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Bringing Forth Treasures New and Old: Xu Caibai, a Forgotten Chinese Jesuit Bible Translator

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Abstract

Although the recent rediscovery of a manuscript containing a translation of the Four Gospels into literary Chinese by Fr. Xu Caibai, a nineteenth-century Chinese priest who joined the Society of Jesus in 1862 and left it to become a diocesan priest in 1884, has given rise to renewed interest toward this remarkable but neglected figure in the history of the Chinese church, precious little work has been done to this day. To remedy this gap, in this paper we will attempt as thorough a reconstruction of his biography as allowed by the sources available to us and provide an analysis of the historical context in which it was produced, both with regards to historical Catholic policies on vernacular Bible translation and the specific context of the mission in Jiangnan, while pointing out several remarkable aspects of his unpublished translation. By comparing Xu's work to Manuel Dias's early exegetical work on Sunday Gospel readings, the classic commentaries of Giovanni Stefano Menochio, those of French Oratorian priest Louis de Carrières, and his contemporary Li Wenyu's translation of the Four Gospels, we will show how Xu strove to weave a rich tapestry in which the legacy of seventeenth-century Jesuit translation is combined with the contributions of French missionaries of the restored Society.

Keywords

Bible – Chinese – Xu Bin – Xu Caibai – Jesuits – Manuel Dias – translation – translation studies – Vulgate

Introduction

The year 1840 could very rightly be termed an *annus mirabilis* for the church in China, as it saw the birth of famous Catholics such as Ma Xiangbo (1840–1939),¹ the founder of Aurora University and Fudan University,² or Li Wenyu (1840–1911), the indefatigable editor, author, and translator.³ When the Jesuit novitiate was founded in Xujiahui 徐家匯, Shanghai, in 1862, the first eleven novices included Ma and Li,⁴ and they and their classmates were described by Xu Zongze (1886–1947) as *yi dai zhi yingxiong, Xuhui gongxue zhi guangrong* 一代之英雄，徐匯工學之光榮 (the heroes of a generation, the glory of the

1 All Chinese names and terms are romanized using the *pinyin* system.

2 On the life of Ma Xiangbo, the three studies by Zhu Weizheng 朱維錚, Li Tiangang 李天綱 and Lu Yongling 陸永玲 featured at the end of the complete works of Ma Xiangbo edited by Fudan University Press remain the definitive references: see Ma Xiangbo 馬相伯, *Ma Xiangbo ji* 馬相伯集 [Collected works of Ma Xiangbo], ed. Zhu Weizheng 朱維錚 (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 1996). Translations of these works in English can be found in Ruth Hayhoe and Lu Yongling 陸永玲, eds. *Ma Xiangbo and the Mind of Modern China* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1996). For another overview of Ma Xiangbo's life and involvement in education, see Michael Kropp, "Ma Xiangbo (1840–1939) und die Modernisierung des Chinesischen Bildungswesens," *Monumenta Serica* 42 (1994): 397–443.

3 A recent work that is bound to become the standard reference on Li Wenyu is Fang Yunfang 房芸芳, *Yi xie yi dao: Wan Qing xixuedongjian zhong de Li Wenyu* 亦寫亦禱—晚清西學東漸中的李問漁 [Writing and praying: Li Wenyu in the spread of Western learning during the Late Qing] (Shanghai: Xuelin chubanshe, 2020). Another excellent resource is Xiao Qinghe 尚清和 and Guo Jianbin 郭建斌, "Li Wenyu shengping shiji ji qi zhuzuo zai tan" 李問漁生平事跡及其著作再探 [A further study on the life and works of Li Wenyu], *Zhongguo Jidujiao yanjiu* 中國基督教研究 [Journal of research for Christianity in China] 13 (2019): 46–87. References in English include Joachim Kurz, "The Works of Li Wenyu (1840–1911): Bibliography of a Chinese-Jesuit Publicist," *Wakumon* 149, no. 11 (2006): 149–58 and Bai Limin 白莉民, "Jesuit Educational Tradition and the Remaking of Erudite Scholars in Late-Qing China: A Case Study of Li Wenyu 李問漁 (1840–1911)," *Ming Qing Studies* (2019): 29–56.

4 David Strong, *A Call to Mission—A History of the Jesuits in China 1842–1954* (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2018), 1:58. A list of these, broken down into *novitii scholastici* (scholastic novices) and *novitii coadjutores* (coadjutor novices), can be found in the *Catalogus Provinciae Franciae Societatis Jesu* [Catalog of the Province of France of the Society of Jesus; hereinafter: CPF], 1863, 101. Fang, *Yi xie yi dao*, 65.

Collège de Saint Ignace).⁵ However, we would like to draw attention to a third member of this initial cohort, who has fallen into relative obscurity.

Xu Bin (許彬, 1840–99), courtesy name Caibai 采白, Christian name Joannes-Baptista,⁶ also known as Xu Jingbang 許靖邦,⁷ was born in Pudong, Shanghai, on August 24, 1840.⁸ Like many of his classmates, he came from an old Christian family,⁹ being descended from the illustrious Candida Xu (1607–80);¹⁰ he enrolled in the Zhangjialou 張家樓 minor seminary at the age

5 Xu Zongze 徐宗澤, “Li Wenyu siduo shishi ershiwu zhounian jinian” 李問漁司鐸逝世二十五周年紀念 [The twenty-fifth anniversary of the passing of Father Li Wenyu], *Shengjiao zazhi* 聖教雜誌 [The Catholic review] 25 (1936): 722–29, here 722.

6 In Christian contexts, Xu Caibai’s name was spelled Joannes-Baptista Hiu in Latin, and Jean-Baptiste Hiu in French.

7 This is the name in which he appears among the novices (see Li Tiangang 李天綱, “Xinyang yu chuantong: Ma Xiangbo de zongjiao shengya” 信仰與傳統——馬相伯的宗教生涯 [Faith and tradition: Ma Xiangbo’s religious career], in *Ma Xiangbo ji* 馬相伯集 [Collected works of Ma Xiangbo], ed. Zhu Weizheng (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 1996), 1227–78, here 1274 and with which several of his works are credited to him, transcribed Hiu Tsing-pang. See the bibliography edited by Henri Cordier, *Essai d’une bibliographie des ouvrages publiés en Chine par les européens au XVII^e et au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1883), 16–17.

8 Auguste Colombel, *Histoire de la mission du Kiang-nan. Troisième partie, III: l’Épiscopat de Mgr. Garnier, 1879–1898* (no place: no publisher, no date), 1399. Auguste Colombel’s original French manuscript being hard to access, the reader may consult the Chinese edition published by Fu Jen University Press: Auguste Colombel, *Jiangnan chuanjiao shi* 江南傳教史 [History of the Jiangnan mission] trans. Zhou Shiliang 周士良 (Xinbei; Fuda chubanshe, 2018), 5–2:959–60. This date is also consistent with the *Catalogus Provinciae Franciae Societatis Jesu*. See, for instance, CPF (1869, 109), CPF (1868, 91), etc. The date of August 20, 1840, given by Li Qiang and Steven Pieragastini, “A Dialogue between Confucius and Christ: The Development and Influence of Chinese Jesuits in Kiang-nan (Jiangnan) during the Late Qing Period (1842–1912),” *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 10 (2023): 654–70, here 661 (https://brill.com/view/journals/jjs/10/4/article-p654_007.xml) [accessed November 19, 2025], is most likely incorrect.

9 This was no coincidence. According to Joseph de la Serrière, “The Work of the Catholic Church in China,” *The Oxford and Cambridge Review* 20 (1912): 67–97, here 87–88, the native clergy was mainly “recruited in Christian families whose belief [had] persisted through two or three generations,” as it was believed that only they would have the steadfastness of faith and discipline. As a result, most native priests were from the old Christian communities around Shanghai.

