

Número 55, diciembre 2025, pp. 388-415
DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/Temas-Americanistas.2025.i55.16>

EUROPEAN JESUIT MISSIONARIES AND THE 1747 SUZHOU RELIGIOUS INCIDENT IN MID QING DYNASTY CHINA¹

MISIONEROS JESUITAS EUROPEOS Y EL INCIDENTE RELIGIOSO DE SUZHOU DE 1747 EN LA CHINA DE MEDIADOS DE LA DINASTÍA QING

Liyu Xue
Shanghai Normal University
<https://orcid.org/0009-0006-6682-1225>

Abstract

Following the ban of Yongzheng period (1723-1735), Jesuits Antoino José Henriques and Tristan d'Attimis rebuilt Catholic networks in Suzhou during the early Qianlong era (1736-1795). Crucially, merchants and boatmen, rather than the gentry, provided essential operational assistance. In 1747, the missionaries were arrested and subsequently executed. This study examines the 1747 Suzhou Religious Incident by cross-referencing Qing official records with Catholic writings. It aims to clarify historical facts, highlight the believers' unique social composition, and reconstruct the historical images of the two missionaries.

Key Words: Catholic Church, official records, merchants, missions, jesuits, Qing Dynasty.

Resumen

Tras la prohibición del periodo Yongzheng (1723-1735), los jesuitas Antonio José Henriques y Tristan d'Attimis reconstruyeron las redes católicas en Suzhou durante la era Qianlong (1736-1795). Crucialmente, comerciantes y barqueros, más que la clase letrada, brindaron asistencia operativa esencial. En 1747 los misioneros fueron arrestados y posteriormente ejecutados. Este estudio examina el Incidente Religioso de Suzhou de 1747, contrastando registros oficiales Qing con escritos católicos, con el fin de esclarecer la verdad histórica, destacar la singular composición social de los fieles y reconstruir la imagen histórica de ambos misioneros.

Palabras Clave: Iglesia Católica, registros oficiales, comerciantes, misiones, jesuitas, Dinastía Qing.

Fecha recepción: 17/4/2025

Fecha aceptación: 28/12/2025

¹ This article is a preliminary achievement of the National Social Science Fund's general project "Compilation, Translation, and Research of Spanish Archives of Maritime Trade between Jiangnan and Manila (1769-1776)" (Project No. 20BZS154).

Número 55, diciembre 2025, pp. 388-415

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/Temas-Americanistas.2025.i55.16>

The Suzhou Religious Incident (also known as the Jiangnan Religious Incident) began in the winter of 1747 (12th year of Qianlong period) lasted several months, and was finalized in the spring of the following year. The incident involved dozens of Chinese Catholics residing in Jiangnan and other places. The center of the incident was located in Gezhuang Village of Zhaowen County, Suzhou Prefecture, Jiangsu Province. Regarding this incident, the famous Catholic scholar Fang Hao summarized the documents and historical materials within the Catholic Church, based on which he wrote the *Huang An-duo* (Fr. Antoino José Henriques), *Tan Fang-ji* (Fr. Tristan d'Attimis), *Tang De-guang*, *Wang Qin-yi*, *Shen-Tao Shi* section in *the Stories of Chinese Catholics*, to show the procedure of the Jiangnan Religious Incident in 1747.²

In recent years, although a number of scholars have dealt with the incident to varying degrees in their studies of Catholic groups or incidents in the middle Qing Dynasty, but the details of the incident have not been specifically addressed.³ Han Qi and Wu Min systematically collected the existing official documents of the Qing authorities related to Catholic religious incidents in the mid Qing Dynasty, which facilitated related research. The author examines the details of Fang Hao's *the Stories of Chinese Catholics* and compares them with the Qing government official records and historical materials published in recent years, and finds that there are a lot of

² Fang Hao, *The Stories of Chinese Catholics*, Vol. II (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1988), pp. 111-112.

³ For instance: Zhou Ping-ping, "A Discussion on Two Religious Cases in Jiangnan during the Qianlong Period," *World Religions Studies*, No. VI (2010), pp. 95-105; Bin Jing, "The Missionary Activities of Chinese Catholics during the Prohibition against Catholicism in Qing Dynasty (1721-1846)" (PhD diss., Ji'nan University, 2007); Feng Er-kang, "On the Transmission and Disciple of Catholicism during the Anti-religion Movements of Yongzheng and Qianlong," *Anhui Historical Studies*, No. I (2013), pp. 17-28; Feng Er-kang, "On Jiangnan Catholic Religious Activity in the Early Qing Dynasty," *History Teaching*, No. XVIII (2013), pp.3-10; Feng Er-kang, "The Boatman Followers in the Missionary Activities of Western Missionaries in the Early Qing Dynasty," *Journal of Tianjin Normal University (Social Sciences)*, No. II (2020), pp. 23-27; José Luis Caño Ortigosa and Fabio Yuchung Lee, *El otro ultramar, crónica de un jesuita en China: Relación del padre Adriano de las cortes del viaje naufragio en Chaucheo de la gran china* (Madrid: Sílex Ediciones, 2022); José Luis Caño Ortigosa, "Náutica y comercio marítimo, actores y prácticas documentales para un lenguaje común en el primer contacto hispánico-sínico", *Navegaciones en Época Moderna: Hombres, barcos y naufragios*, eds. Vicente Pajuelo Moreno and José María García Redondo, (Aranjuez: Doce Calles, 2024), pp. 149-174.

Número 55, diciembre 2025, pp. 388-415
DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/Temas-Americanistas.2025.i55.16>

contradictions in the key details cannot be corresponded to each other and there are one-sidedness, inaccuracies and errors in both the Catholic literature and the Qing government official records. In this paper, the author will re-examine certain details of this incident by comparing and analyzing the documentary evidence, showing the differences between the Catholic literature and the Qing government official records, showing the spread of Catholicism and the activities of Catholics in Jiangnan after the Qing government's ban on Catholicism during Qianlong period.

The Achievements of Fr. Antoino José Henriques and Fr. Tristan d'Attimis in Jiangnan Region

Since the end of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), Jiangnan has long been a prosperous area for Catholicism, with a large number of priests and parishioners, even during the “Calendrical Case”, it was not greatly affected. However, in the early years of Yong-zheng period, the Qing court formally aimed at banning Catholicism throughout the country. In Jiangnan, the Governor General Zha-bi-na, Provincial Governor He Tian-pei and the local officials of various prefectures and counties issued one after another order to prohibit Catholicism. With the expulsion of Western priests, churches were closed and Catholic activities were banned. In Yongzheng period, missionary Western priests originally in Jiangnan such as Jean de Saa (Chinese name “Yang Ruo-wang”), Emmanuel Mendes (Chinese name “Meng You-yi”), Emmanuel Pinto (Chinese name “Bing-duo-ma-nuo”), Louis Porquet (Chinese name “Bo Lei-si”) and Dominique de Britto (Chinese name “Bi Deng-rong”) were forced to return to Macao.⁴ The few Western priests who remained in Jiangnan to secretly preach, such as Jean Baborier (Chinese name “Shen Ruo-wang”), Etienne Peixoto (Chinese name “He Tian-zhang”), and Romin Hinderer (Chinese name “De Ma-nuo”) were mostly already

⁴ “Guangzhou Prefecture's Report on the Trial of Ni Wei-zhi and Others Involved in the Jiangnan Case,” April 28th 1749, eds. Wu Min and Han Qi, *Compilation of Catholic Documents from the Yongzheng and Qianlong Period Collected in Europe* (Shanghai: Shanghai People's Press, 2007), p. 238.

