

Translation and Sinicization: Cultural Capital of Missionary Practice by Jingjiao in China

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Jingjiao, a significant witness of the initial spread of Christian culture in China, holds immense importance for analyzing social practices. Employing Bourdieu's cultural capital, this paper reveals that the linguistic and cultural strategies employed in the Chinese translation are significantly influenced by social, historical, and cultural values. Additionally, the article shows the social factors that influenced religious activities for Jingjiao during the Tang Dynasty, and explains how the Chinese translation contributed to the construction of religious cultural and discourse power. Furthermore, it finds that the Chinese translation of Jingjiao was not merely a linguistic symbol conversion, but rather a competition of social, religious, and cultural powers. Therefore, the article argues that the Chinese translation of Christian culture of Jingjiao accumulated cultural capital for early spread and religious authority of Christian culture in China, laying the groundwork for its future acceptance to Chinese Christians.

Keywords: Jingjiao, Christian culture, Chinese translation, cultural capital

The sinicization of Christianity culture in China could date back to the Tang Dynasty's Jingjiao, which occurred over 1300 years ago (Li et al., 2024; Wang, 1998, p. 7). The spread and establishment of Christian culture in China has undergone a historical development process. Jingjiao is traditionally considered the starting point for the spread of Christian culture in China, and academic research has been conducted on the topic. However, current research primarily focuses on the relationship between Jingjiao and Christian culture, the sinicization of terminology translation of Jingjiao, and the unsuccessful implementation of Jingjiao in China and so on (Adams, 2021; Chin, 2019; Lin, 2017; Wang & Fu, 2022; Wesotowski, 2020; Xiong, 2022; Zemaitis, 2012; Zhang, 2005). Within academic literature regarding the historical progression of the Chinese translation of Bible, occasional

allusions to Jingjiao may be found (Fu, 2006, 2018; Zhou, 2022). The dissemination of Western religions in China is inevitably intertwined with the local religious beliefs, and may potentially give rise to transformative effects on the social and ecological fabric of the region (Lai, 2002, 2007). Nonetheless, religion is a constantly evolving concept that encompasses a social, spiritual, and cultural phenomenon that pertains to a particular era, marked by a diverse range of expressions and rich implications. At present, research on Jingjiao is primarily confined to inscriptions and educational aspects. Nevertheless, Jingjiao, as a social phenomenon that propagated Christian religion in China, has been scarcely investigated by scholars in terms of its cultural capital. During its initial expansion in China, the Christian culture of Jingjiao encountered a formidable challenge from the dominant religious field of native Chinese Buddhism and Taoism. Nonetheless, it managed to accumulate cultural capital and establish a foothold in the country, thereby contributing to the spread of Christian culture. Thus, this paper aims to utilize Bourdieu's cultural capital concept to scrutinize Jingjiao in a particular historical and cultural background, thereby exposing the social practice of Christian culture of Jingjiao and ultimately summarizing the significance of Jingjiao as cultural capital accumulation in the course of Christianity in China.

This work was supported by Postgraduate Research & Practice Innovation Program of Jiangsu Province, Grant KYCX24_0354.

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Jingjiao and Christian Culture

To examine the cultural capital of Christian culture, it is imperative that we initially revisit the investigation concerning the correlation between Christian culture and Jingjiao. “The Holy Apostles Catholic Assyrian of the East, also known as Jingjiao” (Wang & Fu, 2022, p. 49), is an ancient church with a rich history dating back to the Parthian Empire (247 BC–224 BC), an area east of the Roman-Byzantine Empire. According to historical records, Addai, a disciple of St. Thomas, was responsible for introducing Christianity to Persia. The church was then established in the city-state of Edessa (known as Urfa) in the first century AD. It could be found in Penguin Classics: from Christ to Constantine (Eusebius, 1990). Following the collapse of the Parthian Empire around the third century, Sasanian Persia (224 BC–651 BC) rose to power and the church continued to flourish under its reign, eventually expanding throughout the entire Persian Empire. Consequently, based on the developmental background of The Holy Apostles Catholic Assyrian of the East, its theological beliefs have Christian roots and have evolved into a significant denomination within the global Christian community. To study Jingjiao, it is necessary to examine Chinese inscriptions and literature. The most significant records include the Monument for the Propagation of Daqin Jingjiao in China (大秦景教流行中國碑, Figure 1) and the Tang Dynasty Jingjiao Jingchuang (唐代景教經幢, Figure 2), both of which will be discussed in detail below.



Figure 1. The Monument for the Propagation of Daqin Jingjiao in China

One of the four major stone tablets in the world of archaeological discoveries is the Monument for the

Propagation of Daqin Jingjiao in China. It was erected in 781 in the Chang'an Jingjiao Si (Daqin Si) to introduce Christianity to China (Xiao, 1997). The vertical square stele, measuring 279 centimeters in height and 99 centimeters in width, was carved with 32 lines of 62 words each by Xiuyan Lyu in regular script (He, 1987). The inscription, titled “大秦景教流行中國碑,” was authored by Jing Jing, a Nestorian. At the top of the stele, a cross is carved on a lotus seat, with decorative flowers and grass adorning the sides.