10 Li and Pieragastini, “Dialogue between Confucius and Christ,” 662. Candida Xu (1607–80) was the granddaughter of Xu Guangqi (1562–1633), one of the “three pillars of Chinese Catholicism.” Her story became known in the west through her biography written by her confessor Philippe Couplet (1623–93), which was written in French and later translated into Flemish, Italian, and Spanish. See Gail King, “Four Editions of Couplet’s Biography of Madame Candida Xu,” *Sino-Western Relations Journal* 31 (2009): 56–63. Xu Caibai translated an abridged version of this work in literary Chinese, which was published in

of fifteen, and then studied philosophy and theology at the Dongjiadu 董家渡 seminary before his *admissio* (admission) as a scholastic on May 29, 1862, along with Ma Xiangbo and Li Wenyu.¹¹ In the years prior to his ordination to the priesthood, Xu Caibai began to take on responsibilities as a Latin teacher and prefect of discipline in the Collège de Saint Ignace and as an assistant to the prefect of the library.¹² He was ordained on September 8, 1868 at the age of twenty-eight, after some thirteen years of study,¹³ and immediately took on responsibilities as a teacher of Latin, prefect of the library, an assistant to the prefect of studies and the church, a confessor, and missionary,¹⁴ in which context he would be sent to Songjiang 松江, Punan 浦南, Suzhou prefecture 蘇州府 and Anqing 安慶, among others, and would be in charge of the *xenodochium* (hospice) in Yangjingbang 洋涇浜 between 1875 and 1876.¹⁵

Xu returned to Xujiahui for a brief time to teach Latin, this time in the minor seminary, during which time he also wrote and worked reviewing Chinese books,¹⁶ and it was probably shortly after that he began to translate the biography of Candida Xu, first published in 1882, and collaborated with Li Wenyu in the context of the periodical *Yiwen lu* 益聞錄 (Record of useful news), which was founded in 1878.¹⁷ For this, he wrote a series of articles on geography which would later become part of the book *Wu zhou tu kao* 五洲圖考 (An illustrated

1882, Han Qingping 韓清平, “Xu Gandida, zaoqi Zhongguo jiaohui de ‘nü zhushi’” 徐甘弟大一早期中國教會的「女柱石」 [Candida Xu, a “female pillar” of the early Chinese church], *Gongjiao shenxue pinglun* 公教神學評論 [Catholic theological review] 3 (2022): 20–37, here 24, and re-edited, in somewhat simplified language, in 1927 under the title *Xu taifuren zhuan lie* 許太夫人傳略. See Xu Caibai 許采白, trans., *Xu taifuren zhuan lie* 許太夫人傳略 [A brief biography of Madam Xu] (Shanghai: Tushanwan yinshuguan, 1927), 2. For more information on Candida Xu, see Han, “Xu Gandida,” 20–37.

11 Colombel, *Histoire de la mission*, 1399; Colombel, *Jiangnan chuanjiao shi*, 5–2:959–60. CPF 1863, 101.

12 CPF 1866, 61; CPF 1868, 59.

13 Colombel, *Histoire de la mission*, 1399; Colombel, *Jiangnan chuanjiao shi*, 5–2:959–60. As de la Servièrè notes, Chinese seminarians were expected to study longer and be anointed later than Europeans, as a test of their vocation; as a result, it was “rarely that a seminarist in Kiangnan [received] the sacerdotal unction before the age of twenty-eight or thirty, and before this time he must have been subjected to an educative process extending over nearly twenty years,” de la Servièrè, “Work of the Catholic Church in China,” 89. Li Wenyu underwent seventeen years of combined study in the Collège de Saint Ignace and the Jesuit seminary: Fang, *Yi xie yi dao*, 69.

14 CPF 1870, 52.

15 Colombel, *Jiangnan chuanjiao shi*, 4, 206, 212, 232; 5–1, 375; CPF 1877, 57.

16 CPF 1877, 57.

17 Strong, *Call to Mission*, 1:76.

study of the five continents),¹⁸ alternating with his missionary work. In 1884, Xu left the Society of Jesus to become a diocesan priest, which he remained until his untimely death at the age of fifty-eight on February 15, 1899, after having been a priest for thirty-one years.¹⁹

The reasons for this decision are unclear. According to Strong,²⁰ one important factor in the malaise of the mission in Jiangnan under Valentin Garnier (1825–98), who was appointed Vicar Apostolic of Jiangnan in 1879 and seems to have been a rigid and somewhat authoritarian man, was overwork, and this may very well have been the case with Father Xu. Indeed, the *Catalogus* for the year of his resignation describes him as a writer for a Chinese periodical (probably *Yiwen lu*), the president of the sodality of the Blessed Virgin, a confessor in Tushanwan and in the college, a reviewer of Chinese books, a teacher of Latin in the college, and in charge of spiritual exercises.²¹ However, as we shall see below, Xu Caibai would not spend the last years of his life idly.

The Race to Translate the Bible in Late Nineteenth-Century Catholic China

Before we approach the subject of Xu Caibai's activity as a Bible translator, it is worth considering its historical context. Indeed, the publication of the first partial versions of the New Testament in Chinese by the Catholic Church, mainly the Gospels and Acts, but also the Epistles and Apocalypse,²² beginning in the

18 Yan Jianfu 顏健富, "Chaichu zhuguan, pincou pianduan; lun 'Feizhou you ji' duiyu Shideng-lai *Through the Dark Continent* de chonggou" 拆除主幹，拼湊片段——論《斐洲遊記》對於施登萊 *Through the Dark Continent* 的重構 [Breaking down the trunk and piecing the fragments together; on the reconstruction of Stanley's *Through the Dark Continent* in *Travel notes from Africa*], *Zhongguo wen zhe yanjiu jikan* 中國文哲研究集刊 [Chinese literature and philosophy research collection] 53 (2018): 1–46, here 30–31; Fang, *Yi xie yi dao*, 120, 126.

19 Colombel, *Histoire de la mission*, 1399; Colombel, *Jiangnan chuanjiao shi*, 5–2:959–60.

20 Strong, *Call to Mission*, 1:79.

21 CPF 1884, 56.

22 Marie-Louis Félix Aubazac, M.E.P. (known in Chinese as He Leisi 何雷思 or, sometimes, Ou Shengshi 歐聲石, 1871–1919) and Feng Jialu 馮嘉祿 (dates unknown) published a translation of the Pauline and Catholic epistles under the title *Sheng Baolu shuhan bing shuwei zongtu handu* 聖保祿書翰並數位宗徒函牘 [Pauline epistles and epistles of the apostles] in 1918, and Pierre Bousquet M.E.P. (known in Chinese as Bu Shijie 卜士傑 or Bu Duolu 卜多祿, 1874–1945) published a translation of the Pauline epistles, the Catholic epistles and the Apocalypse under the title *Xinjing gonghan yu moshilu* 新經公函與默示錄 [New Testament Catholic epistles and the Apocalypse] in 1923; Daniel Choi, "A History of the Chinese Bible," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible in China*, ed. Khio-Khng

late-nineteenth century, seems to owe as much to developments in Rome as to the initiatives of the clergy in China. One significant step in this regard was the reform of the *Index* in 1757 by Benedict XIV (r.1740–58), in which the *regula quarta* (fourth rule), which regulated the publication of vernacular Bible translations, was softened, after a two-century tug of war between proponents and opponents of vernacular translations. The *regula quarta* was first introduced in the 1564 “Tridentine” *Index* through the bull *Dominici gregis custodiam*²³ in an attempt to moderate the “Pauline” *Index*, published by Paul IV (r.1555–59), which reserved approval for the printing, sale, and reading of vernacular Bible translations to the Roman inquisition²⁴ and which had proved inapplicable to the point that it had already been moderated somewhat through the *Instructio circa indicem* (Instructions concerning the index), a few months after its promulgation, and the *Moderatio indicis librorum prohibitorum* (Moderation of the Index of Forbidden Books) under Pius IV (r.1559–65).²⁵ The *regula quarta*, by devolving the issuance of permits to bishops and inquisitors, was meant to be a decentralizing measure, and an attempt was made to tighten this through the *Observatio circa quartam regulam* (Observation concerning the fourth rule) of the “Clementine” *Index* promulgated by Clement VIII (r.1592–1605) in 1596.²⁶ Once again, however, this proved impractical and, at the initiative of Giovanni della Torre (1549–1623), the papal nuncio in Switzerland, a general dispensation was granted that meant a return in practice to the 1564 *regula quarta* in most places where it had been the norm, except for Italy.²⁷

Yeo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 21–46, here 25. Both translations are in literary Chinese and were printed by the Imprimerie de Nazareth in Hong Kong.

