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A JESUIT MADONNA CASE IN THE
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An Interdisciplinary Perspective to a Historical Issue: A Jesuit Madonna Case in the Seventeenth Century

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Abstract

Historical issues regarding cultural encounters can require explorations of complex relationships between the past and present, the Self and the Other, and various intercultural concepts. These relevant questions not only shape the most prominent characteristics of the discipline of history in the humanities, but also entail other disciplinary methods, such as those of anthropology, sociology, and cultural and religious studies. The study of the multicultural features of Christianity in China provides an insight into an early Chinese understanding of the West, which later served as a foundation for China's modernization. The image and cult of the Virgin Mary—much more popular, and yet also controversial in the early years of the Jesuit China missions—demonstrates well that an image was seen as an object, by means of its distinctive material elements, mostly by its viewers or respondents. This can be revealed and narrated in terms of a material dimension, in which an unintended invention could have resulted when the viewer or recipient, rather than the author or person who had had its authority, was the dominant agent. In this process—from the perception of a foreign object to the forming of a new idea—the image as object could have played the role of “first” agent, then the viewer as the “second” agent. Due to this paramount nature of objecthood, I will demonstrate how a displacement or diversion of the original sacredness of the image could have occurred, and that a new iconography more favourable to the viewer, or the second agent, could only have taken root in a non-Christian land, where the Madonna image and cult would have played a completely different role in its religious efficacy.

I. Introduction

Historical issues regarding cultural encounters can require the explorations of complex relationships between the past and present, the Self and the Other, and various intercultural concepts. These relevant questions not only shape the most prominent characteristics of the discipline of history in the humanities, but also entail other disciplinary methods, such as those of anthropology, sociology, and cultural and religious studies. Research regarding Jesuit Asia

Missions is intercultural and interdisciplinary. It involves a sophisticated analysis of human behavior and thought in a different place and time that contributes substantially to a refined methodology of cross-contextualization and cross-temporalization in the humanities.

Additionally, such a study demonstrate the multicultural features of Christianity in China and provides an insight into the early Chinese understanding of the West, which later served as a foundation for China's modernization.

Catholic missions in China are a fascinating, yet controversial page in the history of seventeenth-century Europe. In his most recent work on Catholic reform of the Early Modern Period, R. Po-chia Hsia states, "One of the prominent themes ignored in the traditional historiography of early modern Catholicism, and still neglected in the current crop of texts, is the history of non-European Catholicism."¹ Indeed, the fascination of the Catholic missions to China lies in the confrontations between two rich yet culturally distinct heritages. Through missionary efforts, Chinese culture came to be seen as an unprecedented and fanciful spectacle with regard to European consideration of other non-Western countries in the world.² The missiological approaches to this subject made in the early twentieth century by people within the Church lack an outside perspective in the examination of the intercultural complexities of this history. Moreover, while Western scholarship highly praised the Jesuit achievements in the China mission, Chinese scholars rarely paid much attention to the appearance of this foreign group in their history. On both sides of this encounter, Catholic missions in China were a marginalized scholarly field roughly until the 1990s.³ When referring to Felipe Fernández-Armesto's analytic structure of a globally geographical framework, as quoted above, I note

¹ R. Po-chia Hsia, *The World of Catholic Renewal 1540-1770* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 6.

² I use here "confrontation," referring to Gayatri Chakravorti Spivak's elaboration, to indicate "diversity" observed in cultures. Spivak's statement is found in her "Explanation and Culture: Marginalia" (1979), which was reprinted in *In Other Words: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York: Methuen, 1987), 103-117. I refer to the quotation made by the following book in the frontispiece, Claire Farago, ed., *Reframing the Renaissance: Visual Culture in Europe and Latin America 1450-1650* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

³ About the missiological approach, see Nicolas Standaert, "New Trends in the Historiography of Christianity in China," *The Catholic Historical Review* 83 (4): 573-77 (October 1997).

that the missionary context was the frontier where two parties, Europe and China, met each other and began an intercultural confrontations affecting the world's image of both peoples. As for the individual cultural traditions in question, this encounter involves complicated issues concerning national and racial identities and the cultural attitudes toward "others" and "outsiders."

The purpose of my research is to deal with this frontier, formerly thought of as a margin, from both a European and a Chinese perspective. During the Counter-Reformation in Europe of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Society of Jesus was a powerful force in the spread of the Roman Catholic faith. As a major target of the Jesuit missions, China, the greatest political power and entity in Asia, had been regarded by Europeans as a mysterious but extremely rich and populous nation since the late thirteenth century, when the account of Marco Polo's travels became known and produced an imaginative picture of the Tartar's wealth and force. Shortly after Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) founded the Society of Jesus in 1540, he dispatched one of his most trusted disciples, Francis Xavier (1506-1552), to Asia with the goal of establishing Christianity there. Although other Christian missionaries were already active outside Europe, the Jesuits forged the strongest links between East Asia and Europe. The complex societies and cultures of East Asia required the Jesuits to develop strategies and approaches very different from those employed in the New World. The contact between Europeans and Asians in the Early Modern Period, mainly occasioned by Jesuit missionary endeavors, produced some of the most intriguing examples of intercultural exchange in world history.

The Jesuits actively employed the visual arts variously in European and foreign missions. The Society of Jesus was the religious order most devoted to the promotion of visual material as aids to religious spirituality, meditation and edification. In their foreign missions, the Jesuits also saw images as the most effective means of communication across linguistic barriers. This idea derives from the larger category of post-Tridentine art theory, as testified in the Bolognese Bishop Gabriele Paleotti's treatise written in 1582, which recognizes the Catholic apologetic traditions on art in regard to painting

as a universal language.⁴ This statement was in agreement with the global view of Early Modern Catholicism, which saw a universality of Christian theology and doctrine as justification of the massive Christianization of non-Europeans. I would like to mention a quotation from an earlier research of Prof. Cummins on the pictorial images in sixteenth-century New World. As you see, the research gave us an example how a crosscultural communication through images contributed to or can be the valuable and common space for the establishment of the truth in colonial Americas.