The inscription can be divided into three main sections: the first part contains religious doctrine and spirit of Jingjiao, and the second part describes the origin and development of Jingjiao in China over a span of more than one hundred years, which is considered to be the most valuable content. The third section primarily focuses on the praise of Isis, who played a significant role in the growth of Jingjiao and served as a senior official in the court of Chang'an area. The Eastern Roman Empire was referred to as “Daqin” (大秦) in ancient China, while the primitive social activities of Christianity introduced to China was known as Jingjiao. As a result, Daqin mentioned in inscriptions denotes the Eastern Roman Empire. During the early Tang Dynasty, Christian culture was brought into China, and The Monument for the Propagation of Daqin Jingjiao in China serves as the earliest evidence of the cultural exchange between the East and the West, as well as the initial introduction of Christianity to China. It represents a unique and indispensable research document for studying the early spread of Christianity in ancient China. Moreover, it is a valuable resource for investigating the history of transportation, cultural, and artistic exchanges between ancient China and the West. The documented evidence confirms the presence of Jingjiao as a religious phenomenon within the societal customs of Christianity in China, thereby furnishing a verifiable foundation for scrutinizing the dissemination of Christian religious practices in China.



Figure 2. The Tang Dynasty Jingjiao Jingchuang

In addition to written accounts, the graphic signs found in cultural relics provide further evidence of the Christian religion and cultural beliefs of Jingjiao (Lin, 2009; Yin & Lin, 2008). The cross is a prominent symbol of the Christian faith, representing the crucifixion of Jesus on the cross and the redemption of sinners, signifying love and forgiveness. The Tang Dynasty Jingjiao Jingchuang, discovered in Luoyang, serves as a crucial historical witness to the religious practices of Jingjiao, and the cross symbol depicted on the Tang Dynasty Jingjiao Jingchuang signifies the Christian cultural influence of Jingjiao.

By scrutinizing the textual and symbolic representations, it is discernible that Jingjiao played a pivotal role in the propagation of Christian culture in China. Consequently, to understand the historical progression of Christianity's dissemination and the formation of religious dominion, Jingjiao's significance as a crucial historical occurrence must not be disregarded. In this regard, the ensuing section delves into the correlation between Jingjiao and Christian culture via scholarly inquiry, thereby establishing a rational and well-founded groundwork for the investigation of the historical events of social communication of Christian culture by Jingjiao in China.

Cultural Capital

Bourdieu's sociology has made a significant contribution to cultural analysis by extensively applying the concept of capital. He integrated the three traditions of Western sociology and affirmed the relativity between cultural and economy and politics (David, 1998, pp. 44–56). Bourdieu developed his own unique main line of research, which focuses on interpreting the symbolic power of culture. According to Bourdieu's theory, culture is relatively autonomous, but not independent of economy and politics. He believes that cultural activities are not separate from the operation of political and economic power, and are not isolated from the process of social change and historical transformation. Culture plays an important and mysterious role in the production and reproduction of social hierarchy. Therefore, the core task of Bourdieu's cultural sociology is to analyze the structural correspondence between the field of cultural symbols and social space, and to identify and analyze how the classification in the cultural system corresponds to the power dominance relationship in the social space.

The concept of cultural capital is not original to Bourdieu.

However, modern scholars widely acknowledge that Bourdieu significantly contributed to the understanding and significance of this concept. Cultural capital, in general terms, refers to the wealth of knowledge in the form of ideas that supports the legitimacy of identity and power. Bourdieu's exploration of the French education system served as the foundation for the concept of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 2011). It is worth noting that Bourdieu did not view cultural capital as a source of economic income. Instead, he emphasized that cultural capital primarily exists within the realm of knowledge and cultural production. Consequently, according to Bourdieu's perspective, cultural capital is valuable and can be utilized as a tool in struggles or within specific interest-based relationships. It is within these struggles that individuals exercise their power and attain intellectual or influential gains.

Hence, it can be observed that, according to Bourdieu's cultural capital theory, capital has evolved into a resource that transcends historical boundaries and possesses the ability to wield influence (Bourdieu, 1989). While culture may not be traditionally viewed as a form of investment, it is, in fact, a distinct type of capital. This form of capital outwardly rejects the notion of utilitarianism as its fundamental basis, thereby obscuring the obligatory and historical transmission of culture. Cultural capital is not limited to a single construct by Bourdieu. The core concept of cultural capital is developed by incorporating various related concepts. Regarding the research discussed in this paper, these concepts encompass field, habitus, and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1993).