23 John O'Malley, *Trent: What Happened at the Council* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2013), 266.

24 O'Malley, *Trent*, 160.

25 Wim François, “La Chiesa Cattolica e le traduzioni della Bibbia in vernacolo tra il Medioevo e gli inizi dell'Età Moderna” in *Scritture sacre: Testi, storia, interpretazioni*, ed. Marco Rainini and Gian Luca Potestà (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 2017), 67–83, here 80; Fausto Parente, “The Index, the Holy Office, the Condemnation of the Talmud and Publication of Clement VIII's Index,” in *Church, Censorship and Culture in Early Modern Italy*, ed. Gigliola Fragnito (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 163–93, here 167; Gigliola Fragnito, “The Expurgatory Policy of the Church and the Works of Gasparo Contarini,” in *Heresy, Culture and Religion in Early Modern Italy, Contexts and Contestations*, ed. Ronald K. Delp, Michelle M. Fontaine, and John Jeffries Martin (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2006), 193–210, here 196.

26 François, “La Chiesa Cattolica,” 80.

27 This led to the rise of what Fragnito terms the “new geography” of vernacular translations in Catholic Europe; Gigliola Fragnito, “Per una geografia delle traduzioni bibliche nell'Europa cattolica (sedicesimo e diciassettesimo secolo),” in *Papes, princes et savants dans l'Europe moderne: Mélanges à la mémoire de Bruno Neveu*, eds. Jean-Louis Quantin

Unlike its predecessors, the 1757 *Index* provided for universal permissions to be granted for approved translations and was the result of significant lobbying by Tomaso Agostino Ricchini (1695–1762), who was named secretary of the Congregation of the Index in 1749, in the face of conservative opposition.²⁸ The new rule would receive its baptism of fire with the approval granted to the Tuscan translation of Antonio Martini (1720–1809), the future Archbishop of Florence, in the brief *In tanta librorum colluvie* given by Pius VI (r.1775–99) in 1778,²⁹ and the length of this two-hundred-word document belies its influence. Indeed, as a result of this brief, vernacular translations of the Bible became normalized even in lands that had historically been opposed to them, with the publication of several Spanish versions and a Portuguese version in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century,³⁰ as well as apologetic works surrounding the brief, such as *De la lección de la Sagrada Escritura en lenguas vulgares*, published in 1791 by Joaquín Lorenzo Villanueva (1757–1837), then an examiner of the Inquisition, commenting on how the Spanish Holy Office had issued a decree in 1782 whereby the rules in Spain were brought in line with the 1757 *Index* and the brief of March 17, 1778, allowing translations to be published under the same conditions.³¹ The brief was reproduced in editions of Martini's translation of the Bible and in many other Catholic translations as well. The novelty of these developments, however, should not be overstated because, as Belgian theologian Jean-Baptiste Malou (1809–64) noted in 1846, the dispositions of the 1757 *Index* had been observed in practice for a long time,³² and the further softening of these regulations in the Apostolic Constitution *Officiorum*

and Jean-Claude Wacquet (Geneva: Droz, 2007), 51–77, here 70–72; Els Agten, *The Catholic Church and the Dutch Bible: From the Council of Trent to the Jansenist Controversy (1564–1733)* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 94–95. Remarkably, Diarmaid MacCullough ignores these developments in *The Reformation: A History* (New York: Viking, 2004), leading subsequent authors to make misleading statements on the subject, as in James Simpson, *Burning to Read: English Fundamentalism and Its Reformation Opponents* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 54.

- 28 Maria Pia Donato, “Reorder and Restore: Benedict XIV, the Index, and the Holy Office,” in *Benedict XIV and the Enlightenment: Art, Science and Spirituality*, ed. Rebeca Messbarger, Christopher M.S. Johns, and Philip Gavitt (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2016), 227–54, here 233–36.
- 29 Michele Colombo, “Dal Settecento a oggi: Fatta la Bibbia in Italiano, bisogna fare l'italiano della Bibbia,” *Liber annuus* 67 (2017): 259.
- 30 E.M. Wilson, “Continental Versions from c. 1600 to the Present Day,” in *The Cambridge History of the Bible. Volume 3. The West from the Reformation to the Present Day*, ed. S.L. Greenslade (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 354–55.
- 31 Joaquín Lorenzo Villanueva, *De la lección de la sagrada escritura en lenguas vulgares* (Valencia: Benito Monfort, 1791), 195–96.
- 32 Jean-Baptiste Malou, *La lecture de la sainte Bible en langue vulgaire* 1 (Louvain: Fonteyn, 1846), 56.

ac munerum given by Leo XIII (r.1878–1903) in 1897, which devolved the right to grant such universal permissions to bishops, also seems to have been a mere formalization of a practice that was already widespread.³³

It was in this context of increasing encouragement of lay access to the Bible in which official attempts would be made to diffuse the text of the Gospels and Acts³⁴ that several initiatives emerged in the Chinese Catholic Church to translate and publish the Bible in the vernacular.³⁵ One such initiative was that of Joseph Dejean (1834–1901), of the Paris Foreign Missions (M.E.P.), who began to translate the New Testament into literary Chinese in the Apostolic Vicariate of Guangdong sometime after 1879.³⁶ Meanwhile, in the Apostolic Vicariate of Jiangnan, one of the priorities of Valentin Garnier also seems to have been the translation of Scripture, and especially the Gospels, into Chinese,³⁷ and to this end he commissioned a number of translation projects.

The first project seems to have been a translation of *Les évangélistes unis, traduits et commentés*, the French version of *Gli evangelisti uniti tradotti e commentati*, a harmony of the Four Gospels by Andrea de' Conti Mastai Ferretti, bishop of Pesaro (1752–1822);³⁸ this work seems to have enjoyed a good reputation among the teachers in Xujiahui, as Ma Xiangbo recalled having been introduced to it by Angelo Zottoli (1826–1902), the author of the remarkable

33 “je crois cependant qu'en vertu des Règles de l'Index qui abandonne (sic) aux évêques et aux universités catholiques l'approbation des versions de la Bible en langue vulgaire, une approbation du troisième genre [i.e., an approval granted by an archbishop, bishop or Catholic university] peut suffire” [nevertheless, I believe that, by virtue of the rules of the *Index*, which devolves the approval of vernacular versions of the Bible to bishops and Catholic universities, an approval of the third sort may suffice]; Malou, *La lecture*, 76. Canonist Auguste Boudinhon also pointed out that this Constitution put “la loi en conformité avec la pratique” [the law in accordance with practice]: Auguste Boudinhon, *La nouvelle législation de l'Index* (Paris: Lethellieux, 1899), 88–89.

34 Leslie Howsam and Scott McLaren, “Producing the Text: Production and Distribution of Popular Editions of the Bible,” in *The New Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol. 4, ed. John Riches (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 71.

35 It is worth noting that in imperial China there was a situation of diglossia in which the written language was not, as a rule, the same as the spoken vernacular. In this case, we are referring to literary Chinese or *wenyan* 文言, as opposed to *baihua* 白話 or vernacular Chinese: Dong Hongyuan, *A History of the Chinese Language* (Milton Park: Routledge, 2014), 81. Literary Chinese is sometimes termed *wenli* or *wen-li* 文理 in Protestant sources; however, this term is foreign to Chinese usage and was generally not used in a Catholic context: Jost Oliver Zetzsche, *The Bible in China: The History of the Union Version or the Culmination of Protestant Missionary Bible Translation in China* (Sankt Augustin: Monumenta Serica Institute, 1999), 87.