Número 55, diciembre 2025, pp. 388-415

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/Temas-Americanistas.2025.i55.16>

old. The Catholic Church in Jiangnan experienced a sudden decline. Many believers lost their enthusiasm and stopped participating in religious activities. However, Catholic activities have not been extinct, there were still a considerable number of Catholics still secretly maintained faith, as Jiangsu Provincial Governor in the early years of Qianlong period Chen Da-shou said, "I have always heard that anyone who joins the religion must take oath in front of God and violators will be punished. Although the followers dare not congregate for chanting, they secretly keep the worship and confuse to apostatize. Moreover, its heresies induced all those who were over-ambitious, who sought refuge in strange behavior, and many of them were devoted to it, not only foolish men and women".⁵ At the same time, the Catholic Church outside of China also actively selected new missionaries to travel secretly to Jiangnan through Macao to resume and develop the missionary work. It was against this background that Fr. Antoino José Henriques and Fr. Tristan d'Attimis came to Jiangnan in early Qianlong period.

There is a discrepancy between the Catholic literature and the official records of the Qing government regarding the experiences of Fr. Antoino José Henriques (Chinese name was "Wang An-duo-ni" or "Huang An-duo", 1707-1748) before his entry into China. According to Catholic documents, he was "born in Lisbon, Portugal. After graduating from the Jesuit school in this city, he went to China with the Portuguese envoy. After returning Macao from Beijing, he saw all the preachers going to inland China and Annam via this port and then was inspired to join the Society of Jesus. He was admitted to the seminary in Macau on December 25th, 1727..... He was sent to Manila for advanced study by the prelates and highly valued as the model for other students by the preceptor and principal there. In 1737 he returned to Macau and

⁵ "Suzhou Provincial Governor Chen Da-shou's Memorial on the Strict Investigation of Catholicism," August 6th, 1746, ed. the First Historical Archives of China, *Materials of Western Catholic Activities in China during the Middle and Early Qing Period*, Vol. I (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2003), p. 109.

Número 55, diciembre 2025, pp. 388-415

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/Temas-Americanistas.2025.i55.16>

was sent to Jiangnan for missionary work. This was the area where missionary endeavors had been most successful and also suffered most from religious persecution".⁶ However, in the Qing official archives Fr. Antoino confessed after being arrested, "I desired to preach in China for there were Catholic churches here. So, I set out from my country in May of the 1st year of Qianlong period and took an ocean-going merchant ship whose owner was called du Halde. The voyage was delayed for the foul wind and official inspection, and took fourteen months to arrive in Macao, Guangdong in June of the next year".⁷ Obviously, he concealed from the Qing authorities the experience of having been to Beijing and studying and practicing monasticism for a long time in Macao and Manila.

In the winter of 1737, Fr. Antoino "set out in October, accompanied by Xu Bo-duo-lu (Peter Xu), a native of Wuhe County in Sizhou Prefecture; Xie Yi-na-jue (Ignace Xie), a native of Nan'an Prefecture in Jiangxi Province, and Tan Wen-duo-la (Bonaventure Tan), a native of Macau in Guangdong, who sent me from Mt. Mei Ling to Nan'an, and then hired a river boat to get to *He-gong Ci* (Fr. Etienne Memorial) in Gezhuang Village, Zhaowen County on November 15th by water." *He-gong Ci* is the center of the Suzhou Religious Incident. The Qing official archives record, "There was a Western Catholic church in Gezhuang Village, Zhaowen County, Suzhou Province, which was ordered to be dismantled during Yongzheng period. He Tian-zhang (Fr. Etienne Peixoto), a Westerner who had previously come to Zhaowen, built several two-story and single-story houses next to the church, living in them. ... In the 4th year of Qianlong period (1739), He Tian-zhang passed away and was buried in the church, and

⁶ Louis Pfister, *Biographies and Bibliography of Jesuits in China*, Vol. II, trans. Feng Cheng-jun (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company), 1995, pp. 731-732.

⁷ "Jiangsu Provincial Governor An Ning's Detailed Report on the Trial of Westerner Wang An-duo-ni and Others", 1748, *Compilation of Catholic Documents from the Yongzheng and Qianlong Period Collected in Europe*, pp. 198-235. This archive contains all the testimonies of the arrested believers in the Jiangnan religious case (except Ni Wei-zhi) and the following citations without notes are all from here.

Número 55, diciembre 2025, pp. 388-415

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/Temas-Americanistas.2025.i55.16>

the house was changed to *He-gong Ci*.” Fr. Etienne Peixoto preached in Jiangnan for many years and had achieved great results. When Fr. Antoino arrived, Fr. Etienne Peixoto was still alive. But according to the letter from Fr. Jean Baborier, Fr. Etienne Peixoto “was already old, very tired, and this enthusiastic missionary could no longer perform his missionary duties”.⁸ After Fr. Etienne Peixoto 's death, Fr. Antoino fully inherited his missionary mission, contacting Catholics in Zhaowen, Changshu (the former was separated from the latter during Yongzheng period) and surrounding prefectures and counties. According to *Biographies of Chinese Catholic History*, in 1744 Fr. Antoino was promoted to the director of the Society of Jesus in Jiangnan. In the next year, the Italian Jesuit missionary Fr. Tristan d'Attimis (Chinese name “Tan Fang-ji-ge” or “Tan Fang-ji”, 1708-1748) “also relied on Ignace Xie and Bonaventure Tan to sneak into *He-gong Ci* on November 25th and here he met Fr. Antoino”, becoming Fr. Antoino 's missionary colleague.⁹

At that time, there were not many Western priests hiding in Jiangnan with continuous deaths and departures. The two priests were young and strong, gradually made Zhaowen and Changshu, where *He-gong Ci* was located, the center of Catholic belief in Suzhou, Songjiang, and Taicang Prefecture, and the local church affairs were gradually restored and developed. Besides *He-gong Ci*, the two priests also stayed at the homes of believers Tang De-guang and Shen-Tao Shi during their missionary work.¹⁰ In addition to local believers, many believers from other places came to visit

⁸ Louis Pfister, *Biographies and Bibliography of Jesuits in China*, p. 721. The book believes that Fr. Etienne Peixoto died in 1744 based on the tombstone inscription of him, but according to the testimonies of Fr. Antoin José Henriques and believer Sun Yu-yu, Fr. Etienne Peixoto died in September 1739. After Fr. Etienne Peixoto's death, he was first buried in the church and was relocated to Mt. Yushan in Changshu County in 1744.

⁹ “Jiangsu Provincial Governor An Ning's Detailed Report on the Trial of Westerner Wang An-duo-ni and Others”, 1748, *Compilation of Catholic Documents from the Yongzheng and Qianlong Period Collected in Europe*, pp. 204,198-199.

¹⁰ In Catholic literature, Shen-Tao Shi is portrayed as a loyal female believer over seventy years old, and “she taught children religious doctrines at home, and many of the female believers who suffered in the case were her students.” See Fang Hao, *The Stories of Chinese Catholics*, Vol. II, p. 116. However, according to the Qing official archives, Shen-Tao Shi was fifty-one years old at the time, which is quite different from the age recorded in Catholic literature.