In recent years, new research has moved from the implication of a uniform “Jesuit style” as an example of European artistic hegemony to Jesuit adaptations of local styles and components to meet their missions’ individual needs.⁵ Artwork produced in a missionary context is no longer judged as an inferior hybrid of a “pure” style. Past devaluation in the past of these works of arts has also evolved around the Church’s attitude towards indigenous artistic traditions; yet, the multicultural character of these works embraces the persistence and resistance of any accommodation, acculturation, or syncretism, three concepts demonstrated multiply or all in one, and they have been recently re-evaluated for their contributions to the primary traditions of the visual arts on which they drew.^{6 7} During the last decades, visual objects, to use the term “mission art,” on which Gauvin Bailey elaborated “for want

⁴ Gabriele Paleotti, *Discorso intorno alle imagini sacre e profane*, in *Trattati d’Arte del Cinquecento: Fra Manierismo e Controriforma*, ed. Paola Barocchi, vol. 2 (Bari: Gius. Laterza & Figli, 1961), 140. As for Paleotti and the importance of his work in late-sixteenth-century European artistic discourse, refer to Anton W. A. Boschloo, *Annibale Carracci in Bologna: Visible Reality in Art after the Council of Trent*, trans. R. R. Symonds (The Hague: Government Publishing Office, 1974), 121-55; Pamela M. Jones, “Art Theory in Ideology: Gabrielle Paleotti’s Hierarchical Notion of Painting’s Universality and Reception,” in Farago, *Reframing the Renaissance*, 127-39.

⁵ The most prominent work to argue that Jesuit thinking on art and architecture was not uniform, thus the term “Jesuit style” is not a useful concept, is Rudolf Wittkower and Irma B. Jaffe, eds., *Baroque Art: The Jesuit Contribution* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1972). A new and overall discussion of the historiographical debate on “Jesuit style” is Gauvin Alexander Bailey, “Le style jésuite n’existe pas’: Jesuit Corporate Culture and the Visual Arts,” in *The Jesuits: Cultures, Sciences, and the Arts 1540-1773*, ed. John W. O’Malley, S.J. et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 38-89.

⁶ The depreciation of arts in missions in the early periods is described and disapproved of by the following works: Celso Costantini, *L’Arte Cristiana nelle Missioni* (Vatican City: Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana, 1940); Pasquale M. d’Elia, *Le Origini dell’Arte Cristiana Cinese (1583-1640)* (Rome: Reale Accademia d’Italia, 1939), 11-13; Gonçalo Couceiro, *A Igreja de S. Paulo de Macau* (Lisbon: Livros Horizonte, 1997), 9-10.

⁷ An example on Renaissance art is the work edited by Farago, *Reframing the Renaissance*, in the introduction of which Farago asks the following two questions as the premise for the essays that follow: “What did new awareness of other cultures contribute to European conceptions of the arts?,” and “How did the exportation of Renaissance ideal and material culture, from Italy to other parts of Europe and worldwide, fare in this environment of intensified interaction?” (p. 1).

of a better term,” produced in a foreign or colonial land have been carefully reconsidered by applying the view that the indigenous peoples associated with these objects were not simply passive and mute with regard to the imposition of European artistic forms.⁸

II. Polemics on the Madonna Case

In the Jesuit missions of China during the late Ming period, two principal types of sacred images were introduced: those of Christ and of the Madonna with Child. The responses to these two types of images were apparently quite different and sometimes even in conflict with each other. The scholarships rarely examine in what way, or in what relationships, the two different types of Christian images were co-used and conceived in China. If we state that the image of the Virgin Mary was more acceptable in local perception, while one Chinese official revealed his abhorrence of the crucifix, which in his eyes was offensive. By way of contrast, the missionary seemed worried when iconographical and epistemological confusion occurred between the image of the Virgin Mary and that of the Buddhist bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, known to the Chinese as “Guanyin.” The Virgin Mary was amalgamated with Buddhist deity Guanyin, who had a prosperous cult in Chinese popular religion during the late Ming period. The shocking conception of God as a female was consequently reported, as in a source from Zhaoqing, Guangdong Province in 1583. Nevertheless, images of both the Virgin Mary and the Crucifixion continued to appear in Jesuit accounts, and the Jesuits never ceased to use either type in their evangelization.

The Jesuits promoted understanding of Christianity through the image of Christ in their vernacular preaching. Several texts written by the Jesuits in Chinese vernacular for the illiterate and the non-literati introduced Christ and the Incarnation. These themes were a major aspect of the Jesuit catechism and religious education offered to non-Christians in China at that time. The Holy Mother

⁸ Gauvin Alexander Bailey, *Art on the Jesuit Missions in Asia and Latin America 1542-1773* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 4-5.

was not a central figure in this discourse. However, the image of the Madonna with Child raised a comparatively intense iconographical modification. The confusion of the Madonna with Guanyin and related Chinese misconceptions such as “God is a female,” or “The Holy Mother is ‘the God’ of Christianity,” were noted and denounced by the Jesuits and their followers.

The question remains as to whether the cult and the image of the Holy Mother address unexpected but active elements in the Chinese comprehension of Christianity, and how the Jesuits evaluated the effect of the Madonna. Different, sporadic and, at times, conflicting sources exist, originating from different contexts and contributing to the story of the Madonna cult and image in China. Nevertheless, to date, we know very little, if anything, about the consequential story of the considerable written and representational sources, and about their significance within the Catholicism that the Jesuits introduced to the Chinese. This is a crucial question in the history of Catholicism in China, because one of the core imputations in the Chinese Rites controversy was that the Jesuits had not appropriately conveyed the nature of the faith of Christ. The aforementioned confusion was somehow an indication of the missionaries’ dilemma and anxiety in speaking for the monotheism in the context of the Madonna cult to non-Christians, whose religions and culture were traditionally polytheistic. The question regarding the Madonna cult that was associated with the disputed points in the controversy was of the Immaculate Conception, which had been debated by the Jesuits and the Dominicans. As the discussion that follows will show, the Jesuits had presented the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception during their early missions, emphasizing the sacred birth of Christ and the Incarnation, which is the foundation of the Christian mystery. My preliminary research attempts to investigate the early history of the Madonna cult in order to enhance the understanding of the Jesuit Christology in the late Ming period.

In this study, I will discuss two aspects of the introduction of the Marian images and cult to China: one concerns the imagery; the other introduces the Chinese texts on the Holy Mother, such as the catechism, to understand how the Holy Mother was explained in Chinese to non-Christians. I will argue that the Jesuits attempted to establish the role of the Holy Mother

within its Christological framework, as seen in their Chinese texts. However, it appears that this discourse did not successfully establish the official recognition of the Holy Mother in the Chinese understanding of Christianity. Conversely, the Madonna (even though only in the representational sense) was adapted to the iconography and cult of the Buddhist Guanyin, which gained significant popularity in South China. In this respect, the inference is that the Madonna image and cult could have been identified only through a perception arising from outside of the Christological framework, or it could be perceived as much as the missionaries expected only in the small communities of converts. Whereas the Jesuits aimed to promote a true understanding of Christ and God to the Chinese, and introduced the concept of one true Creator to the polytheistic environment of Chinese society, the comprehension of the Holy Mother would instead be primarily perceived independently from Christian theism. It was and had to be transformed into a quasi-Guanyin's cult and, thus, joined the Chinese religions. Whether the Jesuit missionaries were aware of the limitations of their Christological method is uncertain, as is whether the comprehension of Christ and of the Holy Mother were conflicted to some Chinese minds. A further question is whether the Jesuit introduction of the Holy Mother was beneficial or detrimental to the Chinese perception of the one true Creator.