36 Missions étrangères de Paris, *Compte-rendu des travaux de 1902 / Société des missions étrangères* (Paris: Séminaire des Missions-Étrangères, 1903), 334.

37 Colombel, *Histoire de la mission*, 1332; Colombel, *Jiangnan chuanjiao shi* 5–2:917.

38 Colombel, *Histoire de la mission*, 1332; Colombel, *Jiangnan chuanjiao shi* 5–2:917.

Cursus litteraturae Sinicae,³⁹ and Valentin Garnier seems to have been especially intent on having it translated into Chinese, having been promised by the Cardinal Prefect of the Propaganda Fide that the resulting work would become “the officially approved version for China.”⁴⁰ The road to publication, however, would prove more challenging than any had anticipated. The work was originally entrusted to fellow Jesuit Shen Zekuan 沈則寬 (Matthaeus Shen, 1838–1913),⁴¹ who produced a first draft;⁴² this, however, seems not to have been satisfactory, and the work was entrusted to Xu Caibai after he left the Society, who worked on it in Nanjing in collaboration local Catholic scholar Zhang Xingnan 張星南 (dates unknown).⁴³ Xu, however, also failed to complete the work, which was again entrusted to Ma Xiangbo, who had recently returned to Xujiahui in 1897,⁴⁴ and would only be completed sometime before 1913.⁴⁵ The resulting 762-page volume, described as a “*liber valde utilis, imo necessarius sacrae eloquentiae vacantibus*” (a very useful book, indeed, a necessary one for those lacking in sacred eloquence), published in ten volumes in traditional Chinese binding, or in two volumes in European binding would prove useful not only due to its annotations,⁴⁶ which were reused wholesale for Ma Xiangbo’s 1937 translation of the Four Gospels,⁴⁷ but also for the lexicon of Biblical and religious names, which would be taken into account

39 Ma, *Ma Xiangbo ji*, 1036.

40 Colombel, *Histoire de la mission*, 1332; Colombel, *Jiangnan chuanjiao shi* 5–2:917.

41 Like Ma Xiangbo, Li Wenyu and Xu Caibai, Shen Zekuan (1838–1913) also joined the novitiate in 1862: Li and Pieragastini, “Dialogue between Confucius and Christ,” 660.

42 Colombel, *Histoire de la mission*, 1332; Colombel, *Jiangnan chuanjiao shi* 5–2, 917.

43 Colombel, *Histoire de la mission*, 1332–33, 1399; Colombel, *Jiangnan chuanjiao shi* 5–2:917, 959. Colombel renders his name Tchang-sin-nan in the French original; the version in Chinese characters is based on the modern Chinese edition of his work and seems to be conjectural.

44 Colombel, *Histoire de la mission*, 1333; Colombel, *Jiangnan chuanjiao shi* 5–2, 917; Zhu Weizheng 朱維錚, “Jindai Zhongguo de lishi jianzheng: baisui zhengzhijia Ma Xiangbo” 近代中國的歷史見證——百歲政治家馬相搏 [A witness to China’s recent history: Ma Xiangbo the centenarian and statesman], in *Ma Xiangbo ji* 馬相伯集 [Collected works of Ma Xiangbo], ed. Zhu Weizheng 朱維錚 (Shanghai: Fudan Daxue Chubanshe, 1996), 1171–226, here 1176.

45 Michael E. Moss, “Ancient Latin or Modern French?: An Inquiry into the Source Text of Ma Xiangbo’s Translation of the Four Gospels,” *Review of Religion and Chinese Society* 10, no. 2 (2023): 206–27, here 212.

46 Catholic Truth Society, *Catalogus generalis librorum catholicorum qui in Sinis eduntur* [General catalog of Catholic books published in China] (Hong Kong: Catholic Truth Society, 1940), 6.

47 Moss, “Ancient Latin or Modern French,” 212.

by the translators of the prestigious Studium Biblicum version;⁴⁸ however, it came rather too late, and was preceded by many other similar works within the Chinese Catholic Church.

On a more successful note, a translation of the Four Gospels was published toward the end of Valentin Garnier's episcopate, in 1897. Already in 1891, the Propaganda Fide had given Augustin Chausse, M.E.P. (1838–1900), the prefect apostolic of Guangdong, authorization to publish Joseph Dejean's translation of the Four Gospels, even going so far as to say that permission could have been granted even without sending a copy of the translation,⁴⁹ and the translation would be issued by the Imprimerie de Nazareth (Nazareth printing house) in Hong Kong in four volumes in 1892 and 1893,⁵⁰ becoming the first books of the New Testament to be formally published by the Catholic Church in China.⁵¹ The new version, by Li Wenyu, was translated in the space of just one year at Garnier's request and was seen as one of the bishop's highest achievements

48 Gabriele Allegra et al., *Sigao Shengjing yuanzhu yishiban xilie* 思高聖經原著譯釋版系列 [Studium Biblicum Bible with original translators' annotations series], viii (Hong Kong: Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, 2015), 150, 298.

49 Véronique Ragöt-Delcourt, "Un révélateur des rapports entre Rome et les missions au XIX^e siècle: Le contrôle des livres publiés en Extrême-Orient," *Bibliothèque de l'école des chartes* 163, no. 2 (2005): 505–24, here 521–22. On the softening of the rules concerning Bible translations in territories under the Propaganda Fide, see also Nikolaus Kowalsky, "Die Sacra Congregatio 'de Propaganda Fide' und die Übersetzung der Hl. Schrift," in *Die Heilige Schrift in den katholischen Missionen*, ed. Johannes Beckmann (Schöneck-Beckenried: Administration der Neuen Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft, 1966), 29–33.

50 Giovanni Rizzi, *Edizioni della Bibbia nel contesto di Propaganda Fide: Uno studio sulle edizioni della Bibbia presso la biblioteca della Pontificia Università Urbaniana*, 3 vols. (Rome: Urbaniana University Press, 2006), 3:1122.

51 Daniel Choi and George Kam-Wah Mak, "Catholic Bible Translation in Twentieth-Century China: An Overview," in *Catholicism in China, 1900–Present: The Development of the Chinese Church*, ed. Cindy Yik-Yi Chu (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 105–24, here 106. Raissa De Gruttola, in "Li Wenyu, i gesuiti cinesi e le traduzioni del Nuovo Testamento," *Sulla via del Catai* 16–29 (2023): 83–107, here 89, citing the work of Hong Xiaochun, argues that Li Wenyu's 1887 *Zongtu dashi lu* 宗徒大事錄 [Acts of the Apostles] was the first official and approved Catholic translation of a volume of the Bible into the Chinese language. However, as both De Gruttola, "Li Wenyu," 97, and Hong Xiaochun, "Catholic intellectuals in modern China and their Bible translation: Li Wenyu and Ma Xiangbo," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 3 (2022): 1–17, here 8, doi: 10.1017/S1356186322000220, acknowledge, this work was more of a paraphrase than a proper translation. Nevertheless, both authors omit the fact that Li would go on to produce a proper translation of Acts in the autumn of 1905, which he published in 1907 alongside a reprint of his translation of the Gospels: Li Wenyu 李問漁, *Xin jing yi yi* 新經譯義 [Translation of the New Testament] (Shanghai: Cimitang, 1907), 5.

before he passed away in 1898,⁵² having been disseminated across the provinces and praised for its accuracy and style.⁵³ From the above, it would seem that Xu Caibai's role as a Bible translator was limited to having worked on the translation of Mastai Ferretti's Gospel harmony, and this was indeed believed to have been the case until the recent rediscovery of an old manuscript of the Four Gospels in the Xujiahui library.

