

Article

The Images of Jesus and the Virgin Mary in the Early Qing Collection of Taoist Immortal Stories

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Abstract: The book *Lidai Shenxian Tongjian* (*The Comprehensive Mirror of Immortals Throughout the Dynasties*), a compilation of Taoist narratives from the early Qing dynasty, contains a dedicated section on “The Life of Jesus,” accompanied by two images portraying Jesus and the Virgin Mary. “The Life of Jesus” is believed to have originated from Gaspar Ferreira’s *Nianzhu Guicheng* (*Rule for the Recitation of the Rosary*) and Diego de Pantoja’s *Tianzhu Yesu Shounan Shimo* (*The Passion of the Lord Jesus*). The narratives and images of Christian content within *Tongjian* showcase the influence of Chinese Ming–Qing Taoist immortal stories and the indigenization of Christianity that resulted in a fusion of Chinese and Western cultural elements. Multiple versions of the accompanying images exist in different editions of *Tongjian*, indicating an evolution in the depictions of Jesus and the Virgin Mary. Through a comparative analysis of these images and their variations, we can glean valuable insights into the Qing dynasty editors’ reception of Western culture, shedding light on the process of localizing Christianity during the Ming–Qing period and emphasizing the significance of the cultural exchange and mutual understanding between Chinese and Western civilizations.

Keywords: *Lidai Shenxian Tongjian* (*The Comprehensive Mirror of Immortals Throughout the Dynasties*); Taoist immortal stories; the image of Jesus; the image of the Virgin Mary; indigenization of Christianity in China



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1. Introduction

The book *Lidai Shenxian Tongjian* 歷代神仙通鑒 (“*The Comprehensive Mirror of Immortals Throughout the Dynasties*” (henceforth, “*Tongjian*”)), published in 1712, is a captivating work that encompasses a collection of Taoist stories. It intriguingly includes biographies of religious leaders from various traditions, such as Confucius from Confucianism, Gautama Buddha from Buddhism, Jesus Christ from Christianity, and the Prophet Muhammad from Islam. The inclusion of stories featuring leaders from different religions in the Taoist knowledge system in this book raises a series of questions: (1) Despite being a collection of Taoist stories, why and how does *Tongjian* incorporate content from other religions? (2) How does the book effectively integrate content from other religions while maintaining the central position of Taoism? (3) What unique characteristics define the multi-religious fusion portrayed in the book? (4) Do these distinct features exhibit regional and temporal variations? In the subsequent discussion, I will attempt to answer these related questions by using relevant examples.

Before delving into these inquiries, it is essential to provide a concise introduction to the relevant information on this book and to present my research findings based on a preliminary investigation of its different versions. *Tongjian*, a complex book originally published during the early Qing period, has undergone multiple editions, leading to confusion and misunderstandings in previous research (Wen and Wen 2006, p. 369). Hence, it is crucial to present some fundamental information regarding the different editions:¹

- (1) Volume compilation: *Tongjian* consists of 22 volumes, initially compiled by Xu Dao 徐道 (17 volumes) and continued by Cheng Yuqi 程毓奇 (5 volumes);

- (2) Endorsement from Zhang Jizong 張繼宗: In the year 1700 (the Gengchen year of the Kangxi reign “康熙庚辰年”, as mentioned in the preface), Xu Dao sought endorsement from Zhang Jizong, a prominent Taoist leader known as The Celestial Master of the Dragon and Tiger 龍虎天師;
- (3) Printing process: With financial support from some close friends, Xu Dao initiated the printing process in 1705.

Based on my research findings, the following points deserve more attention:

- (1) Completion date: The editing of the 22-volume *Tongjian* was finalized no later than 1700, and the earliest possible completion date is believed to be 1712 (the fifty-first year of the Kangxi reign 康熙五十一年), when the book was officially published. This contradicts some prior scholars who inaccurately indicated the first-edition date as 1700, 1701, or 1705 (Xu and Cheng 1712, prefaces);
- (2) Editor attribution: Erroneous attributions have been made regarding the editor, falsely associating individuals like Zhang Jizong with the book, which is incorrect. The correct information is as stated above;
- (3) Originality and detail: Despite numerous reprints of *Tongjian* after its initial publication, none of the subsequent versions matched the meticulousness and level of detail found in the 1712 first edition. In particular, the reprints or rearranged editions from the late Qing Dynasty period failed to attain the same level of exquisite craftsmanship as the first edition;
- (4) Reprint and prefaces: In 1722 (the sixty-first year of the Kangxi reign 康熙六十一年), the book underwent a reprint under the title “*Sanjiao Tongyuanlu*” 三教同源錄 (*Records of the Common Origins of Three Religions*), featuring the addition of several prefaces;
- (5) Re-editing and publishing: The contemporary scholar Chen Rongmen 陳榕門 (1696–1771), also known as Chen Hongmou 陳宏謀, may have participated in the subsequent re-edition of the book. Following Chen’s demise, a new edition called *Chen’s Critical Edition* was first published in 1787 (Chen 1787, preface), and it was reprinted several times thereafter.² However, the primary content of this edition remained unaltered from the 1712 first edition, which could be because the publisher employed a renowned name to augment the book’s market appeal and potential sales;
- (6) Other editions and versions: Various alternative versions of the book exist, attributed to different editors. One notable edition is known as *Xinke Huang Zhanglun Xiansheng Pingding Shenxian Jian* 新刻黃掌綸先生評訂神仙鑒 (*The New Critical Edition of the Mirror of Immortals with Commentaries by Mr. Huang Zhanglun*) (Xu and Cheng 1795, preface). This edition, consisting of 22 volumes, includes comments and critiques from scholars such as Huang Zhanglun and Li Li 李理. This critical edition underwent multiple reprints from the mid-18th century to the 1920s. These subsequent editions have led to the misconception that Huang Zhanglun was the author or editor of the work.

In short, *Tongjian* is a 22-volume book compiled by Xu Dao and Cheng Yuqi. The initial edition was completed in 1712, and subsequent versions and reprints exhibit variations in details and editor attributions. The book’s historical context and different editions offer valuable insights for further exploration.

In my previous publications, I focused on the portrayal of “The Life of Jesus” in *Tongjian*. The first article, published in 2020, examined the translation and interpretation of this biography as documented by Protestant missionaries in the 19th century in China and Southeast Asia. Expanding on this research, my second article, published in 2022, delved into the textual origins of the story, suggesting that its sources were the works of late-Ming Jesuit priests: Gaspar Ferreira’s (Fei Qigui 費奇規, 1571–1649) *Song Nianzhu Guicheng* 念珠規程 (*Rule for the Recitation of the Rosary*) (Malek 2017, pp. 234–35)³ (henceforth, “*Guicheng*”) and Diego de Pantoja’s (Pang Diwo 龐迪我, 1571–1618) *Tianzhu Yesu Shounan Shimo* 天主耶穌受難始末 (*The Passion of the Lord Jesus*) (Malek 2017, pp. 421–22)⁴ (henceforth, “*Shimo*”). However, the analysis of the depictions of Jesus and the Virgin Mary in the book was limited due to a scarcity of available information. Recent research has led to new discoveries, which motivated me to write this article with the aim of pro-

viding a more comprehensive understanding by offering further explanations based on these findings.

To provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic, it is important to establish additional background information about the book. *Tongjian* is a compilation of biographies of immortals centered around Taoism. The cover of the book bears the inscription “Xi-anzhen Yanpai, Fozu Chuandeng, Shengxian Guanmai” (仙真衍派, 佛祖傳燈, 聖賢貫脈), which emphasizes the shared origins of three religions in China (Daoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism) and their ultimate connection to the “Tao”. In the ninth volume of the book, specifically in the second section titled “Yan Ziling Gaoqu Guangwu, Maliya Zhenchan Yesu” 嚴子陵高屈光武, 瑪利亞貞產耶穌 (“Yan Ziling cleverly submitted to Guangwu Emperor; the Virgin Mary gave birth to Jesus”), there is a part known as “The Life of Jesus” that provides a concise account of Jesus’ birth, teachings, crucifixion, resurrection, and other significant events in his life. Excluding the Chinese works produced by Jesuit missionaries and their Chinese helpers during the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, this story stands as the earliest known written record of Jesus’s life in Chinese literature by Chinese authors.

During the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368–1912), collections of biographies of immortals and supernatural novels often featured illustrations, which can be attributed to the popularity of the so-called “Xiuxiang Xiaoshuo” 繡像小說 (woodcut-illustrated novel) during this period. *Tongjian* and other literary works, categorized as “Shenguai Xiaoshuo” 神怪小說 (fictional works exploring the themes of spirits and the uncanny), portray the life narratives of immortals, ghosts, and extraordinary individuals. *Sou Shen Ji* 搜神記 (*The Record of Searching for the Spirits*), *Fengshen Yanyi* 封神演義 (*The Investiture of the Gods*), and other similar works fall within this genre. It is worth noting that in the first half of the 19th century, many Protestant missionaries in China also mistakenly identified the book *Tongjian* as *Soushen Ji* or *Soushen Daquan* 搜神大全. The confusion may have stemmed from the fact that during the mid-Qing period (roughly 1736–1850), *Tongjian* was republished with the outer covers occasionally bearing titles like “*Soushen Ji*” or “*Soushen Daquan*”, causing confusion among readers.