Número 55, diciembre 2025, pp. 388-415

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/Temas-Americanistas.2025.i55.16>

the priests, such as Wang Yu-zhao from Nanhui County in Songjiang Prefecture, who confessed, “Because Wang An-duo-ni (Fr. Antoino) lived in *He-gong Ci*, I went to see him with Zhao Xing-qi. He advised us not to be indifferent to the church's rules and should still read scriptures and worship”. Another example is Yang Wei-song, the “chairman” of the believers in Jiading County, who stated, “Because the foreign religion was banned, I also stopped reading scriptures and worshiping. Later, when I went to Changshu County to buy cotton, I met Tan Fang-ji-ge (Fr. Tristan) in Gezhuang Village, and he told me to read scriptures and worship the cross.” In addition, the two priests also hired boats of boatmen believers to go to neighboring prefectures and counties to contact believers, spread the doctrine and revive the church, establishing a water missionary network system. According to the confessions of the people, Fr. Antoino had been to Danyang County (staying at the home of believer Wang Feng-jia), Jiading County (staying at the home of “chairman” Yang Wei-song), Shangyuan County, Changzhou County, etc., and Fr. Tristan had been to Huating County (staying at the home of believer Wang Jia-hou), Lou County (staying at the home of believer Zhang Shenhou), Changzhou County (staying at the home of believer Guan Xin-de), etc. The places mentioned in the confessions are only a part of the actual activities of the two priests, and their actual scope of activities may cover all prefectures in Jiangnan. Because the two priests are good at adapting to the social environment, “we have been here for a long time, can speak some Suzhou dialect, wear the clothes of the south, so when we encounter police, they can't recognize us. The Baojia leaders see that we are moral people and they don't report to the officials.” They travelled by boat of boatman believers, accompanied and accommodated by believers, with little contact with outsiders. Because of the peak of ban on Catholicism had passed, although they are westerners, they have been preaching for many years without being investigated and

Número 55, diciembre 2025, pp. 388-415

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/Temas-Americanistas.2025.i55.16>

captured.¹¹

According to the confessions of the two priests, Fr. Antoino persuaded 69 people to join the church, and Fr. Tristan persuaded 17 people to join the church. However, upon careful examination of the confessions of the people involved in the case, it is found that there were two situations. One was that they originally did not believe in Catholicism and started to believe after being persuaded by the priests. Those who belong to this situation were only more than a dozen people. The other situation was that they were originally Catholics, but after the Qing court ordered the ban on religion, they began to be indifferent and stopped religious activities. However, after being persuaded by Fr. Antoino and Fr. Tristan, they regained their faith and actively participated in religious activities again, such as the aforementioned Wang Yu-zhao and Yang Wei-song. Most of the believers involved in the case were born in Catholic families and believed in the Lord from a young age, or they had already joined the church early on. However, since Yongzheng period, on the one hand the Qing court issued a ban on religion, and on the other hand Western priests either returned to Macau or died of old age, and the church lacked leadership, falling into disintegration. Many believers could not participate in religious activities, but they still had some faith in their hearts and did not dare to reveal it publicly due to the situation. The arrival of the two priests, persuading “to revive Catholicism in the future, not to be indifferent to church rules, and to talk about some instructive words,” undoubtedly gave a large number of believers hope and inspired their faith, actively participating in religious activities again, and the churches in various places in Jiangnan showed a trend of revival.

However, from the confessions, it can be seen that the work of the two priests was not always successful. Some believers for various reasons refused to restore their

¹¹ “Jiangsu Provincial Governor An Ning's Detailed Report on the Trial of Westerner Wang An-duo-ni and Others”, 1748, *Compilation of Catholic Documents from the Yongzheng and Qianlong Period Collected in Europe*, pp. 208, 213, 215.

Número 55, diciembre 2025, pp. 388-415
DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/Temas-Americanistas.2025.i55.16>

faith. For example, Zhao De-qian from Baoshan County confessed, “Wang an-duo-ni advised me to return to the church, but I thought his words were absurd and refused to follow him.” Another example is Ma Yun-xi from Shanyang County in Huai'an Prefecture, who claimed that when Fr. Antoino came to persuade believers to return to the faith, “although I saw him, I had long left the church and did not follow him.” His son Ma Da-guan also said, “I only met Wang An-duo-ni once and did not follow him.” The boatman Ge Si stated to the authorities, “I don't have time to read scriptures,” and did not join the church.¹²

The Arrest of Fr. Antoino José Henriques and Fr. Tristan d'Attimis

In 1746, a religious incident occurred in Funing Prefecture, Fujian Province, where Bishop San Pedro Sans y Jordá (Chinese name “Bai Duo-lu”), several Western priests and a large number of believers were arrested, shocking the Qing court. Emperor Qianlong issued an edict, “At present, in Funing Prefecture, Fujian, there are Westerners who advocate Catholicism, attracting men and women to worship and chant scriptures. They deceive the ignorant, set up “chairman” and create churches, which are all illegal and harm customs with their heresies and incitement. Catholicism has been banned for a long time. There may be some westerners scattered in other provinces. The governors of each province should investigate secretly. If there are those who use Catholicism to lure men and women to gather and chant scriptures, they should be immediately arrested and punished according to the law. Westerners should all be sent to Guangdong and return to their country by ship within the time limit, without being allowed to stay and cause trouble. If local officials do not sincerely investigate and report and allow them to stay, the governors should accuse immediately”.¹³ From this, another round of

¹² “Jiangsu Provincial Governor An Ning's Detailed Report on the Trial of Westerner Wang An-duo-ni and Others”, 1748, *ibid.*, pp. 214-216, 218.

¹³ *Veritable Records of the Qianlong Emperor*, Vol. CCLXIX, June 1746, in *Veritable Records of the Qing* (*Qing Shilu*), Vol. XII (Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1986), p. 11682.

Número 55, diciembre 2025, pp. 388-415
DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/Temas-Americanistas.2025.i55.16>

the Qing court's ban on Catholicism began nationwide, and it was far more severe than in the early years of Yongzheng period.

Fang Hao's *the Stories of Chinese Catholics* records the origin of the Jiangnan religious case and the arrest of the two priests, which are summarized here:

*“There was a bad believer in Changshu, Mr. You, in the 11th year of Qianlong Period (1746), because of a dispute over land with his clan, was blamed by Fr. Antoino and harbored hatred in his heart. On December 11th 1747, the nephew of this person secretly reported to the Surveillance Commissioner Weng Zao that the two priests lived in the believer's house, and Fr. Tristan and his follower Wang Qin-yi were arrested at the same time...Before Fr. Tristan was arrested, he had met with Fr. Antoino. After the arrest, Fr. Antoino went to Suzhou with Fr. Shen Dong-xing (José Saraiva), communicated with the prison guard secretly and asked him to treat Fr. Tristan well. He then took the merchant ship of believer Shen Tian-ru and planned to go to Song's home in Haiyan County in Zhejiang Province to take a temporary refuge. Unexpectedly, just as he left the Gate Feng of Suzhou it was dawn. While the boat was still in the Huang-tian-dang, he was caught by the police and taken to the city, where he was imprisoned with Fr. Tristan”.*¹⁴

The author compares this account with the relevant content of the Qing official archives and finds that the content is largely inconsistent. Regardless of the minor details, there are several core issues, including the informers on the two priests, the whereabouts of Fr. Antoino before arrest by the authorities, which have obvious discrepancies.