A Forgotten Manuscript Emerges: Xu Caibai's Translation of the Four Gospels

In 2014, the United Bible Societies launched an ambitious project to digitize, among others, Chinese versions of the Bible produced between 1707 and 1960,⁵⁴ and it was in this context that the manuscripts of two Chinese translations of parts of the New Testament were uncovered by researcher Simon Wong (Huang Ximu 黃錫木) and Xu Jinhua 徐錦華 of the Xujiahui cangshulou 徐家匯藏書樓 (Xujiahui library). One of the first to analyze these documents was Daniel Choi (Cai Jintu 蔡錦圖), who was able to take them into consideration in his outstanding opus on the Bible in China.⁵⁵

One of the two manuscripts is a translation of the Four Gospels in seven volumes in traditional sewn binding. It is unsigned and undated, but the first page of most volumes features an annotation by a later hand that reads *Shanghai Xu Bin Caibai shi bian* 上海許彬采白氏編 (edited by Xu Bin [courtesy name] Caibai of Shanghai). Wong and Choi have surmised that the translation must have been made sometime after 1884 based on Colombel's statement according to which "Dès lors [after Xu left the Society in 1884],⁵⁶ Mgr Garnier l'employa à la traduction de la concordance des Évangiles" (subsequently, bishop Garnier

52 Li Wenyu 李問漁, *Xin jing yiyi* 新經譯義 [Translation of the New Testament] (Shanghai: Cimitang, 1897), 3; Li, *Xin jing yiyi* 1907, 5; Colombel, *Histoire de la mission*, 1333; Colombel, *Jiangnan chuanjiao shi* 5-2:917-18.

53 Henri Havret, *La mission du Kiang-nan: Son histoire, ses œuvres* (Paris: J. Mersch, 1900), 142.

54 On this subject, see Simon Wong, "Digitalization of Bibles in Greater China (1661-1960)," *The Bible Translator* 72, no. 2 (2021): 241-54.

55 Daniel Choi 蔡錦圖, *Shengjing zai Zhongguo: Fu Zhongwen Shengjing lishi mulu* 聖經在中國附中文聖經歷史目錄 [The Bible in China: With a historical catalogue of the Chinese Bible] (Hong Kong: Logos and Pneuma Press, 2018), 5, 30.

56 Simon Wong 黃錫木, "Zhonghua Shengjing yiben (1661-1960) shuweihua gongcheng" 中華聖經譯本 (1661-1960) 數位化工程 [Chinese Bible translation (1661-1960) digitisation project], *Xin wang ai* 信望愛 [Faith, hope and love], August 11, 2019, <https://www.fhl.net/nbg/reading/reading542630.html> (accessed November 4, 2025); Choi, *Shengjing zai Zhongguo*, 31.

put him to work on a translation the Gospel harmony);⁵⁷ however, this is far from certain, since the above passage clearly refers to Mastai Ferretti's harmony of the Gospels, and this translation is no harmony at all. More mysterious still is why this translation, which is complete and amply annotated, was never published, especially given that Valentin Garnier was eager to publish a translation of the Gospels, as we saw above. I will reflect on this question below.

With regards to the formal features of the manuscript, as Choi points out, the text is written in literary Chinese, and it features interlinear annotations in small characters;⁵⁸ these are similar to traditional *jiapi* 夾批 (interlinear notes) but are written in a single line, and each chapter features a number of endnotes preceded by a chop reading *shiyi* 釋義 (explanations) that seems to have been carved for the occasion; these endnotes feature the passages being commented, in large characters, followed by *shuang hang jiapi* 雙行夾批 (interlinear notes in two lines). The titles of pericopes are provided in the upper margin in the *meipi* 眉批 (eyebrow comment) style, and paragraphs are divided with a large circle ○.

The translation has clearly been made from the Sixto-Clementine Vulgate, and this is readily apparent from the idiosyncrasies in verse numbers and its distinctive textual variants; thus, for instance, in Jn 10:16 *ovile* (sheepfold) is rendered *zhan* 棧 and Jn 21:12 *discumbentium* (reclining to eat) is rendered *xijian* 席間,⁵⁹ even though it surprisingly includes some readings found in the Greek Majority Text, such as εὐθὺς (at once) in Jn 21:3.⁶⁰ It would be tempting, therefore, to conclude that this is simply a version of the Vulgate, translated and annotated by Xu Caibai sometime in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Upon closer examination, however, the translation reveals several layers of influence that Xu Caibai took into account and wove into his work, which would not have gone unnoticed by his contemporaries.

57 Colombel, *Histoire de la mission*, 1399; Colombel, *Jiangnan chuanjiao shi*, 5–2:959.

58 Choi, *Shengjing zai Zhongguo*, 31.

59 *ποιμνη* in Greek. The original Vulgate reading, as it appears in the Stuttgart Vulgate and other critical editions, is *discipulum* (of the disciples), which corresponds to the Greek τῶν μαθητῶν. One would expect to find *discipulorum* or *ex discipulis*, as it appears in several Old Latin copies, but *discipulum* seems to have been a carryover from the African textual tradition, see Olegario García de la Fuente, *Latín bíblico y latín cristiano* (Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 1994), 138.

60 The presence of this reading will be explained below.

A Tribute to Manuel Dias: Xu's Translation as a Collation of *Shengjing Zhijie*

The first remarkable feature of this translation is how it seamlessly integrates a much older text that goes back to the golden age of the Jesuit mission in China in the seventeenth century: the book *Shengjing zhijie* 聖經直解 (A direct explanation of Scripture),⁶¹ published by Manuel Dias the Younger (known in China as Yang Manuo 陽瑪諾, 1574–1659) between 1636 and 1642.⁶² This work, written in the elevated style of the *mogao* 謨誥 (counsels and announcements) in the Book of Documents,⁶³ contains a translation into literary Chinese of the Gospel readings for the liturgical calendar,⁶⁴ and these include both short interlinear annotations within the text itself, and lengthier commentaries at the end of each reading. It is worth noting that Dias's work was so highly regarded for its style that it achieved the status of a "Christian Chinese classic" and its translations were reused in later Catholic works, including the *Misa jingdian* 彌撒經典 (Roman Missal) and *Shengjing Guangyi* 聖經廣益 (The wide benefits of the Bible);⁶⁵ even as late as 1922, it was praised by Ma Xiangbo, who suggested that students' writing could benefit from studying it.⁶⁶

As a result, this early partial translation, which features approximately a quarter of the entirety of the Four Gospels,⁶⁷ would exert significant influence on later translations but Xu,⁶⁸ rather than merely having been influenced by it,

61 Manuel Dias, *Tianzhu jiangsheng shengjing zhijie* 天主降生聖經直解 [Direct explanation of the scripture on the incarnation of God] (BNF Chinois 6722–6723).

62 Chen Yanrong, "Christian Biblical Tradition in the Jing Chinese Culture," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible in China*, ed. Khiok-Khng Yeo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 495–510, here 499.

63 Zheng Haijuan, "De Poirot's Chinese Bible and Its Influence," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible in China*, ed. Khiok-Khng Yeo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 95–112, here 98.

64 Shioyama Masazumi 塩山正純, "Kasorikku ni yoru seisho shōyaku Diasu no 'seikyō jikige'" カソリックによる聖書抄訳 ディアスの『聖經直解』 [A partial translation based on Catholicism: Dias's "Zhengjing zhijie"], *Bunmei* 文明 [Civilization] 21, no. 20 (2008): 55–77, here 59–60.

65 Chen, "Christian Biblical Tradition," 500–1.

66 Ma, *Ma Xiangbo ji*, 432.

67 Shioyama, "Kasorikku ni yoru seisho shōyaku," 60.

68 On this subject, see Zheng Haijuan 鄭海娟, "Wenben zhi wang: Guxin Shengjing yu houdai Shengjing Han yiben zhi guanxi" 文本之網：《古新聖經》與前後代《聖經》漢譯本之關係 [The relationship between Poirot's Chinese Bible and Chinese translations of the Bible made before and after it], *Qinghua zhongwen xuebao* 清華中文學報 [Tsing Hua journal of Chinese literature] 11 (2014): 261–98 and Zheng, "De Poirot's Chinese Bible," 106.

seems to have taken up the challenge of completing Dias's translation, carefully collating the parts of the Gospels as they appear in *Shengjing zhijie*, amending them where necessary, and translating any missing parts in between. In this regard, Xu's work is especially impressive in his treatment of the Passion narrative. Indeed, in *Shengjing zhijie*, the Passion narrative is presented as a synopsis of the Four Gospels, without indicating the exact provenance of each verse. In his outstanding paper on the *Shengjing zhijie*, Shioyama painstakingly identified the forty-nine passages woven together by Dias, and Xu seems to have done the same by pinpointing each passage and returning it to its place within the main text of the Gospels.

