

## Article

# Building Communities through Rituals: Glimpses into the Life of Chinese Christian Communities in the 17th Century

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**Abstract:** As central agents in the cultural dialogue between China and Europe in the 17th century, Christian Chinese communities represent a rich and fascinating source, offering a unique intercultural perspective on the intellectual, cultural, and religious world of late Ming and early Qing China. What did these communities look like? How did they come into being and maintain their significance as a community? By utilising stories depicting scenes of Christian ritual practices in local Chinese contexts between the 1620s and 1640s, collected by a late Ming Christian convert from Fujian, this article delves into the life of Chinese Christian communities, specifically focusing on the dimension of ritual practice. It shows how rituals played a key role in the formation of these communities, not only in keeping them alive, but also in continually redefining their significance for their members.

**Keywords:** Christianity in 17th-century China; intercultural interactions; ritual practice; local communities; *Lixiu yijian*; Chinese Christian texts

## 1. Introduction

In the 17th century, Christian communities in China acted as a major hub for intercultural creation and experimentation, with Western missionaries, local converts, and non-Christian Chinese taking the roles of the primary agents and contributors. In the past decades, studies on these Sino-European exchanges have increasingly raised awareness of and revealed the complex and rich context in which such communities flourished, permitting various social, cultural, and religious contacts and cooperation to take place. Yet, a dimension that is often relegated to obscurity, primarily due to scarce documentation, is how these communities, amidst various agents, actually came into being and operated in the daily context as communities.<sup>1</sup> This article addresses this question by focusing on one main aspect of community life, namely, rituals. It selects rituals as the main object of research because they played a pivotal function in the formation and maintenance of communities.<sup>2</sup> Particularly, this happened in the context of a highly ritualised society like the Chinese one. Its long-standing ritual tradition traced its earliest elaborations back to texts such as the *Yili* 儀禮 and *Liji* 禮記 from the fourth to the third century B.C. and further solidified in the Ming period with the institutionalisation of Zhu Xi's 朱熹 (1130–1200) *Jiali* 家禮 and the regulation of the (*Da*) *Ming jili* (大)明集禮. Thus, with the arrival of missionaries, an intriguing question arises: how did the newly arrived package of equally grounded Christian rituals reproduce in Chinese Christian communities? Eventually, this article will show that the Sino-European exchanges in the 17th century were not merely intellectual encounters but, at the very concrete and everyday level, ritual encounters.

At the centre of this research is *Lixiu yijian* 勵修一鑑 (A Mirror to Encourage Cultivation),<sup>3</sup> an anthology of Christian stories compiled by a local convert from Fujian named Li Jiugong 李九功 (?–1681).<sup>4</sup> The entries in this anthology primarily consist of anecdotes of contemporary Christians in China, albeit in lesser proportion, alongside stories from European biblical and exemplum literature translated into Chinese. It is a very unique source combining people, places, and events set in the West with those in China.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, it is one of the few sources that provides a consistent and systematic group of anecdotes revealing



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the daily dimension of the local Christian community. Woven into proselytising messages promoting the doctrine and benefits of Christianity are also some precious snapshots of ritual life in Christian communities in late Ming China. These stories not only provide a tangible idea of the ritual regimens practiced, but also reveal to modern readers how these unique communities at the grassroots level operated through and were characterised by a dominant ritual dimension. Through analysing the representations of communities in *Lixiu yijian*, the article deals with two aspects. First, it looks at how Christian rituals contributed to the formation of a Chinese Christian community in the local Chinese context by serving as platforms through which the community was brought together, revitalised, and defined. Second, by zooming into the representations of ritual practice, it argues that these communities present a unique reconfiguration of the ritual sphere that is shaped by the interweaving of existing Christian and Chinese ritual and social structures. Within it, a new group of lay social agents, the local converts, is empowered and emerges as key players, actively engaging in and reconstructing rituals through ongoing negotiations with the local reality. By doing so, the article aims to contribute by adding a new layer to our understanding of Chinese Christian communities and the cultural richness they encompass.

## 2. Encounter between Ritual Traditions

Chinese and Christian European societies in the 17th century were characterised by and ingrained into highly ritualised structures, stemming from their respective deeply rooted ritual traditions. Consequently, rituals were an important arena in which the Chinese Christian encounters, embodied by Jesuits and Chinese converts, took place. While studies have widely focused on the cultural interactions within the intellectual realm, enquiring into scientific and philosophical exchanges, it was indeed within the realm of rituals, in the everyday practice and adherence to ritual traditions, that cultural interactions were most dynamic and intercultural communities were formed. This encounter was one of thoughts, but even more so, an encounter of rituals. Thus, before engaging in the analysis of the stories, some attention should be dedicated to defining and discussing rituals, as well as introducing some characteristics of the ritual traditions in both premodern China and Christian Europe.

To begin, the meaning and definition of ritual have been subjects of longstanding debate, hardly limited to one fixed interpretation. Scholars have begun advocating for an alternative approach to define the ritual, which does not strive for the search of a few essential characteristics which are universally applicable, but aims to emphasise its nature as a *fuzzy set* and *polythetic* concept. Namely, rituals can be defined as such by possessing a certain minimal number of defining characteristics, without the requirement for all features to be present in every ritual (Snoek 2006). Amidst this discourse, there is a general consensus on distinguishing in rituals a transformative action—the ritual affects something about people and things, involving the transformation of their being or state into another. Rituals are also dominantly associated with the sphere of religiosity. Religious traditions can be analysed as belief–ritual packages, which evolve and spread by an interaction and influence of these two aspects (Uro et al. 2019). Within this specific sphere, a ritual can be further defined as an act in which (1) someone (agent) does something to (2) someone or something to bring about some non-natural consequences by virtue of appeal to a non-human or superhuman agency (Barrett 2004).

Another aspect with which religious rituals, but also rituals more generally, are often associated is community. Particularly in the 19th and 20th centuries, studies on rituals have emphasised them as a fundamental component of human cultures, “the basic social act of humanity”, as defined by Robert Bellah (Bellah 2011, p. 145), that has a central social and political function in societies. The connection with community emerged prominently in anthropological debates, especially with the development of the Functionalist school. Within it, Emile Durkheim’s theories are certainly the most influential and foundational, particularly his definition of ritual as the representation of the sentiment of society. According to Durkheim, rituals provide occasions for individuals to come together as a collective group.

The atmosphere of collective effervescence that arises from the event of the ritual can stir a sense of solidarity among its participants, legitimating and renovating their cosmologies of the society and the world in which they live (Bell 1997). In other words, the ritual provides the ground for community building. It is a social phenomenon comprising a full series of interactions, actions, and emotional engagement from and between members that allows them to experience a sense of identification with the other partakers and of belonging to the larger collective. Such occasions eventually reconfirm the social order underneath the collective, along with the embedded social roles and hierarchies. Durkheim's ideas laid the foundation for consequent explorations by later scholars from different angles, further delving into the relationship between rituals and community. This includes studies emphasising the role of emotion related to ritual interactions in shaping social life and environment (Collins 2014), as well as addressing the reception of the messages encoded in the formality and performative character of rituals by participants (Rappaport 1999).

Among the stream of theories flourishing, Mary Douglas's grid and group diagram brings the functionalist approach to a new level, further extending the relation between ritual and community. She argued that the "ritual is pre-eminently a form of communication", generated from social relations and, in turn, exerting a "constraining effect on social behaviour". Communication entailed in ritual activity always reproduces the real social relations among human beings. Thus, ritual activity in a society not only stirs solidarity and fosters community, but is also correlated with its social organisation and worldview (Bell 1997, p. 44). In summary, rituals extend beyond individual connections with the divine; they also encompass the community. By encouraging social cohesion and solidarity among members and solidifying group identity, roles, normative rules, and hierarchies through bodily participation in prescribed acts, rituals forge the community and nourish its survival.

In the study of the relationship between rituals and community, scholars across various fields have endeavoured to bridge the gap between theoretical insight and historical reality. They have observed and demonstrated the social function of rituals explored by the aforementioned functionalist theories within the contexts of their respective areas of study.<sup>6</sup> Among them, many have shown that both Chinese and Christian traditions have been characterised by a strong ritual dimension, which played a pivotal role in the historical formation of their communities. Scholars of pre-modern China have often identified (and translated) the term "ritual" with the classical concept of *li* 禮. *Li* is not only about the proper and appropriate performance of all formal conduct according to one's role within the family and community, but also about the relationship between the living and the ancestors, which forms the basis of social harmony. Similar to Barrett's definition of ritual, *li* can also be understood as an action performed by the living that elicits a response from the supernatural or extra-human realm.

In the *Liji*, the resonance between the *li* performance with the natural cycles and the extra-human world of the ancestors was already noted. The text prescribed the steps for the proper performance of family rituals, through which individuals could revere and appease the ancestors, seeking their blessings. Additionally, it laid the foundation for the concept of auspicious and inauspicious days, which formed the basis of the Chinese almanac, structuring the rhythm of life in Chinese society (Watson and Rawski 1988, p. 10). Ritual prescription texts were transmitted, revised, and updated in the course of time, and its users also expanded, especially from the Song dynasty onwards. Lying at the centre of late imperial ritual practice, Zhu Xi's collection of ritual prescriptions, *Jiali*, marks a turning point in the effort to revitalise and make rituals easier to practice in ordinary life. Zhu Xi's work expanded further during the Ming period, when it was institutionalised, and widespread accessibility to printing enabled great production and circulation of revised and simplified versions, making it more accommodating for popular use. Although determining the uniformity of ritual practice or the extent of understanding of rituals by people is always challenging, scholars have agreed on the thorough extent to which Chinese society was highly ritualised and valued ritual practice (Watson and Rawski 1988; Ebrey 1991).

Ritual practice is a central pillar of Christianity, providing people the right way to worship, believe in, and live under God. In the Roman Catholic Church, ritual practice centres on the Sacraments (in early times, mainly on Baptism and Eucharist, and later on the Seven Sacraments), which serve as the foundation for initiation into the Christian faith and a Christian way of life. Departing from older approaches that studied Christianity solely as a history of doctrines, scholars have increasingly turned their attention to the centrality of rituals in Christian tradition and the shaping of its religious culture. In examining Christianity in Medieval Europe, for example, John Van Engen demonstrated that medieval culture, contrary to common assumptions, was primarily shaped by a small group of well-versed clerical elites in theology, surrounded by a population that was only superficially Christianised. The term used by medieval people at all levels to identify their religious culture, *Christianitas*, encompassed the shared observance of religious faith and practice, where the practical dimension was as central as that of faith. Christian communities were identified based on the degree to which time, space, and ritual observances were defined and understood according to the liturgical year. The prescription and supervision of the correct observance of sacraments and liturgies, beginning with baptism and encompassing all significant events in people's lives, were pivotal aspects in establishing *Christianitas* (Van Engen 1986). A pivotal moment for Christian rituals occurred at the Trent Council. The council reinforced the centrality of rituals by strongly affirming and celebrating the Seven Sacraments as tangible manifestations of God's redemption of humanity, and by formalising their practice. With the availability of printing, ritual prescriptive books were extensively produced, facilitating a certain synchronicity in ritual practice across different regions through standardised texts.