In the existing Qing official archives, there is no record of the betrayal process of the believer Mr. You and his family, but the arrest of the two priests is attributed to

¹⁴ Fang Hao, *The Stories of Chinese Catholics*, Vol. II, pp. 114-116.

Número 55, diciembre 2025, pp. 388-415

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/Temas-Americanistas.2025.i55.16>

the confession of the believer, Xu Lu-zhi. According to the archive *Jiangsu provincial governor An-ning's Detailed Report on the Trial of Westerner Wang An-duo-ni and Others*, the Suzhou Prefecture reported, “In the winter of the 12th year of Qianlong period (1747), it was found that there had been a Catholic church in the Gezhuang Village of Zhaowen County, which was changed to *He-gong Ci* after the demolition. There were three rooms behind the church, which were built by Xu Lu-zhi, a former believer.” Therefore, the authorities “send police to arrest them.” After hearing the news, Xu Lu-zhi voluntarily surrendered on November 11th and reported to the official that “Westerners Wang An-duo-ni and Tan Fang-ji-ge came to live in *Hegong Ci* successively, and persuaded people to chant scriptures and take fasting. They also interacted with Tang De-guang and You Yuan-chang. Now it is heard that there is a Wang Qin-yi who follows Tan Fang-ji-ge and lives in Qian Shang-gong's house near the north gate of Zhaowen County. He can be summoned for interrogation. Wang An-duo-ni is unknown where he has gone.” The officials “immediately detained Tang De-guang, You Yuan-chang and Tan Fang-ji-ge.” In the confessions of several people, many believers from surrounding prefectures and counties were mentioned, but the whereabouts of Fr. Antoino were not mentioned. Suzhou Prefecture authorities immediately “ordered the arrest of the criminals and transferred the case to Songjiang and Taicang Prefecture for joint investigation.” At the beginning of the incident, upon hearing the news Fr. Antoino fled to the home of believer Sun Jing-san in Haiyan County in Jiaxing Prefecture, Zhejiang, with the help of believers Bao Tian-qu and Miao Jia-lu, who hired the boatman Ge Si, Zou Han-san and Zou Han-si. They were eventually found by the authorities. “According to the report from the official of Changzhou County, along with the officers from Changshu, Zhaowen and Jiaxing, in conjunction with the district jailor of Jiaxing County, Wang An-duo-ni and Bao Tian-qu were captured at Sun Jing-san's home in Haiyan County.” According to Bao Tian-qu's confession, “Since the 11th year of Qianlong period (1746), I have hired Huo

Número 55, diciembre 2025, pp. 388-415

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/Temas-Americanistas.2025.i55.16>

Zaihou's boat to travel around. After hearing about the news, it was Miao Jia-lu who hired a boat, along with Wang An-duo-ni and me, and flee to the home of believer Sun Jing-san in Haiyan County, Jiaxing Prefecture." On the way of escape, they once stayed at the home of Ding Liang-xian, a person who sold paintings in Changzhou County. According to Chen San-guan, the nephew of Ding Liang-xian, "On November 7th, Miao Jia-lu and Wang An-duo-ni came to my uncle Ding Liang-xian's home and stayed for one night. It was Miao Jia-lu who went to hire a boat for Wang An-duo-ni to go to Jiaxing." Boatmen Ge Si, Zou Han-san and Zou Han-si also confirmed the above situation.¹⁵ According to the Qing official archives, Xu Lu-zhi surrendered on November 11th, followed by the arrest of Fr. Tristan and others, while Fr. Antoino had already left Changshu before that, arriving at Ding Liangxian's home in Changzhou County on November 7th. The next day they went to Jiaxing Prefecture, and there was no rescue experience after Fr. Tristan's arrest. Fr. Antoino's arrest was at the home of believer Sun Jingsan in Haiyan County, Zhejiang, not outside Suzhou City as stated in *Biographies of Chinese Catholic History*.

Although *the Stories of Chinese Catholics* combines many Catholic internal documents, there are many problems within it. After all, most of the documents it cites were formed in the late 19th century and even the 20th century, more than a hundred years after the case occurred. Therefore, it is difficult to find original evidence. Relying only on the oral statements of later believers or scattered historical materials, errors are inevitable. The book cites *the Brief Record about the Martyr in Suzhou* which describes the trial process, stating that the second trial was the "Baojia Bureau trial". But in fact, the "Baojia Bureau" was advocated by Zhang Hui-yan in early Jiaqing period (1796-1820),¹⁶ and its widespread establishment was even later in the late Qing Dynasty.

¹⁵ "Jiangsu Provincial Governor An Ning's Detailed Report on the Trial of Westerner Wang An-duo-ni and Others", 1748, *Compilation of Catholic Documents from the Yongzheng and Qianlong Period Collected in Europe*, pp. 214-216, 218.

¹⁶ Zhang Hui-yan, "Ming-ke-wen Anthology (Supplement)", Vol. I, *Letter Discussing the Baojia System*

Número 55, diciembre 2025, pp. 388-415

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/Temas-Americanistas.2025.i55.16>

There is no record of the Baojia Bureau in the historical documents of Qianlong period, so its authenticity is questionable. Moreover, it states that the believer Bonaventure Tan could not bear the severe torture of the authorities and “made up stories about priests turning fetuses into gold and using dead people's eyes as telescopes”, and later trampled on the sacred image and apostatized. However, there is no such situation in the Qing official archives. Bonaventure Tan accompanied the two priests from Macao to Jiangnan. After the incident occurred, he was indeed implicated and the Jiangnan authorities issued an official document to the Guangdong authorities to capture him. However, the Guangdong authorities found in his hometown that Bonaventure Tan had died on November 10th day of the 11th year of Qianlong period (1746), and his burial place was clear with local residents and neighbors confirming, so the story of his torture and apostasy is purely fictitious. Therefore, the author believes that although *the Stories of Chinese Catholics* and *the Brief Record about the Martyr in Suzhou* and other modern works refer to many documents and materials, lack of first-hand materials and obvious distortions make them not credible works reflecting this religious incident.

“Chairman” Leaders and Merchant Groups among the Believers

After the outbreak of the Jiangnan Religious Incident, the authorities arrested a large number of believers involved in the case and conducted detailed interrogations on their experiences with religion. A wealth of details was preserved in the archives. Apart from the details directly related to the case, from the perspective of occupations and experiences of the believers, the upper-level “chairman” leaders and ordinary businessmen, fishermen and other groups are worthy of research and attention. Their different behaviors before and after the occurrence of the religious incident are also worth exploring.

with Mr. Jin, (Shanghai: Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House, 2015), p. 187.