Field

Field, according to Bourdieu, can be described as a "network" or "configuration" of the objective relationship between different positions (Wacquant & Bourdieu, 1992, p. 97). These positions are determined by the current or potential power distribution among their occupants. The definition of these positions also relies on the objective relationship between them and other positions, such as dominance or subordination. From this definition, it becomes clear that the field is a spatial concept. Firstly, it serves as a practice space where actors engage in social activities from different positions. Secondly, it functions as a competitive space, comparable to a playground, "where players are often hostile and ruthless towards each other as they vie for power or capital" (Wacquant & Bourdieu, 1992, p. 98). Lastly, the field is a space of relationships, with at least two levels of objective relations: the first being the competition between actors within

the same field, and the second being the objective relationship between different fields arranged hierarchically within society. “These sub-fields have their own operational logic and are connected through various relationships such as dominance and subordination” (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 6). According to Bourdieu’s cultural capital, field serves as more than just a means of acquiring interests; it also becomes a battleground for establishing the legitimacy of those interests. When actors become involved in the field, whether intentionally or inadvertently, they inevitably align themselves with the values and capital within it. The allure of the interests present in the field holds a unique temptation for them. Consequently, the historical field in which Christian culture by Jingjiao propagated highlights the competition among various religious cultures to secure his own interests and positions, thus establishing the groundwork for the institutionalization of diverse religious capital.

Habitus

Habitus, according to Bourdieu, can be defined as a durable and adaptable framework of potential behavioral tendencies. It is characterized by certain “structured structure” that serve to be “structuring structure” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 72). In other words, habitus acts as a guiding and organizing principle for practical activities and representations, allowing them to align with individual intentions rather than rigidly adhering to predetermined rules. It is apparent that habitus not only influences individual behavior but is also inseparable from collective foundations. The development of individual habitus is a result of long-term socialization experiences, enabling individuals to cultivate habits and cognitive structures that align with environment, thus possessing cultural capital. Unlike other forms of rules and norms, habits can reliably ensure the consistency of practical activities, yet also inevitably exhibit differences. Bourdieu asserts that the principle of differentiation in interpersonal relationships stems from the specificity of social trajectories, which correspond to the chronological and irreducible sequence of decisive factors. The moment of habitus aligns with the structure of previous experiences to generate new experiential structures, and these new experiences influence the previous structure within the limits determined by the power of period selection (Bourdieu, 2003, p. 93). Therefore, the concept of habitus holds significant importance in uncovering the Chinese translation of Christian culture of Jingjiao, particularly the translator’s strategy of translation. However, the concept

of habitus is not only limited to shaping and restricting the behavior of actors, but also plays a crucial role in adaptation to new field. As a result, habitus not only reveals the translation strategies of missionary, but also explains the conversion trends of religious believers. The habitus that exists within a group or class is manifested in the individual through social objective rules, and in the context of Christian religion, it is manifested through the rules of the faith. In further analysis, we will discover that while cultural norms, values, and goals are important, the cultural agency and practicality driven by habitus have a more significant impact in constructing social and religious belief groups using cultural resources.

Symbolic Capital

According to Bourdieu, social reality is inherently marked by various struggles for rights. Power manifests itself through various symbols, which serve as indicators of participation in society’s production and reproduction, as well as reflections of the power structure. Therefore, “cultural production is closely intertwined with symbolic power” (Zhang, 2005, p. 130). Bourdieu’s fundamental perspective is that conflict is the driving force of social life, with power struggles always at the core of social organization. For Bourdieu, any expressions or symbolic representations of sociality cannot be separated from their underlying power relations. The successful exercise of power relies on its legalization, which is obtained through symbolic interests or symbolic capital. The process of legalization, in turn, is the process of producing symbolic power. Symbolic interests hold the same objective importance as material interests. To fully grasp Bourdieu’s argument, it is important to recognize that language is a distinct symbolic system created by humans, and the application of language serves as the most fundamental symbolic practice in human society. In Bourdieu’s perspective, all social activities and social life are essentially exchanges of symbolic symbols, with language acting as the intermediary. The underlying concept of symbolic symbol exchange via language is that the speaker possesses linguistic resources, and these resources must adhere to the principles of price formation within the language market during the exchange process.

Hence, linguistic capital represents the ability to influence the practicability mechanism of language, enabling the practicability law to operate in a manner that aligns with human interests and generates specific value (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 80). Consequently, language exchange is more than mere communication, as it permeates various external factors.

Bourdieu's fundamental viewpoint on language symbols emphasizes that the exchange of symbolic language symbols reflects power dynamics. Through language exchange, the actual outcome is the exchange of power and the competition of different forms of capital. Therefore, Bourdieu's focus is not on the syntactic structure or linguistic rules, but on the intricate power dynamics inherent in language usage, specifically the power relationships manifested through its utilization. From the perspective of the symbol itself, the usage of Shen (神), Tianzhu (天主), Tian (天), or Shangdi (上帝), in Chinese can be considered arbitrary and man-made for the creators of all things in the Christian culture. There is no inherent objection within the symbol itself. However, when these symbols are associated with particular time periods and specific Christian groups, it becomes apparent that translators play a significant role in shaping the new interpretation of these symbols within society or country.