This brief overview of European Christian and Chinese ritual spheres aims to provide insight, albeit incomplete, into the highly ritualised nature of both societies and the central social role played by rituals. In different ways, Christian liturgies and Chinese *li* laid the groundwork for people's roles, relationships, and life rhythms within their respective communities. With the arrival of Jesuit missionaries in China during the 17th century, an encounter unfolded not only in thought, philosophy, or sciences, but also between two communities, each boasting its own well-established ritual and calendrical systems. The article aims to investigate this encounter of rituals. Chinese Christian communities, which emerged as a product of this encounter, thus offer a case for close examination.

### 3. Christian Rituals and Communities in Late Ming China

*Christianitas* was the term applied by Jesuit missionaries to designate the local Christian communities, and like European *Christianitas*, they also operated and were defined around a set of rituals, a liturgical calendar, and spaces. The stories in *Lixiu yijian* provide potential glimpses into the lives of these communities and the central role played by ritual therein. In fact, they offer vivid representations of Chinese Christian communities where the ritual sphere is particularly emphasised. Out of 41 stories set in the Chinese context, only 2 do not include or mention ritual practice. The remaining 39 stories all contain episodes of ritual performance, underscoring the centrality of the ritual sphere within the representation of these local communities. Although these representations do not constitute impartial accounts for historical investigation, they nonetheless embody mechanisms and processes of the community they belong to. As Robert Company already specified with respect to Buddhist miracle stories centred on the power of sutra, the corpus of narratives should be taken seriously "as a record of types or patterns of devotional practices that made sense and possibly were followed, but obviously are designed to argue benefits of certain actions related to sutras" (Company 1991, p. 45). Analogously, the stories in *Lixiu yijian* bear an evident proselytising aim, uniquely selecting and presenting stories of ritual success and faith exaltation. However, they should not be dismissed as mere tools of conversion, but analysed as valuable records of practices and community modalities coherent to its contemporary readers. In the paucity of historical material, they serve as precious intermediaries, informing us about the ways in which Chinese Christian communities op-

erated in late Ming times. The following table (Table 1) summarises all the stories in *Lixiu yijian* involving ritual practices, totalling 39. It particularly highlights the place in which the ritual episode occurred; the main ritual agents (whether performed by priests or local converts); other ritual participants or the recipients of the ritual (specifying their action and when they are not Christian); the type of ritual act (if it is a collective act) and the objects involved;<sup>7</sup> and any eventual ritual outcome (such as the conversion of new members, reinforcement of faith, or stirring of collective amazement).

**Table 1.** Episodes in *Lixiu yijian* involving ritual practice.

	Place	Ritual ( Collective )	Main Agent (Priest/Convert)	Other agents (Actions)/Recipients (Christian/non-Christian)	Ritual Outcome
1	Wulin	Baptism	Matteo Ricci	- Yang Tingyun - Li Zhizao [advising]	
2	Nanjing (1603)	Baptism	João da Rocha	Xu Guangqi	Big progeny
3	Sanshan	Baptism	Giulio Aleni	Chen Zheng	
4	Wulin	Fast	Yang Tingyun, Yang family		
		Baptism		Yang's mother	
5		Funeral	Yang Tingyun		Conform with <i>Jiali</i> 家禮
6	Nanjing	Exorcism (HW, HS)	Matteo Ricci	Liu Douxu	Collective amazement
7	Jianchang	Exorcism	Gaspar Ferreira	- Christian neighbour Yang [call Fei] - Convert [help Fei] - Possessed man	
8	Sanshan	Mass	Bento de Matos	- Qiu family - Mr. Cao	
		Exorcism (HN, HW, HN, holy candles)	Bento de Matos,	- Cao family - 2 local converts [helping]	Family conversion
		Mass	Bento de Matos	Cao family	
		Baptism	Bento de Matos	Cao family	
9	Wenling	Exorcism (sign of the cross, holy books)	Hong Qizhu	Possessed cousin	
10	Wulin	Exorcism (sign of the cross)	Yang Tingyun	Possessed man	Collective amazement
11	Sanshan (1629)	Exorcism (HN)	Convert	- Christian neighbour [instruct Lin] - Lin's father [ask converts] - Lin Henzhen/Lin's family	Family conversion
		Baptism		Lin family	
12	Fuqing	Worship holy sign	Christian woman	relative Wang [initiate her to faith]	
		Prayers	Christian woman	Ill son	
13	Quanzhou	Exorcism (HW, HN, HC, holy cross)	Local convert	- Zhang father [invite convert] - Zhang Qixun/wife Fu	Family conversion
		Baptism		Zhang family	
14	Yongchun	Healing ritual (HW)	Yan Ande	Yan Aide	
15	Hui'an	Healing ritual (HW, HC)	Lin Qifu	- Chen Sannan - Chen's daughter	Family conversion



Table 1. Cont.

	Place	Ritual ( Collective )	Main Agent (Priest/Convert)	Other agents (Actions)/Recipients (Christian/non-Christian)	Ritual Outcome
16	Jinjiang	Healing ritual (prayers, HW) Baptism	Zhang Geng Giulio Aleni	Zhang's sister Zhang's sister	Conversion
17	Dongyue	Exorcism (HN, HC)	Matteo Ricci	- Father [Invite priest] - Cursed son	Family conversion
18	Wulin (1621)	Prayers	Li Zhizao's household		Rescue
		Ritual (HC)	Baola (Li's family)	Li's family	Rescue
		Prayers	Li Zhizao's eldest son, 2/3 converts		Rescue
19	Deqing (1623)	Baptism Ritual (prayers, HC)	Giulio Aleni Xu Shoujie	Xu Shoujie 6/7 passengers	Rescue
20	Yongchun	Healing ritual (HC, prayers) Baptism	Yan Ande	Yan's daughter Yan's daughter and son-in-law	Conversion
21	Fuqing	Childbirth ritual (HC)	Old Christian woman	Lin Shibing/wife	
22	Hui'an	Childbirth ritual (prayers, HC)	Mai Zhaomei, Mai's brother and nephew	- Guo Chun [Invite the convert] - Guo's wife Chen	Family conversion
23	Yanping (1635)	Apotropaic ritual (prayers, HC)	Zhang Baida	Wang Yuan	
24	Jinjiang (1626–1629)	Baptism	Giulio Aleni	Xie Maoming	
25	Wulin (1621–1622)	Baptism	Priest (Aleni)	- Zhang Shi (Micheal) - Nian Maoke [introduce faith]	
26	Wulin (1622–1623)	Baptism		- Xue Tinglian (Francis) - Zhang Shi [introduce faith]	
		Confession	Priest	Xue Tinglian [Invite the priest]	
		Intercessory prayers	Zhang Shi	Xue Tinglian	Reinforcing faith
27	Minhou county	Mass (regular)	Priest	Mr. Qiu	Healing
28	Jianzhou (1633)	Mass		Wu Kejiao	Prevent calamity
29	Houguan (1642)	Rituals (prayers, HS)	Chen Ruowang, Chen household		Collective amazement
30	Jinjiang (1634)	Mass Mass	(probably Aleni)	Chen Yangchu Chen's brother	Conversion
31	Fuqing	Prayers	Lin Duomo		
32	Xianyou (1641)	Calling holy names	Chen Ruowang		Collective amazement
33	Xianyou (1643)	Prayers (holy cross)	Chen Ruowang and his brother	Hundreds of refugees	Rescue
34	Qingxi (1632)	Healing ritual	Giulio Aleni	Lin Su [make the holy sign]	

Table 1. Cont.

	Place	Ritual ( Collective )	Main Agent (Priest/Convert)	Other agents (Actions)/Recipients (Christian/non-Christian)	Ritual Outcome
35	Fuqing	Baptism	Ignacio Lobo	Matthew Chen [Invite priest]	
		Intercessory prayers	Matthew Chen	Chen's mother	
		Mass (3 days)	Ignacio Lobo	- Matthew Chen - Li Jiugong [Ask priest to pray]	
36	Wenling (1643)	Confession	Pietro Canevari	Zhang Geng [Ask the priest]	
37	(1623)	Rituals before death (prayers, holy candles)	Zhang Shi		
38	Yongchun	Healing prayers	Yan Ande		Reinforcing faith
39	Wulin (1619)	Childbirth ritual (statue of St. Ignatius)	Zhang Shaoshi	Mr. Sun/Sun's wife	

The table reports 39 entries containing episodes of ritual practice by the local Christian communities. The various episodes take place in different geographical locations, mainly in Fujian and with a few cases in Zhejiang, Guangdong, and Nanjing. In total, 56 people are mentioned, including both local converts and non-Christians, as well as 7 missionaries. All the mentioned individuals lived during the lifespan of the book's compiler, Li Jiugong. Prominent figures, such as the three pillars of Chinese Christianity—Yang Tingyun 楊廷筠 (1562 [1557]–1627), Xu Guangqi 徐光啟 (1562–1633), and Li Zhizao 李之藻 (1571–1630)—are among those mentioned. Additionally, there are other names less or not recognisable today, hardly traceable in existing historical records, like Yan Ande 顏安德, Lin Su 林櫛, and Chen Zheng 陳鉦, although they are presented in the texts with detailed information such as their identity, place of origin, occupational status, and names of family members. These individuals could have been prominent figures within the local community at the time. Many mentioned people were from Fujian and acquaintances of the author, Li Jiugong, in real life, with whom he had more or less close relationships. For example, figures like Zhang Geng 張廣 (c.1570–1646/47), Chen Zhongdan 陳衷丹, and Yan Zanghua 嚴讚化 (d.>1681), who appear in multiple accounts as protagonists, were collaborators of Li Jiugong and played significant roles within the Christian community in Fujian (Dudink 1997; Zürcher 2007; Lin 1992; Lin and Wu 1994). Their names often appear in the paratext of Li's texts for their contributions; in fact, they participated in the production of *Lixiu yijian* itself by writing prefaces. Among these 56 mentioned people, those who specifically participated and played significant roles in the performance of rituals are listed in the column dedicated to “ritual participants”.