Número 55, diciembre 2025, pp. 388-415
DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/Temas-Americanistas.2025.i55.16>

“Chairman” Leaders among the Believers

According to the official records of the Qing government, among the arrested believers, seven served as “chairman”. Among them, Xu Lu-zhi was a student of the County Academy before his arrest, and Liu Guan-yang was a student of the Directorate of Education. From the testimonies, there were few gentry and literati among the arrested believers, with only Xu Lu-zhi, Liu Guan-yang and Meng Xi-jiu, who worked as a private tutor at Ni Xian-wen's family in Changzhou County. After the “Chinese Rites Controversy” the Roman Catholic Church banned Chinese believers from ancestor worship and Confucius worship in late Kangxi period (1661-1722), and the Qing court also banned Catholicism in China. Thus, if gentry and literati insisted on their faith, they would undoubtedly cut off their path to the imperial examinations and advancement. Therefore, the proportion of gentry and literati among believers had significantly decreased since the ban. However, some gentry and literati still keep faith and played a key role in the church. This phenomenon is more prominent in Fujian Province (especially in Funing Prefecture) and other places outside of Jiangnan.

The so-called “chairman” is a lay leader of believers with more profound faith. Xu Lu-zhi and Liu Guan-yang were gentry who enjoyed considerable prestige in the local community at the time and had been believers since childhood, which may be the direct reason for their roles as “chairman”. However, from the testimonies in this case, these “chairman” believers did not play much of a leadership role before the incident. For example, You Yuan-chang confessed, “I just led the recitation of scriptures.” And Xu Lu-zhi “had a small statue of the Virgin Mary in his house, reciting scriptures on the first and fifteenth days of each month and then stopped after the ban”. After their arrest, their loyalty to the faith was also hard to see. *The Stories of Chinese Catholics* cited from *The Brief Record about the Martyr in Suzhou*, stating that Xu Lu-zhi “was greedy for money and not very enthusiastic.” Upon hearing that the authorities were arresting him, he surrendered to the authorities, reporting the whereabouts of the priests

Número 55, diciembre 2025, pp. 388-415

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/Temas-Americanistas.2025.i55.16>

and other believers. Similarly, Liu Guan-yang confessed, “Although I was a ‘chairman’, my faith has been lukewarm since the ban. Because they (referring to Fr. Antoino and Fr. Tristan) came to He-gong Ci and persuaded people to recite scriptures, I have not dared to recite scriptures since the ban in August of the 11st year (of Qianlong period), and have burned the portraits and scriptures... I did not surrender immediately, which was my fault, but I did not really attract people to the church”.¹⁷ The rest, including Zhou De-sheng, You Yuan-chang, Sun Yu-yu, Yang Wei-song and Zhao Xing-qi all claimed not to have set churches or attracted others to the faith, and all expressed a willingness to abandon their belief. From this religious incident, due to the characteristics of Catholicism itself and its short development time in China, there had not been a large number of native priests trained, and at that time, the Catholic Church in Jiangnan was basically led by Western priests, and a leadership layer of believers capable of leading the church organization had not yet formed. Once the Western priests could not effectively lead the church, the church organization was bound to decline or even collapse.

Merchant Groups among the Believers

In this case, many believers were arrested and their professions were not explicitly stated in the testimonies, except for a few gentries, a private tutor and several doctors, most of whom were middle and lower-class civilians such as merchants and boatmen. Compared with the aforementioned gentry and literati, merchants and boatmen not only had more people in Catholicism but also played a more significant role in church activities. Moreover, even after the religious incident, many survivors still keep faith and assisted in missionary work, leading to re-arrest in the future. Given that Feng Er-kang has conducted special research on Catholic boatmen believers in the

¹⁷ “Jiangsu Provincial Governor An Ning's Detailed Report on the Trial of Westerner Wang An-duo-ni and Others”, 1748, *Compilation of Catholic Documents from the Yongzheng and Qianlong Period Collected in Europe*, pp. 201, 210-212.

Número 55, diciembre 2025, pp. 388-415
DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/Temas-Americanistas.2025.i55.16>

early Qing Dynasty, this article will not elaborate further but will focus on the merchant group of believers. The sources of the merchant believers involved in this case are diverse, most of them are local Jiangnan merchants, and there are a few Huizhou merchants and a Cantonese merchant, which will be discussed in detail below.

The local Jiangnan merchants, the Tang brothers

Among the believers involved in this case, there are many relatives such as fathers and sons, mothers and daughters, uncles and nephews, brothers and sisters and so on. The Tang brothers refer to Tang De-guang and his younger brother Tang Xing-zhou. The Tang brothers dealt in cotton and other goods while also ran a dye house on the main street inside the south gate of Changshu County. Tang De-guang's wife and several female relatives were also believers. Tang De-guang met the two priests when they first arrived in Zhaowen and became their core believer and main assistant.

Tang De-guang not only arranged for the two priests to stay at home but also played a more important role in using the opportunity to do business in Guangdong to bring funds back to the priests in Jiangnan. According to his confession, "I went to Guangdong to do business in the 5th and 6th year of Qianlong period. There was a Fa Fu-lv (Francois Foller), in the José Church in Macau, asking me to bring 100 taels of silver for Wang An-duo-ni and Shen Ruo-wang (Fr. Jean Baborier) each. In the 7th and 8th year of Qianlong period, it was the Cantonese person Ni Ruo-ya-jing (Jehoiakim Ni, just Ni Wei-zhi in the following text) who brought 200 taels of silver each time and handed it over to Wang An-duo-ni. In the 9th year of Qianlong period, my younger brother Tang Xing-zhou also went to Guangdong to do business and brought back 100 taels of silver for Wang An-duo-ni and Shen Ruo-wang. In the 10th and 11th year, my younger brother brought back 100 taels of silver from Guangdong for Wang An-duo-ni. This silver was all brought for their living expenses".¹⁸ In addition, as a core believer,

¹⁸ "Jiangsu Provincial Governor An Ning's Detailed Report on the Trial of Westerner Wang An-duo-ni

Número 55, diciembre 2025, pp. 388-415
DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/Temas-Americanistas.2025.i55.16>

Tang De-guang also had contacts with other underground priests besides Fr. Antoino and Fr. Tristan. As mentioned earlier, he helped the elderly priest Fr. Jean Baborier bring funds from Macao, as well as carried and buried the coffin of the Western priest Romain Hinderer in Haining, Zhejiang after his death.¹⁹ Tang De-guang and Wang Qin-yi were not “chairman”, but due to their close relationship with the priests, they were also regarded as important criminals by the authorities. *The Stories of Chinese Catholics* records that they both suffered severe torture but were unyielding, and Tang De-guang died in prison before the case was closed. This is also recorded in the *Veritable Records of the Qing*.²⁰

Huizhou merchants Wang Qin-yi and Bao Tian-qu

Huizhou merchants were an important group of merchants during the Ming and Qing dynasties and had a broad influence in the Jiangnan region. Among the arrested believers were three people from Huizhou, all of whom were believers since childhood. Among them, except Gu Xing-zhou was a doctor, Wang Qin-yi and Bao Tian-qu were both merchants.

Bao Tian-qu was the one who was arrested with Fr. Antoino in the previous article. He confessed, “I am from She County, Huizhou Prefecture, and I have been a Catholic since I was a child. My baptismal name is Job, and my teacher's surname is

and Others”, 1748, *Compilation of Catholic Documents from the Yongzheng and Qianlong Period Collected in Europe*, p. 209.