"The interactions among cultural theory and Christian Studies in the Western academia may inspire the discussion concerning Sino-theology and deserve to be studied thoroughly in the context of contemporary China" (Lai, 2011, p. 17). This paper centers around the concept of cultural capital and its utilization as an analytical tool. The rationale behind selecting cultural capital as the primary theoretical concept lies in the understanding that the adaptation of Christian culture in China can be viewed as a cultural phenomenon. This phenomenon is construed as the accumulation and transmission of cultural capital through a series of religious adaptations in specific regions and ethnic ways of life. By merging the Chinese adaptation of Christian culture with the concept of cultural capital, it is able to observe and analyze the lasting influence of Christianity in China. Examining the cultural capital of Jingjiao in China, as one of the earliest social practices, can offer valuable insights into the growth of the Christian faith in China.

The Chinese Translation of Christian Culture of Jingjiao

When it comes to the dissemination of foreign religions in China, a common challenge arises—how to ensure that the religious doctrines are understood and embraced by the missionary target. This understanding and acceptance of religious doctrines should not be limited to the ruling class alone, but should also extend to the majority of religious believers. If a foreign religion seeks to gain understanding and acceptance from Chinese believers, the initial step is to

effectively communicate the religious doctrines in Chinese. Jingjiao, for example, had made significant efforts in expressing Christian culture in Chinese, as evident in Jingjiao Monument (景教碑).

According to records from the Monument for the Propagation of Daqin Jingjiao, in a display of nobility and reverence, the Church of the East monk Aluoben (阿羅本), a distinguished of ancient Qin Empire (Roman Empire), embarked on a journey to bring sacred scriptures to the capital (Chang'an) for worship. Recognizing the significance of this act, Tang Taizong (唐太宗) Shimin Li (李世民) (599 AD–649 AD), the emperor of the time, instructed Prime Minister Xuanling Fang (房玄齡) (579 AD–648 AD) to extend a warm welcome to Aluoben and his entourage, complete with an honor guard stationed in the western suburbs of Chang'an. Within the confines of his camp, situated within the palace, Aluoben diligently translated the scriptures, while also engaging in profound doctrinal discussions with Tang Taizong, who graciously invited him to his residence.

Based on the inscription records, it can be inferred that Aluoben was a highly accomplished missionary with significant religious and academic achievements during that period. He must have possessed a considerable level of proficiency in Chinese as well. The scriptures he presented as tribute were either fully or partially translated into Chinese. Additionally, it is likely that Tang Taizong had some knowledge about the Nestorians of ancient Qin Empire (Roman Empire), as he showed great interest in hosting foreign religious missionary. However, if foreign religions wish to conduct genuine preaching in China, they should employ eloquent language that resonates with the ruling class, while also ensuring that the general public can comprehend and accept their message. A similar situation arose during the translation of Christian culture of Jingjiao: a missionary would explain or narrate Christian religious doctrines to a Chinese who had limited knowledge of missionary's language and culture, and the Chinese would record the religious doctrine in Chinese. However, the challenge lies in the stark differences between the religious doctrine of Christian religions and traditional Chinese religions, as well as the fact that ancient Chinese is a language rich in imagery. Even in modern Chinese, not all meanings can be effectively conveyed through linguistic symbols. Consequently, the missionaries' interpretation of Christian culture inevitably hindered the understanding and expression of the recorded Chinese. Therefore, in the translation process, one often encounters the following problems: how should the original

text be interpreted? What is the appropriate way to express the meaning of the original text in Chinese? During the Tang Dynasty (618 AD–907 AD), Buddhism (佛教) and Taoism (道教) were widely practiced. In order for Jingjiao, a foreign religion, to gain recognition as a legitimate faith and attract followers, it had to navigate the complexities of translating Christian culture into Chinese. This required a careful balance between adapting to the local customs and maintaining the symbolic power of the religion. The translators played a crucial role in this process, as their habitual characteristics influenced the way the translation was carried out.

Domestication of Religious Languages

Jingjiao, among the Monument for the Propagation of Daqin Jingjiao in China, along with other eight classics, employed a strategic linguistic approach in translating Christian religious doctrines. It extensively borrowed religious terminology from Buddhism and Taoism, aiming to seamlessly integrate itself into the prevailing ideological landscape. Due to the limited space available, this article will present a condensed religious language comparison for reference.

Table 1

A Comparison of Jingjiao Language and Taoism Language

Jingjiao Language	Taoist Language	Source of Jingjiao Language
Qimiao 奇妙	Xuanmiao 玄妙	Jingjiao Monument
Shen wu yiding de mingcheng 神無一定的名稱	Dao wu chang ming 道無常明	Jingjiao Monument
Shengling 聖靈	Yuanfeng 元風	Jingjiao Monument
Bianhua shengtian 變化升天	Shengzhen 升真	Jingjiao Monument
Bianhua shengtian 變化升天	Chengzhen 成真	Jingjiao Monument
Chuangzao 創造	Zaohua 造化	Jingjiao Monument
Zaowuzhu 造物主	Zhenzhu 真主	Jingjiao Monument
Zhenshen 真神		
Tianfu 天父 Zhen Shen 真神	Tianzun 天尊	Yi shen lun 一神論
Tianguo 天國 Leguo 樂國	Dishan 帝山	Zhixuan anle Jin 誌玄安樂經 ¹
Xuantong shengtian 玄通升天	Xuantong shengjin 玄通升進	Zhixuan anle Jin 誌玄安樂經
Jieyu 節欲	Wuyu 無欲	Zhixuan anle Jin 誌玄安樂經
Kongxu de xin 空虛的心	Wude 無德	Zhixuan anle Jin 誌玄安樂經
Yi jiaxing zuo jianzheng 以嘉行做見證	Wuzheng 無證	Zhixuan anle Jin 誌玄安樂經
Momo de xingdao 默默地行道	Wuwei 無為	Zhixuan anle Jin 誌玄安樂經
Xianji 獻祭 Qidao 祈禱	Xiu Gongde 修功德	Jingjiao Monument