Based on the given definition of a ritual act,<sup>8</sup> we can identify approximately 56 separate ritual acts carried out in a local Chinese context by local converts and missionaries, reported across these 39 accounts. Among them, 20 rituals were explicitly conducted by missionaries, and 29 rituals by Chinese converts as the main agents. Recurrent features emerge in terms of the roles played by different social agents, suggesting an implicit division of ritual responsibilities among the various groups. Certain rituals were exclusively delivered by missionaries, others mostly by local converts of significant relevance, and some could be performed by the broader Christian community and non-Christians. The topic of ritual agency requires further elaboration and will be examined in more detail in Section 4.

The taxonomy of rituals has been a question that often poses challenges in the study of rituals. A general differentiation that is used is, for example, the distinction between prescriptive and situational rituals or between periodic and occasional rituals. More elabo-

rate classifications have been proposed by scholars, such as the five categories based on an intention criterion by Anthony F.C. Wallace<sup>9</sup> and the six categories identified by Catherine Bell using a more descriptive approach.<sup>10</sup> Another perspective, which sets aside personal intention and social purposes, was presented by Humphrey and Laidlaw, who propose a two-fold typology, classifying rituals based on the actions that are carried out, namely performance-centred rituals and liturgy-centred rituals (Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994, p. 97). The sheer diversity in classifications highlights the challenge of establishing a consistent taxonomy (Grimes 2014). While considering and building on past theories, this article will nonetheless adopt a looser criterion of classification in discussing the ritual episodes in *Lixiu yijian*. Rituals are approached from the perspective of the effects they have on the performers and the social groups these performers live in. It differentiates two main modalities of ritual practices: the individual and the collective, based on the intentions behind the rituals and the significance they carry from the perspective of the participants.<sup>11</sup>

Collective rituals involve multiple agents, often an entire household or a community of people participating in the same ritual action simultaneously. *Lixiu yijian* contains several scenes where the community engages in collective rituals, one of which is inevitably attendance at Mass. Additionally, other forms of community religious practice that appear include the collective recitation of prayers and collective fasting. Individual rituals, constituting the majority of the represented cases, involve a single main performer, but may include multiple participants who passively receive the results of the ritual. Most commonly, *Lixiu yijian* represents local converts engaging in individual rituals, such as exorcism and healing rites, either out of personal necessity or in response to requests for help from others. These rituals prominently involve the use of “holy objects” (*shengwu* 聖物), such as the sticking of the holy name of the Lord or of the Holy Mother, the aspersion of holy water, the placing and worship of a holy statue or of the crucifix, or the holding or throwing of a holy casket. Other individually performed rituals include calling the holy name of the Lord, the Holy Mother, or the Saints; holding books about the Holy Teaching; and making the sign of the cross. Lastly, the recitation of prayers, whether as an accompaniment to the aforementioned rituals or as a ritual in itself, is a practice that is ubiquitously performed.

In terms of their effects, the narratives illustrate that the rituals, whether collective or individual-based, bring about positive and beneficial outcomes to their participants, such as the liberation of the latter from an illness or from a demonic attack. This positive outcome proves the efficacy of Christianity and, eventually, leads to the further reinforcement of the protagonist’s pious conducts or to the persuasion of a non-Christian protagonist to convert. As previously mentioned, the text serves a strong proselytisation function, and the inclusion of stories depicting ritual success like these certainly aligns with that purpose. Yet, the stories also underscore the central role that rituals played in Chinese Christian communities. Within the narrative, the stories portray instances where it was indeed rituals that significantly impacted the protagonists and characters; outside the narrative, using these episodes as tools of conversion presumes that the described ritual episodes were also appealing and coherent to the readers.

### 3.1. Collective Rituals: Bringing the Community Together

In the general Durkheimian conception, a ritual is a mode of action in which the group engages with a shared focus of attention in a joint activity that stirs collective solidarity, allowing for space for group interaction and formation. Rituals often are communal and involve the participation of a collective. Major Christian rituals such as funerals, weddings, and Mass are carried out in a group context, and it is not novel that devotional acts such as the recitation of prayers or fasting are also often performed as a collective experience. Here, by collective rituals, I will mainly address those rituals which have the social group, the community, in the foreground and as the main intention or perspective. In short, these are rituals that are performed and whose significance is shared by a collective. *Lixiu yijian* offers some glimpses of collective practices in the context of local Christian communities



in the late Ming period, albeit in a limited number. The following table (Table 2) lists all the scenes representing collective rituals as defined here:

**Table 2.** Collective rituals.

N.	Place	Ritual	Participants (Christian/non-Christian)
4	Wulin	Fast	Yang Tingyun, Yang family
5	Wulin	Funeral	Yang Tingyun; Yang household
8	Sanshan	Mass	Bento de Matos, Qiu family, Mr. Cao
		Mass (multiple days)	Bento de Matos, Cao family
18	Wulin	Apotropaic prayers	Li Zhizao's household
		Apotropaic prayers	Li Zhizao's eldest son, 2/3 converts
27	Minhou county	Mass (regular)	Priest, Mr. Qiu
28	Jianzhou	Mass	Wu Kejiao
29	Houguan	Apotropaic rituals (prayers, holy statue)	Chen Ruowang, Chen household
30	Jinjiang	Mass	Chen Yangchu
		Mass	(probably Aleni), Chen's brother
33	Xianyou	Prayers (holy cross)	Chen Ruowang and his brother
35	Fuqing	Mass (3 days)	Ignacio Lobo

The most recurrent form of collective ritual is certainly the Mass. The stories contain seven references to Mass performance. Despite the reports not elaborating on the ritual itself—either furnishing simple information or merely mentioning its occurrence—they provide some tangible grasp of Mass practice in these early Christian communities, giving evidence that it formed an integral part of the ritual lives of local converts<sup>12</sup> and offering actual instances that can complement studies on 17th century prescriptive liturgical texts. For instance, the following story informs us about Mass practice in the Jinjiang 晉江 community in the year 1634:

In Jinjiang, there was man called Chen Yangchu who firmly served the Holy Teaching. His younger brother was often unhappy about this. Even though Chen attempted many times to persuade him, he still could not understand the Holy Teaching. On the first day of the *jiaxu* year during the reign of Chongzhen [1634], Yangchu respectfully went to attend the Mass at the church. During the night, he lightened the lamps before the [statue of the] Lord. And this was the place where he slept. That day he had drunken a little, so he fell asleep very soundly. At midnight, the fire broke inside the room. He was sleeping deeply when he felt someone suddenly pushing him down from the bed. He fell on the ground and only then he realised about the fire. He urgently called his family to extinguish it. His brother finally was touched by the Lord's mercy. The next day, he immediately went to the church to attend the Mass. He asked Master Aleni to open him to the faith. The younger brother used to have a foot illness. As he received the Lord's blessing, he successfully recovered from that old disease without taking any medicine and decoctions.<sup>13</sup>

Apart from demonstrating how the Lord's grace assists pious people in escaping dangers, the story also includes rather precise documentation of Masses that had taken place. The story specifically mentions two Masses, one performed on the first and one on the second day of the first lunar month of 1634. Both Masses were very likely delivered by Giulio

Aleni S.J. (Ai Rulue 艾儒略, 1582–1649), whom the brother addressed for guidance after being persuaded to convert.

Another episode of Mass occurs in Sanshan 三山. The missionary Bento de Matos S.J. (Lin Bendu 林本篤, 1600–1651), on his way to Mass, was reached by a villager, Mr. Cao 曹, asking for his help to expel a demon:

Very early in the morning, Mr. Cao arrived at the church and prostrated to implore for the Lord's protection. At the time, Mister Lin was ordering the driver to go to the house of Qiu to perform the ritual of Mass. Cao cried and explained him the situation. Mister Lin said: "There is nothing to worry about. Please go to the house of Qiu first. After performing the ritual of Mass, I will make arrangements".<sup>14</sup>

After performing Mass, the demon in Cao's house became less powerful and disappeared wholly when De Matos ordered some local converts to bring Christian paraphernalia to the haunted house. In the following days, the Cao family attended Mass constantly:

Therefore, they went to the church to attend Mass for several days in a row and thanked the Lord of Heaven for his great grace.<sup>15</sup>

As in the previous case, the story does not provide further details about the size of the Mass or the occurrence for which it was celebrated. The fact that Cao was invited by de Matos to attend suggests that the event was not exclusive to the Qiu family, who hosted it. Records in other sources, such as *Kouduo richao* 口鐸日抄, show that communal rituals were carried out privately in the mansions of local converts, especially during periods of persecution and political turmoil (Zürcher 2007, p. 96).

The remaining episodes of Mass, respectively, occurred in Fuqing 福清 in the year 1638–1639, in Jianzhou 建州 in the year 1633, and in the county of Minhou 閩侯. The last two cases, in particular, centrally focus on promoting the beneficial effects of attendance to Mass. For example, in the episode taking place in Minhou, the account shows that attending Mass was a regular activity in the daily life of the 70-year-old Qiu 丘:

In the area of Minhou, there was a certain man called Qiu who was already seventy and more years old. In the *dingmao* year [1627], he entered the teaching. Every day he went go to the church to attend Mass, and he had never missed it even for once. Yet, by nature he was impatient and bad-tempered, and greatly liked to read books. For this reason, his eyes turned blind. For several years, he took medicines and treatments but they did not work. No matter how people repeatedly persuaded him [not to attend Mass], Qiu's determination in following the teaching grew even stronger. Wherever there is a Mass, he let someone guide him and went to the church with the aid of his stick [...] then, thanks to the Great Lord's blessing, he gradually recovered his sight without taking any medication.<sup>16</sup>

Part of the praise for Qiu's devotion lies in his meticulous attendance of Mass, despite his old age and poor health condition. By specifying that he would attend Mass every time without ever missing once, the account illustrates the cyclical nature of Mass and the temporal engagement and effort that it imposed on its followers. These stories thus provide some scattered yet tangible snapshots of Mass practice in the lives of local converts and the Christian community in late Ming China.