¹⁹ According to the testimony in the archive *Jiangsu Provincial Governor An Ning's Detailed Report on the Trial of Westerner Wang An-duo-ni and Others*, “De Ma-nuo (Romain Hinderer) died of illness in the 6th or 7th year of Yongzheng (1728 or 1729), and Tang De-guang carried his coffin and buried him at the Guotai Bridge in Xiashi Town, Haining County.” However, according to Fr. Louis Pfister's *Biographies and Bibliography of Jesuits in China*, Romain Hinderer actually died on August 26, 1744 in Changshu. The Qing official archives push Romain Hinderer's death year back to the Yongzheng period, which is likely an intentional act by local officials to shirk their responsibility for not enforcing the ban effectively. In addition, the testimonies of the arrested believers in the previous text often claim that they had long left the church, which may also be the result of local officials intentionally guiding and coercing to shirk responsibility. Therefore, there are also inaccuracies and one-sidedness in the Qing official archives.

²⁰ *Veritable Records of the Qianlong Emperor*, Vol. CCCXXVII, in *Veritable Records of the Qing*, Vol. XII, p. 12596.

Número 55, diciembre 2025, pp. 388-415

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/Temas-Americanistas.2025.i55.16>

Fei, who died long time ago. In the 5th year of Qianlong period (1740), I went to Changshu to sell cotton and met Wang An-duo-ni in Gezhuang Village, Zhaowen County. He asked me to follow and serve him, promising me a monthly salary of half a tael silver. ... Since the ban in the 11th year of Qianlong period (1746), I hired a boat from Huo Zai-hou and went around. After hearing that the authorities wanted the priests and believers, Miao Jia-lu hired a boat, together with Wang An-duo-ni and me, we fled to the home of the believer Sun Jing-san in Haiyan County, Jiaxing Prefecture.” Wang Qin-yi confessed, “I am from She County, Huizhou Prefecture, fifty years old, and have been living in Changshu for a long time. I joined the church in the 5th year of Yongzheng period (1727), and I have never set a church to lure others to faith. My teacher was Romain Hinderer, who has died and is now buried in Xiashi, Haining County. Wang An-duo-ni came to Gezhuang Village in the 2ed year of Qianlong period (1737), and I followed him everywhere. I can't remember the names of the people we have met. Tan Fang-ji-ge started in Guangdong in the 9th year of Qianlong period and arrived in Gezhuang in November, and I followed him”.²¹

Under the coercion of the authorities, Wang Qin-yi insisted on “not remembering the names”, and his testimony was vague, seemingly covering up the believers he had contacted in the past. According to *the Stories of Chinese Catholics*, Wang Qin-yi had a close relationship with the two priests, “Wang's family was a rich and powerful family in Huizhou, and there have been believers since the late Ming Dynasty. Qin-yi followed Fr. Antoino to visit believers everywhere. A few years later, he also assisted Fr. Tristan in preaching. Fr. Tristan was not good at Chinese and he got a lot of help from Qin-yi.” It can be seen that Wang Qin-yi also master foreign language to a certain extent and acted as a translator.²² From the testimonies of other arrested

²¹ “Jiangsu Provincial Governor An Ning's Detailed Report on the Trial of Westerner Wang An-duo-ni and Others”, 1748, *Compilation of Catholic Documents from the Yongzheng and Qianlong Period Collected in Europe*, pp. 203-204, 220.

²² In 1754 Wang Qin-yi was arrested again and confessed, “I understand a little western language.”

Número 55, diciembre 2025, pp. 388-415

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/Temas-Americanistas.2025.i55.16>

believers, it is also known that Wang Qin-yi accompanied them to contact believers and spread the Catholic doctrine many times. For example, Ma Yun-xi from Shanyang County confessed, “In the 8th year of Qianlong period (1743), Wang An-duo-ni once came with someone surnamed Wang to look for people who had believed before”. Guan Xin-de from Changzhou County stated, “On May 4th of the 12th year of Qianlong period (1747), Wang Qin-yi led Tan Fang-ji-ge to come”. Ni Xian-wen from Changzhou County confessed, “On May 29th of the 12th year of Qianlong period, Wang Qin-yi led Tan Fang-ji-ge to my place”.²³ Wang Qin-yi also helped Fr. Antoino hire boatman believers to travel, such as boatman Huo San confessed, “It was Wang Qin-yi who came in March of the 11th year of Qianlong period to ask me to sail a boat, getting a monthly salary of 0.6 tael silver.” His son Huo Jin-gong stated, “Wang An-duo-ni once asked Wang Qin-yi to hire me to sail a boat in the 10th year of Qianlong period, and in March of the 11th year, he also hired my father and Ge Si to sail a boat to go everywhere, getting 0.2 tael silver per day.” It is also worth mentioning that *the Stories of Chinese Catholics* records, “After the two priests martyred, Wang Qin-yi was on the verge of death because of the heavy punishment and died soon after release”.²⁴ This statement is also false. In fact, after Wang Qin-yi was released, he and the released boatman believer Zou Han-san, the escaped believer Ding Liang-xian did not give up their faith. Instead, they continued to actively assist the western priests José de Araujo, Devis Ferreira and Emmanuel Viegas who came to Jiangnan to preach, contact believers and spread the doctrine until the case broke out again in the 19th year of Qianlong period (1754).²⁵ Compared with the upper-class gentry and literati like Xu Luzhi, ordinary

²³ “Confession of Westerners Zhang Ruo-se (José de Araujo) and Others”, May 24th 1754, *Materials of Western Catholic Activities in China during the Middle and Early Qing Period*, Vol. I, p. 230.

²⁴ Fang Hao, *The Stories of Chinese Catholics*, Vol. II, p. 119.

²⁵ “Confession of Westerners Zhang Ruo-se (José de Araujo) and Others”, May 24th 1754, *Materials of Western Catholic Activities in China during the Middle and Early Qing Period*, Vol. II, pp. 228-233.

Número 55, diciembre 2025, pp. 388-415
DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/Temas-Americanistas.2025.i55.16>

merchants and boatmen believers like Wang Qinyi and Zou Hansan undoubtedly have more loyal faith and make more lasting contributions to the church.

Cantonese Merchant Ni Wei-zhi

Most of the believers involved in the Jiangnan Religious Incident lived in the Jiangnan, but there were also a few people from other provinces, such as Ignace Xie and Bonaventure Tan who were mentioned earlier to bring the two priests to Jiangnan, and there was another merchant named Ni Wei-zhi from Guangdong, who was also arrested for helping Fr. Antoino and other priests. Ni Wei-zhi was originally from Min County, Fuzhou Prefecture, Fujian Province. He had been a believer since childhood and had long been practicing medicine and operating the pharmaceutical industry in Foshan town, Guangdong. From the archival materials, Ni Wei-zhi's main activity was to travel around for pharmaceutical trade, so the author also classifies him as a merchant. Due to the purchase of imported medicines and other reasons, Ni Wei-zhi often went to Macao and had much contact with western priests and believers. In the 10th year of Yongzheng period (1732), he met Tang De-guang, who came to Guangdong for trade, at the São José Church in Macao. In the 2ed year of Qianlong period (1737), Ni went to Macao to purchase foreign medicines and was introduced to Fr. Antoino by the western priest Francois Foller (Chinese name “Fa Fu-lv”) and sold snuff and borneol for him. In the 10th year of Qianlong period (1745), “I went to Macao to buy cardamom, storax, cobalt and other items to sell in Suzhou. Because I knew Wang An-duo-ni and Tang De-guang, Fa Fu-lv enclosed 200 taels of silver in two letters and asked me to bring it to Tang Xing-zhou's dye house in the south gate of Changshu County and hand it over to Tang De-guang. I arrived in Suzhou in April of the 11th year and went to Tang Xing-zhou's dye house to meet Tang De-guang. I handed over the silver and letter to him, and thus I got to know Tang Xing-zhou. In October of that year, I went to Macao to buy foreign goods to Suzhou again. Fa Fu-lv again prepared 200 taels of silver as