III. Imagery Discourse

The first Madonna image to appear in China was the small picture brought from Rome and given to Wang Pan, the prefect of Zhaoqing, Guangdong, where the two first Jesuit missionaries had settled in 1583, Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) and Michele Ruggieri (1543-1607). In the latter half of the account for 1583, Ricci described how the Chinese people were attracted to an image of the Madonna with Child placed on their temporary altar in Zhaoqing. This would be the first record of the response of the Chinese people to the image of Madonna with Child:

Ricci noted the admiration of “the artifice of our picture,” an indication that Chinese interest resulted from the skill and technique employed by the European artist, but not from any sympathetic inclination to the subject or its symbolic meaning. The objecthood of this image of the Madonna with Child might be recognized as the inception of the cross-cultural encounter. The Chinese response that “God is a woman” indicated a naïve confusion among Chinese viewers, unexpected by the missionaries and a source of tension felt by Ruggieri and Ricci. As may be gleaned from the key terms of Ricci’s account, the dual meaning of the iconography of the Madonna and Christ Child was incomprehensible to the Chinese mind, due to its seeming opposition to the concept of a single God.

The Jesuits were the devout patrons of the cult of the Holy Mother. Jesuit founder Ignatius of Loyola had a particular personal devotion to the Holy Mother, and S. Maria della Strada, a chapel in Rome, was central for their ministries from the time of Ignatius. An engraving of the Madonna della Strada and the first two saints of the Society, Ignatius and Francis Xavier, was supposed to have been made after 1638 as a celebration of the beatification in 1622 of these two remarkable people.⁹ The Madonna cult and image were undoubtedly central to Jesuit piety. According to Gauvin Bailey, the Jesuits “perpetuated the early medieval devotion to the miraculous image.” The Madonna of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome was particularly associated with their China and Japan missions. In 1569, the General of the Society of Jesus, Francis Borgia, petitioned Pope Pius V to have a replica made of the *Salus Populi Romani* icon (hereafter referred to as the Roman icon) at Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome. This icon was believed to be an authentic portrait of Mary, painted in person by St. Luke according to ancient Catholic tradition. Its specialness lay in its status to be believed as an *acheiropoieton* (“not

⁹ Thomas M. Lucas, ed., *Saint, Site, and Sacred Strategy: Ignatius, Rome, and Jesuit Urbanism* (Vatican City: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1990), 26, 30-31, 113 (pl. 52).

made by hand”), a miraculous image that bore the exact likeness of the Virgin’s face.¹⁰ Around the same year Matteo Ricci, the Italian Jesuit who would later become the primary and most prominent missionary in the China mission during the early period, joined the recently founded Marian Congregation of Rome.¹¹

The request of the General Borgia was granted, and within a short time, an exact replica of the Roman icon was placed on the altar of a chapel of the Jesuit Casa Professa in Rome. The Jesuit novitiate in the Church of S. Andrea al Quirinale in Rome, the chapel dedicated to St. Stanislaus Kostka also possessed an initial copy of Borgia’s reproduction. The original idea of the duplication was also associated with a missionary in Brazil, Ignazio de Azevedo, who in 1569 arrived in Rome to promote the copying of the Roman icon for the Jesuit foreign missions. A later oil painting indicated De Azevedo’s contribution to the reproduction and distribution of the Marian icon overseas, through the sailing ships looming against the gray background behind the missionary in the artwork. Additional copies of the Roman icon of Santa Maria Maggiore, particularly by means of copper-engraving, were thus made available to accompany the Jesuits to their missions around the world.¹² Moreover, the Roman icon was a particularly effective choice for use in missionary work, as it was especially celebrated as a sacred image and as a symbolic relic of the Virgin Mary, thus exhibiting the dual features of representation and true presence.

Matteo Ricci himself might have brought one such reproduction in printed format to China, when he arrived in Macao in 1582. The above small Madonna image from Rome presented to

¹⁰ Steven Ostrow, *Art and Spirituality in Counter-Reformation Rome: The Sistine and Pauline Chapels in S. Maria Maggiore* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 120-122; Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 31-77, 478-90; G. Anichini, “La “Mater Dei Dignissima” di S. Maria Maggiore,” *L’illustrazione Vaticana*, anno. II, num. 15 (August 1931): 22-26.

¹¹ D’Elia, *Fonti Ricciane*, 2: 552; Jonathan Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* (New York, 1985), 239-40.

¹² A primary and fundamental history of the reproduction and distribution of this Marian icon from Europe to the outside, see Pasquale M. D’Elia, “La Prima Diffusione nel Mondo dell’Imagine di Maria ‘Salus Populi Romani’,” *Fede e Arte* (October 1954): 1-11.

Wang Pan, was likely a copy of the Roman icon. Ricci's personal account repeatedly specified the presence of the Madonna icon of St. Luke from Santa Maria Maggiore, and he indeed presented a great painting of the Virgin Mary by St. Luke to the Chinese emperor Wanli 萬曆 in 1601, supposedly a reproduction of the Roman icon that arrived in Macao in 1599-1600. Unfortunately, neither the painting given to the emperor nor the smaller pictures survive today. Currently housed in the Tokyo National Museum is a European painting of the Roman icon, which was originally a replica transported to the Japan mission and found in Nagasaki.¹³ In the trove of the oil paintings from the Seminary of St. José in Macao, there is a panel with oil paintings of "the Virgin Mary and Child" on both sides, and they are also apparently duplications of the Roman icon.¹⁴ These three pictures from Japan and Macao are in European formats and style. That which was given to Emperor Wanli could have been a similar painting.

In addition to the copies of the Roman icon exported from Europe, the duplication of this sacred image was adaptively made on the other side of the world. A most well-known case associated with the Jesuits is an image on the scroll found in Xian 西安, China. At present this Chinese-style painting is displayed in a vitrine within the Chinese section of the Field Museum in Chicago, U.S. The bright red of the Madonna's halo and the Child's Chinese garment at the first glance attracts the viewer and introduces the mystery of the image, which is a mingling of the vivid Chinese pictorial style and format with a European subject. This representation is in all likelihood a Chinese version of the Roman icon, although there is no direct evidence to connect the replication with the Jesuit mission. However, based on its visual qualities, it serves

¹³ Aoki Shigeru 青木茂 and Kobayashi Hiromitsu 小林宏光, eds., 中國の洋風畫展—明末から清時代の絵画・版画・挿絵本 (*Exhibition of Western-Style Paintings of China—Paintings, Prints, and Illustrations from the Late Ming to Qing Dynasties*) (Tokyo: 町田市立国際版画美術館 (International Print Museum of the Machida City), 1995), 113.