Tongjian includes a total of 120 illustrations known as “Shenxian xiang” 神仙像 (“Portraits of the Immortals”). The authorship of these illustrations is only partially known. The first edition of *Tongjian* in 1712 attributes the first illustration in the entire book to “Gu Yan Dai Jun” 古崑戴峻, as indicated in the lower right corner of the frame (Figure 1). Based on the available information, we can infer that the illustrator responsible for the artwork was Dai Jun 戴峻, also known by his style name, Gu Yan 古崑. Unfortunately, historical records regarding his life are scarce, leaving us with mere speculation. The following are the findings stemming from my investigation. Dai Jun, originally from Suzhou, gained recognition for his remarkable skill at imitating and recreating the artistic style of Ming Dynasty painters, with a particular emphasis on capturing the essence of Tang Yin’s 唐寅 (1470–1524) landscape art. Intriguingly, he intentionally obscured his true identity and attributed his works to Tang Yin, thereby enhancing their prestige (Wang 2000, p. 507). However, the limited number of pieces that carried his own name exuded a refined and archaic aesthetic (Wu 1999, p. 805).

Within the twenty-two volumes of the book *Tongjian*, there are a total of one hundred and twenty illustrations, out of which only two depict Jesus and the Virgin Mary in relation to Christianity. For convenience, I will refer to them as the “Image of Jesus” (the 98th illustration in the 1712 first edition) and the “Image of the Virgin Mary” (the 103rd illustration in the 1712 first edition) in the subsequent discussion. The following sections will explore the presentation of these two images in different versions of the text and how their changes reflect the localization of Christianity, which also coincided with the convergence of multiple religions in Qing dynasty literature.

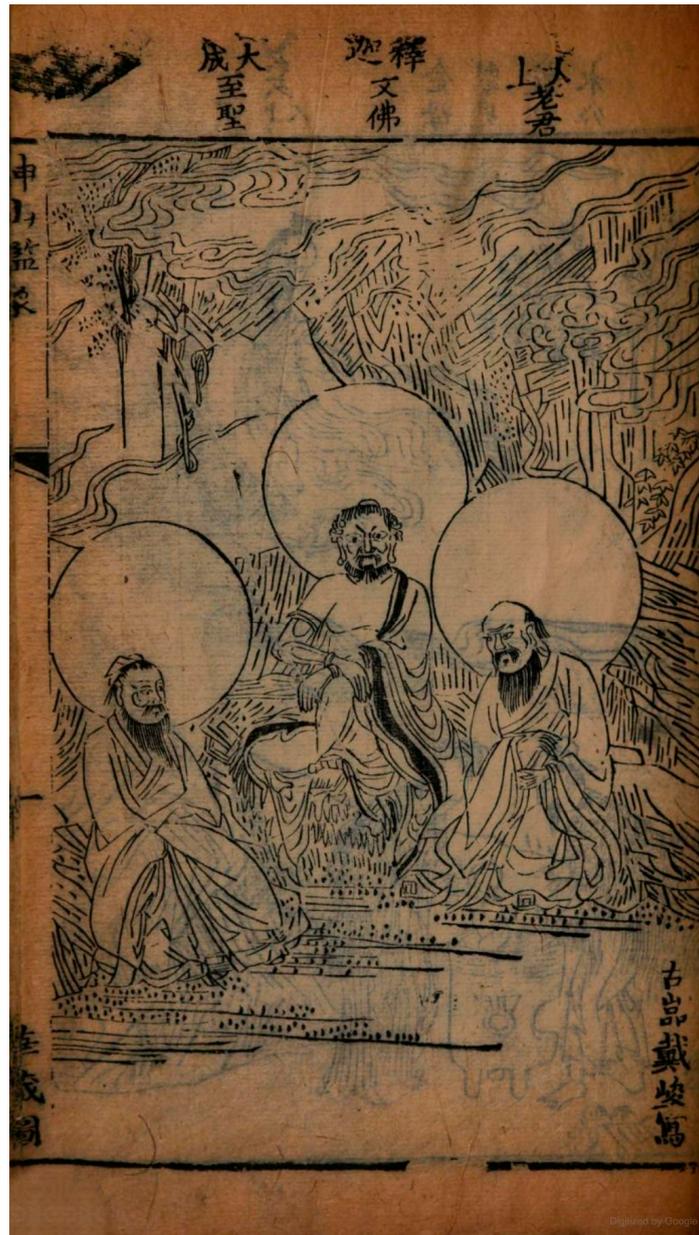


Figure 1. The first illustration in *Tongjian* (Xu and Cheng 1712, 1a).

2. The Image of Jesus

The inclusion of “The Life of Jesus” in the collection of Taoist immortal stories in *Tongjian* is significant for the discussion in this article. Moreover, previous transcriptions of the text often contain errors and inaccuracies. Therefore, in this specific instance, it is imperative to furnish a thorough, modern transcription, including punctuation, of the entire text provided.

The original Chinese text transcribed from the original book is as follows:

是冬，羌人入寇，馬援大破之。遠西國人云：去中國九萬七千里，經三載，始抵西羌界。彼國初有童貞瑪利亞，於辛酉歲（實漢元始元年），天神嘉俾厄爾恭報天主特選爾為母，已而果孕降生，母極喜敬，裹以常衣，置於馬槽，群天神奏樂於空。

後四十日，母抱獻於聖師罷德肋，取名耶穌。方十二齡，隨母往謁聖殿，歸時相失，母心痛苦。三日夜後，覓至殿中，見耶穌上座，與耆年博學之士，講論天主

事理。見母忻喜同歸，孝敬事奉。至三十歲，辭母、師遊，行如德亞，傳教淑人，所行聖蹟甚多。

其國中巨家及在位者，極傲惡，嫉其眾歸附，謀欲殺之。耶穌十二徒中，名茹答斯者，素有貪行，揣知本國眾意，因以攫利，夜深，引眾捕縛，送於亞納斯。在比刺多衙內，褫衣系石柱，鞭五千四百有奇，全體剝傷，默不置辯如羔羊。惡黨以棘刺冠，箍於其額，以絳蔽袍披其身，偽拜如王。造一重大十字架，逼令肩荷，一路壓跌難堪。被釘手足於架上，渴以醋膽。終命時，天昏地震，石相觸碎，時年三十三。

死後三日復活，身極光美，先見母以解憂。四十日後，將欲升天，面諭宗徒百二十人，分行天下訓誨，與領聖水，洗罪入教。論畢，古聖群從隨躋天國。後十日，天神降臨，迎母升舉，立於九品之上，為天地之母皇，世人之主保。徒眾分巡化教。(Xu and Cheng 1712, vol. 9, 4b–5b)

The following is my English translation of this passage:

It was that winter when the Qiang people invaded, and Ma Yuan achieved a resounding victory over them. People from a distant Western country said: "From China, it is a journey of nine thousand seven hundred miles, taking three years to reach the Western Qiang border. In that country, there was a young virgin named Ma-li-ya (Mary). In the year of Xinyou (which is equivalent to the first year of the Han Dynasty's Yuanshi period), the heavenly angel Jia-bi-e-er (Gabriel) came to announce to her that she was chosen by God to be the mother. Subsequently, she conceived and gave birth. The mother was filled with immense joy and reverence, and she wrapped the baby in swaddling clothes and placed him in a manger. The heavenly angels played music in the sky.

Forty days later, the mother presented the child to the holy teacher Ba-de-le (Pater) and named him Yesu (Jesus). When Yesu was twelve years old, he accompanied his mother to visit the holy temple. On their way back, they became separated, causing great distress to his mother. After three days and nights of searching, she found Yesu sitting among the elders and scholars, discussing matters of God. Seeing his mother filled with joy, he returned with her, showing filial respect and serving her. At the age of thirty, he bid farewell to his mother and teacher and embarked on a journey to preach in places like Ru-de-ya (Judea), performing numerous holy miracles.

The wealthy and those in power in his own country became exceedingly proud and wicked, envious of the multitudes who followed Yesu, and plotted to kill him. Among Yesu's twelve disciples, there was one named Ru-da-si (Judas), known for his greed. Having perceived the desires of those people, he sought personal gain and, late at night, led a group to capture Jesus and handed him over to Ya-na-si (Annas). In the interior Yamen (the government office) of Bi-la-duo (Pilate), he was stripped and tied to a stone pillar, receiving five thousand four hundred lashes that left his entire body wounded. He remained silent, not uttering a word of defense, like a lamb. The wicked party crowned him with a crown of thorns, pressing it into his forehead, and dressed him in a worn-out purple robe, pretending to bow to him as a king. They made him carry a heavy wooden cross, causing him to stumble and fall repeatedly along the way. Nails were driven into his hands and feet on the cross, and he was given vinegar to drink when he was thirsty. At the moment of his death, the sky darkened, the earth shook, and the stones shattered upon collision. He was thirty-three years old.