Número 55, diciembre 2025, pp. 388-415
DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/Temas-Americanistas.2025.i55.16>

well as a letter, and asked me to bring them to Tang De-guang. I arrived in Suzhou in January of the 8th year of Qianlong period (1743), and went to Changshu to find Tang De-guang again, and handed over the silver and letter to him... In the 9th, 10th and 11th year, it was Tang De-guang's younger brother, Tang Xing-zhou who brought goods to Guangdong, and each time he went back Fa Fu-lv had 200 taels of silver coins assigned me to go to Canton city to change into silver ingots and gave Xing-zhou. Because the silver coins in Guangdong can be more valuable than in Jiangnan. I went to the silver shop to change into silver ingots and handed them over to Xing-zhou to take back to Jiangnan and give Wang An-duo-ni".²⁶

In addition, introduced by Tang De-guang, Ni Wei-zhi also assisted the Jiangnan priests and believers when they reached Guangdong. According to his confession, "In October of the 11th year of Qianlong period, a person from Jiangnan came to Foshan to ask about my home, and gave me a letter from Tang De-guang, saying that Yang Yin-guan and Yang Lu-jue sent Shen Ruo-wang (Fr. Jean Baborier) to Guangdong. He let me take care of them. So, I went to the boat to meet them. They asked me to go with them to the Thirteen Hongs to find if there were any foreign Catholics living there. When I arrived at Canton city, I saw that there were three or four foreigners with tricorn living in Yuan-lai Hong. I knew those foreigners with tricorn are all Catholics, so let them enter the Hong".²⁷ Yang Yin-guan and Yang Lu-jue were also the believers arrested in this religious incident. They had escorted the elderly priest Fr. Jean Baborier back to Macao. When they arrived in Guangzhou, Tang De-guang asked Ni Wei-zhi to assist.

From the experiences of the aforementioned merchants, in the Jiangnan

²⁶ "Guangzhou Prefecture's Report on the Trial of Ni Wei-zhi and Others Involved in the Jiangnan Case," 1749, *Compilation of Catholic Documents from the Yongzheng and Qianlong Period Collected in Europe*, p. 242.

²⁷ "Guangzhou Prefecture's Report on the Trial of Ni Weizhi and Others Involved in the Jiangnan Case," 1749, *ibid.*, p. 243.

Número 55, diciembre 2025, pp. 388-415
DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/Temas-Americanistas.2025.i55.16>

Religious Incident the group with the closest relationship with Western priests is the merchants who believed in Catholicism. Whether accompanying priests to preach, or helping priests transport funds, convey information or contact with other believers, merchant believers played an important role. Merchants traveled everywhere, having rich experiences and flexible minds. They understood the local situation and were good at interacting with people from all walks of life. For western priests unfamiliar with the Chinese language, culture and environment, they were undoubtedly the best candidates for guides and assistants when going out. At that time, under the inconvenient transportation and Catholic prohibition environment, merchants traveling around to sell goods were also a good cover. In addition, although merchants had the characteristic of focusing on profit, they also have the spirit of keeping promises and valuing contracts, plus the influence of religious belief, so it was natural for western priests hiding in Jiangnan to choose merchants as their guides and assistants to keep contact with the outside world.

Different Images of the Jesuit Priest Fr. Antoino José Henriques in Two Types of Documents

It is undeniable that under the strict prohibition of Roman Catholicism by the Qing court, western priests coming to China faced great danger. The unfamiliar environment, different culture, hard life, hiding from pursuit all year round and facing severe punishment, all required extreme courage, extraordinary wisdom and steadfast faith. After Fr. Antoino and Fr. Tristan were martyred, the Catholic Church regarded them as models of loyal martyrs and commemorated them.

However, from the Qing official archives, associations of Fr. Antoino with wealth and sex can be found. As Catholic priests and Jesuits, after the ordination they should vow to give up wealth and sex and serve God wholeheartedly. Once associated with wealth and sex, it not only disconform to the aforementioned image of loyalty but

Número 55, diciembre 2025, pp. 388-415
DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/Temas-Americanistas.2025.i55.16>

also does not meet the behavioral requirements of a qualified priest. Catholic literature naturally denies this, which is quite different from the Qing official archives.

The issue of “wealth” is relatively minor. After the two priests were arrested, the official asked about their sources of funds and whether they had collected money from believers. Fr. Antoino initially confessed, “There is no collection of money... When I came to China, I brought some goods and deposited them in Macao. I asked Ni Wei-zhi to manage the business and let others send money for my expenses.” Fr. Tristan also said, “There was no collection of money, even the travel expenses here were all brought by myself”. Later the interrogating official pointed out, “Last year the Bai Duo-lu (Pedro) case in Fujian, all the money used was sent by your king to him, which shows that your daily expenses are sent by the king, how can you say it is brought by yourself?” The two priests said, “The money we use was actually sent by our brothers and relatives to Macao, and then sent from Macao for expenses, and it was not sent by the king”.²⁸

The two priests had a lot of cover-up for the source of funds, seemingly to conceal the situation that the funds came from the Catholic Church or the government of the country they belonged to. From the aforementioned confession of Ni Wei-zhi, Fr. Antoino did carry valuable goods to China and let Ni Wei-zhi to sell for profit. “(Francois Foller told Ni Wei-zhi that) Wang An-duo-ni carried a barrel of snuff and ten pounds of borneol, which was difficult to sell in Macao for a while and you should take them to Canton city...And the total price of the two goods was one hundred and seventy-five taels of silver”.²⁹ However, this income was only Fr. Antoino's personal profit behavior. From the confessions of Tang brothers and Ni Wei-zhi, it is known that there was a fixed amount of silver every year, sent from Francois Foller at São José

²⁸ “Jiangsu Provincial Governor An Ning's Detailed Report on the Trial of Westerner Wang An-duo-ni and Others”, 1748, *ibid.*, p. 208.

²⁹ “Guangzhou Prefecture's Report on the Trial of Ni Wei-zhi and Others Involved in the Jiangnan Case,” 1749, *Compilation of Catholic Documents from the Yongzheng and Qianlong Period Collected in Europe*, p. 242.

Número 55, diciembre 2025, pp. 388-415
DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/Temas-Americanistas.2025.i55.16>

Church in Macao to Fr. Antoino, Fr. Tristan, Fr. Jean Baborier and others priests in Jiangnan, and the amount was one hundred taels of silver per person each year. Obviously, this was not sent by the priest's family, but a unified arrangement by the Catholic Church. With the support of the church's regular funds, western priests can maintain their daily expenses in Jiangnan, and have the ability to hire followers and boatmen, as well as support several women believers living together.