¹⁴ See a register in the following inventory: *Inventário Fotográfico de Objectos de Arte Sacra Existentes nas Igejas de Macau: Escultura e Pintura* (Macao: Direcção dos Serviços de Educação e Cultura, 1981), no. P-24. Two paintings are for the first time color reprinted in a recent catalogue: *Ha jiao ru zong—Li madou shishi sibai zhounian wenwu teji* 海嶠儒宗—利瑪竇逝世四百周年文物特集 (*Special Compendium for Commemorating the 400th Anniversary of the Demise of Matteo Ricci*) (Macao: Museu de Arte de Macau, 2010), 196-97 (pl. 134).

as compelling evidence of the appearance of the Roman icon being present in China. This painting was made with ink and color pigments on silk mounted on a scroll. The central figure of the Madonna wears a white long garment and holds a Chinese boy in her left arm. If one compares this image with the original icon, one sees that the poses and hand gestures of the Madonna and her child are the same as those of the original Virgin and Child, although the Chinese boy no longer has a halo. The linear expression of the Madonna's drapery in the scroll painting belongs to Chinese pictorial tradition, but the shading appears to be in emulation of Western chiaroscuro technique. The little boy has clearly been represented in the Chinese tradition as witnessed by his hair and dress. Furthering the non-western tradition, he also holds a book with a Chinese binding in his left hand.

Jesuit scholarship pays considerable and witty attention to this painting a result of the importance of the Roman icon for the Society of Jesus ever since its founding. Due to the comparative conformity in the depiction of the figures, Jesuit scholarship has generally ascribed the Chinese copy to the Ricci's time, when the Roman icon's entry into China was highlighted. Additionally, local tradition held that it had been handed down from the later Ming period. Dating has been a questionable issue for this mysterious adaptation of the Roman icon, and the author remains unknown.¹⁵

Despite these uncertain circumstances, the Xian Madonna has the iconic features of the White-robed Guanyin, although it seems that the child holding a book never appeared in Guanyin's imagery. Even so, the Xian Madonna could have certainly aroused a visual identity with the Guanyin image, particularly if the Chinese viewer had never seen the Roman icon. Moreover, the Xian Madonna changed the image from a half-length to a full-length figure, with its naked feet visible under the white garment. This style is identical to Guanyin's formulation

¹⁵ I have more discussions on the date of this painting and its possible link to the late Ming period in my dissertation, see Hui-Hung Chen, "Encounters in Peoples, Religions, and Sciences: Jesuit Visual Culture in Seventeenth Century China" (PhD dissertation, Brown University, 2004), 61-69.

during the sixteenth to seventeenth century, during which period the goddess was never portrayed in half-length. The Xian Madonna is the only known reproduction in the world to depict a standing full-length representation of the Roman icon of Santa Maria Maggiore. Charbo. F. Hartman in his research on the Xian Madonna suggested two relevant points that will be considered here. Firstly, Chinese portraiture of ancestors and divinities did not depict half-length figures, which might be construed as mutilated or deemed inappropriate. Secondly, bare feet were never represented in Christian iconography, except sometimes in the case of Christ and his Apostles.¹⁶ Thus the Xian Madonna must have borrowed Guanyin's iconography, and the reformulation of the image of the Madonna was made to suit Eastern visual discourse.

The confusion between the two female deities occurred when the audience of a different culture and language perceived their visually similarity. This bewilderment also testifies that the Chinese understood and adopted the Madonna image not because of any comprehension of the Christian subject, but because the subject could be related to a customary Chinese genre of the sacred. In other words, the western subject just played the material role for a new type of image that the Chinese viewer chose to understand. Or, the material contacts by objects including sacred images that somehow did not concern about the sacredness of images. Chinese response to the subject diverged from its original epistemology towards a different model in accordance with the appropriation of the image by a cross-cultural viewer.

Guanyin, the Deity of Mercy or Goddess of Compassion, was served by one of the most favorable and significant Buddhist cults in China. Guanyin enjoyed a vigorous evolution in terms of iconography and devotion, and wide duplication in the various media of popular culture during the late Ming period. One of the most noteworthy icons is the feminine White-robed

¹⁶ His letter, dated on June 15, 1966, to Mr. Kenneth Starr who was the curator of the Field Museum of Chicago, was, housed in the museum archive. I give my particular gratitude to Doctor Ben Bronson, the Curator of Asian Archaeology and Ethnology in the Field Museum of Chicago, who offered a valuable assistance for the archival records of this painting in my visit to the museum in October, 2002.

Guanyin (白衣觀音), and one important aspect of this cult of Guanyin was closely associated with the petition for a male child to be given to the worshipper, thus giving Guanyin the name “the Bestower of Sons (送子觀音)” or “Child-giving Guanyin.” The White-robed Guanyin derived from a goddess in esoteric Buddhism, which bears a maternal meaning for all of the heavenly deities, buddhas and bodhisattvas. The white color of the mantle carries this symbolic implication of the maternity of the deity. However, as Chün-fang Yü has pointed out, the White-robed Guanyin is “a fertility goddess who nevertheless is devoid of sexuality. She gives children to others, but she is never a mother....she is thus a figure of motherliness, but not of motherhood.”¹⁷ In Chinese religious art, that the style and nature of the Guanyin image developed from the masculine to feminine aroused several contemporaneous debates, especially as the female form was predominant in Guanyin imagery from the Ming dynasty. Some conclude that femininity was sometimes regarded as secularization away from the holiness of Guanyin. One solution, based upon the canonical theory that Guanyin was a bodhisattva with multiple and expedient variants in Buddhist doctrine, was to see Guanyin as an ungendered figure, and consider the gender issue not to be in the question concerning Guanyin’s visual formats.¹⁸ This notion is completely divergent from the Christian notion of the Holy Mother.¹⁹

In addition, one of Guanyin’s dual acolytes vital for its sixteenth-century iconography and folklore was Sudhana, a young pilgrim in the relevant Buddhist sutra who became a legendary devotee and attendant of Guanyin. Sudhana was usually depicted as a little figure or child beside Guanyin in the image, or paying reverence to the central figure of Guanyin. The

¹⁷ Chün-fang Yü, “Guanyin: The Chinese Transformation of Avalokiteshvara,” in *Latter Days of the Law: Images of Chinese Buddhism 850-1850*, ed. M. Weidner (Lawrence: Spencer Museum of Art and the University of Kansas, 1994), 151-81; the quotation on p. 172.