¹ For the translation of Zhixuan anle Jin 誌玄安樂經, there are four English translations. (See, Wang 1998, p. 48). The names of this article are presented exclusively in pinyin (拼音) and Chinese character.

Table 1 illustrates that during the translation of Christian religious doctrines, Taoist terminology were extensively incorporated by Jingjiao. In the realm of Taoism, the historical usage of the term “Tianzun” (天尊) has typically referred to “Laozi” (老子), who is revered as the “Daode Tianjun” (道德天尊). And within Taoism, the highest deity is recognized as “Yuanshi Tianzun” (元始天尊). However, despite the distinct religious framework of Taoism, Jingjiao Christianity adopted the concept of “Tianzun” (天尊) when incorporating their religious culture, and there are several underlying reasons for this decision. Initially, Jingjiao Christianity amalgamated aspects of foreign Christian culture with familiar Chinese terminology, aligning themselves with the prevailing religious culture in China during Tang Dynasty. This strategic approach allowed Jingjiao Christianity to effectively compete for religious resources. Furthermore, Jingjiao Christianity paid homage to the Jewish-Christianity tradition, wherein the direct name of God is intentionally avoided. For instance, in Jiuyue Shengjing (舊約聖經, the *Old Testament*), Jews interpret the name Jehovah as Adonai, which can be translated as “Shangzhu” (上主) in Chinese. As Tianzun and Shangzhu share a comparable meaning, the inclusion of God’s name aligns with the Jewish Christian tradition. Additionally, Jingjiao Christianity regards Tianzun as the exclusive object of worship, directly challenging the religious authority of Taoism and asserting that only the God of Jingjiao is deserving of this esteemed title.

Table 2

A Comparison of Jingjiao Language and Buddhism Language

Jingjiao Language	Buddhism language	Source of Jingjiao Language
Xiudaoyuan 修道院 Jiaotang 教堂	Simiao 寺廟	Jingjiao Monument
Xiushi 修士 Chuandao 傳道	Seng 僧 Sengtu 僧徒	Jingjiao Monument
Zhujiao 主教	Dade 大德	Jingjiao Monument
Zong zhujiao 總主教	Fa zhuseng 法主僧	Jingjiao Monument
Zhengjiu wanmin 拯救萬民	Jiudu wubian 救渡無邊	Jingjiao Monument
Shitu 使徒	Sengjia 僧伽	Zhixuan anle Jing 誌玄安樂經
Shengren 聖人 Xianzhi 先知	Fawang 法王	Zunjing 尊經
Xin 心 Shen 身	Wuyin 五蔭	Yi shen lun 一神論
Yongsheng 永生	Changzhu 常住	Yi shen lun 一神論
Zhenshen 真神	Fo 佛	Xu ting mi shi suo jing 序聽迷詩所經
Jieshou Jiaohui 接受教誨	Shoujie 受戒	Xu ting mi shi suo jing 序聽迷詩所經
Zui'e 罪惡	E'ye 惡業	Xu ting mi shi suo jing 序聽迷詩所經
Baoying 報應	Guobao 果報	Xu ting mi shi suo jing 序聽迷詩所經
Zhuling 諸靈	Zhufo 諸佛	Xu ting mi shi suo jing 序聽迷詩所經
Zhongtianshi 眾天使		Xu ting mi shi suo jing 序聽迷詩所經

The utilization of Buddhist terminology is also evident in the language selection of Christian doctrine, as illustrated in Table 2. This indicates that Jingjiao Christianity have incorporated certain concepts and expressions from the Buddhist tradition. In the context of Buddhism, Shen (神) symbolizes supreme wisdom and holds a position of utmost sanctity as the embodiment of religious culture. When translating the Christian culture into Chinese, a careful consideration is given to the impact and assimilation of Buddhism in Chinese religious field. As a strategic measure to enhance the comprehension and reception of Christian culture among the Chinese people, Zhenshen (真神) (and Zhenzhu [真主] is more commonly used by Christians today) is borrowed from Buddhism for translation purposes. This deliberate choice aims to foster a deeper understanding and wider acceptance of Christian culture within the framework of Chinese religious beliefs.

