我。如汝 之言。</p> <p>(Offering</p> <p>O Mary, Mother of Abundant Virtues, Supreme Blessings, and of Virginity, I offer this prayer in praise of your boundless joy of grace. On that day, the Angel Gabriel came to you at the command of the Lord of Heaven, announcin g respectfull y that "Hail Mary, full of grace,</p>
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	<p>your virginal entrails for the remedy of men. And you, Lady, assuring the vow of your virginal purity with profound humility of this contentment, saying: Behold the servant of the Lord, let it be done unto me according to your word.)</p>	<p>to you, saying that God the Son had chosen you as his mother and that you would conceive in your womb the holy child, most pure and clear, who would take flesh as human for the salvation of the world. At that moment, you replied in a humble and respectful manner, saying that “Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Be it done unto me according to your word.”</p>	<p>chosen you as his mother and that you would conceive in your womb the holy child, most pure and clear, who would take flesh as human for the salvation of the world. At that moment, you replied in a humble and respectful manner, saying that “Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Be it done unto me according to your word.”</p>	<p>the Lord is with thee”, and that God the Son had chosen you as his mother and that you would conceive in your womb the holy child, most pure and clear, who would take flesh as human for the salvation of the world. At that moment, you bowed humbly, saying that “Behold the handmaid of the Lord. Be it done unto me according to thy word.”</p>
Petition	<p><i>Oração</i> <i>Peçōu os humilmente me</i></p>	<p>求 今我虔恭求尔。为我转求</p>	<p>求 今我虔恭求尔。为我转求</p>	<p>求 今我虔祈圣母。转</p>

	<p><i>alca[n]ceis verdadeira alegria de boa consciencia, &amp; que minha alma resuscite em nua vida, &amp; costumes, &amp; firmemente creaos misterios da fé que ensina a S. Madre Igreja de Roma. Amen. (Petition</i></p> <p>I humbly ask you to obtain for me true joy of good conscience, and that my soul may rise again into a renewed life and conduct, and that I may firmly believe the mysteries of the faith taught by the Holy Mother Church of Rome. Amen.)</p>	<p>于尔极爱之子 耶稣。赐我完 全之谦。使我 诸凡行事物之 间。自能顺承 天主至圣之 旨。亚孟。 (Petition</p> <p>Now I pray to you devoutly and humbly to intercede for me with your beloved Son, Jesus, that He may grant me utmost modesty, so that in all my words and deeds amidst the affairs of this worlds, I may freely submit to the most divine will of the Lord of Heaven. Amen.)</p>	<p>于尔极爱之子 耶稣。赐我完 全之谦逊。使 我诸凡行事物 之间。自能顺 承天主至圣之 旨。亚孟。 (Petition</p> <p>Now I pray to you devoutly and humbly to intercede for me with your beloved Son, Jesus, that He may grant me utmost humility, so that in all my words and deeds amidst the affairs of this worlds, I may freely submit to the most divine will of the Lord of Heaven. Amen.)</p>	<p>祈圣子耶 稣。赐我 谦逊之 德。使我 诸凡行 为。自能 顺承天主 至圣之 旨。亚 孟。 (Petition</p> <p>Now I devoutly entreat you, Holy Mother, and through you our Lord Jesus, that He may grant me the virtue of humility, so that in all my words and deeds, I may freely submit to the most divine will of the Lord of Heaven. Amen.)</p>
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