¹⁸ Lee Yu-min 李玉珉, 觀音特展 *Visions of Compassion: Images of Kuan-yin in Chinese Art: Catalogue to a Special Exhibition of Works from the National Palace Museum Collection* (Taipei: National Palace Museum, 2000), 38-39.

¹⁹ For the maternal nature of the Holy Mother, see Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976), 177-331.

representation of Guanyin could hence include a child, who may be either Sudhana or a symbol of the child-giving power of Guanyin, but the child could never be the iconographical and religious focus of the divinity. The highlighted principle of the pair in Guanyin imagery is completely different from the meaning of the Virgin with Child in Christian doctrine. In fact, the image of Guanyin holding a child was not very popular one within the deity's pictorial traditions, because the inclusion of the child was not a critical element in realizing Guanyin's sacred virtue. Furthermore, according to Lauren Arnold, who offers a different observation, the appearance of the image of Guanyin with a child or of Child-giving Guanyin was found in China after around 1400. It could in fact derive from a Western source, the image of the Madonna with Child introduced by Franciscan missionaries during the 1300s into the same area: the southern coast of China. Arnold's arguments are also linked to the fact that the female Guanyin also began to be popular around the 1300s. This Western source could be the true origin of the image of the Child-giving Guanyin, the later evolution of the female White-robed Guanyin. A key difference of Arnold's proposition from earlier research is the emphasis on an overlapping iconography, in which the Madonna and Guanyin shared the same values of filial piety and feminine chastity.²⁰ By establishing this meaningful similitude, the coincidence of the iconographies of Guanyin and the Madonna not only lies in a visual correspondence, but also in their content.

IV. Textual Discourse

If the adaptation of the Xian Madonna had to do with the Jesuit consciousness of the

²⁰ Lauren Arnold, "The Franciscan Origin of the Image of the Child-giving Guanyin," in *The Ricci Institute Public Lecture Series* (February 16, 2005), 2-4. This is a brief but concise article. Or, another earlier article of the same author: "Folk Goddess or Madonna? Early Missionary Encounters with the Image of Guanyin" (paper presented at the conference of *Encounters and Dialogues—An International Symposium on Cross-Cultural Exchanges between China and the West in the Late Ming and Early Qing Dynasties*, co-sponsored by the Institute of World Religions of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and The Ricci Institute for Chinese-Western Cultural History of the University of San Francisco, Beijing, October 14-17 2001).

adoption of Guanyin's iconography, however, the Jesuit textual discourse in China speaks a different story of their attitude toward the confusion of these two female deities. The earliest Jesuit Chinese text that mentions the Holy Mother is Ruggieri's Christian doctrine, entitled *Tienzhu shilu* 天主實錄, written between 1580 and 1584. In its ninth and eleventh chapters, the texts state that God chose a sacred and meritorious lady named Maria to give birth to his son, Jesus, without conception.²¹ In another manuscript, which was a brief catechism attached to the manuscript of the Portuguese-Chinese Dictionary of 1583-1588, composed by Ruggieri and Ricci, the same information regarding Maria was also stated in a similar manner.²² However, at the end of the *Tienzhu shilu*, as seen in the mentioned version of 1580-1584 in the Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, Rome (ARSI), a prayer text indicates that the Holy Mother Maria had significant grace to give birth to Jesus. For this very reason, Maria was in the closest position to God, and therefore one could pray to her, expressing confession, appeals for grace and abstinence, etc. This is a statement that the Holy Mother was the most significant intercessor in Christian piety. The Chinese title of this prayer text *baigao* 拜告 is literally translated as "paying devotion and appeal," which is a similar theme found in relevant Buddhist prayers. This *baigao* is not a complete translation of the Hail Mary, but it does bear the same nature as the Ave Maria. The most recent research showed that this text may have been the earliest Chinese translation of the Ave Maria and Pater Noster (Our Father; Lord's Prayer). According to a letter by Ricci, dated November 30, 1584, he planned to send the *Tienzhu shilu* as well as the translation of the Ten Commandments, the Our Father and the Hail Mary to Rome. This evidence shows that a Chinese translation of the Our Father and the Hail Mary had been completed around the time of the creation of the *Tienzhu shilu*. From her introduction to the Chinese, the Virgin Mary was

²¹ Nicolas Standaert and Adrian Dudink, 耶穌會羅馬檔案館明清天主教文獻: *Chinese Christian Texts from the Roman Archives of the Society of Jesus*, 12 vols. (Taipei: Taipei Ricci Institute, 2002), 1: 59, 63.

²² ARSI, JapSin I, 198, original page 14.

translated as *shengmu niannian* 聖母娘娘, which was an appellation generally employed without distinction for a local female deity in Chinese popular religions.

From these writings, the Virgin Mary's position as the Holy Mother and the intercessor between the faithful and God were appropriately explained in the Jesuit view, despite any implications caused by indigenous terms. Furthermore, in Catholic devotion, she played a subversive role to both Jesus and God. As John W. O'Malley points out, this concept was certainly presented in Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*, which formed the basic and the most important framework for Jesuit piety. However, O'Malley also reminded us that the *Exercises* did not mention the Virgin Mary as much as one might have expected, especially upon closer examination of the prayers to the saints. He quoted the remarks of Jerome Nadal to show the general sentiment amongst the early generation of the Jesuits: caution not to confuse the veneration of the saints with what was most fundamental to Christianity. Among the most significant Jesuit figures at that time, Nadal stated: "Take care lest devotion to the saints and their invocation weaken devotion to God and invocation of him, which ought always to be on the increase. The latter differs totally from the former and altogether excels it." This admonition might explain the modest tone with regard to the veneration of the Virgin Mary in the *Exercises* and the reason for several catechisms associated with the Jesuits exhibiting an "extremely modest scope" for the Marian prayers.²³ It makes one wonder if the Jesuits in China would have had this modesty in mind when they conducted their Christological evangelizations. Despite the Holy Mother, the Jesuits rarely proposed the veneration of the saints nor had the images of the saints in their China missions. A handful of Jesuit Chinese literature on the Holy Mother or the saints might have been confined in the small circle of converts.

Around 1600, the Jesuits published the first rosary prayer in Chinese, *Song nian zhu gui*

²³ John W. O'Malley, *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 266-70; the quotation of Nadal is on p. 269.

cheng 誦念珠規程 (*Method for Reciting the Rosary*, abbreviated *Nian zhu*). As seen in the sixteenth century in European Christendom, the Rosary was standardized as a combined vocal and mental prayer, which held that meditation was an essential part of this devotion.²⁴ That it should be conducted by means of vocal and mental faculties was expressed in the preface of the *Nian zhu*:

每日誦 天主聖母全念珠一串，并默想十五超性之事，包含吾 主耶穌一生的事體。

Each day reciting the whole Rosary and meditating fifteen supernatural things (Christ mysteries), including the life events of Christ.²⁵

“Reciting” means that the text was composed for reading aloud and that “meditating” would be carried out via the ability of mental construction to which the image is absolutely subsidiary. The ultimate aim for this religious practice is an appeal to God, and its purpose lies in the apprehension of Christian mysteries.