Nowadays, contemporary researchers frequently express their dissatisfaction with the domestication of language implemented by Jingjiao Christianity when translating Christian culture. The strategy employed by Jingjiao Christianity involves incorporating a significant number of preexisting Chinese cultural, often borrowing terms from Buddhism and Taoism. “These borrowed Buddhist terms, which are found in the outskirts of Jingjiao, fail to accurately convey the true meaning of Jingjiao” (Lin, 1998, pp. 9–10). This occurs because the Chinese people interpret these terms through the lens of their Buddhist symbolism, rather than understanding the authentic concepts of Jingjiao. However, within the historical field of Christianity’s introduction as a foreign religion in China, the integration of this new religious culture occurs within a fresh framework. In this new field (the Tang Dynasty), the creation of unfamiliar words, utilizing the existing vocabulary, does not pose a significant challenge to the believers’ comprehension abilities. Therefore, to effectively promote the dissemination of Christian culture within this new cultural context and reduce the need for creating new vocabulary, it is widely recognized that the language strategy employed by Jingjiao Christianity during the Tang Dynasty—which involved drawing from other religious languages—was justified.

Sinicization of Religious Doctrine of Jingjiao

To promote the Christian culture during the Tang Dynasty, Jingjiao made adjustments to the religious belief of Christianity in China, incorporating elements from traditional

Chinese religions like Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. Essentially, “Jingjin (淨景) and Aluoben adopted a preaching approach that involved integrating the language of Buddhism within the framework of Confucianism, thus establishing a religious and cultural system for Christianity” (Chen, 2004, p. 89). This assimilation allowed Christian culture to effectively propagate its beliefs in the new cultural field.

To begin with, the primary aim of Jingjiao is to establish a suitable focal point of veneration for Chinese. This objective is driven by the desire to develop a visual representation of Christianity that aligns with the Chinese people’s inclination towards visual symbolism. The manner in which Jingjiao addresses the sinicization of Christian culture is evident in the names of worship. The information presented in this article is derived from the names of the Monument for the Propagation of Daqin Jingjiao in China and other eight classics, as exemplified in Table 3.

Table 3

A Comparison of Names of Jingjiao and Christianity

Jingjiao	Christian
Tianzun 天尊 Fo 佛	YHWH
Cifu mingzi Jingfengwang 慈父明子淨風王	Holy Trinity
Jingzun 景尊 Fawang 法王	The Savior
Mishisuo 迷詩所 Mishike 彌師珂	Mashiah
Zhenjing 真經 Zunjing 尊經	Bible
Zhufo 諸佛	Angel
Yishu 移鼠 Jingzun 景尊 Dashengzi 大聖子	Jesus

According to Table 3, the names of gods in Christian culture possess distinct religious significance and symbolic power. In an attempt to establish a presence in the Chinese religious field, the translation of gods’ names of Jingjiao adopts the titles used in traditional Chinese religions, aiming to assimilate Christian culture into Chinese society. This linguistic approach emphasizes the importance of religious and cultural capital. Specifically, during the Tang Dynasty in China, Jingjiao sought to directly incorporate existing linguistic symbols from Chinese religious culture to compete for religious authority and establish a foothold in the capital. During the sinicization of Christian culture, Jingjiao generated considerable controversy by directly translating Jesus as “Yishu” (移鼠). However, “researchers suggest that Shu (鼠) in Nestorianism holds multiple connotations. Firstly, it aligns with the initial syllable of the Greek term “Inoou.” Additionally, it resonates with Chinese surnames. Moreover, considering that Shu is the first animal in the Chinese zodiac, this choice appears somewhat fitting” (Lin, 1998, pp. 39–40). The Chinese translation of Jesus’ name of Jingjiao has not

been widely disseminated due to cultural symbols associating Shu with indecent behaviors, such as “Shumu Cunguang” (鼠目寸光), “Shutou Shuonao” (鼠頭鼠腦), “Guojie Laoshu” (過街老鼠). Throughout the extensive history of sinicization in Christian culture, languages that hold cultural capital and symbolic power have been inherited and have become the prevailing language in Chinese Christian culture. As historical development progresses, Christian religious languages that fail to align with Chinese culture eventually become overshadowed.

Creative Translation of Religious Name

During the sinicization of Christian culture, Jingjiao employed innovative terminologies. Church (教堂) was translated as “Jingmen” (景門), Jiaozhu (教主) was translated as “Jingzun” (景尊), believers (教徒) was translated as “Jingzhong” (景眾), canon (教規) was translated as “Jingfa” (景法). These are all creative translations by Jingjiao in the process of the spread of Christian culture in China. According to the pertinent research, “it has been established that the initial introduction of Christianity in China can be traced back to Persia in the year 635BC. During this time, it was commonly referred to as “Bosi Jiao” (波斯教, Persian Popes), while its place of worship was known as “Bosi Si” (波斯寺, Persian Temple) and its religious practitioners as “Bosi Seng” (波斯僧, Persian monks). However, in 745 AD, it underwent a name change to “Daqin Si” (大秦寺), with its monks being rebranded as “Daqin Seng” (大秦僧). Concurrently, Jingjiao, previously known as Bosi Jiao, was also introduced” (Zhu, 1993, p. 131). Henceforth, the significance and worth of Jing (景) in the translation of Christian culture into the Chinese society becomes evident. Jing holds significant meaning in Chinese traditional culture, as evident in numerous literary references. For example, “In politically transparent nations, the presence of a moral star, symbolizing a guiding light, is often observed during sunny weather. While these stars do not possess a fixed form, their significance is undeniable” (Si, 2023).