Other forms of communal ritual practice in local Christian communities represented in the stories include informal, priestless devotional gatherings, such as communal praying. In these stories, groups of people gather, often under the leadership of a head, to recite prayers together. The prayers are said with the intention of helping the whole group overcome a situation of difficulty and danger. For instance, in one episode, it is reported that a fire broke out in Houguan 侯官 in 1642, destroying one part of the city and violently approaching the area where the local convert Chen Ruowang 陳若望 (Chen Zhongdan) lived. In response, Chen prayed the act of contrition before the statue of the Lord and called all

the “adult and young, men and women” (*daxiao nanfu* 大小男婦) of his house to do the same, in the hope that the Lord could stop the disgrace. Despite the fear and panic, “everyone prayed the rosary without any interruption” (*nianjing wucuo* 念經無輟). As a result, the fire deviated its direction and spared the Christian residence.<sup>17</sup>

*Lixiu yijian* also reports one case of collective fasting. The scene appears in one episode concerning Yang Tingyun. Worried about his mother, who was a fervent Buddhist, he committed himself and his family to fasting in the hope that the Lord could assist them and turn her away from heretical teachings:

He could only bemoan by himself and appeal pray the Lord of Heaven asking him to guide her through for guidance. He admonished his family to strictly observe the holy fast, hoping that the Lord could grant enlightenment.<sup>18</sup>

When the old lady eventually realised her mistake, she corrected herself by converting to Christianity. Grateful towards the Lord for the help received, the whole family engaged in fasting once again:

To love and thank the great mercy, the whole family fasted for more than ten days and give their thanks for the Lord’s grace.<sup>19</sup>

Although presented in a rather fragmentary manner, the stories in *Lixiu yijian* depict moments of communal ritual practice in the Christian communities of late Ming China. By illustrating that local converts gathered in collective rituals during various occasions, including more formal events such as Mass characterised by greater formality and often presided over by missionaries, as well as more informal occasions like collective fasting or prayers conducted privately within households by converts on their own, these stories provide a tangible insight into the role of rituals in the lives of such communities and their people. Rituals provided opportunities for local converts to come together and build solidarity. These occasions likely facilitated the establishment or reinforcement of social connections among members, ultimately fostering a sense of communal identity and community.

### 3.2. Individual Rituals: Revitalising the Community

As mentioned previously, collective rituals constitute only a small part of the ritual episodes in *Lixiu yijian*. Most of the time, the represented rituals are individual rituals. Unlike collective rituals, these are predominantly individual-oriented, meaning they are performed by one main active agent, and their significance is relevant only for the performing party. They are nonrecurrent and occasional acts carried out to address specific needs, often of a single individual. This type of ritual does not strictly adhere to the Durkheimian concept of social ritual, as it does not involve the collective, but is primarily self-conducted and appears to concern or benefit only the practitioner or a specific participant. Nonetheless, like collective rituals, they also play a pivotal role in community dynamics. Individual-based rituals, as portrayed in the stories, serve a strong social function as a means of revitalising the community. By revitalising, I mean that these rituals infuse new life and energy into the community, either by reproducing it through attracting new members or by reaffirming it through reiterating its role in pursuing well-being. Although individual rituals may not involve collective participation, their outcomes can profoundly impact the community as a whole. Due to space limitations, only two types of individual rituals will be treated here: baptism and apotropaic rituals.

Baptism is one example of a ritual concerning the individual, involving the priest as the active agent and the newbie as the recipient, yet affecting the collective. More specifically, baptism impacts the community at two interconnected levels. First, baptism is a sacrament of identity through which one becomes Christian. In doing so, it forms the foundation for community building, facilitating the actual establishment of the community. By receiving baptism, one not only is conferred a formal Christian identity, but, more crucially, one is detached from their past and is transformed into someone else, acquiring a new existence as a part of the Christian world (Johnson 1999). Second, from a social per-

spective, baptism grants not only a formal identity, but also membership. It establishes the person's formal affiliation with a community, solidifying their existence as well as shaping the functioning of that community. Through baptism and formally gaining status as a Christian, individuals not only become integral members of a community, gaining access and connection to a network of people associated with and spending time in the local church, but also assume specific roles within it.

In the case of Chinese Christianity, baptism as a ritual acquires a new dimension related to the community. It is noteworthy that in these stories, baptisms often occur as a group event requested and received en masse by entire households at the same time. Such a phenomenon is depicted, for example, in the aforementioned episode of Mr. Cao in Sanshan. As the family is successfully freed from the demon thanks to the help of the local church, all the members request baptism:

Therefore, they went to the church to attend the Mass for several days in a row and thanked the Lord of Heaven for his great grace. The whole family received the holy water and joined the doctrine.<sup>20</sup>

Always in Sanshan, another family, the Lins, asked for baptism in 1631 after local converts exorcised a demon who had long harassed Lin Hengzhen's 林衡鎮 wife and pledged to marry her in the underworld. After the intervention of local converts:

The demon did not dare enter the room again, but he just stopped at the central hall and left wiping away his tears. The following day, Hengzhen made the vow of faith and received the scriptures. The wife saw a group of demons fleeing to the roof of the house. As a consequence, the entire family submitted to the Lord of Heaven and deeply regretted their past mistakes. They studied the scriptures and asked to receive the baptism. All the traces of the demon successfully disappeared.<sup>21</sup>

Looking back at Table 1, we find many other cases in which baptism was received by or given to entire families. As the episodes illustrate, baptism often turned into an event concerning the whole household. Conversion happened in groups, and baptism was received by the entire household. Scholars such as Zhang Xianqing 張先清 have already argued that Christianity was first established in China in the form of "Christian lineages" (*fengjiao jiaozu* 奉教家族), where local Christian communities took shape around members of local families: the higher their role within the lineage, the greater the extent to which the lineage became Christian (Zhang 2005). Coincidentally, in all of the stories, it is usually a figure of the father or head of the household who first approaches Christianity and turns to Christian rituals. Thus, the ritual of baptism permits new members to join the community, together with their entire household, by granting them a formal identity.

Apart from baptism, apotropaic individual rituals greatly contribute to revitalising the community by reaffirming the role of the community to its members as well as by attracting external people through their persuasive character. More than half of the stories contain apotropaic rituals, among which the most recurrent types are childbirth rituals, healing rituals, and exorcisms. As the previous stories with baptism already showed, non-Christians often turned to Christianity persuaded by a successful apotropaic ritual. The trope of a Christian, predominantly a local convert, who saves a non-Christian person from calamities through various apotropaic rituals is very common in *Lixiu yijian*, showing how such rituals became the very points of contact between the external society and the local Christian community, acting as an intermediary between the Christian and Chinese worlds.

*Lixiu yijian* presents 22 stories sharing such narratives. In all these stories, the non-Christian person approaches, whether coincidentally or purposely, the local Christian community due to ritual needs; 10 of the stories end with the conversion of the pagan protagonists, who receive baptism and join the local church community. What is typical in these accounts is that conversion is contingent on the preceding apotropaic ritual. Conversions always follow after the successful ritual intervention of Christian converts and priests, after

the calamity affecting the non-Christian is solved. The apotropaic rituals that appear most in such contexts include the use of holy objects, in particular the sprinkling or aspersing of holy water, the throwing of a holy casket, and the sticking of a holy name. Details of the respective rituals are listed in Table 1. The following story reports a case of an individual apotropaic ritual performed by a local convert named Lin Qifu 林啟甫 to save the daughter of a non-Christian neighbour, Chen Sannan 陳三南. Lin's successful ritual leads to the conversion of the entire Chen household:

Chen Sannan from Putian lived in the town of Fengwei in Hui'an prefecture. He had a daughter that was aged fourteen. One day, she became suddenly affected by *gu* 蠱 poison. She felt her abdomen bloated and was on the verge of death. For people who are afflicted by this poison, there is no single chance to survive. Nan was sorrowful but could not find any solution. In the neighbouring area there was a person called Lin Qifu, who worshiped the doctrine of the Heaven. [...] Lin Qifu took the holy water and ordered the daughter to drink it. Then, he hung on her chest the holy casket that he was wearing. Suddenly, more than hundred small snakes wriggled out with raised head. Then, the daughter was safe. Nan was moved and persuaded by it. The whole family converted to Christianity.<sup>22</sup>

There are also cases in which pagan people actively go the local church to seek assistance from Christian converts, thereby establishing a link to Christianity through their own initiative. Lin Hengzhen's father, as previously mentioned, is, for example, one of them. To save his daughter-in-law and prevent her from being forced to marry the demon, he:

suddenly heard about the Holy Teaching of the Lord of Heaven. Therefore, he went to the church and earnestly prostrated himself. He asked the church member to come to his house to sprinkle the holy water and to attach the holy sign in his bedroom. That day, at dusk the evil demon came again. However, he did not dare to enter her inner chamber and just asked her [Fu, i.e., Lin's wife] to meet up while standing in the central hall. The day after, the member of the church came again to his house to present the holy sign. Then, the demon totally vanished. Fu's illness gradually recovered and she began to drink and eat as before.<sup>23</sup>

Both scenes show the active role of the local converts in performing rituals and providing families with holy objects when needed. The success of the ritual by the local convert, once again, paves the way for the conversion of the household, confirming that ritual experiences and "the happy discovery that they work" could constitute the primary motive for conversion (Zürcher 1985, p. 371). Moreover, the accounts convey how individual apotropaic rituals served to build community by acting as a point of contact for the external society. They provide a platform through which non-Christian individuals establish their initial contact with and interest in the Chinese Christian community. By playing a major role in attracting and creating new members, individual rituals played a fundamental role in the reproduction and development of the community.

### 3.3. The Liturgical Cycle: Defining the Community

Departing from the stories and delving deeper into the connection between rituals and community, this section introduces another essential element of communities with effective rituals: the liturgical calendar. Serving as the foundation of ritual life, the liturgical calendar provided guidance on what rituals should be performed and how they should be conducted throughout the year. It played a central role in organising and rhythmising people's time and, consequently, in shaping the community. The introduction of the Christian liturgical calendar, intersecting with the local Chinese almanac that had long structured community life, led to the emergence of new patterns (Menegon 2005). Local converts found themselves navigating these patterns, prompting them to reassess elements from both calendars and come to terms with them. This process was crucial in shaping the characteristics of the community through a unique understanding of time specific to Chinese



Christianity. This community set itself apart from the rest of local society, incorporating a new conception of time—the Roman Christian one. Simultaneously, it maintained a distinctive character by retaining the indelible imprint of the Chinese almanac. This section provides some initial insight into how this process of reassessment unfolded.

As sociologist Eviatar Zerubavel argues in his exploration of the structuring of time, calendars are intricately linked to group formation, as the shared temporal order unique to a group serves both as a unifier and a separator. On one hand, it emphasises the similarities among group members, solidifying in-group sentiments and providing a robust foundation for mechanical solidarity. On the other hand, it also underscores differences with those who do not share it, establishing boundaries that separate group members from outsiders and setting it apart from other groups (Zerubavel 1985, p. 70). Through their dual function of unifying and segregating, calendars facilitate the reproduction of the group and its social structure. This underlying mechanism involves what Pierre Bourdieu refers to as the “internalisation” of a common, public time, which individuals within the group must align with and adjust their internal experiences of time to (Bourdieu 2014, p. 169). The calendar establishes the conditions necessary for harmonising the external time of the group with the internal experiences of time among its members. By internalising this external temporal order through the calendar, individuals establish unity with the group and avoid being segregated as different. Simultaneously, the visions and institutions of society conveyed by the calendar are further legitimised and reproduced.