Later in 1620s, Yang Tingyun 楊廷筠 (baptized as Michael, 1562-1627), among the most famous Chinese literati baptized by the Jesuits during the late Ming period, wrote a work to explain a number of doubts regarding Catholicism in Chinese society. Yang’s work entitled *Daiyi pian* 代疑篇 (*In Place of Doubt*), written in 1621, includes a section that elaborates on three points regarding the Holy Mother. First, the Holy Mother gave birth to Jesus through an immaculate conception, which shows the sacred merit of the Mother and the value of her chastity, also of high value in mundane world. Second, the most popular type of the Madonna image is the Madonna with Child, as it represents the Incarnation. In revealing the maternal relationship, the image of the Madonna with Child conveys the love of the Mother for the Infant Child, which the faithful emulate in their relation to God. Third, according to Yang, “至視聖母與俗所謂觀

²⁴ A concise yet explicit history of the development of the Rosary in Europe offered by W. A. Hinnebusch, *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 12 (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967-79), 667-70.

²⁵ João da Rocha, *Song nian zhu gui cheng* 誦念珠規程 (*Method for Reciting the Rosary*) (ARSI, JapSin I, 43), 1r. A modern facsimile of this work was published in Taipei, see Standaert and Dudink, *Chinese Christian Texts*, 1: 515-74; the above folio 1r is on page 515.

世音者比倫，尤萬不相侔也 (Consider the Holy Mother as Guan shih yin [i.e. Guanyin] or compare to the latter by common people—this is absolutely not comparable).” In this quote, he elaborated the distinction between the Holy Mother and Guanyin by emphasizing the relationship between the Holy Mother and God’s Son, which did not relate to the Buddhist concept of Guanyin.²⁶ He repeated this elaboration again in his another work.²⁷ It is likely that a religious amalgamation between these two icons and cults could have occurred quite often in the minds of the Chinese people.

In sum, we may conclude that Jesuit piety clearly showed the Holy Mother in a subordinate role to God. In addition, the Marian devotion emphasized several points, such as the Immaculate Conception, the Incarnation, and the virtue of the Mother, in order to confirm the faith of Christ. When Yang denounced the fallacy of the confusion of the Holy Mother with Guanyin, it displayed a different opinion regarding local or popular religions from several Jesuit cases seen in Europe and the Latin America. O’Malley mentioned that the Jesuits had expressed their toleration of the traditional local practices in their European missions.²⁸ The appropriation of local female deities into the Madonna cult, or intentional religious amalgamation between the Catholic and non-Catholic cults and images, was even developed in the missions of the Latin America. This generated the well-known cult and iconography of the Virgin of Guadalupe, which significantly contributed toward Catholic evangelization and local perception of Christianity in the region of Mexcio. Such a situation did not ever occur in China.

From Yang’s rejection of local traditions in order to emphasize the Immaculate Conception and the Incarnation, it may be inferred that the missionaries preached a monotheism that focused

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²⁷ Yang Tingyun, *Tian shi min bian* 天釋明辨 (*Lucid Debating for Catholicism and Buddhism*), in *Tianzhujiao dongchuan wenxian xubian*, 1: 283-86. Whether Yang’s reiteration of this distinction indicates that the amalgamation between two cults occurred prominently in the Jiangnan area, his homeland and places of activities, should deserve a notice.

²⁸ O’Malley, *The First Jesuits*, 267-68.

on the figure of Christ, while being firm in their preference for Confucianism over Buddhism or other local religions. This path was definitely demonstrated in their Chinese writings. The Jesuits thought to position themselves on the same side as the official orthodoxy of Confucianism, which may account for their antagonistic attitude toward the amalgamation of the Holy Mother with Guanyin. By so doing, the diverse accommodations relevant to encounters with local religions were not recognized as the official attitude of the missionaries nor demonstrated in their Chinese writings. Furthermore, the China mission might have not been able to predict that a new and localized iconography, such as the Virgin of Guadalupe in the Latin America, could become a strong and iconic representation of Catholicism, since they had remained firm in denouncing local religions politically.

As Craig Clunas has suggested, the Jesuits “tended to stress the image of the Virgin and Child.”²⁹ Gauvin Bailey stated that Ricci and his successors “went on to capitalize upon the Madonna/Guanyin phenomenon, which is why the Madonna became such a common image in Macao and China.”³⁰ These arguments seem to imply the positive role of the missionaries, who consciously employed the Chinese popularity of the cult of Guanyin to provide a link to the Virgin and Child, as more recent research continues to emphasize. However, these inferences do not seem to take into account the above textual analysis of Jesuit literature in Chinese. At least after 1610, it seems that the Jesuits were not interested in taking advantage of this confusion of the Madonna with Guanyin.

The image of the Virgin with Child along with the intellectual notion of the Child, embodied the meaning of God, presented a difficulty for the Chinese understanding of the true meaning of this Christian image. As concerns the Chinese conception of the Catholic God and representation of the divine, as wells of the type of the Virgin with Child (sometimes in concert

²⁹ Clunas, *Art in China*, 129.

³⁰ Bailey, *Art on the Jesuit Missions*, 89.

with St. John the Baptist), and the Chinese sources' description of the Marian image that was foreign to them, one concludes that the Chinese visual attraction to the materiality to the Christian Marian image, was matched by an intellectual comprehension based on observance of the physical content of the image: "a woman holding a child," the divinity of this sacred imagery lying in "the female figure." Both the iconographical type of "a woman holding a child" and the divinity of the female figure could have derived from the indigenous Guanyin cult, and so the Chinese responses to the Madonna with Child reflected an originally local habit of apprehending the sacred meaning of the kind, which is directed toward the female figure. This iconography diverged completely from the Catholic theological meaning of the image of Madonna with Child, and would be also in conflict with the meaning of the Virgin Mary that the missionaries tried to explain in their texts. Actually, as I will argue further below, this amalgamation actually took place outside of the missionary contexts. In some sense it was not approved by the Jesuits, as far as may be seen in current surviving sources.