Three days after his death, he resurrected, his body radiating with extraordinary beauty, and he appeared to his mother first to alleviate her sorrow. Forty days later, as he was about to ascend to heaven, he addressed his 120 disciples, instructing them to spread teachings throughout the world, baptizing with holy water to cleanse sins and bring people into the faith. After conveying his mes-

sage, the ancient saints accompanied him to the heavenly kingdom. Ten days later, the heavenly angels descended to lift his mother, raising her to the highest rank, becoming the empress mother of heaven and earth, the protector of all humanity. The disciples dispersed to spread the teachings of the faith.

As mentioned above, in my previous article, I established that the Chinese text of “The Life of Jesus” heavily relied on the Chinese works of Jesuit fathers during the late Ming period. Both Ferreira’s *Guicheng* and Pantoja’s *Shimo* were included in a re-edited book called “*Tianzhu Shengjiao Nianjing Zongdu*” 天主聖教念經總牘 (*The Complete Collection of Catholic Prayer*), edited by Rodrigue de Figueredo (1594–1642) in 1628 (Ferreira 2014, pp. 137–66; Pantoja 2014, pp. 97–128). This book, specifically, is the textual source for the Chinese excerpts quoted in the preceding paragraph. The compiler of *Tongjian* skillfully synthesized the contents of these texts to create “The Life of Jesus” (Yao 2022, p.147). Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that Ferreira’s *Guicheng* contains a series of illustrations directly related to the depictions of Jesus and the Virgin Mary in the discussed Taoist story collection.

Several contemporary scholars have previously examined the relevant illustrations, and Dai Bufan 戴不凡 and Xing Dongtian 邢東田 specifically drew attention to an inconsistency in the image and the Chinese text depicted in the upper portion of the illustration. The Chinese characters “耶穌” (“Ye-su”) and “如德亞” (“Ru-de-ya”) are present in the upper part in the illustration of the “Image of Jesus.” However, upon consulting the 1712 first edition, it was discovered that both the main text and the caption above the illustration are written as “耶穌” (“Ye-Su”), with the character “蘇” (“Su”) represented using the variant form of the Chinese word “禾魚” (“Su”) (Figure 2). This variant form, featuring “禾” on the left and “魚” on the right, can be found in certain ancient texts. Regrettably, Dai and Xing mistakenly transcribed it as the characters “耶穌” (“Ye-Su”). Moreover, it is important to clarify that the Chinese term “如德亞” (“Ru-de-ya”) is not, as stated by Dai and others, a personal name. Instead, it aligns with the place name “Judaea” in the Christian Bible, specifically referencing the southern region of ancient Palestine.

Previous studies have presented three distinct interpretations regarding the depiction of the “Image of Jesus” found in *Tongjian*. (1) Dai Bufan describes the image as depicting Jesus as a child dressed in traditional Chinese clothing, bowing, and accompanied by an older man wearing attire similar to that of a Buddhist monk from the Western Territories 西域胡僧 (Xiyu Huseng).⁵ The older man is described as having curly hair and a beard (Figure 2). Dai believes that the child represents Jesus, but the identity of the older man remains uncertain (Dai 1982, p. 268). (2) In contrast to Dai’s view, Xing Dongtian suggests that the depicted scene does not show Jesus being baptized but rather depicts him bidding farewell to his teacher before embarking on a journey. Xing argues that, based on biblical history, Jesus was an adult when baptized, and baptisms typically took place in rivers with the involvement of John the Baptist. Given the absence of any mention of John the Baptist in the text accompanying the image, Xing puts forth the interpretation that the depiction represents a Huseng figure symbolizing Jesus, while the child dressed in traditional Chinese attire is portrayed as the recipient of the preaching (Xing 1999, p. 104). Xing also mentions Bishop Tu Shihua’s 塗世華 (1919–2017) viewpoint, suggesting that the term “shi” 師 (teacher) in the image refers to “father,” indicating Jesus’ earthly, adoptive father, Joseph. This interpretation implies that the purpose of the depicted journey is to preach in the Judaea region (Xing 1999, p. 104). However, this point is not further elaborated. (3) In my 2020 publication, I present an alternative interpretation of the depicted image, which is based on extensive research and analysis. I propose that the elderly figure and child, both attired in Chinese garments and portrayed beneath a tree (Figure 3), represent a Huseng and Jesus, respectively. The elderly figure in the image shares similarities with a monk from Xiyu 西域, distinguished by curly hair and the headband typically worn by monks or ascetics. The illustration includes two names, one clearly labeled as “Yesu” 耶穌 (“Jesus”), while the other is less legible but is believed to read as “Ba-de-le” 罷德勒 (“Pater”) rather than “Ru-de-ya” 如德亞 (“Judaea”). Furthermore, I posit that the image does not depict Jesus being baptized and that it does not align with the accompanying text.

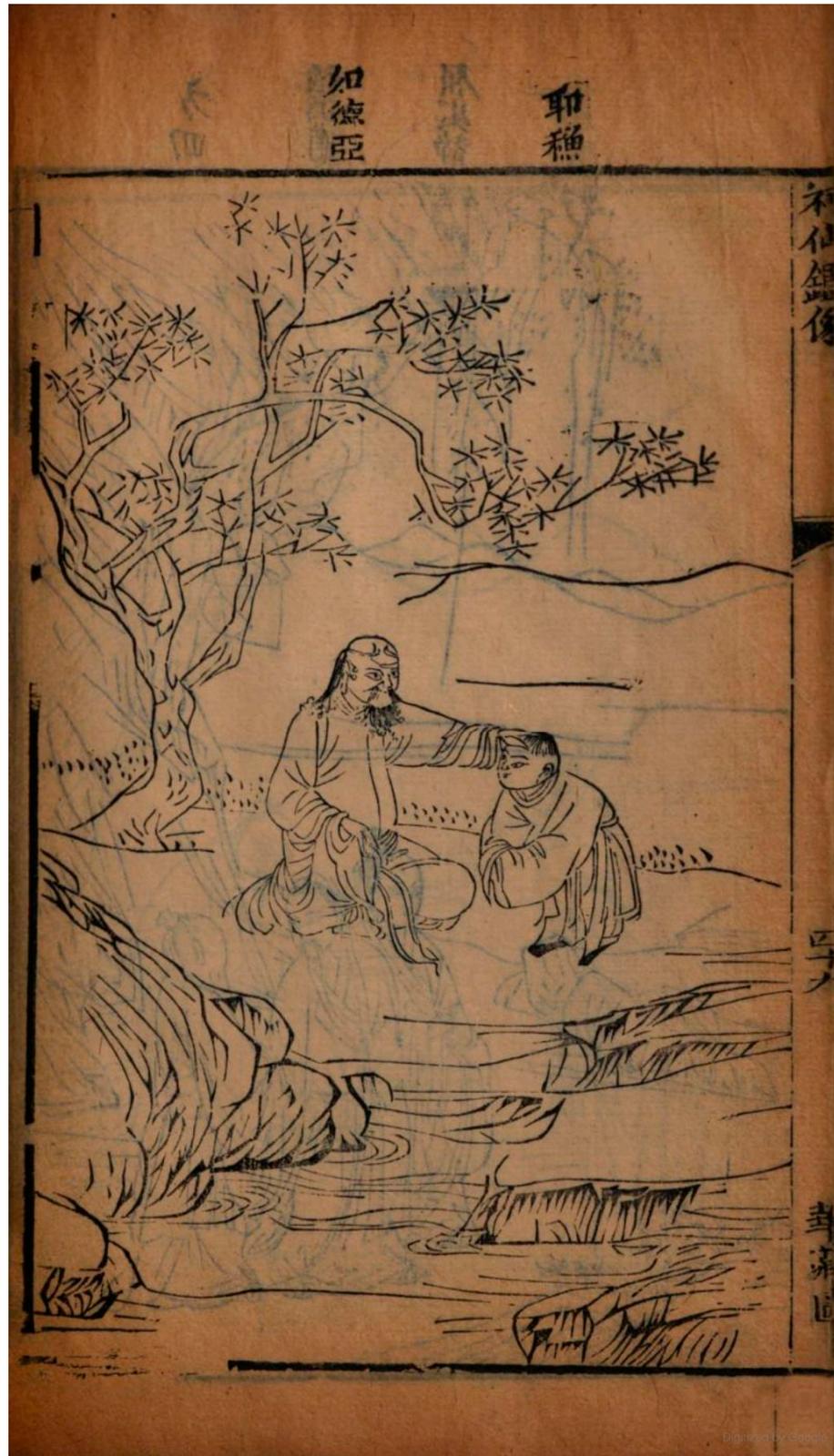


Figure 2. The “Image of Jesus” from the 1712 first edition (Xu and Cheng 1712, 49b).



Figure 3. The “Image of Jesus” illustration is derived from a reprint of the 1712 first edition of *Tongjiang*, which can be found in the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek (Bavarian State Library) in Munich, Germany.