As an example of the nature of the work carried out by Xu, let us consider Jn 1:19–20 as translated by Dias and Xu below:

Dias: 19 [...] *Wei shi, Rudeyi zi Rilusaleng qian saze ji Leweida zao Ruohan wen yue: er wei shei?* 20 *Nai ren, qie bu hui, yue: yu yun fei Qilisidu.* 19 [...] 維時如德義自日路撒冷。遣撒責及勒未達。造若翰問曰。爾為誰。20 迺(迺)認。且不諱。曰。予允匪契利斯督。⁶⁹

Xu: 19 *Ruohan zhi zheng ru zuo: shi Rudeyaren, zi Rilusaleng qian saze ji Leweida yi Ruohan wen yue: er wei shei?* 20 *Nai ren er fu hui, yue: yu yun fei Jilisidu.* 19 若翰之證如左。時如德亞人。自日路撒稜(稜)遣撒責及勒未達。詣若翰問曰。爾為誰。20 迺(迺)認而弗諱曰。予允匪基利斯督。⁷⁰

Vulgate: Et hoc est testimonium Joannis, quando miserunt Judaei ab Jerusalem sacerdotibus et Levitis ad eum ut interrogarent eum: Tu quis es? Et confessus est, et non negavit, et confessus est: Quia non sum ego Christus.

And this is the testimony of John, when the Jews sent from Jerusalem priests and Levites to him, to ask him: Who are you? And he confessed, and did not deny: and he confessed: I am not the Christ.

Here, for instance, the customary *incipit* (opening words), *in illo tempore* (in those days), rendered as *weishi* 維時, which Dias includes at the beginning of each lectionary reading, is duly omitted by Xu, who has completed the beginning of the verse with *Ruohan zhi zheng ru zuo* 若翰之證如左 (John's testimony is as follows). Furthermore, he has mostly maintained Dias's Latinizing

69 Dias, *Shengjing zhijie*, 1, fols. 24^r–24^v.

70 Xu Caibai 許采白, trans., *Si shi quan bian* 四史全編 [The complete four Gospels] (no place: no publisher, no date), 6:fol. 3^v.

translations *saze* 撒責 for *sacerdotes* (priests) and *leweida* 勒未達 for *Levitas* (Levites), though he has not gone so far as to use the Latin plural *Rudeyi* 如德義 for *Judaei* (Jews),⁷¹ translating it as the more comprehensible *Rudeyaren* 如德亞人, and has modernized the transliteration *Qilisidu* 契利斯督 for *Christus* (Christ) as *Jilisidu* 基利斯督 to conform to the more common usage of the Chinese Catholic Church at the time. Other than these few differences, the verses are translated almost identically, down to the use of the same graphical variant for the character *nai* 迺 (then).

Generally speaking, with regards to vocabulary Xu seems to have strived to maintain most of Dias's more colorful foreignizing translations,⁷² including *Samalidanuo* 撒瑪里大諾 for *Samaritanus* (Samaritan) in Jn 8:48, *Nazaleinuo* 納匝勒諾 for *Nazarenum* (of Nazareth) in Jn 18:5, *Zesalei* 責撒肋 for *Caesarem* (Caesar) in Jn 19:15, or *sipangrang* 斯盤壤 and *yisuobo* 義索剝 for *spongiam* (sponge) and *hyssopo* (hyssop) in Jn 19:29, and even coined a few of his own, such as *Eboleiren* 厄白勒人 to designate the Hebrews in Jn 5:2.⁷³ When it comes to phrasing, Xu also maintained Dias's original translation as much as possible, amending it whenever it strayed too far from the original: thus, whereas Dias omits *erat enim nudus* (for he was naked) in Jn 21:7, Xu duly translates the verse word-for-word, and in some others he maintained Dias's more paraphrastic translations as interlinear notes in small print, such as the addition of *bu gan fangming* 不敢方命 (I dare not disobey), at the end of Jn 13:9. However, in some cases, mistakes committed by Dias are transferred into Xu's translation: this is the case of the inclusion of εὐθὺς, present in the Greek Majority Text but absent both in the Vulgate and Critical Greek, rendered *ji* 疾, in Jn 21:3; the omission of the expressions *Domine* (Lord) in Jn 13:9 and *amen dico vobis* (verily, verily I say unto you) in Jn 3:11; or the inclusion of the number two with regards to the sons of Zebedee in Jn 21:2, which is absent in the original.

Finally, with regards to the passages of the Gospels that were not translated in *Shengjing zhijie*, Xu was able to faithfully reproduce the elevated style used by Manuel Dias, including his use of archaic particles influenced by his

71 In an interlinear note immediately below, Dias explains that *Rudeyi* is the collective name for the people of *Rudeya* (Dias, *Shengjing zhijie*, 1, fol. 24^r). Ma Xiangbo, another admirer of Dias's work, would use *Rudeyi* in the same manner in his own translation of the Gospels published in 1949.

72 One of the most striking ones is his transliteration of the genitive in *Rex Judaeorum* as *Rudewulong wang* 如德惡隆王 in Jn 19:19, which Xu renders with the more grammatically Chinese *Rudeya wang* 如德亞王.

73 He uses it to translate *cognominatur hebraice* as *Eboleiren cheng* 厄白勒人稱 (named by the Hebrews) and specifies that *Eboleiren* is equivalent to *Rudeyaren* in an interlinear note.

study of the *Book of Documents*⁷⁴ to produce a coherent and unified text, with a few minor exceptions. One such exception is his occasional copular use of *xi* 係, whereas Dias sometimes used *shi* 是 as a copula. As a result, since Xu maintained the instances of *shi* used by Dias, his translation features both sentences, such as *hui shi zhe xi Falisai* 會使者係法利塞 (*qui missi fuerant, erant ex Pharisaeis*, they that were sent were of the Pharisees) and *shi Zhu* 是主 (*Dominus est*, it is the Lord).

The Sources of Xu's Commentaries: Carrières and Menochius

As we pointed out above, Xu Caibai's manuscript includes both interlinear commentaries and notes at the end of each chapter. The interlinear commentaries are glosses woven into the text of Scripture to interpret and expand on its meaning, some of which are quite lengthy. Below is an example of these glosses as they appear in Jn 3:9–10, reproducing the typography of the original in horizontal script:

9 *Nigedemu yue: ruo shi zhe, xi neng wei?* *Ren wu neng yin Shengshen er sheng?* 10
Yue: er wei guo shi, shang meng zi li? *Bu shi Jingshu duo you ji jiu ling cheng de, xu fu*
xin yu Shengshen? 9倪閣德睦曰。若是者。奚能為。人烏能因聖神而生。10曰。爾為
 國師。尚懵茲理。不識經書多有記救靈成德。須復新於聖神。75

Nicodemus said: If this is so, how can it be done? How can a man be born through the Holy Spirit? He answered: you are a teacher of this nation and you still do not understand this truth? Do you not know that the Scriptures often speak of salvation and the renewal of virtue—that one must be made new by the Holy Spirit?

These notes are in fact a translation of the commentaries by French Oratorian priest Louis de Carrières (1662–1717), who wrote a running commentary of the Bible based on De Sacy's (1613–84) translation, which was published in

74 In Li Sher-Shiueh, "Catholic Tracts and Parabolic Stories in Ming-Qing China," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible in China*, ed. Khiok-Khng Yeo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 301–16, here 305, it is described as "an antique, though not obsolete, style [...] which was difficult not only for non-native speakers but also for native speakers of Chinese to understand completely [...]. The style of his '*Shengjing*,' of course, was created by imitating as closely as possible that of the *Shujing*."