The Chinese calendar, which traces back to the previously mentioned early ritual manual of the *Liji*, was established by the emperor and revised annually. By the late imperial period, the passage of the year was defined into a series of time-based rituals, creating a normative cycle that rhythmically organised and permeated all aspects of the lives of the people. Even today, almanacs remain the most important and common printed books in Chinese villages. Village life revolves around the almanac, guiding daily activities and serving as a reference for lucky and unlucky days (Hayes 1985, pp. 82–83). In Bourdieu’s terms, Chinese almanacs provide a degree of systemisation and harmonisation of society at the empire-wide level, organising individuals and the empire into one empire-level community of time (Li 2021, pp. 340–45). Adhering to the calendar not only meant participating in the community, but also accepting the kind of society and the cultural meanings, values, and practices that ordered it. Contrastingly, embracing alternative calendrical systems could entail a challenge and conflict with its projected order.

In this context, the Christian liturgical calendar placed local Christian converts in a space where they had to negotiate and define their position between the two social orders and sets of cultural meanings. This process involved a conscious reconsideration of which elements from each party should be retained or discarded, followed by a reinforcement of the chosen elements through daily repetition and internalisation. In coming to terms, one main conflict regarded the overlaps between the liturgical calendar and the local almanac, for which local converts were compelled to choose what rituals to maintain. The tensions were especially pronounced and problematic when Chinese ancestral cults were involved, and Chinese converts saw themselves positioned “between two worlds and two times”.<sup>24</sup> The following aims to offer glimpses, based on some of the accounts in *Lixiu yijian*, of how such tensions manifested concretely in the converts’ daily lives, and of attempts made to resolve them. A scene of conflict caused by the adoption of the Christian liturgical calendar, for example, is illustrated in the story of Hong Qizhu 洪啟珠. The account tells that, during a visit to his native village to “pay respect to ancestral tombs” (*baifen* 拜墳), Hong found his cousin possessed by an ancestral spirit. After liberating the cousin by making the sign of the cross, an angel descended on the latter and reprimanded Hong with the following words:

You worship Christianity, why are you not obeying to the Lord’s admonishments? Do not you know that we are now in Lent, how dare you kill animals to worship the [ancestral] graves? But considering that you have been filially devoted and that since you have received the baptism, you have been accomplish-

ing works of mercy just for three months and a half but such works of yours can be equated to what other people accomplish in three years and a half, I will therefore absolve you from your guilt.<sup>25</sup>

The angel's reprimand towards Hong highlights a conflict between the observances for the "purification period" (*zhaiqi* 齋期) and those for the period of "paying respect to ancestral tombs". Visiting the ancestral graves is commonly associated with the Qingming Festival (*Qingming jie* 清明節), falling on the first day of the fifth solar term of the lunar calendar (15 days after March equinox). It is therefore possible that the "purification period" indicated the Lenten period (*da zhaiqi* 大齋期), which also fell on similar dates (ending with Holy Thursday, three days before Easter Sunday corresponding to the First Sunday after the first full moon after the Vernal Equinox). The adoption of the liturgical calendar created new patterns of festivals and rituals that were exclusively Christian and carried with them specific ritual observations to abide by, as in the case of Lent. The story shows that this new Christian pattern could not always be realigned with the existing local one, and transgressions to the former due to such calendrical differences could lead to punishment. However, it is noteworthy that despite condemning Hong's transgression, what the angel concretely did was to tolerate it, since it was acted out of "filial devotion" (*xiaosi* 孝思). Ultimately, this seems to suggest that conflicts arising from ritual and calendrical differences were not absolute, and there was room for tolerance on an ad hoc basis.

Outside the religious sphere of local festivals and cultic practices, the liturgical calendar could also have repercussions on the secular sphere. The story of a certain Wu Kejiao 吳可教 seems to portray a tension of this sort, showing that the performance of periodical Christian rituals such as Mass can affect, to some degree, one's ordinary daily activities:

In the winter of the *kuiyou* year [Nov. 1633], on the tenth month, a man from Jianzhou called Wu Kejiao wanted to hire a boat to travel to his village. His village was sixty *li* far from the provincial area. Accidentally, the church was going to perform Mass on that day. Bearing in mind that during the ritual of Mass the Lord personally descended, and that if he hastened to depart he would have then not been able to attend it, he decided to send [the boat carrying] his belongings away first and prolong his stay, not leaving until he had personally listened to Mass. When the ritual and the sermons terminated, he rushed to the riverside. However, on that day, the boats going to the countryside had all been already dispatched.<sup>26</sup>

The story does not portray a real and proper conflict; nonetheless, it gives an idea that Christian liturgical time was indeed extending beyond the purely ritual context and gaining space in people's routines, even leading to changes. Although a brief testimony, we read that Wu Kejiao had to make practical arrangements such as sending away his belongings, extending his stay, and adjusting his schedule to attend Mass. Along with this, we also learn about his mental pondering involving an initial consideration of the problem, weighing the advantages and disadvantages ("Bearing in mind that during the ritual of Mass the Lord personally descended, and that if he hastened to depart he would have then not been able to attend it") and finally making a decision ("he decided..."). Beyond the story, it is not unlikely that the temporal rigor of Christian rituals might have had repercussions on local converts' pre-established routines and secular commitments. The imposition of such a new ritual time eventually created an alternative routine which did not always agree with the temporal, cultural, and social arrangements predominantly characterising the local society. In Bourdieu's words, such alterations represented a challenge against the dominant social structure and the processes of internal harmonisation reinforcing it. They gave rise to new social orders that shaped existing constructs of identity and community. As a consequence, they could appear as elements of threat or of divergence from the normative order to the ruling class and to supporters of the orthodox tradition. Unfortunately, there is still very little we know about how the Christian liturgical calendar

in itself and the changes it brought affected local converts' daily activity and to what extent it created discrepancies with the wider community, if it did.

Through both the cases of Hong Qizhu and Wu Kejiao, we can observe ways in which local converts, finding themselves in between two worlds, reassessed and came to terms with them. By adopting the Christian liturgical calendar, they were confronted with very concrete choices—whether to observe fasting for Lent or carry out animal sacrifices for Qingming; whether to attend Mass or comply with previous engagements. In the continuous act of making such choices, local converts navigated the overlap of the two liturgical times and practices by prioritising, selecting, and reshaping values, meanings, and practices from both the new and the old. Ultimately, these choices culminated in the reconstruction of their existing cultural baggage. They forged new identities as individuals and as a community emerging from between temporal and ritualistic dimensions. Through its repetitive nature and its all-encompassing reach into daily life, the reassessed Chinese liturgical calendar contributed to reaffirming such choices and solidifying them as integral components of the Chinese Christian identity.

Finally, rituals and community share an indelible relationship of mutual fulfilment. The performance of rituals and adherence to the liturgical calendar form the foundation of the community, bringing it together, revitalising it, and defining it. Concurrently, in the process of ritual engagement, the community actively reconstructs these very rituals, its affiliation to them, and its agency in them through constant negotiations with its local reality.

#### 4. The Chinese Christian Community: A New Equilibrium

The aforementioned stories in *Lixiu yijian* illustrate how rituals, whether communal or individual, are perceived by members as serving to deliver satisfactory services in addressing daily dangers, maintaining existential well-being, and seeking eternal salvation. Rituals are depicted as forming the foundation of a mutual support system within the community and society at large, where their efficacy in providing support is instrumental to sustaining both faith and the community itself. In this sense, the communities represented greatly present characteristics of what Nicolas Standaert defined as “communities of effective rituals”—communities, shaped according to patterns of both European *Christianitas* and Chinese religious communities, founded on rituals that are deemed effective as they serve to unite the group and are considered by members to bring meaning and salvation. Such “communities of effective rituals”, according to Standaert, structured Christianity in 17th-century China (Standaert 2001). Thus, the communities represented in *Lixiu yijian* can provide potential historical examples to be compared, and through this, we can analyse “communities of effective rituals”. The concluding section of the article will specifically examine one distinctive feature of the communities in *Lixiu yijian*, which could potentially be extended to the definition of “communities of effective rituals”: a community structure in which the lay and institutional religious spheres are reconfigured. As *Christianitas*, the represented Chinese Christian communities are entirely encompassed by and under the supervision of the religious institution, the parish, playing an exclusive role in the pursuit of the community's salvation. Simultaneously, as local religious communities, they involve a predominant lay agency contributing to this pursuit. In the end, this article argues that Chinese Christian communities allow for the emergence of an empowered group of lay agents, whose ritual ability and identity are legitimated by the institutional clerical agents.

Adopting Van Engen's initially mentioned definition, *Christianitas* are characterised by a religious culture that emphasises both the faith and practice, with a significant focus on the ritual dimension. In this context, institutions, such as the village parish, play a crucial role in overseeing the community and supervising its ritual life. The ultimate goal is to ensure the salvation of the community members (Van Engen 1986). This pattern of religiosity and community structure is not exclusive to Christianity, but is also observed in the Chinese religious landscape. Indigenous religious communities in China similarly prioritise the ritual dimension and the pursuit of salvation, with religious institutions tak-

ing responsibility for providing ritual services at both the individual and collective levels to achieve universal salvation projects.<sup>27</sup> What significantly distinguishes and separates the two is a fundamental difference related to the arrangement of lay and religious institutional spaces within the community. This variation eventually reflects different types of agency and roles played by laypeople and the clergy in ritual practice.