It is conjectured that the illustrator might have misconstrued the narrative, drawing inspiration from the illustration style commonly found in Ming and Qing dynasty novels. I propose that the image portrays “聖師罷德肋” (the holy teacher Ba-de-le) as a Huseng from the Western Territories, establishing connections to “The Life of Jesus” described in the second section of the opening chapter. This interpretation is supported by the earlier passage in the text that recounts General Ma Yuan’s 馬援 expedition to the Western Territories, as mentioned in the previously quoted passage: “Ma Yuan achieved a resounding victory over them.” Consequently, the old man depicted in the image symbolizes a Buddhist monk from the Western Territories (Yao 2020, pp. 55–56). It is important to reiterate that the image portrayed in the text does not directly correspond to the narrative but instead emerged as a result of the illustrator’s misinterpretation. The varying interpretations by Dai and Xing can be attributed to their exposure to different versions of the text. Dai suggests that the name above the elder figure in the illustration is now unidentifiable, and I can confirm the same situation in the reprint of the 1712 first edition, as depicted in Figure 3. Xing’s examination shows the name “Ru-de-ya” above the elder figure, suggesting the illustrator’s misconception that the Chinese place name is a personal name. Nonetheless, I disagree with Xing’s interpretation that the elder figure represents Jesus and that the child represents the one being preached to.

Through a meticulous examination of the illustration in the 1712 first edition titled the “Image of Jesus,” it was revealed that several Chinese characters are placed directly above the illustration, indicating the names of the depicted figures. Above the elder figure, it reads “Ru-de-ya” 如德亞 in Chinese, and above the child figure, it reads “Yesu” 耶穌 (“Jesus”) in Chinese. According to the book’s layout, names are indicated above the characters throughout the text. A single vertical line to the right of the text signifies a personal name (such as the Chinese word “耶穌”), while a double vertical line represents a place name (such as the Chinese word “如德亞”). Consequently, the illustrator, Dai Jun, made an error by treating the Chinese place name “Ru-de-ya” 如德亞 as a personal name. However, Xing Dongtian’s assertion that the elder figure represents Jesus is also incorrect; it should be the Chinese word “Ba-de-le” 罷德肋. In other words, Dai Jun mistakenly wrote the Chinese word “罷德肋” as “如德亞.” The mistake was later discovered by the publisher of the book’s reprinted edition. A subsequent reprinted version of the 1712 first edition could serve as evidence. In the illustration on this page (Figure 3), there are clear indications that the engraving of the three characters “如德亞” was modified based on the original foundation in the later woodblock-printed⁶ version. The Chinese character “如” was changed to “罷” and the upper half of the character “德” remains almost unchanged, while the last character in the modified version is somewhat indiscernible (Figures 4 and 5).

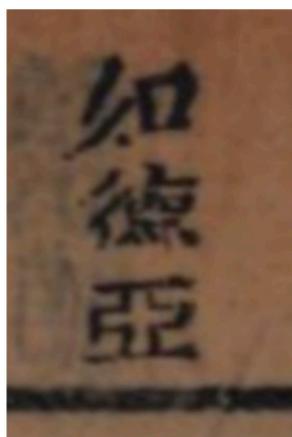


Figure 4. The textual details in the specific area of Figure 2 read as “Ru-de-ya” 如德亞 (Judeae) (Xu and Cheng 1712, 49b).



Figure 5. The textual details in the specific area of Figure 3. The first two Chinese characters can be recognized as “罷德” (Ba-de), although the third character is now illegible. Based on this, it can be inferred that it has been modified to “罷德肋” (Ba-de-le), which corresponds to “Pater” in Latin, representing “father”.

Based on the evident traces of modification in Figures 4 and 5, it can be concluded that in the later reprinted, revised version, the Chinese words “如德亞” (“Ru-de-ya”) were modified to “罷德肋” (“Ba-de-le”). However, the characters “罷德” (“Ba-de”) are clearly visible, whereas the character “肋” (“le”) is no longer legible. The 1712 first edition and subsequent reprints were likely derived from the same woodcut version. Due to multiple printings, the text and images in the later editions are not as clear as those in the first edition, and this specific section underwent modification. This suggests that the printer, who utilized the woodcut block, made subsequent modifications that led to the lack of clarity of the Chinese characters on the woodblock.

In his article, Xing Dongtian mentioned consulting Bishop Tu Shihua of the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association, who believed that in the sentence “至三十歲，辭母、師遊，行如德亞，傳教淑人，所行聖蹟甚多” (“At the age of thirty, he bid farewell to his mother and teacher and embarked on a journey to preach in places like Ru-de-ya, performing numerous holy miracles.”), the Chinese term “師” (“Shi”) should be interpreted as “father” rather than “teacher.” I share his perspective, as, within the context of the text, it is evident that Jesus bids farewell to both his mother and teacher and embarks on a journey to Judaea. This interpretation is supported by the image, which depicts Jesus parting ways with his teacher, rather than his baptism, as previously suggested by others.

The main focus of the discussion revolves around the existence of a source for the specific depiction of Jesus in question. I put forth the proposition that there must indeed be a source, and, to support this claim, I present two similar images as potential explanations. The first image, titled “Jesus Praying,” is an illustration from Ferreira’s *Guicheng* (Ferreira Before 1628, 14a) (Figure 6). The second image, titled “The Yellow Emperor Inquiring about the Dao,” is from Wang Shizhen’s 王世貞 edited volume *Youxiang Liexian Quanzhuan* 有象列仙全傳 (*Complete Biographies of All Immortals with Illustrations*)⁷ (henceforth “*Liexian*”), published in 1581 (Figure 7). It is important to note that I do not assert that the “Image of Jesus” originated from these illustrations but rather emphasize that this specific style of illustration was prevalent during this period and had established a distinct mode of representation. Thus, this type of image serves as the source of the influence for the “Image of Jesus” illustration.

The text of “The Life of Jesus” in *Tongjian* extensively relies on Ferreira’s *Guicheng*, except for the section concerning Jesus’ Passion, which is sourced from Pantoja’s *Shimo*. In Ferreira’s book, preceding the mentioned identical passage, there is an illustration titled “Jesus Praying” (Figure 6). This image portrays Jesus kneeling at the edge of a cliff, deeply engaged in prayer, while an angel emerges from the clouds above.

The illustration found in Ferreira’s *Guicheng* adopts the customary techniques and composition commonly observed in Chinese woodblock-printed illustrations. It incorporates elements such as rocks, tree branches, and palatial structures (here used as a representation of the Christian notion of heaven) amidst the mountains (Figure 6). The substan-

tial localization of the text is evident, portraying Jesus in an appearance reminiscent of a Buddhist monk on Earth. However, I believe that this specific illustration (Figure 6), while corresponding to the original text, may not have directly influenced the illustrator, Dai Jun.



Figure 6. “Jesus Praying,” illustration from Ferreira’s *Guichen* (Ferreira Before 1628, 14a).