Based on the literature of Jing, it becomes evident that Jing predominantly pertain to the concepts of noble morality and political clarity. Consequently, Jingjiao demonstrated creativity in translating names during the propagation of Christianity in China, effectively comprehending and capturing the significance of Jixiang (吉祥), Xiangrui (祥瑞), Taiping (太平), and Fuzhi (福祉) in Chinese culture. In the same way, Jingjiao employed Jing to denote the religious

doctrines of Christianity, which embody the symbols of spreading well-being and prosperity. It can be affirmed that this reflects the translator’s familiarity with Chinese culture at that time, enabling a more seamless integration of Christian culture into China.

The endeavor to translate religious name into Chinese in a way that effectively conveys the cultural significance of Christianity and is embraced by Chinese individuals can be fundamentally viewed as a means to vie for the authority to communicate and cultivate cultural influence within the realm of Chinese spirituality. The choice of Jing as the spiritual moniker for the propagation of Christianity in China can be seen as rooted in the cultural significance of Chinese characters, while also serving to establish the symbolic power of the Christian faith within Chinese culture. Through the implementation of this distinctive form of translation, we are able to discern the meticulous endeavors and conflicting sense of powerlessness that characterized the early phase of Christian cultural translation by Jingjiao. Consequently, the missionary endeavors of Jingjiao in China took on the role of “political theology” (Chin, 2019, p. 551), serving the interests of the feudal ruling class.

Discussion

The Favourable Cultural Capital for Social Engagements by Jingjiao

The growth and influence of Christian culture in China underwent a gradual and intricate development. As a result, Jingjiao found its way into China during the Tang Dynasty, owing to its strong resonance with the cultural demands and openness prevailing in Chinese society during that period.

To begin with, we view the Tang Dynasty as a pivotal field for the dissemination of Christian culture in China. Ever since Han Wudi (漢武帝, 156 BC–87 BC) of the Han Dynasty dispatched Qian Zhang (張騫, 164 BC–114 BC) to the Western Regions (西域), China has experienced a significant increase in interactions with Central Asia, West Asia, and South Asia. With the advent of the Tang Dynasty, these exchanges between China and the West intensified, leading to an unprecedented growth in economic and trade activities. “The eastward propagation of Jingjiao can be primarily attributed to economic incentives, as commercial endeavors constitute a defining aspect of Jingjiao” (Zhu, 1993, p. 63). From the standpoint of Chinese traditional culture, China has consistently been a

nation with diverse religious beliefs, and the rulers of various dynasties have shown a relatively tolerant attitude towards different religions. Tang Dynasty, for instance, implemented a policy of good relations and amicability towards Persia and neighboring countries. Moreover, the establishment of Tang Dynasty was aided by other ethnic groups, which somewhat diluted the influence of traditional Chinese concepts. It is undeniable that Tang Dynasty represented a period of substantial national strength, with cultural advancements that were at the forefront at that time. Consequently, this provided an excellent field for the assimilation of diverse cultures and religions. Thus, Jingjiao played a significant role in “reshaping the structure of the field in this particular field” (Gao, 2004, p. 138).

Moreover, during the Tang Dynasty, Jingjiao Christian exhibited remarkable scientific and technological proficiency in various domains. They presented numerous marvels to the rulers of Tang Dynasty, effectively satiating the inquisitiveness of the ruling elite. Concurrently, “Jingjiao Christian capitalized on their extensive knowledge and expertise to successfully convert certain individuals in China” (Zhu, 1993, p. 69). In the emerging field, Jingjiao encountered challenges in propagating Christian beliefs in China. They astutely merged Christian religious customs with the prevailing ideologies in China during that period, strategically relying on the rulers. In societal fields with the sphere encompassing two distinct states, the deliberate habitus by Jingjiao endowed their missionary endeavors with “culture and symbolic power” (Zhang, 2005, p. 7), facilitating the integration of Jingjiao within the religious and cultural field of the Tang Dynasty.

Furthermore, a crucial factor lies in the fact that Tang Dynasty not only permitted but also tolerated the efforts made of Jingjiao missionaries. This favorable field played a crucial role in fostering the growth and cultural development of Christian culture in China. Tang Dynasty records discovered in Dunhuang (敦煌) reveal the existence of Chinese texts related to Jingjiao. Additionally, Tang Dynasty actively supported Jingjiao by providing missionary sites and assisting with the translation of scriptures. These actions created favorable conditions for the initial introduction and growth of Christian culture in China.