According to Joël Thoraval, eastern Mediterranean religions and Chinese religions are characterised by different ways of organising their communities. The former tends toward an exclusive pillar structure in which “religious professionals” and laypeople are united into one group of exclusive belonging, not allowing cross-membership to other pillars. Whether clergy or laypeople, members of one religious group cannot be affiliated with another. On the other hand, in premodern China, communities tend to a stronger division between the clergy and the laypeople. There is a predominant undivided lay community without formal religious affiliations vis-à-vis a multitude of minor groups of religious professionals and active semi-professional laypeople who are exclusive in their religious affiliations and practice. In such a community, laypeople can appeal to different ritual specialists and are not confined to any of them. In terms of ritual practice, Christian communities extensively rely on religious professionals, often also engaging as main agents in non-sacramental rites that required no presence of the priest. In the Chinese religious milieu, contrastingly, the overlap between professional and lay rites is limited. There is a starker distinction between the circle of rituals belonging to the secular social space, performed by laypeople, and the one of rites of institutionalised religion requiring religious professionals (Thoraval 1992).<sup>28</sup>

Such differences were eventually interwoven into the Chinese Christian communities. In the communities represented in *Lixiu yijian*, the ritual sphere presented prominent features at the organisational level, which differentiated it from the structure of both *Christianitas* and indigenous religious communities. The studies above provide a sketch of *Christianitas* in Europe as primarily revolving around clericalised rituals that required the service of the priest, investing the parish and local priests with the main authority in religious practices and, consequently, in everyday community life. In contrast, Christian communities in China appear to have been supported by a greater lay component, centred around non-sacramental rites performed by converts on their own, with less intervention from priests. One practical factor driving such a change was inevitably the small number of foreign missionaries in China at the time. Thus, Chinese Christian communities witness an enlargement of the circle of non-sacramental rites, where ritual practice by Catholic laity becomes predominant over that by religious professionals.<sup>29</sup> As a result, the reorganisation of the ritual sphere brings new community dynamics and a realignment of social agency. More specifically, it means that (1) the role of the priests becomes marginal, and local converts take on a greater and more active agency in the performance of rituals, and (2) with the expansion of their agency in religious practice, they also retain a greater role within the community as a whole, as its life is organised around rituals. It is indeed possible to notice in the stories that certain local converts are represented as more prominent or have major relevance compared to others.

#### 4.1. Re-Alignment of Lay Agency

The enlargement of the non-sacramental ritual circle and emergence of a dominant priest-less lay ritual agency in Chinese Christian communities are notable in the stories. As the Section 3.2 on individual apotropaic rituals might have suggested, the represented communities engaged in various types of ritual practices, especially apotropaic rituals performed by lay converts themselves. Overall, it is evident that the number of rituals from the non-sacramental sphere is higher than that of rituals from the sacramental sphere. The following table (Table 3) summarises the sacramental (in green) and non-sacramental rituals conducted by priests and lay converts:

Table 3. Ritual agency in comparison.

Ritual Act		Priest	Ritual Act		Lay Convert
1	Baptism	Matteo Ricci	4	Fast	Yang Tingyun, Yang family
2	Baptism	João da Rocha	5	Funeral	Yang Tingyun
3	Baptism	Giulio Aleni	9	Exorcism	Hong Qizhu
6	Exorcism	Matteo Ricci	10	Exorcism	Yang Tingyun
7	Exorcism	Gaspar Ferreira	11	Exorcism	Convert
8	Mass	Bento de Matos	12	Worship holy sign	Christian woman
	Exorcism	Bento de Matos,		Prayers	Christian woman
	Mass (multiple days)	Bento de Matos	13	Exorcism	Local convert
	Baptism	Bento de Matos	14	Healing ritual	Yan Ande
	Baptism	Giulio Aleni	15	Healing ritual	Lin Qifu
17	Exorcism	Matteo Ricci	16	Healing ritual	Zhang Geng
19	Baptism	Giulio Aleni	18	Prayers	Li Zhizao's household
24	Baptism	Giulio Aleni		Ritual	Baola (Li's family)
25	Baptism	Priest (Aleni)		Prayers	Li Zhizao's eldest son, 2/3 converts
	Confession	Priest	19	Ritual	Xu Shoujie
27	Mass	Priest	20	Healing ritual	Yan Ande
	Mass	(probably Aleni)	21	Childbirth ritual	Old Christian woman
34	Prayers	Giulio Aleni	22	Childbirth ritual	Mai Zhaomei, Mai's brother and nephew
35	Baptism	Ignacio Lobo	23	Apotropaic ritual	Zhang Baida
	Mass (3 days)	Ignacio Lobo		Intercessory prayers	Zhang Shi
36	Confession	Pietro Canevari	29	Rituals	Chen Ruowang, Chen household
			31	Prayers	Lin Duomo
			32	Calling holy names	Chen Ruowang
			33	Prayers	Chen Ruowang and his brother
				Intercessory prayers	Matthew Chen
			37	Rituals before death	Zhang Shi
			38	Healing prayers	Yan Ande
			39	Childbirth ritual	Zhang Shaoshi

A quick glance at the table reveals a noticeable prevalence of the colour blue (non-sacramental rituals) over the green (sacramental rituals). This reflects a significant presence of lay religious practices throughout the text. Firstly, the frequency of rituals conducted by local converts surpasses those by priests. Secondly, the number of non-sacramental rituals is much larger than that of sacramental rituals. The rituals conducted by local converts without priestly supervision can be categorised into two types: non-sacramental rituals that do not involve objects, mostly devotional acts (fasting, prayers, appeals to the divine), and non-sacramental rituals that involve holy objects. The latter category of lay rituals is particularly interesting given their consistent presence across the stories, making them a common theme and a distinctive feature of the collection as a whole. It is also noteworthy that they align closely with the individual apotropaic rituals discussed earlier, playing a major role in community building by serving as a point of contact and appeal for the non-Christian world.

These non-sacramental rituals can be technically categorised as “sacramentals”: objects (e.g., holy water) and rites (including exorcisms, blessings), resembling the sacraments, that signify certain effects obtained through the intercession of the Church. Some sacramentals are closely associated with sacraments such as baptismal water blessings or holy oils, while some others are connected with the various human activities that are rendered holy, such as the prayers for the harvest or at meal, and these can cover almost every circumstance of human life (Louth 2022). Despite their similarities to the seven sacraments, sacramentals do not fully share their nature or effects. Unlike sacraments, sacramentals are not infallible, and their effect depends principally on the pious intention of the person using them. They do not bring immediate inward sanctification, but contribute towards it



by imparting minor graces and protect only from temporal evils (Deharbe 1912, p. 323). While the minister of sacramentals is typically a cleric with the necessary power, in certain cases, some sacramentals can be administered by laypeople possessing appropriate qualities.<sup>30</sup>

The majority of rituals conducted in the stories in *Lixiu yijian* belong to the category of sacramentals. The number of sacramentals mentioned (33) is almost twice that of the sacraments (17), showing that they held a visible presence and significance within the Chinese milieu. We can also notice that sacramentals are all administered by local converts, with four exceptions of exorcisms carried out by or involving missionaries. The role of the local convert in ritual practice is far from being just passive and receptive. Apart from devotional acts, individual or communal, they are entitled to perform a variety of sacramentals on their own initiative, which can bring concrete beneficial effects to themselves and others. The following episodes illustrate the active agency of local converts in the performance of rituals, specifically exorcisms and healing rituals. They show how, in their daily lives, local converts could perform these rituals by themselves, not only for their own benefit but also to support others and contribute to the community's well-being. For instance, Li Jiugong reports that Yang Tingyun saved a man who became possessed by a demon and began spirit-writing predictions by carrying out an exorcism with the sign of the cross:

One day, a demon possessed a village man. The man wielded the brush and, by practicing spirit-writing *jiangji* 降箕 [lit. with the spirit descending into the stick], wrote predictions about fortunes and calamities. When Mister Yang heard about it, he went to have a look. As he arrived in front of the man and made the holy sign of the cross, the stick stopped to move. All the people were surprised for the strangeness.<sup>31</sup>

In another account, it is reported that Xu Shoujie 許守節 was able to ensure the safety of himself and his fellow companions during their boat journey on the Yellow River by performing a storm-calming ritual involving prayers and holding the holy casket:

Xu Shoujie from Deqing was the nephew of Officer Xu.<sup>32</sup> [...] At that time, Shoujie was going to Pizhou to the magistrate Houjin 侯金. Hence, he departed wearing it [the holy casket]. On his route, he passed by the Yellow River and encountered an unusual storm wind. The waves were surging and sweeping, and he was almost dying in the bellies of the fishes. Shoujie held the holy casket and silently prayed for the Lord of Heaven's protection. The sea waves gradually calmed down. Suddenly, he was anchored ashore and was able to get safe. The six or seven people who were in the boat with him had all turned pale at first, believing that they would have inevitably died. Then, together with the boatman they thanked Heaven again and again but none of them could explain what it had happened.<sup>33</sup>

To give a last example, we could look at this episode of a healing ritual with the use of a holy casket delivered by Yan Ande to cure his daughter:

One day, the daughter fell ill. For several days, she kept hiccupping and choking, as well as feeling cold. Her stomach suddenly began to hurt unbearably. Her breath was discontinuous. Her husband immediately called the sorcerer to perform the elimination [of the *sha* 煞] as according to the custom. However, it did not heal her. Therefore, he asked to Yan Ande. Yan arrived galloping very late in the night. Immediately, he removed everything and hung the holy casket that he was carrying on the daughter's chest. Then he prostrated himself and prayed the Holy Mother for her. In one moment, her upper chest vomited the food from the day before and recovered immediately.<sup>34</sup>

In this account, once again, a local convert, Yan Ande, administers the ritual without the presence of priests and saves the sick patient. Yan is portrayed as highly well-versed in the ritual praxis, acting out and instructing each step with great resolution. Episodes

like these are numerous in *Lixiu yijian* and strongly reflect a ritual landscape in which local converts emerge as the actual leading agents and the main points of reference for ritual needs and services in the daily life of the Christian communities from the late Ming period. These episodes vividly show that local converts held active agency in the performance of a variety of rituals addressing situations and benefiting them in their daily lives. Particularly in the face of dangers such as illnesses, demons, and calamities, they could utilise and support their families and community through such rituals.

As the stories have already shown, local converts performed rituals not only for their own sake, but for the sake of the wider society, eventually becoming intermediaries between the Christian and non-Christian communities. Apart from highlighting the active agency of the local convert within the community, these narratives sometimes also provide clues about the convert's standing or significance within the group, indicating potential relevance to the local milieu. For example, by reading an account such as the following one, it would not be unlikely to suggest that the mentioned local convert, appealed for help by the non-Christian couple, was a point of reference for the local community. The couple actively sought him out, but were afraid he would not offer his help due to their ordinary negligence.