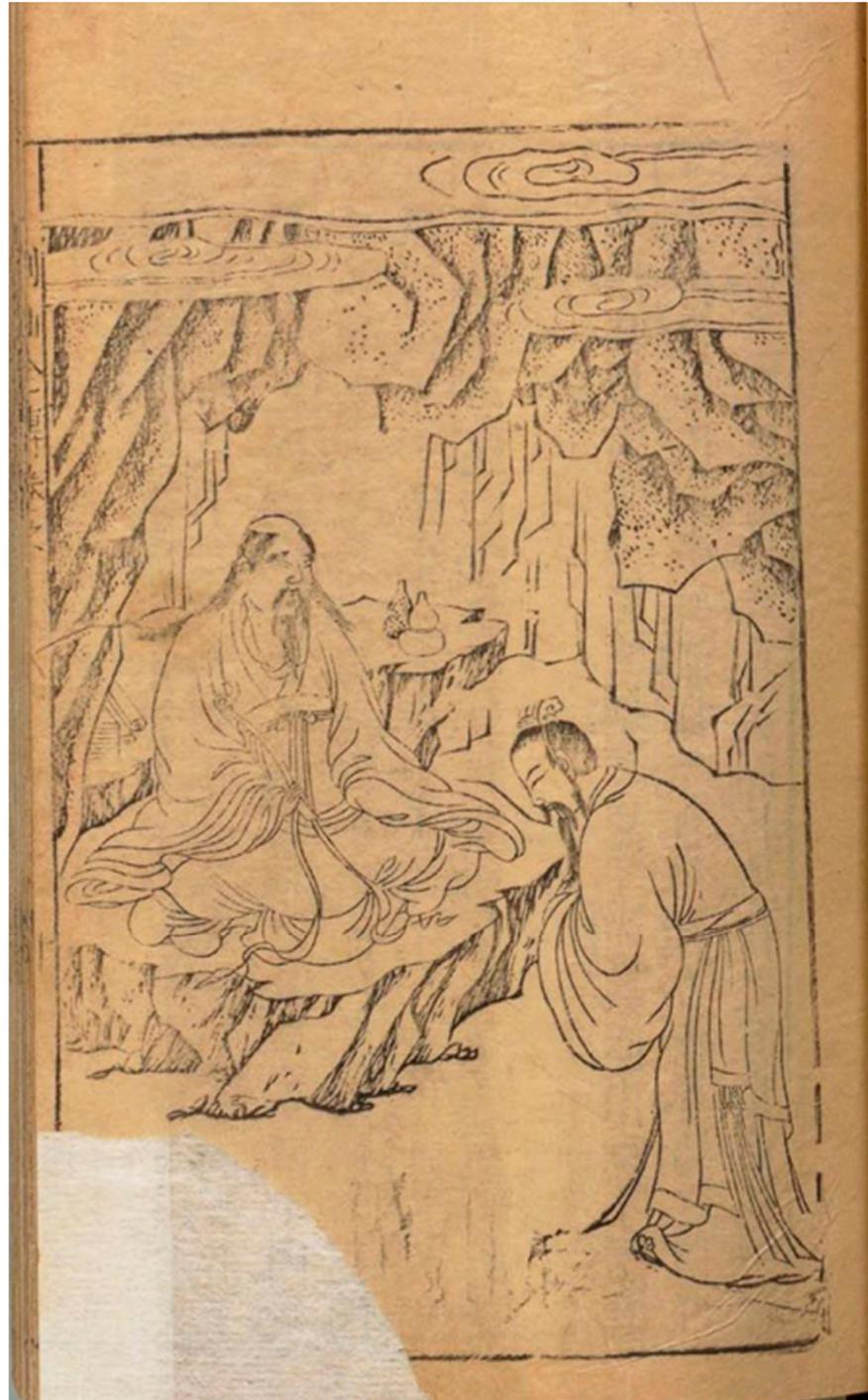


Figure 7. “The Yellow Emperor Inquiring about the Dao” (Wang 1581, vol 1, 9b).

While comparable illustrations are not the precise origin, it is highly likely that Dai Jun and others encountered them. As they read the text (or simultaneously viewed the image), it likely triggered their imaginations to envision a scene infused with distinct Chinese elements. It is probable that Dai Jun and others encountered similar illustrations in the Chinese works of Jesuit fathers, and their inspiration may have also been influenced by the prevalent woodcut illustrations of this era. Interestingly, I came across a comparable illustration in a contemporary book, Wang Shizhen’s work *Liexian*, which showcases a strikingly similar image (Figure 7). This particular illustration, titled 黃帝問道圖 (The Yellow Emperor Inquiring about the Dao), bears a vague resemblance to Figure 2.

The accompanying Chinese text for this illustration (Figure 7) is as follows: “黃帝立為天子十九年，聞廣成子在崆峒之上，乃往見之”。 My translation of the text is as follows: “After reigning as the Emperor for nineteen years, the Yellow Emperor heard that Guangchengzi 廣成子⁸ was located atop Mount Kongtong, so he went to pay him a visit.” In this illustration, Guangchengzi is portrayed as the seated elderly figure, while Huangdi 黃帝 (the Yellow Emperor)⁹ is represented by the bowing figure wearing Taoist attire. A clear similarity can be observed when comparing Figures 2 and 7.

There is no direct evidence to establish the specific influence of Wang Shizhen’s work on Dai Jun. However, during the Ming and Qing dynasties, there were widespread works similar to Wang’s *Liexian* that may have included comparable illustrations. The presence of “the Yellow Emperor Inquiring about the Dao” illustration offers weak evidence rather than conclusive proof of the influence between the two versions. Nevertheless, it underscores a similarity that deserves attention from future researchers and prompts the need for further investigation.

To summarize, there is no direct correlation between the text of “The Life of Jesus” in *Tongjian* and the illustrations of the “Image of Jesus.” The differences and variations in the printing of Chinese characters and illustration styles between earlier and later versions have resulted in diverse interpretations among scholars. Additionally, the text of “The Life of Jesus” in *Tongjian* draws from Ferreira’s *Guicheng* and Pantoja’s *Shimo*. It is likely that Dai Jun, the illustrator of *Tongjian*, was influenced by the images found in Ferreira’s and Pantoja’s works, leading him to utilize his familiar Chinese painting techniques and depict Jesus as a monk from the Western Territories.

3. The Image of the Virgin Mary

Within the collection of 120 illustrations found in *Tongjian*, there exists another noteworthy depiction in addition to the “Image of Jesus”. This particular image portrays the Virgin Mary (Figure 8). In the 1712 first edition of *Tongjian*, an illustration titled the “Image of the Virgin Mary” was included, presenting the Virgin Mary alongside a girl from Xihe (the Western River), referred to as “Xihe Shaonu” 西河少女 (the “West River Maiden”). The depiction of the Virgin Mary features her with her back turned towards the viewer, while the West River Maiden gazes back at the Virgin Mary, creating an impression of a conversation between the two figures. The artistic style used to portray the distant clouds, mountains, grass, and trees reflects the local aesthetics, evoking a sense of mysticism and ethereal beauty associated with a realm beyond the ordinary.

The enigmatic figure known as the “West River Maiden” appears in various Taoist mythological works. Despite conducting a thorough examination of all 22 volumes of *Tongjian*, there are no relevant narratives that mention the West River Maiden. However, the story of the West River Maiden holds significant importance in Taoist mythology. In Sima Qian’s *Shiji* 史記 (*The Grand Scribe’s Records*), particularly in the essay “Wei Jiangjun Biaoqi Liezhuan” 衛將軍驃騎列傳 (“Biography of General Wei Qing and [General of] Agile Cavalry”), there is a reference to the sentence “Now the General (Wei Qing) of Chariots and Cavalry has crossed Hsi-ho 西河 (the Western River), and reached Kao-ch’ueh” (今車騎將軍青度西河至高關) (Ssu-ma 2010, p. 319). In this context, the Western River refers to a portion of the Yellow River that flows from south to north between Ningxia 寧夏 and Inner Mongolia. The location of Xihe (the West River), mentioned earlier, is roughly the Western Territories (Xiyu) referred to in the previous text. The story of the West River Maiden is also found in other Taoist mythological works, including the renowned and influential book *Shenxian Zhuan* 神仙傳 (*Biographies of Immortals*) (Ge 1998, pp. 166–67). Although falsely attributed to Ge Hong 葛洪 (283–343), this book was actually edited by later authors. Another notable source of information on the subject of the West River Maiden’s story can be found in the collection of short stories called *Taiping Guangji Chao* 太平廣記鈔. This book was compiled by Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 (1574–1646), a novelist from the Ming Dynasty (Feng 2019, pp. 135–36).

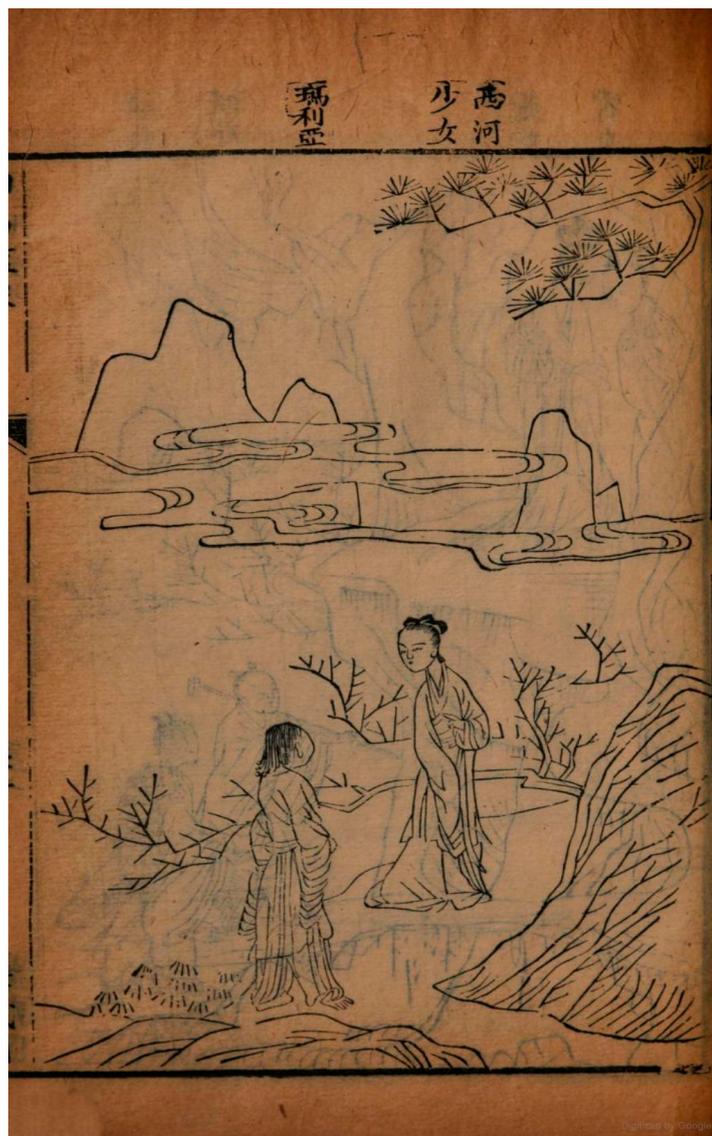


Figure 8. Illustration of “The West River Maiden and the Virgin Mary” from *Tongjian* (Xu and Cheng 1712, 52b). The above heading states the names of the two individuals in the image: “Ma-li-ya” 瑪利亞 (the Virgin Mary) on the left and “Xihe Shaonu” 西河少女 (the West River Maiden) on the right.