Hence, the missionary of Jingjiao in China during Tang Dynasty effectively fulfilled the religious-cultural requirements, thanks to a combination of Tang Dynasty’s inclusive cultural policy and the strategic approach embraced by Jingjiao. This approach, known as sinicization, aimed to circumvent clashes with prevailing ideologies and other

religions in China. Notably, the ruling class of the Tang Dynasty tacitly approved the activities of Jingjiao, thereby ensuring the smooth execution of their social endeavors.

The Unfavourable Cultural Capital for Social Engagements by Jingjiao

Jingjiao, in contrast to later Christian religion in China, faced significant challenges such as the absence of external political, military, and economic support, as well as the inability to attract a substantial number of followers. Numerous factors acted as constraints on the development of Jingjiao, leading to its gradual decline after a period of prosperity.

For one thing, Chinese translation of Jingjiao must confront the religious power field of Tang Dynasty. It is well-known that the rulers of Tang Dynasty considered Laozi as part of their own family due to the same family name, and they consistently showed respect and protection towards Taoism. This poses a significant challenge for Jingjiao in its missionary efforts. While Tang Dynasty’s policy of religious freedom and cultural tolerance facilitated Chinese translation of Jingjiao, the presence of other religious forces like Islam also emerged in Tang society. Given the exclusivity of any religion, this imposes significant constraints on the missionary activities of foreign religions. Hence, within the “struggle field” (Gao, 2004, p. 138) of Tang Dynasty predominantly religious cultures influenced by Taoism, the Chinese translation of Jingjiao inevitably encountered opposition from Chinese Buddhism, Taoism, and traditional Chinese culture, as it sought to establish its legitimacy as a missionary religion in China.

Subsequently, to achieve the goal of promoting Christian culture in China and align with the religious field of Tang Dynasty, Jingjiao ultimately opted to attire the Tang Dynasty rulers and incorporated numerous Buddhist and Taoist terms when translating Christian culture into Chinese. Chinese translation practice of Christian culture by Jingjiao, influenced by this perspective, will inevitably exhibit an inherent habitus: utilizing the principles of Taoism and Buddhism to cater to the ruling elite of Tang Dynasty, so as to adapt to the changing social environment (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 72). “In the history of the religion-state relationship in China, a model of subordination of religion to the state has been dominant for centuries” (Lai, 2020, p. 149). In Chinese feudal society, the growth of a religion is heavily influenced by the ruling class’s interests and preferences, as well as cultural values. During

the Tang Dynasty (845 AD), the policy of Hui Fosi Zhi (毁佛寺制) resulted in the suppression of Jingjiao, which was seen as having adopted elements from Buddhism and Taoism.

In addition, one of the biggest challenges hindering the spread of Christian culture in China is the language barrier. “Context serves the purpose of comprehending the world and effecting change within it” (Gao et al., 2021, p. 15). In order for Christian culture to be accessible and comprehensible to Chinese people, it had to be translated into Chinese symbols. However, due to the inherent differences in meaning between Chinese and Western language symbols, finding equivalent symbols that accurately conveyed the essence of Christian culture was difficult. Despite Jingjiao missionaries having some knowledge of Chinese, it was not feasible to find exact language symbols that aligned with the concepts of Christian culture. As a result, the translated Christian culture became obscure to Chinese people, making it challenging for Jingjiao to gain a wide following. The language symbols of Christian culture should ideally serve as vehicles for conveying ideology through general functional logic (Bourdieu, 1990, pp. 112–121). However, the Chinese translation of Christian language symbols did not possess the corresponding religious power, nor were they recognized as “symbols of strong belief and reverence” (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 66).

Conclusion

In discussing the history of Chinese translation, there is often a focus on Buddhist translation while neglecting the Chinese translation efforts of Jingjiao. This is due to the translation strategies employed by Jingjiao translators in their interpretation of Christian culture. However, it is important to acknowledge that while there were indeed Chinese translation activities of Jingjiao in the history of Chinese translation, that these activities did not adhere to any specific translation principles. It is necessary to recognize that the adoption of these special translation principles was primarily limited to the early stages of translating religious classics, serving as a means for translators to establish symbolic power through habitual behavior within a specific historical field. Without such strategies, the goal of religious preaching would be reduced to mere empty words. “Due to the recognition of the importance of Christianity in contemporary China and the awareness of the global context for Christian theology, there was a growing interest among western theologians in non-western Christian theology, including Chinese Christian

theology” (Lai, 2019, p. 103). The current studies on Jingjiao primarily concentrate on its connection with other Western religions, the spread of Christian culture, and the artistic significance of inscriptions, among other topics. Consequently, this paper regards Jingjiao as a pivotal element in the realm of translating and disseminating Christian culture in China, and situates it within the field of historical development in order to assess its cultural impact. In essence, Jingjiao laid the foundation for the cultural capital necessary for the Chinese translation of Christian religion, and subsequent Chinese translations of Christian culture benefited greatly from this experience, forming the initial basis for the establishment of missionary and religious authority of Christianity in Chinese world. Then, as the field network of the spread of Christian culture in China, the value of Jingjiao as an important node should not be forgotten.

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