Chen, wife of Guo Chun from Hui'an, was to give birth. For days, she was unable to deliver the baby. Many times, she almost died. The whole family was scared. The woman medium prayed the gods but it was inefficacious. The family wanted to invite Mai Zhaomei to pray the Lord of Heaven and the Holy Mother for them. Yet, as they did not believe [in the Lord of Heaven] in everyday life, they were afraid of getting mocked. Yet, as the situation was dangerous and urgent, they had no choice but to ask sincerely for his help. Then, Mei [i.e., Mai Zhaomei] came with his brother and nephew. Together they prayed for the Lord's blessing. He also ordered his sister-in-law to personally go to the delivery room and ornate her (Chen's wife) with the holy casket that she was carrying. As soon as they prayed, the efficacy was immediately. Both the mother and son were safe.<sup>35</sup>

In this story, the non-Christian couple looks for Mai Zhaomei 麥肇美 to pray for them. They know beforehand whom from the local church to address to seek help, suggesting that Mai Zhaomei may have occupied a significant role in the local church of Hui'an 惠安 or, at least, was known by local people for his ritual capacities. The mentioning of the brother and the nephew suggests that Mai belonged to a Christian family, possibly of relevance within the local Christian community. Appealed by the family, Mai guided the non-Christian couple throughout the ritual, first engaging them in a collective prayer together with his brother and nephew and then adorning the patient with the holy casket. This is an explicit case of a local convert who had and exerted a very active agency. In this narrative, Mai is at the centre of the whole ritual practice and plays the role of a guide and leader.

In line with what Menegon observes in Fu'an 福安, the stories in *Lixiu yijian* also attest to the joining of Christianity into the local religious market, for which the priests, acting as religious specialists, were compelled to respond to popular demands for ritual needs and compete with the religious specialists from the local heterogeneous religious fabric (Menegon 2009). Through examining these episodes, it is furthermore possible to observe the emergence of a new group of laypeople with ritual power, whose active presence often surpassed that of missionaries, and who could legitimately conduct rituals for themselves and others. Firstly, they distinguish themselves from existing local ritual practitioners and institutions, as well as other lay and non-institutionalised practitioners, as they are not affiliated with any existing religious traditions but are rooted in the faith in a new divine entity, the Christian Lord of Heaven. Secondly, they cannot avoid conflating themselves with them by engaging in rituals that greatly overlap with the repertory of ritual services offered by these local religious professionals, leading to real situations of concurrence. These situations of ritual competition are sometimes depicted in the stories, with the demonstration of the superiority of Christian rituals as their major objective. A trope in these stories

sees Christians stepping in and successfully performing rituals when local religious professionals fail to help the protagonists. In line with their proselytising nature, the accounts aim to suggest that the former can serve as a more effective replacement for the latter, highlighting the new role taken on by local converts in the local religious sphere. As a result, this group of non-professional ritual practitioners, namely, local converts such as the previously mentioned Yan Ande or Yang Tingyun, plays a central role in Chinese Christian communities. They define the ways in which the Christian community establishes itself, integrates into the greater local milieu, and interacts with other local religious communities and professionals.

#### 4.2. Re-Alignment of the Priestly Agency

So far, the stories have provided a more tangible image of the enlargement of the sphere of laypeople's rituals in Chinese Christian communities. This situation was prompted by the visible paucity of missionaries in 17th century China: the number of missionaries was around 20 people between 1620 and 1630, and around 30–40 between 1630 and 1680 (Standaert 2000). In the timespan of the stories, between 1603 and 1643, the number of missionaries was indeed very limited. Nonetheless, this did not mean that these communities were beyond missionaries' control. They were still centred and dependent on the role of the priest, who maintained exclusive authority over sacramental rites. Looking back at Table 3, we can see the concentration of the colour green (priestly agency) for sacramental rituals. In stark opposition to lay ritual agency, missionaries' participation in non-sacramental rites was limited to a few cases. Missionaries are mainly represented in the local stories in relation to rituals such as Mass, confession, and baptism. For instance, in the aforementioned story featuring Bento de Matos, the Portuguese missionary was going to the house of a convert to perform Mass. In another previously seen story of the old man Qiu from Minhou, who attended Mass diligently, the presence and performance of the priest is again specified: ". One day, while he [the old Qiu] was attending Mass, he suddenly saw two angels in the middle of the hall who were wearing white clothes and standing around the priest".<sup>36</sup>

Several accounts do not depict the active action of the priests in the rituals as in the episode above, but mention his presence indirectly by indicating local people asking, requesting, or inviting him to conduct a certain sacrament. The sacrament that is mostly requested in such a way in the local accounts, as Table 3 shows, is certainly baptism. It is made clear that such sacraments require the priestly presence and cannot be conducted by the local converts themselves. As concrete evidence and consequence of this, the stories contain quite a few scenes representing people who wait for the arrival of the priest to administer sacraments, as in the following story:

Matthew Chen from Fuqing was a disciple of Li Qixu [Li Jiugong]. Since his early age he heard about the Holy Teaching of the Lord of Heaven and used to recite the morning prayers and evening prayers daily. As the priest lived far from him, he was not cleansed from the impurities [was not baptised]. Until the year *wuyin* [1638], the priest Mister Lu was living in Zelang [Zelam] Tang, which was one 舍 *she* [ca. 15 km] far from Matthew's house so Matthew finally succeeded in inviting him to the house and getting baptised.<sup>37</sup>

In this episode, it is explained that the protagonist, a student of Li Jiugong, could not receive baptism for a long time due to the great geographical distance from the priest. Eventually, he was baptised upon inviting the priest to his home.<sup>38</sup> Similar narratives illustrating local people who await or request baptism from priests can be found throughout the accounts. While it is possible to read about the sacraments of baptism and, to a lesser extent, Mass in the accounts, it is rarer to come across episodes involving confessions.<sup>39</sup> We can identify two cases in which local converts ask the missionary for confession. In both cases, the request is made by the protagonists after they experience a holy dream or vision. Upon waking up, they invite the priest to hear their confession, for example:

On the 19th day in the mid-spring of the year *kuiwei* during the reign of Chongzhen [1643], Mr. Zhang Geng of Wenling suffered from diarrhoea. During the night, he had been having diarrhoea ten times, the pain was incessant and endless. Moreover, he could not eat and could not get off from bed even if he wanted to. In the early morning of the 20th day, he seemed to see someone with pale skin whom was an ancient saint coming to his bed and kneeling down near to his knees. Mr. Zhang looked at him in admiration and silently prayed. He did not dare to ask him who he was [...] After then, he gradually woke up and invited the priest, Mr. Nie [Canevari], to his place to make confession.<sup>40</sup>

In this episode, Zhang Geng is unwarily visited by his prematurely dead son Zhang Shi. After the angelic vision, Zhang Geng invites the Pietro Canevari S.J. (Nie Boduo 聶伯多, 1596–1675) to hear his confession.

The narratives confirm that sacraments remained the exclusive office of the priests. This created inconvenient situations such as the one experienced by Matthew Chen, who waited a long period before receiving baptism as he lived far from the missionary. As scholars have well-documented, in remote areas, the wait was further aggravated as missionaries could only pay a few visits, and converts had to wait long periods to receive important liturgies (Standaert 2000). According to Emmanuele Raini's study on Chinese catechists, there were occasions in which catechists could take on some significant roles in sacraments. For instance, in circumstances of urgency, such as moribund infants, baptism could be administered by catechists. Otherwise, if someone requested to be baptised when the priest was absent, catechists could still administer it to the neophyte privately, but the process would be completed and formalised by the priest when back (Raini 2019, p. 1345). Thus, it was the priest who supplied formal identity and adherence to the Christian community through a ritual. We could add here that rituals from the lay or clerical agency both contributed to the formation of the community, yet in different ways: the first by setting up the informal context and the second by delineating the formal membership.

## 5. Conclusions

This article proposes a study on Chinese Christian communities in 17<sup>th</sup>-century China. Based on the precious representations contained in *Lixiu yijian*, it is shown that these communities, characterised by a dominant ritual sphere, emerged from the interweaving of ritual elements and structures from both the Chinese and the European Christian ritual traditions. A core idea explored in this article is that, at a local everyday level, rituals were the very sites at which cultural encounters occurred and generated interaction. Thus, the history of contact between China and Europe is not merely about the encounters between two different intellectual traditions, but even more so about the encounter between two well-established ritual traditions. It involves a dialogue between concepts and ideas, but even more between rituals, the calendar, and ways of living. Such interactions generated an intercultural product, the Chinese Christian communities, which formed and defined their identities through establishing and practicing Chinese Christian rituals. More specifically, the article demonstrates the importance of this ritual encounter by investigating (1) the role of rituals in the building of the Chinese Christian community and (2) the ways in which this community characterises and positions itself in-between the Christian and the Chinese ritual worlds.

For the first point, Section 3 explored the relationship between rituals and the community from three aspects—collective rituals, individual rituals, and the liturgical calendar. Based on the episodes in *Lixiu yijian*, I argued that rituals contributed to bringing together, revitalising, and defining the community. Moreover, in engaging in ritual practice, local converts are confronted with an ongoing process of re-assessing elements from Christianity and their original cultural background, and taking stances when tensions arise. Eventually, they reconstruct both existing and new elements, forging a new in-between identity as individuals and as a community. For the second point, Section 4 analysed the Chinese Christian community by focusing on ritual agency. It argued that Chinese Chris-