In Feng Menglong’s work, there is a passage about the “West River Maiden” that reads as follows in the Chinese text: “雍州人，入華山得道。……漢遣使行經西河，於城東見女子笞一老翁，頭白如雪，跪而受杖，怪而問之。” Here is my English rendition: “She hailed from Yongzhou¹⁰, ventured into Mount Hua, and attained enlightenment to transcend into an immortal being... During the Han Dynasty, an envoy was dispatched and traversed through a locale known as the Western River. On the eastern outskirts of the town, they chanced upon a young woman vigorously chastising an elderly man. This aged individual possessed hair as white as snow and humbly knelt to endure the thrashing with a cane. Intrigued and perplexed by this spectacle, they inquired about the situation.” At this moment, the West River Maiden responds, disclosing that the person subjected to the cane punishment is her 71-year-old son, while she herself has already reached the age of 130 years.

In summary, *Tongjian* is a compilation of writings that assimilates the ideas of previous authors and draws inspiration from similar works of the past. Scholars during the Qing

Dynasty possibly viewed the concept of “Yuanxi” (“the far west”) and “Xiyu” (“the Western Territories”) as interchangeable, just like the west mentioned in the “Western River.” Consequently, the illustration depicting the West River Maiden and the Virgin Mary together can be seen as a reflection of this imaginative perspective.

The name of the “West River Maiden” is mentioned only once again in the entire 22-volume book. Specifically, it appears in Volume 15 of the second part, associating her with the genealogy of the gods of Mount Hua 華山 in the “Thirty-Six Heavenly Caverns and Seventy-Two Blessed Lands of Jade Register” (玉冊三十六洞天 仙籍七十二福地). She is described as being “ranked among the immortals”, and her name is recorded in the immortal register. The subsequent genealogies of the gods in the book were composed by Cheng Yuqi and others, situating all the gods within the spatial framework of China, encompassing the directions of east, south, west, north, up, down, left, and right, thereby creating a unique Chinese Taoist pantheon. However, it is important to note that Jesus and the Virgin Mary are not included in this Taoist immortal registry because they do not belong to the Chinese pantheon of gods and cannot be associated with any specific mythical location within the realm of “Heavenly Caverns and Blessed Lands” (洞天福地) in Taoism.

Among the numerous reprints that followed, there was one edition of *Tongjian* that stood out with the highest print run and greatest influence. This edition is known as the critical version by Huang Zhanglun 黃掌綸, titled “*Xinke Huangzhanglun Xiansheng Pingding Shenxianjian*” 新刻黃掌綸先生評訂神仙鑒 (*Newly Engraved and Edited Mirror of Immortals with Annotations by Mr. Huang Zhanglun*). The first edition of this version was originally published in 1795. It later came to be known as “*Shengxiangjian*” 神仙鑒 (*Mirror of Immortals*). The content of Huang Zhanglun’s critical edition is essentially consistent with Xu Dao’s 1712 first edition, but there are significant differences in the series of illustrations that accompany it. Cheng Yuyao notes that the illustrations in *Tongjian* faced criticism for consolidating unrelated characters within the same frame, lacking emphasis on a central figure, likely driven by cost-saving motives regarding printing (Cheng 2021, p. 88). In other words, the revised edition merged characters from the original illustrations into composite images, combining multiple separate illustrations or individual character depictions into a single picture, all aimed at minimizing publishing costs. During my investigation, I discovered that in Huang’s critical edition, the illustration featuring the Virgin Mary and the West River Maiden is combined with images of Taoist immortals, resulting in a composite picture. Please refer to Figure 9, where I have named this illustration “Image of a Group of Immortals.” This discovery provides additional evidence to support the belief that the illustrators of the different editions either opted for cost-saving measures regarding printing, neglected the relationship between the illustrations and the text, or possibly had a limited understanding of the narratives depicted in the text.

In Figure 9, the depicted group of immortals consists not only of the Virgin Mary and the West River Maiden but also includes the following Taoist immortals: Liu Chen 劉晨; Ruan Zhao 阮肇; Li Ying 麗英; Zhen Zhen 貞貞; Yin Siming 殷司命; Lu Miaodian 魯妙典; and Yin Xueqiao 尹雪翹. Upon comparing these immortal stories in the Huang’s 1795 critical edition with their respective images, the following findings were observed: (1) With the exception of Yin Xueqiao, all the characters have their own unique legendary tales, all of which take place after the narrative of the story “The Life of Jesus”. (2) The 1712 first edition of *Tongjian* features a series of illustrations that correspond to the individual immortal stories following the “Image of Jesus” (Figures 10 and 11). (3) In Huang’s critical edition, all the mentioned immortal images are integrated together and placed on a single page, as seen in Figure 9.

In Figure 9, the depiction shows the Virgin Mary positioned in the center, facing away from the viewer, adorned with both a crown and a Taoist headpiece. At the culmination of “The Story of Jesus” in *Tongjian*, the text reveals “後十日，天神降臨，迎母升舉，立於九品之上，為天地之母皇，世人之主保” (“Ten days later, the heavenly angels descended to lift his mother, raising her to the highest rank, becoming the empress mother of heaven and

earth, the protector of all humanity”). In the text of Ferreira’s *Guicheng*, the corresponding passage reads as follows: “天主罷德肋、天主費略、天主斯彼多利多三多，特立爾為天地之元后，賜爾榮福，超眾諳若與眾聖人，為我世人托賴轉達的保主” (Ferreira Before 1628, pp. 32–33). Here is my English rendition: “God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit crown you to be the Empress Mother of Heaven and Earth, bestowing upon you glory and blessings surpassing all angles and saints, while entrusting you with the role of humanity’s guardian and the task of imparting truth.” In Ferreira’s later, revised edition, this sentence was modified to “天主立聖母在於九品天神之上，以為天地之主母，及世人之主保” (Ferreira 2014, p. 166). Here is my English rendition: “God established the Holy Mother above the nine ranks of heavenly spirits (angels), as the Mother of Heaven and Earth and the protector of humanity.” The content of this sentence is identical to the sentence in *Tongjian*. In the previous sentence, “天主” corresponds to the English term “God” (the Lord of Heaven), “罷德肋” corresponds to the Latin word “Pater” (which translates to “the father” in English), “費略” corresponds to the Latin term “Filius” (which translates to “the son” in English), and “斯彼多利多三多” corresponds to the Latin phrase “Spiritus Sanctus” (which translates to “the Holy Spirit” in English). The last three Chinese terms together represent the concept of the Holy Trinity in Christianity.



Figure 9. “Image of a Group of Immortals,” from *Shengxiangjian* (Xu and Cheng 1795, p. 13).