75 Xu, *Si shi quan bian*, fol. 13^r.

the early eighteenth century.⁷⁶ Indeed, the notes were presented in a similar format, with the biblical text in roman and his commentaries in italics, as can be seen in the same passage as above:

9 Nicodème lui répondit: Comment cela peut-il se faire, *et comment un homme peut-il naître du Saint-Esprit ?* 10 Jésus lui dit: Quoi ! vous êtes maître en Israël, et vous ignorez ces choses *si clairement marquées dans la loi, dont la perfection consiste dans le renouvellement intérieur de l'âme par la grâce du Saint-Esprit !*⁷⁷

(Translation as above.)

It is worth noting here, however, that Xu does not follow Carrières's commentaries slavishly and has chosen to omit quite a few of them, especially those that reflect readings from the Greek *textus receptus* tradition, such as that which mentions Bethbara as an alternative to Bethany in Jn 1:28. In some cases, moreover, he has combined elements from the interlinear commentaries by Manuel Dias and Carrières to produce an original note, as in the commentary on Jn 18:32 below:

Dias: *Yesu xian yi shuo, dang bei ding shizijia er si, nai Rudeya guo wu ci xingfa. Ren fan zui, shumin huiji, zhi shi er sha zhi. Ding shizijia, nai Luomaguo, ji Biladuo guo xing. Zhu chou fu Zhu yu Biladuo, qiu dingsha zhi, wu Zhu zhi yan ze yan yi.* 耶穌先已說。當被釘十字架而死。乃如德亞國無此刑法。人犯罪。庶民會集。擲石而殺之。釘十字架。乃落瑪國。即比辣多國刑。主仇付主於比辣多。求釘殺之。吾主之言則驗矣。⁷⁸

Jesus had already said that he would be nailed to a cross and die, but there was no such penalty in Judaea: when a man committed a crime, the people would assemble and stone him to death. Crucifixion is a Roman punishment, that is, from Pilate's nation. The Lord's enemies handed him over to Pilate and demanded that he be nailed to die. Thus the words of our Lord were fulfilled.

76 Jacques Dupont, "Vin vieux, vin nouveau (Luc 5,39)," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 25, no. 3 (1963): 286–304, here 289.

77 Louis de Carrières, *La sainte Bible contenant l'Ancien et le Nouveau Testament* (Besançon: Imprimerie d'Outhenin Chalandre fils, 1870), 57.

78 Dias, *Shengjing zhijie*, 5, fols. 13^r–13^v.

Carrières: Car il avait déclaré qu'il fallait qu'il fût livré aux gentils, et crucifié par les gentils.⁷⁹

For he had declared that he had to be delivered to the gentiles and crucified by the gentiles.

Xu: *Gai chang yan ji jiang ding si, er Rudeyaren wu ding si zhi xing.* 蓋嘗言已將釘死。而如德亞人無釘死之刑。⁸⁰

For he had declared that he would be nailed to die, but there was no such punishment in Judaea.

Finally, as we pointed out above, Xu's manuscript also includes notes at the end of each chapter, with the relevant passages in large characters and the commentary in two lines of smaller characters. These, too, are an abridged selection of another classic Western source: the *scholia* (commentaries) of renowned Jesuit biblical scholar Giovanni Stefano Menochio (1575–1655). Some of them are reproduced in their entirety, as in the commentary to Jn 4:13 below:

Xu: *Yong wu ke bu zai ke yu rou shen chang shi, ji shi jian caihuo zunrong.*
永無渴不再渴於肉身暢適。⁸¹ 及世間財貨尊榮。

He will not thirst for eternity. He will never thirst again for bodily comfort, nor for the wealth and honors of the world.

Menochius: *Non sitiet in aeternum. Non patietur sitim rerum temporalium, honorum, voluptatum, etc.*⁸²

He will not thirst for eternity. He will not suffer the thirst for temporal things, honors, pleasures, etc.

In other cases, Menochius's *scholia* have been reduced to their bare essence, but are still recognizably his, both due to the selection of passages and the general gist of the commentary:

79 Carrières, *La sainte Bible*, 7, 632.

80 Xu, *Si shi quan bian*, 7, fol. 30^v.

81 Xu, *Si shi quan bian*, 6, fol. 23^r.

82 Carrières, *La sainte Bible*, 7, 515.

Xu: *Ju fei Jilisu ci fei yi Zhu zhi ci, nai yin ren jiu Zhu zhi yan ye.*
 詎非吉利斯督此非疑主之辭。乃
 引人就主之言也。⁸³

Is this not the Christ? These are not words of doubt toward the Lord, but words meant to lead others to Him.

Menochius: *Numquid ipse est Christus? Non dubiat ipse, sed ex ejus operibus prudenter rem aliis relinquit judicandam; non enim crederent, si diceret se invenisse Christum, ut ait Cyrillus; sed invitat eos ad videndum, quoniam inde credituros esse scit.*⁸⁴

Is he not the Christ? She does not doubt herself, but prudently leaves the matter to others to judge for his works; for they would not believe if she said that she had found Christ, as Cyril says; but she invites them to see, because she knows that they will believe from that.

The simultaneous presence of commentaries by Carrières and Menochius in Xu's work is most likely not a coincidence. Indeed, the Carrières Bible, which was reprinted many times in France throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, often also included Menochius's *scholia*; one such edition was the 1865 Parisian edition, which was used for teaching in seminaries and faculties of Theology, and which features the Latin Vulgate, the French translation with Carrières's running commentary, and Menochius's *scholia* on each page.⁸⁵ It is almost certain that Xu Caibai, who worked as prefect of the library and taught Latin in the minor seminary, would have had access to this work or to a very similar one, especially in view of his consistent use of these two sources.

Conclusions and Further Lines of Inquiry

When commenting on the history of the Jesuits in China, it is common for the "second" mission—that which Vermander⁸⁶ has termed the *mal-aimés* (ill beloved)—to get the worst of comparisons with its illustrious predecessors. Indeed, after a long period during which Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) fell

83 Xu, *Si shi quan bian*, 6, fol. 23^r.

84 Carrières, *La sainte Bible*, 7, 518.

85 Rizzi, *Edizioni della Bibbia*, 1, 471, 474–79.

86 Benoît Vermander, "Les jésuites et la Chine: Le temps des mal-aimés (1842–1949)," *Esprit* 415, no. 6 (2015): 41–45.

into relative obscurity due to having been at odds with official ecclesiastical policy, the pendulum swung against the Franco-centric attitude of the nineteenth-century Jesuits beginning with the promulgation of *Maximum illud* in 1919.⁸⁷ This contradiction, however, did not exist for Xu Caibai who, by weaving the legacy of Manual Dias the Younger and the Francophone tradition of the restored Jesuits into his draft translation of the Gospels, brought forth “treasures new and old” to produce a version of the Bible that is uniquely Chinese, not only due to its high-sounding literary language, but also due to the multi-layered heritage of the mission in Jiangnan.

Earlier in this paper, I raised the question of why this translation was never published, especially considering the insistence of vicar apostolic of Jiangnan Valentin Garnier on publishing a Chinese version of the Gospels. Considering that the version by Li Wenyu would ultimately be published in 1897, as we pointed out earlier, it is entirely possible that Xu’s translation was produced as a candidate for publication roughly at the same time. In that case, a number of possibilities emerge: if the work was completed prior to 1897, it may have been deemed unsatisfactory and rejected, or, if it was completed after 1897, there may no longer have been a need for another version of the Gospels. In many ways, Li Wenyu’s version appears to be a more polished version that nevertheless retains much of what is good in Xu Caibai’s translation, lending credence to the first hypothesis. Eschewing Xu’s approach, Li, an acknowledged master of classical prose,⁸⁸ does not hesitate to depart from Dias where necessary to produce a leaner, more idiomatic translation, as can be seen in Jn 1:1 below:

Xu and Dias: *Jue shi Wu'erpeng yi you. Si Wu'erpeng shi zai Tianzhu, shi ji Tianzhu.* 厥始物爾朋已有。斯物爾朋實在天主。實即天主。⁸⁹

87 David Emil Mungello, “Reinterpreting the History of Christianity in China,” *The Historical Journal* 55, no. 2 (2012): 533–52, here 540–41; Jean-Paul Wiest, “Bringing Christ to the Nations: Shifting Models of Mission among Jesuits in China,” *The Catholic Historical Review* 83 (1997): 654–81.