tian communities were typically characterised by a significant enlargement of lay ritual agency, leading to the emergence of a new group of social agents—the local converts—who entered the scene as new key players within the local religious world. Differently from *Christianitas*, in which devotees' lives revolve around the priest, the stories illustrate that local converts basically became the main agents providing daily ritual support to the community. Yet, despite the marginalisation of priestly agency due to the small number of foreign missionaries in China, the role of the missionaries was still irrevocably fundamental for the community, which relied on them to receive the most crucial sacraments that defined its Christian identity and salvation. Finally, the community dynamics and ritual practices represented in *Lixiu yijian* show how Christianity was reproduced in the local Chinese milieu, shaped by the Chinese. It attests to the active and steady agency of local converts in forging a Chinese Christian identity and community that had its own life and significance for its members. Going beyond the framework of cultural interaction and reception, this article also aims to shift its focus to the “other”—specifically, the local convert, Li Jiugong, and his protagonists. By making them the primary focus, the study explores the history of Chinese Christianity through the lens of this phenomenon and its significance for them.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> “Community” is used here in the broad sense of a group of persons engaging in social interaction, within a geographic area, and sharing a common tie spanning a wide range aspects such as common lifestyle, work, culture, kinship, shared norms, and values (Hillery 1959, p. 6).
- <sup>2</sup> Other approaches on the formation of the Chinese Christian community in 17th century include: Nicolas Standaert’s study focused on the formation of communities through the production and the circulation of books (Standaert 2012); Xiao Qinghe’s study focused on the function of group communication, social networks, and religious life in creating and maintaining Christian communities (Xiao 2015).
- <sup>3</sup> I am grateful to the anonymous peer reviewer for kindly suggesting this English translation of the title. Other translations that have been used by scholars include “Mirror for the Exhortation to Cultivation” and “A Mirror for Self-Cultivation”.
- <sup>4</sup> For more bibliographical information, see the CCT Database: [https://libis.be/pa\\_cct/index.php/Detail/objects/1238](https://libis.be/pa_cct/index.php/Detail/objects/1238) (accessed on 26 January 2024).
- <sup>5</sup> Previous studies on this text include Michèle Boin (Boin 1984), Luo Qun 罗群 (Luo 2016), Wu Changxing 吴昶兴 (Wu 2012), and Lin Xiqiang 林熙强 (Lin 2015). The text is also mentioned and partially dealt in Zürcher (1985) and Standaert (1993). My current PhD project aims to provide a systematic study, inclusive of a full translation, of the *Lixiu yijian*.
- <sup>6</sup> To give just a few example of scholarly efforts in the field of sinology: the functionalist and Durkheimian influences have notably marked the works of scholars such as C.K. Yang (1961). Roy Rappaport’s approach has been often used in the context of early China (Sanft 2014), while Mary Douglas’ theories can be found applied in the study of outcast in traditional Chinese society (Hansson 2021).
- <sup>7</sup> Some of holy objects involved will be indicated in the table by their abbreviations: HS for holy statue or images *shengxiang* 聖像, HW for holy water *shengshui* 聖水, HC for holy casket *shengdu* 聖匱, a small locket containing a wax Agnus Dei as identified by Ad Dudink (1993), HN for holy name *shenghao* 聖號, and a representation of the holy name of Jesus (Zürcher 2007).
- <sup>8</sup> An act in which (1) someone (agent) does something to (2) someone or something to bring about some non-natural consequence by virtue of appeal to a non-human or superhuman agency (Barrett 2004).
- <sup>9</sup> The five categories are, respectively, technology, therapy and anti-therapy, ideology, salvation, and revitalisation, and are followed by subcategories. For a more detailed survey of each category and subcategory, see Stein and Stein (2017, pp. 79–102).
- <sup>10</sup> Bell’s categories: (1) rites of passage, (2) calendrical rites, (3) rites of exchange and communication, (4) rites of affliction, (5) rites of feasting, fasting, and festivals, and (6) political rituals (Bell 1997, p. 91).



- This approach is partially inspired by the division of ritual modalities between individualised rituals and collective rituals adopted in Michaels (2016, pp. 173–77).
- For a more detailed study on Mass practice in 17th century China, and the dynamic interactions through which Catholic rituals shaped and were shaped by the Chinese society, please refer to Yang (2022).
- “晉江陳養初者，篤奉聖教。其弟每不悅，即多方勸諭，弗悟也。崇禎甲戌元旦，養初恭赴堂瞻禮。至晚，主前燃燈。養初臥榻即其處也。是日微飲酣睡，午夜室內火發，正熟寐，忽覺有人亟推下床，墮地始覺，亟呼家人撲滅之。其弟亦感悟主恩。翌日遂至堂瞻禮，求艾師開發信心。弟素有足疾，即蒙主佑，不用湯藥，夙恙頓瘳。” in *Lixiu yijian*, *juan 2*, p. 36a.
- “遂凌晨到堂，叩求主祐。適林先生命駕往丘家行彌撒禮，曹哭陳其狀，先生曰：‘無患也，請先往丘家，行彌撒後，自有分發。’” in *Lixiu yijian*, *juan 2*, p. 3b.
- “於是連日到堂瞻禮，謝天主洪恩” in *Lixiu yijian*, *juan 2*, p. 3b.
- “閩侯邑有丘某者，年七十餘矣。丁卯歲入教，日到堂瞻禮無缺。而性燥多怒，又喜看書，因之兩目喪明，數年藥石罔効。人雖二三其說。丘奉教之念益堅。每瞻禮日，必使人導之，扶杖進堂【...】自茲大主默祐，不用藥石，目漸復明。” in *Lixiu yijian*, *juan 2*, pp. 32b–33a.
- Lixiu yijian*, *juan 2*, p. 35b.
- “躬自悼。戒家人嚴守聖齋，冀主默啟。” in *Lixiu yijian*, *juan 1*, p. 26a.
- “愛感鴻慈，闔家奉齋，旬有餘日，致謝主恩焉。” in *Lixiu yijian*, *juan 1*, p. 26b.
- “於是連日到堂瞻禮，謝天主洪恩，一家皆領聖水入教矣。” in *Lixiu yijian*, *juan 2*, p. 3b.
- “婦見魔亦叩頭，不敢復入臥室，第於廳事前揮淚而已。翌日，鎮大發信心，領經聽講。婦見群魔奔竄屋上。于是闔家歸誠，痛悔前非，學經求洗，魔遂滅跡。” in *Lixiu yijian*, *juan 2*, p. 8a–b.
- “莆人陳三南寓居于惠安之峯尾鄉，有女年十四，忽中蠱毒，腹脹垂死。從來中此毒者，萬無生理。南憂，莫奈。隣鄉林啟甫者，素奉天教[...] 林啟甫乃取聖水，命其女服之，復以所佩聖匱懸其胷。忽下小蛇百餘，皆蜿蜒昂首，女遂無恙。南感且服，全家入教。” in *Lixiu yijian*, *juan 2*, p. 12b.
- “夫翁係聞天主教，於是造堂叩懇，請教友至其家聖聖水，貼聖號于臥房。是日方暮，邪魔復至，不敢入其私室，第就其廳求合。翌日，教友復奉十字聖架至其家。魔遂絕跡，傳病漸痊，飲食如故。” in *Lixiu yijian*, *juan 2*, p. 10a–b.
- Eugenio Menegon gives an extensive overview of the elements of change and areas of conflicts, as well as eventual negotiations that local converts and Dominican missionaries in the community of Fu'an resorted to. According to the author's analysis, despite elements of incompatibility between the Christian and the Chinese time, especially with regard to practices related to ancestral reverence, accommodation, and negotiations, allowed such conflict to be defused, enabling Christianity to survive even through the periods of repression: “a balance between doctrinal rigidity and practical flexibility was found, and Chinese and Christian ‘times’ continued to coexist” (Menegon 2005).
- “爾奉教，胡不遵主誡，獨不聞今日乃齋期，敢宰牲上墳耶？但原爾一點孝思，且爾自受洗以來，功課有三月半，可當他人三年半之功，姑赦爾罪。” in *Lixiu yijian*, *juan 2*, p. 7a.
- “建州吳可教者，癸酉冬十月，欲買舟往鄉鄉，距郡治六十里。適是日乃聖堂瞻禮，自念彌撒盛典，吾主親身降臨，迫行則不及與，故寧行施，稽留，不躬聽彌撒不已也。及瞻禮聽講畢，趨往溪畔，是日下鄉船，俱已早發。” in *Lixiu yijian*, *juan 2*, p. 33b.
- Similar patterns of religious community can be seen in *jitan* religious groups (Goossaert 2022), Marshal Wen cult groups (Katz 1998), and Daoist- and Buddhist-oriented communities also embedding this pattern by exercising a liturgical modality that aim at universal salvation (Chau 2011).
- This compartmentalisation might fall into a mechanical approach. For another view on Chinese local ritual practice, please see ter Haar (2001). Nonetheless, all these studies point out the attitude of openness and non-exclusiveness to different religious options and ritual practices by both laypeople and professionals as a dominant pattern in the Chinese religious sphere.
- This mechanism of enlargement of non-sacramental sphere vis-à-vis marginalisation of the priestly sacramental sphere was first noticed and studied in the context of funerary rituals; see Standaert (2011).
- Code of Canon Law, c. 1168 (Caparros 1993).
- “日有魔附其鄉人，運筆降筭預言休咎，公聞而默之，至其前自畫聖號而箕止不動。眾咸駭異” in *Lixiu yijian*, *juan 2*, pp. 6b–7a.
- It is noteworthy that Xu Shoujie was the nephew of Xu Dashou 許大受, a local literatus known for his anti-Christian attitude, and author of *Zuopi* 佐闢, a refutation of Christianity (Xu 2022). This unveils a fascinating “patchwork” depiction of Chinese society, wherein different realms of social and religious spheres are actually interwoven. For more details about Xu Dashou and the possible impact that the conversion of Xu Shoujie's and other family members had on his rejection of Christianity, see Meynard (Meynard 2017).
- “德清許受節，許司馬之猶子也。【...】受節適欲往毗州候金刺史，遂佩之以行。道經黃河，遇暴風異嘗，波濤洶湧，幾葬魚腹。受節持聖匱默祈主佑，水波漸平，倏而泊岸，賴以無恙。同舟六七人，初盡失色，為必無幸。後偕舟師聲聲謝天，而莫解其繇。” in *Lixiu yijian*, *juan 2*, p. 15a–b.
- “一日患呃噎者數日，又感冷，陡腹痛不可忍，鼻息在斷續間。其夫亟呼巫至，從俗起煞，弗瘳於是。聞之顏安德，顏即四鼓馳至，亟遣去一切。但將所佩聖匱掛其胷，併為之俯祈聖母。須臾，胷膈宿食吐盡，霍然而愈。” in *Lixiu yijian*, *juan 2*, p. 15b.

- 35 “惠安郭春妻陳氏分娩，數日不下，幾死者屢。一家驚惶，女巫禱祝不効。欲懇麥肇美代祈天主聖母，以平日不信，恐見哂，但值危急不得不發心求救。美乃全（同）其弟侄共籲主佑。仍令乃嫂躬至產室，以所佩聖匱佩之。立祈立應，母子俱無恙。” in *Lixiu yijian*, juan 2, p. 16a.
- 36 “一日瞻禮堂中，忽覩兩白衣天神擁司祭者左右” in *Lixiu yijian*, juan 2, p. 32b.
- 37 “福清陳瑪寶者，李其敘門徒也。幼聞天主聖教，習早晚功課不輟。顧鐸德在遠，未得滌除夙染。迨歲戊寅，鐸德盧先生居澤朗堂，去瑪寶家一舍而遙，遂恭延至家，獲領洗焉。” in *Lixiu yijian*, juan 2, pp. 47b–48a.
- 38 Episode mentioned also in *Litt. Ann.* 1637 (Dudink 1997, p. 161n104).
- 39 For a detailed study on confession in 17th century China, please refer to (Menegon 2006).
- 40 “崇禎癸未仲春十有九日，溫陵張令公 患瀉，一夜數十度，連綿不休，且絕粒，意不可起。念一初更，恍睹白哲者先聖，登其牀，跪其膝旁。公仰瞻默祝，不敢問為誰【...】從是漸甦，延鐸德聶先生告解。” in *Lixiu yijian*, juan 2, p. 49a–b.

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