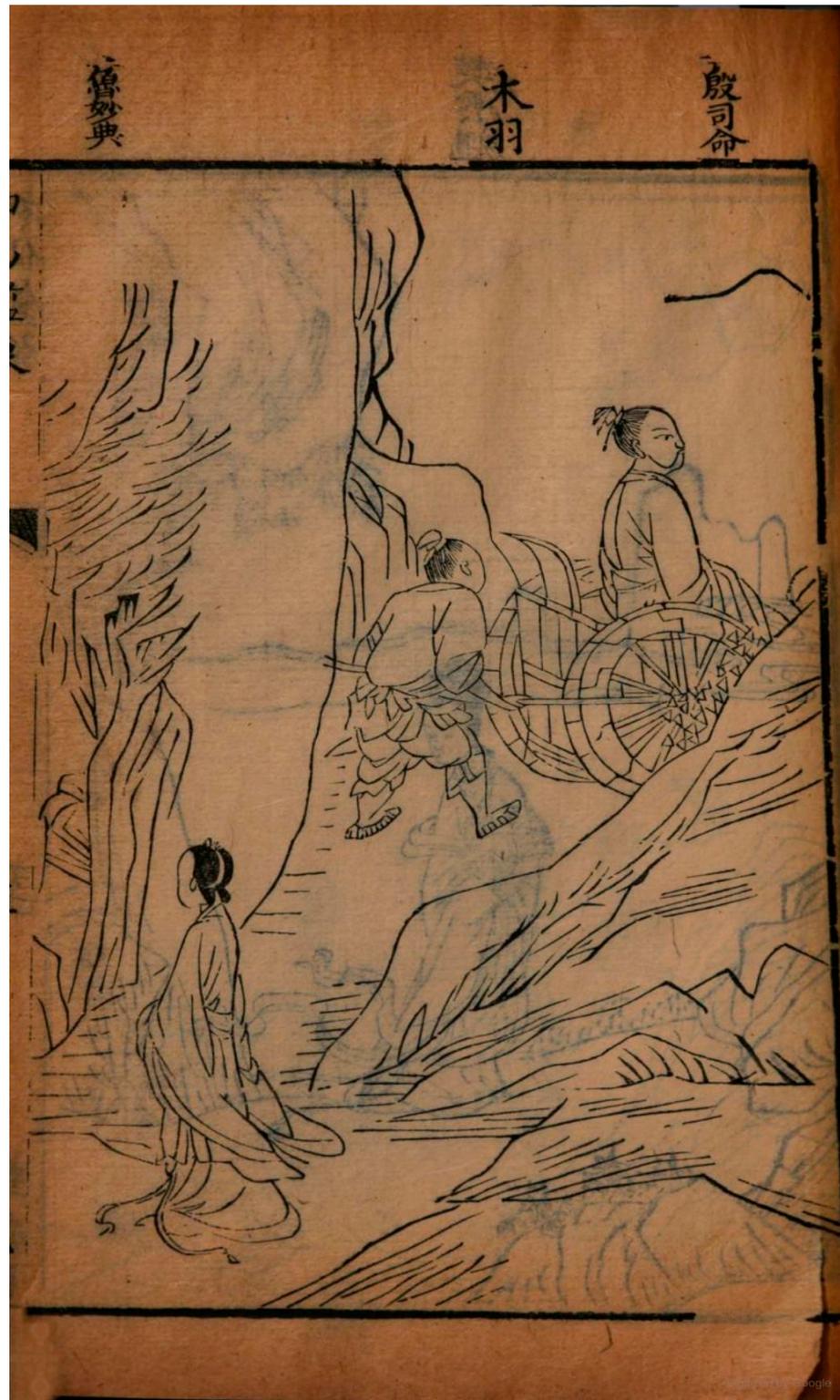


Figure 10. Illustration from *Tongjian* (Xu and Cheng 1712, 51b).

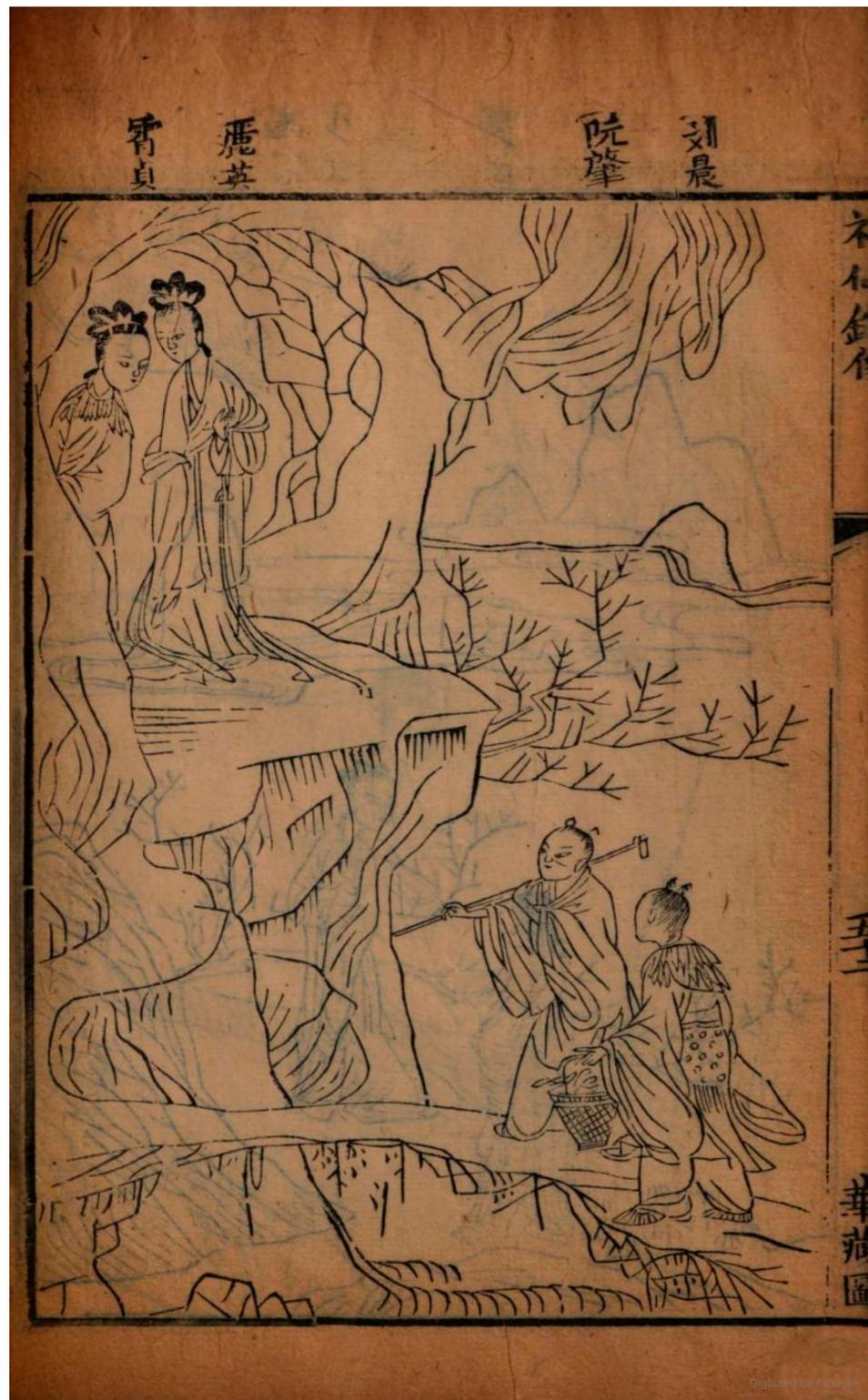


Figure 11. Illustration from *Tongjian* (Xu and Cheng 1712, 52b).

Regarding the previously mentioned depiction of the crowned Virgin Mary, Ferreira's *Guicheng* includes a corresponding illustration (Figure 12). This particular illustration, titled "Coronation of the Virgin Mary," portrays God the Father, God the Son, and the Holy Spirit (represented by a dove) crowning the Virgin Mary above the clouds. However, in the 1712 first edition of *Tongjian* (Figure 7), the Virgin Mary is depicted as a female Taoist

immortal. Additionally, in Figure 9, there is an intriguing depiction of her wearing a Taoist headpiece, specifically a Daoguan道冠 (the literal translation is “Daoist crown”), instead of a crown. This transformation of the Virgin Mary’s crown into a Taoist headpiece exemplifies how Christianity was integrated within the framework of the indigenous religion. *Tongjian* is a compilation of immortal stories primarily centered around Taoism, intertwining the narratives of diverse religious figures into Taoist tales. By incorporating these figures into familiar contexts, *Tongjian* achieves the integration and harmony of multiple religions, reflecting the characteristics of religious synthesis and unification observed in the post-early-Qing era.



Figure 12. “Coronation of the Virgin Mary,” Ferreira’s *Guichen* (Ferreira Before 1628, 31b).

Dai Bufan once commented on the arrangement of these illustrations in *Tongjian*, noting, “In a single picture, there are often several unrelated figures, including Buddha and Taoist practitioners on the same page, without any connection. It resembles the illustrated edition of *Shanhai Jing* 山海經 (*the Classic of Mountains and Seas*) from the Ming Dynasty” (Dai 1982, pp. 267–68). The characters in the images are mixed together in a peculiar and

unrelated manner. What factors led to this situation? One possible speculation is that the editors and illustrators, driven by the goal of cost reduction, hastily created the illustrations without adequately considering the cohesive integration of the characters and text. As a result, a compilation of incongruous images emerged, indicating a lack of coherence in the final outcome. The illustrators of various versions were not limited to drawing inspiration solely from *Shanhai Jing*. They likely also sought references from and imitated works like Ferreira's *Guicheng* and illustrations from other immortal biographies of the same era. From the local characteristics of these images, it is evident that the depictions of Jesus and the Virgin Mary bear more resemblance to the illustrations found in the widely circulated immortal biographies of the Ming and Qing dynasties.

4. Conclusions

Tongjian is a collection of Taoist stories that includes narratives of leaders from different religions. The story of Jesus in *Tongjian* is derived from the works of Ferreira and Pantoja and constitutes merely a fraction of the book, which consists of 22 volumes and over one hundred stories in its entirety. Consequently, this short narrative does not diminish the central position of Taoism within the entirety of the book. In addition, it unveils the open pantheon structure of Taoism, in which the position of the main deities remains firmly established at the center, while gods from other cultural traditions can be continuously incorporated in peripheral positions. Previous research has overlooked the assimilation of elements from Christianity into Taoist works, as exemplified by this article. The lack of available information prevents us from obtaining related materials about the editors or illustrators of this book, making it impossible to verify how Christianity influenced Taoist literature in this period. Notably, most Chinese writings by Jesuit missionaries in the 17th and 18th centuries adhered to traditional woodblock printing, featuring illustrations in a Chinese style, despite their contents being related to the Bible and Christianity. The illustrations of Jesus and the Virgin Mary in *Tongjian* also demonstrate the characteristics of traditional woodblock prints, with limited heterogeneity. It appears that the illustrator consistently employed traditional expressions and portrayed Jesus and the Virgin Mary as Taoist immortals, resulting in a localization that disregarded foreign cultural heterogeneity.