88 Joachim Kurtz, “Opening up the Well of Reason: Li Wenyu’s Religious and Academic Writings for the Jesuit *Imprimerie de T’ou-sè-wè*,” in *Yang zi yu Huawen: jindai Xianggang yu Shanghai de Xishu Zhongyi he chuban* 洋字與華文：近代香港與上海的西書中譯和出版 [Chinese translations and publications of Western books in Hong Kong and Shanghai in the modern era], ed. Song Gang, 50–82, here 77. Li Sher-Shiueh, “Catholic Tracts and Parabolic Stories in Ming-Qing China,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Bible in China*, ed. Khiok-Khng Yeo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 301–16, here 305.

89 Xu, *Si shi quan bian*, 6, fol. 2^r.

In the beginning, the Word already was. This Word truly was with God, [and] it truly was God.

Li: *Jue chu you Wu'erpeng. Wu'erpeng zai Tianzhu. Wu'erpeng yi Tianzhu.*
 厥初有物爾朋。物爾朋在天主。物爾朋亦天主。⁹⁰

In the beginning was the Word. The Word was with God, and the Word was God.

In this case, not only has Li trimmed out a number of additions such as *yi* 已 (already)⁹¹ and *shi* 實 (truly) and restored the omitted third instance of *Word*, he has also changed Dias's *jue shi* 厥始 (in the beginning) to *jue chu* 厥初. This last change would not have gone unnoticed to classicists, as it is with this same expression that the Zhou dynasty hymn *Sheng min* 生民 (The birth of our people) begins: *Jue chu sheng min, shi wei Jiang Yuan* 厥初生民，時維姜嫄 (In the beginning, she who gave birth to our people was Jiang Yuan),⁹² and beyond the fact that it functions better as an *incipit*, it can also be understood as a nod to the Chinese literary tradition. Furthermore, in those parts not previously translated by Dias, Li's translation is nevertheless more literal than Xu's: this is the case, for instance, in Jn 3:36, where *ira Dei manet super eum* (the wrath of God abides on him) has been rendered as follows:

Xu: *Tianzhu nu bi dai qi ren.* 天主怒必逮其人。⁹³

The wrath of God must catch that man.

Li: *Tianzhu zhi nu lin zhi.* 天主之怒臨之。⁹⁴

The wrath of God looks over him.

Furthermore, Li seems to have relied on the same source as Xu for his paratexts, albeit in a much reduced form: thus, the introductions to each Gospel

90 Li, *Xin jing yiyi*, 2.

91 Please note that the addition of *yi* 已 is not necessarily spurious, as it expresses the perfective aspect to stress the fact that the Word did not come into being in the beginning, but already existed.

92 Hong Zhentao 洪鎮濤 and Liu Ting 劉婷, eds. *Shi jing* 詩經 [The classic of poetry] (Shanghai: Shanghai daxue chubanshe, 2012), 164.

93 Xu, *Si shi quan bian*, 6, fol. 16^r.

94 Li, *Xin jing yiyi*, 15.

are abbreviated versions of the ones found in the Parisian Carrières Bible, and Li has done away with Carrières's running commentary, instead integrating shortened versions of the commentaries by Menochius Xu placed at the end of each chapter as interlinear notes. This may have been intended to cut costs: in 1900, a reader sent the following question to *Huibao* 匯報 (The review for all), a Catholic newspaper run by Li Wenyu:

Guibao yan gujiao bu jin ren du Shengjing, bu zhi guichu jiaotang Zhong yi you xin jiu yue chushou fou, you ze qing shi jiao mu. 貴報言貴教不禁人讀聖書不知貴處教堂中譯有新舊約出售否有則請示價目⁹⁵

Your newspaper says that your religion does not forbid people from reading Holy Scripture. Does your church offer Chinese translations of the Old and New Testaments for sale? If so, please provide a list of prices.

The editors were only too happy to oblige, answering that Li's translation sold for 330 *wen* 文 (cash coins), which was somewhat less than a day's wages for an unskilled laborer at the time,⁹⁶ and highlighted the version's faithfulness. The translation was an immediate success: at the time, Henri Havret (1848–1901) noted that it was *répandue dans les provinces de Chine. On en loue fort le style et l'exactitude* (disseminated across the provinces of China). It is much praised for its style and accuracy.⁹⁷

However, we would like to consider a third possibility. According to Colombel,⁹⁸ before his death, Xu Caibai was working on a Latin-Chinese dictionary based on Louis Quicherat's (1799–1884) *Dictionnaire latin-français*, and it so happens that Xu Caibai's erstwhile Latin teacher, Angelo Zottoli, had also undertaken the project of creating a Latin-Chinese dictionary by translating the Kangxi dictionary into Latin toward the end of his life. On this subject, Antonio De Caro points out that, even though Zottoli's manuscript has not been found, the Xujiahui library does contain an anonymous draft entitled

95 "Wen da" 問答 [Questions and answers], *Huibao* 匯報 [The review for all], March 3, 1900.

96 Sidney Gamble, "Wages of Unskilled Chinese Laborers 1807–1902," *The Far Eastern Quarterly* 3, no. 1 (1943): 41–73, here 61. It is worth noting that Catholic missions often sold books at a loss for very low prices; Véronique Ragôt-Delcourt, "L'imprimerie au service de la mission: les missions étrangères et l'apostolat par le livre (années 1770–1880)" (PhD diss.: Université Strasbourg II, 2008), 310–12.

97 Havret, *La mission*, 142.

98 Colombel, *Histoire de la mission*, 1399; Colombel, *Jiangnan chuanjiao shi* 5–2:959–60.

Dictionarium Latino-Sinicum.⁹⁹ Could this manuscript be the draft Xu Caibai was working on? In any event, Xu's background as a teacher, his concern with producing educational material for the Xujiahui seminary and the fact that he based his translation of the Gospels on eminently didactic texts—Manuel Dias's classic and an edition of the Bible intended for seminaries—suggests that, whereas Li Wenyu's translation of the Gospels, with its limited number of notes, was designed as a pastoral tool, Xu may well have wished to create a Chinese study Bible that could be used for the training of the native priesthood.

Be that as it may, this recently discovered version of the Bible stands as a testament to the growing consciousness of the Chinese clergy in the waning years of the nineteenth century of the need to provide the local church with the tools to grow and develop into a truly autonomous and self-sufficient body, and in this regard, the momentous task of translating the Bible stood out to such an extent that three of the seminarians born in 1840 who joined the Xujiahui novitiate in 1862—Ma Xiangbo, Li Wenyu, and Xu Caibai—would produce their own translations of the Gospels.¹⁰⁰ The passion and missionary zeal evident in these translations act as a stark rejoinder to the words reported by Joseph de la Servière according to which “old Christian communities are like old women—they bear no more children,”¹⁰¹ and we hope that further contributions will cast light on the long-neglected work of Xu Caibai in this regard.

99 Antonio De Caro, *Angelo Zottoli, a Jesuit Missionary in China (1842 to 1902): His Life and Ideas*, (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2022), 80–82.

100 On the translations by Li and Ma, see Hong, “Catholic Intellectuals,” 1–17 and Li and Pieragastini, “Dialogue between Confucius and Christ,” 662–63.

101 de la Servière, “Work of the Catholic Church in China,” 74.