Many of the ivory sculptures of Guanyin holding a child appeared after the Jesuits had introduced the cultic image of the Virgin and Child, and the recent Western scholarship is inclined to establish that the Guanyin ivory icon was influenced by European images of the Virgin with Child.³¹ The dating of these ivory sculptures has not yet reached a convincing consensus. It is usual to ascribe most of them to the late seventeenth to eighteenth centuries. In addition, many ivory and porcelain sculptures of a goddess holding a child, usually in portable sizes, were quite often seen in eighteenth-century China, and they were supposed to derive mostly from the Province of Fujian. Since the Spanish established a trading center in the Philippines in 1565, they did business with Chinese merchants mainly from Zhangzhou 漳州 in Fujian, and the Fujianese also began emigrating to the Philippines around then. The Spanish

³¹ Jessica Rawson and Jane Portal, "Luxuries for Trade," in *The British Museum Book of Chinese Art* (London, 1992), 277-78; Yü, "Guanyin: The Chinese Transformation," 173; Clunas, *Art in China*, 128-29; Bailey, *Art on the Jesuit Missions*, 89.

commissioned and even trained these Chinese, either in the Philippines or in Fujian, to make Christian images in ivory for the Spanish and European market. Within this commercial discourse the commissioned Chinese producing the Virgin with Child images was the same group also carving ivory Guanyin statuettes for the Chinese market, since the Guanyin cult was popular in Fujian Province.

More complicatedly, the most important local deity in China, Mazu 媽祖 or Ama 阿媽 derived from Fujian, where Mazu was considered as a transformation of Guanyin. She was the goddess who protected sailors and navigators. In Macao she was well known by local people and even Portuguese traders and missionaries. The Portuguese name for Macao (Macau) was taken from the Chinese name for the Bay of Ama. Thus, one cannot disregard any connection between Mazu, Guanyin, and the Christian Virgin in Jesuit iconography for the China mission, nor can we dismiss the possibility of the amalgamation of deities as a catalyst for the promotion of the cult of the Virgin Mary, as it played out in the case of the ivory statuettes. As for the porcelain versions, the Dehua kiln 德化窯 of Fujian was famous for moulded white porcelain artifacts, and their products featuring Guanyin with a child from the Ming dynasty were exported to Japan in large quantities and were well received there. The Christian subject also appeared in this atelier and attests to the possible contact of the Fujianese craftsman with the Christian Marian cult.³²

Does this constitute a transformation or transplantation? The ivory statue of Guanyin holding a child raises a question of visual identification, as it could be confused with the Virgin with Child. Did the Jesuits or the Chinese transformed the Virgin into the Chinese “Holy Mother” so as to be Guanyin for Chinese comprehension? Or, did the Jesuits or the Chinese intended to transplant the image of

³² For the Dehua kiln, refer to *Cang hai yi zhen—Dun xian tang cang Dehua ci xiang zhan* 滄海遺珍—敦顯堂藏德化瓷像展 (*The Unknown Charm—Blanc de Chine Figures of Dun Xian Tang Collection*) (Macao: Instituto Cultural de Macau, 1997); Ye Wencheng 葉文程, *Zhongguo gu wai xiao ci yanjiu lunwen ji* 中國古外銷瓷研究論文集 (*Essays on Chinese Old Porcelains for Foreign Trades*) (Beijing: Zijincheng chubanshe 紫禁城出版社, 1988), esp. 240-59.

the Virgin Mary in China, making the assimilation with local religious traditions unavoidable? As Morton Fried pointed out, Buddhism in China transformed non-Chinese beings into Chinese beings by their physical appearances. One of the most startling was the transformation of the male bodhisattva of Indian origin, Avalokiteśvara, into the female Chinese goddess Guanyin. Such a transformation was never seen in the figure of Jesus Christ, who remained male and Caucasian. Furthermore, as stated above, after around 1610, the Jesuits might not have been interested in taking advantage of the confusion of the Madonna with Guanyin. In the case of ivory or porcelain statues of the Madonna or Guanyin appearing in South China and linked to Macao and Japan, this line of development seemed a divergence from the official Jesuit view that defended the status of the Holy Mother. One might ask if this religious amalgamation was to a greater extent carried out by local people who did not care about Chinese comprehension of Christian knowledge and the image and cult of the Virgin Mary. Nevertheless, throughout this “unofficial” channel, the Madonna image and its background story entered Chinese society in ways beyond the Jesuits’ manipulation.

The introduction of the Holy Mother through Jesuit literature in vernacular Chinese language and the interface of the Virgin Mary with Guanyin, especially from the imagery perspective, both tells a story. These two approaches, textual and visual, each provides a particular and legitimate point of departure to probe the formation of the Marian cult in China.

V. Objects—Material Dimension

The image of the Virgin Mary demonstrate well that such a depiction was seen by the Chinese viewers or respondents primarily as an object with distinctive material elements, since the Madonna case exemplifies most of the Chinese first responses to Christian images. It also accounts for the most meaningful displacement of the European originality of objecthood, as will be argued. In the majority of surviving records written by the Chinese literati and officials who had befriended Matteo Ricci or knew of him, the Virgin Mary was most often remarked upon, and referred to among the Christian

images that Ricci brought with him. Whether an object originated in Europe or an object manifesting indigenous interests was made in the mission, both demonstrate a displacement or transformation. In a complex cross-cultural setting, Chinese responses to Christian images pointed to the basic theological question of what the meaning of the sacred should be, for both missionaries and the Chinese. This is related to ways in which coeval perceptions may differ between minds that are not of the same culture. Moreover, in speaking of the concepts of accommodation or inculturation in the use of these devotional objects, local responses are considered to be crucial as the missionaries' intentions.³³ Both responses and intentions involve a complicated intercultural dialogue between objects and peoples, and in this sense the nature of the object and its transformation deserve special consideration.

According to William J. T. Mitchell, "objects," may be defined as "material support in or on which an image appears, or the material thing that an image refers to or brings into view"; "images" are "any likeness, figure, motif, or form that appears in some medium or other."³⁴ The Chinese responses usually encompassed these two levels or aspects of "object" and "image" in cross-cultural reading or comprehension. However, the simple meaning of "being objects" occurred to a considerable extent, or if not a fully dominant one. Although "people" still play a dominant role in responses and intentions, the agency of objects definitely attracts attention. The question here is how to treat the nature of the visual object and its transformation in Jesuit China missions from the perspective of the object instead of the people? Does this very question offer another angle for the interpretation of Chinese responses? The specific nature of an object responded to by a viewer can be revealed and narrated in terms of a material dimension,

³³ "Inculturation" is the term Nicolas Standaert elaborated on to replace "acculturation" for the Jesuit China mission, defining it as follows: "Inculturation is the incarnation of Christian life and of the Christian message in a particular cultural context, in such a way that this experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question (this alone would be no more than a superficial adaptation), but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the culture, transforming and remaking it so as to bring about 'a new creation,'" see Nicolas Standaert, "Inculturation and Chinese-Christian Contacts in the Late Ming and Early Qing," *Ching Feng* 34 (4): 214 (December 1991).