After the publication of *Tongjian* in 1712, multiple editions and reprints of the book were produced, resulting in the emergence of various versions. Consequently, when contemporary scholars encountered different versions but lacked a comprehensive understanding of the version system, they might have made errors in their judgments. Dai Bufan, Xing Dongtian, and other scholars offer diverse interpretations of the text and images related to "The Life of Jesus" in the book, based on their analysis of different versions. The assessment of the validity and limitations of their arguments can only be achieved by examining multiple versions.

In the 1712 first edition of *Tongjian*, there are 120 portraits of immortals, including two images titled the "Image of Jesus" and the "Image of the Virgin Mary", which are connected to "The Life of Jesus." However, there are slight variations in the accompanying text for the "Image of Jesus" across different versions. Notably, the images and text do not directly correspond. The illustrator, Dai Jun, mistakenly treated the place name "Ru-de-ya" as a personal name, but subsequent editions corrected it to "Ba-de-le." In other words, the depiction of the old man in the image represents the "saint" mentioned in the text, while the child represents Jesus. The image portrays the scene of Jesus bidding farewell to the saint before his departure, contrary to the previous belief that it represents the baptism of Jesus or the old Jesus preaching to the child, as suggested by Xing Dongtian.

I argue that both depictions of the "Image of Jesus" and the "Image of the Virgin Mary" were influenced by a diverse range of sources, reflecting the complex interplay of cultural and religious influences. These images drew inspiration from Chinese literary texts and visual representations in Chinese Christian texts produced by Jesuits in China, such as the "Rules for Reciting the Rosary." Moreover, they clearly display traces of influence from illustrations found in biographies of immortals, as seen in works such as Wang Shizhen's

“Complete Biography of Immortals.” A comprehensive analysis of these two images reveals a multifaceted phenomenon attributable to various factors. Firstly, the impact of folk Taoist texts played a significant role in shaping the artistic and conceptual aspects of these depictions. Secondly, the distinctive characteristics of Ming and Qing immortal genealogies contributed to the specific portrayals of divine figures. Furthermore, the dissemination and localization of Jesuit missionaries in China exerted an influence on the artistic representations of Jesus and the Virgin Mary. These images serve as evidence of the dynamic dialogue and integration between contemporary Chinese and Western religions and cultures. They exemplify how local literati adeptly incorporated indigenous elements into their artistic expressions, effectively transforming foreign content into a distinct local style.

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Data Availability Statement: No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Notes

- 1 This study relied on primary sources obtained from the following institutions: the Harvard University Library system, the libraries at Washington University in St. Louis in the United States, the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BNF Collection Chi-nois), the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin in Germany, Peking University Library, and the National Library of China. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to these libraries, as well as my colleagues and friends, especially Ms. Yuhua Shi, for their generous support throughout the research process. The versions examined are as follows: (1) *Lidai Shenxian Tongjian* 歷代神仙通鑒 (*The Comprehensive Mirror of Immortals Throughout the Dynasties*), a 22-volume work compiled by Xu Dao 徐道 and Cheng Yuqi 程毓奇, published by Zhihe Tang 致和堂 in 1712, available at the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek in Berlin. (2) The National Library of Berlin (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek) holds multiple versions of the book *Shenxian Tongjian* 神仙通鑒 (*The Comprehensive Mirror of Immortals*), including several editions edited by Huang Zhanglun 黃掌綸, likely from the mid-Qing dynasty, although specific publication details are not provided. (3) *Shen Xian Jian* 神仙鑒 is included in the book series *Zhongguo Zhexue Sixiang Yaoji Congbian* 中國哲學思想要籍叢編 (*Essential Collection of Chinese Philosophical and Intellectual Works*), vol. 1, published in Taipei by Guangwen Shuju 廣文書局 in 1975. (4) Another version of *Shen Xian Jian* 神仙鑒 is included in the book series *Zhongguo Minjian Xinyang Ziliao Huibian* 中國民間信仰資料彙編 (*Chinese Folk Belief Documentary Series*), vol. 1, edited by Wang Qiugui 王秋桂 and Li Fengmao 李豐楙, published by the Taiwan Student Bookstore in Taipei in 1989. (5) *Lidai Shenxian Tongjian* 歷代神仙通鑒 (*The Comprehensive Mirror of Immortals Throughout the Dynasties*) was published in Shanghai (around 1920–1930) by Jiangdong Shuju 上海江東書局 and Maoji Shuju 茂記書局, following the edited version by Huang Zhanglun. (6) *Shenxian Tongjian* 神仙通鑒, which is included in *Zangwai Daoshu* 藏外道書 (vol. 32), was edited by Hu Daojing 胡道靜 and others. It is a reprint published by Bashu Shushe 巴蜀書社 in Chengdu in 1994. However, this edition is of poor quality, has a small font size and incomplete content, and only covers the content from the first section of Volume 1 to the ninth section of Volume 10. (7) A modern transcribed and re-edited version, titled *Lidai Shenxian Yanyi* 歷代神仙演義 (*The Legend of Immortals Throughout the Ages*), edited by Zhou Jing 周晶, was published by Liaoning Ancient Books Publishing House in Shenyang in 1995. It should be noted that this edition contains some errors in transcribing and editing.
- 2 The Kang Collection of Leiden University Library possesses a copy of the reprinted edition titled “*Xinke Chen Hongmou Piping Jishi Tongjian*” 新刻陳宏謀批評記史通鑑 (*The Newly Engraved Chen Hongmou’s Critical Edition of Tongjian*), comprising 39 volumes instead of the original 22 volumes found in the 1712 first edition.
- 3 This book went through several re-editions, and at times it was also known as “*Song Nianzhu Guicheng*” 誦念珠規程 or “*Shengmu Meigui Shiwuduan*” 聖母玫瑰十五端 or “*Shengmu Meigui Jin*” 聖母玫瑰經. Despite the different titles, these various versions shared a similar content, differing primarily in their headings. For a detailed description of the text, along with its variant titles and other reprints, see the CCT Database (by using the keywords “Sheng mu mei gui jing shi wu duan”): https://libis.be/pa_cct/index.php/Detail/objects/2127 (accessed on 2 December 2023).
- 4 For information regarding this book and its various versions, please refer to the CCT Database (by using the keywords “Tian zhu Ye su shou nan shi mo”): https://libis.be/pa_cct/index.php/Detail/objects/2537 (accessed on 2 December 2023).
- 5 The term “Xiyu” 西域 (the Western Territories) refers to the regions situated beyond the Yumen Pass (玉門關) in ancient Chinese history.
- 6 Traditional woodblock printing (雕板印刷) in China is an ancient and unique technique widely used for creating books and artworks. It involves meticulously carving characters or images onto wooden blocks, applying ink to the blocks, and manually

transferring the inked design onto paper. This method is highly regarded for its ability to produce intricate and high-quality prints, making it a vital medium for artistic expression and the preservation and dissemination of Chinese culture and literature.

- 7 The book, titled under Wang Shizhen (possibly falsely attributed as the compiler), was published by Wang Yunpeng's 汪雲鵬 Nanjing (金陵) publishing house, Wanhuxuan 玩虎軒, in 1581. This nine-volume book includes a preface by Li Panlong 李攀龍 (1514–1570). With over 200 illustrations, it chronicles the stories of over 500 Taoist immortals, ranging from ancient times to the mid-Ming period, starting with Laozi 老子 and culminating with the Ming Taoist Priest Zhou Side 周思德.
- 8 Guangchengzi, a character in the classic Chinese novel *Fengshen Yanyi*, is both a Taoist deity and a significant figure in Taoist mythology. According to Taoist beliefs, Guang Chengzi served as the manifestation of Taishang Laojun (also known as Daode Tianzun) during the reign of the Yellow Emperor in ancient Chinese history. See Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guang_Chengzi (accessed on 2 December 2023).
- 9 Huangdi 黃帝, known as the Yellow Emperor, is one of the mythological emperors of ancient China. He holds the distinction of being a cultural hero and is revered as a patron saint of Taoism. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Huangdi> (accessed on 2 December 2023).
- 10 Yongzhou 雍州 is renowned in the *Shujing* 尚書 (*Book of Documents*) as one of the fabled “Nine Provinces” 九州 of ancient China’s prehistoric era. During the Eastern Han dynasty in AD 194, the government established the Yongzhou Inspectorate, which had jurisdiction over the commanderies of Wuwei, Zhangye, Jiuquan, Dunhuang, and Xihai to the west of the Liang River. For more detailed information, see Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yongzhou_\(ancient_China\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yongzhou_(ancient_China)) (accessed on 2 January 2024).

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