³⁴ W. J. T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), xiii.

in which an unintended invention could have resulted when the viewer or recipient, rather than the author or person in authority, was the dominant agent. In this process—from the perception of a foreign object to the forming of a new idea—the image as object could have played the role of “first” agent, then the viewer as the “second” agent. This point differs from those on which Alfred Gell elaborated in his inspiring work *Art and Agency*, wherein humans are seen to exercise the first agency through the medium of artifacts, the secondary agents.³⁵ While taking inspiration or a theoretical framework from anthropological work such as Gell’s, the above difference would be properly emphasized because the appeal of foreign objecthood on several occasions initiated an interaction between peoples. Furthermore, due to this paramount nature of objecthood, I will demonstrate how a displacement or diversion of the original sacredness of the image could have occurred, and that a new iconography more favourable to the viewer, or the second agent, could only have taken root in a non-Christian land, where the Madonna image and cult would have played a completely different role in its religious efficacy.

To put it further or speaking of it in a fundamental sense, the cultural encounters through visual materials, such as the cases shown in the two occasions in 1583 that took place between the Chinese and European by means of visual activity, are a kind of material contact. Treating sacred images and other secular objects or gifts together, as observed in the first greeting of the missionaries by Wang, the Madonna image works in a broad sense of objects and actually became a gifting thing for cultivation of a friendship. All European things they brought, whatever their specific meaning, were objects to the Chinese. What type of Christian subject would be important and how they were to be explained in a Chinese cultural setting were rarely, in comparison, of primary concern to the missionaries, who paid much more attention to whether or how the objects and images streamlined an intercultural communication. Sacred and

³⁵ [Gell](#), 20 (Osborne, 2)

non-sacred objects were relegated to a consistency of logistics.³⁶ This corroborates what I have suggested: it shows their objecthood and a displacement of European originality, particularly with regard to sacred images.

Furthermore, it is noted that there are two major aspects to the history of Marian cult. One has been defined as “material,” the other is related to the striking response to beholding Marian images, as seen in the case of Jesuit China missions. For the former, Hans Belting has elaborated on the early development of the icon of the Virgin Mary within the Easter Church season and has remarked that the veneration of the Virgin “had taken on highly material forms” when the icon was set up under a canopy and carried in the procession. The iconic images were mostly “garlanded, crowned, or even dressed like real people,” or had gold coverings in her cult practices. In other words, material formulations were a very important and prominent feature in the religious traditions of the Marian cult and the treatment of its images.³⁷ This prominent materiality has correspondence to a remark by Bailey regarding the Andean South American response to the Madonna image. He states that the figure of the Virgin Mary in comparison to the materials turned out to be unimportant, while non-Christian Andean people were much more attracted to “ceremonial garments and attributes which accompanied [the image of the Virgin]” that were based on their favored indigenous styles. This occurred even in the veneration of the Virgin by “Christianized” Andean people.³⁸ The Jesuit case in China would be different, but the unimportance of the central figure points to a transformative interpretation by non-Christians

³⁶ Another article of mine has examined in more details the sources from Ricci’s period about the using of “cose,” sending of objects between missions, and the close relation to the building of the friendship and communication contexts: Hui-Hung Chen, “Yesu hui chuanjiaoshi Li Madou shidai de shijue woxiang ji chuanbo wangluo” 耶穌會傳教士利瑪竇時代的視覺物像及傳播網絡 (Visual Objects and Personal Interactions: Their Contexts as Described by the Jesuit Matteo Ricci (1552-1610)), *New History* 21 (3): 55-123 (September 2010).

³⁷ Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 48.

³⁸ The remark was quoted by Gauvin Bailey in order for explaining a possible generation of a new meaning in different eyes of the beholder: Gauvin Alexander Bailey, *Art on the Jesuit Missions in Asia and Latin America 1542-1773* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 28, 204; the original remark was made by Carol Damian, see her book *The Virgin of the Andes: Art and Ritual in Colonial Cuzco* (Miami Beach: Grassfield Press, 1995), 31.

when confronted by a foreign imagery. This may also be evidenced in the Chinese comprehension of the Madonna image.

Another indication of a striking response to the beholding of Marian images as seen in the Jesuit China missions is an insight from the research of Gauvin Bailey. As he stated, the most prevalent *topos* relating to the visual arts of the missions is “indigenous people dazzled by the artifice of European pictorial realism,” such as happened in Japan, Mughal India, China, and Latin America. The paintings that caused “great excitement” among local people are “usually of the Madonna.”³⁹ This observation involves a comparatively global scale to interpret an identical phenomenon that could be further elaborated through a search for the reasons for the responses and the particular subject of the Madonna. However, the first-time response points to the material quality of technique and style, and the popularity of the Madonna subject also specifically links this type of image to a dimension of responses to the materiality of the image. The anthropological perspective of object or gift theory helps us decipher the process of the cross-cultural response.

VI. A Reflection on the Interdisciplinary Approach

My research is a preliminary approach to an exemplative and advantageous method of applying the perspectives of anthropology to historical sources in a cross-cultural context. There are two major problems regarding the present application. First, most of the anthropological methods or theories I have cited have been forged from different cultural and historical cases. The ideas and the frameworks are inspirational, but whether their validity is culturally and historically circumscribed is disputable. They raise the ensuing problem: the borrowings of theoretical frameworks and concepts from anthropology for the Jesuit mission in the Early Modern Period is merely a superimposing of A onto B. The formal correspondence

³⁹ Bailey, *Art on the Jesuit Missions*, 33.

cannot solve the possible conceptual discrepancies in the content. There are several fundamental differences between anthropology and history. The former focuses on system and the latter on process. Anthropology searches for a synchronic pattern, and history, is usually thought to be concerned with a more diachronic process.

These basic differences largely come from a traditional distinction between the social sciences and the humanities. With respect to the above Jesuit case, the application of anthropology to historical questions is not meant to demonstrate a different perspective alone. As I have argued, the anthropological theories or methods that I cited may help to decipher descriptions of the use of the devotional objects, to provide a new and forceful interpretation of the local responses, or to draw insight from them, rather than thinking of those sources only as sketchy information about an event. It is widely recognized that the contact made between Europeans and Asians in the Early Modern Period, mainly occasioned by Jesuit missionary endeavors, produced some of the most intriguing examples of intercultural exchange in world history. To analyze fully the complicated intercultural encounters within its framework and thus produce a satisfactory picture of the reality, is a challenging task. It is hoped that the insights from anthropological methodology may benefit historians working on cross-cultural complexes.