After the religious incident occurred, the Qing authorities found that Tang De-guang and Shen-Tao Shi's houses where the two priests lived "all have winding passages and secret rooms" and captured five single women from Danyang County at Shen-Tao Shi's house. So, the Qing authorities determined that there was an improper relationship between the priests and these women and forced the priests and believers to confess in the trial. According to the Catholic religious writings, "Tang De-guang stated that priests were all upright gentlemen with excellent character, and there was no such thing", although he suffered severe torture many times, he did not change his testimony.³⁰ However, the records of the Qing official archives are quite different again.

The five Danyang women were all in their thirties. Three of whom were the daughters of the believer Wang Tian-pei, whose names were Wang Da-gu, Wang Er-gu and Wang San-gu, and the other two were Shen Qi-gu, the niece of the believer Shen Tian-ru, and his eldest daughter-in-law Xu Si-gu. Nominally speaking, the five women were all married, but four of them had not actually lived in the husband's family for various reasons, and Wang San-gu's husband had been away from home for many years, so they were all single in reality. According to Wang Da-gu, the five women went to Shen-Tao Shi's house at the urging of Fr. Antoino, "Wang An-duo-ni said that it is easy to ascend to heaven by reciting scriptures and worshiping together."

As for the adultery, Fr. Antoino denied it at first, saying "(Wang Da-gu and other

³⁰ Louis Pfister, *Biographies and Bibliography of Jesuits in China*, Vol. II, p. 736.

Número 55, diciembre 2025, pp. 388-415

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/Temas-Americanistas.2025.i55.16>

women) were sent to the home of Shen-Tao Shi in Changshu by Wang Tian-pei, and they lived with me and cooked for me. I only always chatted with them. And I saw that they were poor, so I gave them some silver. Wu Shi, the wife of Tang De-guang, and the widowed mother and daughter next door all joined the church, but they only came to recite scriptures and observe fasts, and there was no other situation.” But finally he changed his words and confessed, “I am guilty for I had an improper relationship with Wang Da-gu and Wang Er-gu, and I don’t remember the date. But the rest of three women have not committed adultery.”

Wang Da-gu and Wang Er-gu's testimony had a more detailed description of the adultery. Wang Da-gu said, “Wang An-duo-ni lived in *He-gong Ci* and occasionally came to the Shen-Tao Shi's house to preach and worship, and then lived with us. He said that after joining the church, it doesn't matter for living together. He had repeatedly teased me, but I didn't bend to him. In a spring dusk of the 11th year (of Qianlong period), I can't remember the date, in the Shen-Tao Shi 's house, I studied the scriptures with my two sisters in Wang An-duo-ni's room. After my two sisters went out, Wang An-duo-ni grabbed me and committed adultery. My second younger sister was also had improper relationship with him. But my third younger sister, Xu Sigu and Shen Qigu have not committed adultery.” Wang Er-gu made a similar confession as that of her elder sister. And the others except Tang De-guang all insisted that they knew nothing about the indecency.³¹

The author has pointed out in previous studies that both Catholic literature and Qing official archives have one-sided and false records about this religious incident. The problem with Catholic literature is mainly that the writing is far from the time of the case, and there is a lack of objective factors of first-hand historical materials. There

³¹ “Jiangsu Provincial Governor An Ning's Detailed Report on the Trial of Westerner Wang An-duo-ni and Others”, 1748, *Compilation of Catholic Documents from the Yongzheng and Qianlong Period Collected in Europe*, pp. 222-225.

Número 55, diciembre 2025, pp. 388-415

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/Temas-Americanistas.2025.i55.16>

are subjective factors in the Qing official archives, such as local officials deliberately changing the facts to shirk their own responsibilities and cater to the intentions of their superiors. In view of the possibility that local officials deliberately fabricated scandals and forced confessions to slander and attack priests and believers, the author does not intend to make a judgment on whether the improper relationship between Fr. Antoino and Wang sisters is exact or its morality. In the final judgment, “Wang An-duo-ni committed adultery and was exempt from punishment for this lesser offense”, Wang Da-gu and Wang Er-gu were exempt from punishment for joining the Catholic church but incurred the penalty of flogging and fines for adultery.³²

After the case was concluded, the Provincial Governor of Jiangsu An Ning reported to the Qing court and requested that the two priests be “sentenced to death according to the law.” For this, Emperor Qianlong specially instructed: “Foreigners who sneak into China, deceive Chinese people and commit illegal acts should be severely punished. However, if these criminals are sentenced to death, it seems to be deliberately severe on foreigners. If they are imprisoned for a long time, I’m afraid they may cause trouble. It is better to let them die in prison secretly to settle the matter completely”.³³ Obviously, Emperor Qianlong ordered Jiangsu officials to secretly execute the two priests in prison. His purpose was to eliminate all the influence of Catholicism at the social level quietly. Soon after the two priests “died in prison,” a large number of believers involved in the case were punished and the negligent officials were disciplined, this religious incident came to an end.

³² “Jiangsu Provincial Governor An Ning’s Detailed Report on the Trial of Westerner Wang An-duo-ni and Others”, 1748, *ibid.*, pp. 228-229.

³³ *Veritable Records of the Qianlong Emperor*, Vol. CCCXX, in *Veritable Records of the Qing*, Vol. XII, p. 12454.

Número 55, diciembre 2025, pp. 388-415
DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/Temas-Americanistas.2025.i55.16>

Conclusion

The Jiangnan region during the Ming and Qing dynasties was a land of economic and cultural prosperity. Since the late Ming Dynasty, it has also been an important area for the development of Roman Catholicism. The Suzhou Religious Incident in 1747 was another significant event following the Fu'an Religious Incident in 1746, that western missionaries were brutally killed and a large number of believers were involved.

Since the Qing court's strict ban on Catholicism, its spread among the people was largely in an underground and secret state, and thus the historical materials left behind are very limited. Apart from some documents within the Catholic Church, the main sources are the archival materials from the Qing official investigations into the religious incident. Looking at the Suzhou Religious Incident in 1747, both Catholic documents and Qing official archives have subjective, one-sided, and inaccurate aspects to varying degrees, making it difficult to objectively, accurately, and comprehensively reflect this period of history. The main drawback of Catholic documents is that they were written a long time after the incident, lacking objective and primary sources. In contrast, Qing official archives have subjective factors, mainly because local authorities altered facts to shirk responsibility and catered to superiors. Relatively speaking, Qing official archives have a slight advantage in timeliness, with fewer apparent contradictions. Although there are drawbacks of local officials covering up and fabricating, the Qing official documents also record and preserve the actuality of the underground Catholic church, the living dynamics of the missionaries and the conditions of the Chinese believers at the time, which can supplement the Catholic documents and hold significant research value.

It needs to be emphasized that the defects in historical materials do not mean the loss of significance of the research of this period. During the mid-Qing period, despite continuous suppression by the authorities and loss of the majority of gentry and

Número 55, diciembre 2025, pp. 388-415

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/Temas-Americanistas.2025.i55.16>

literati believers after the “Chinese Rites Controversy”, Catholic churches still thrived in many places at the grassroots level, supported by a few dedicated western missionaries and believers among merchants, boatmen and other common people. Their specific activities and social impacts are worth in-depth exploration. Although both Catholic documents and Qing official archives have their preconceived positions and defects, researchers can uncover historical truths by focusing on sorting through comparison between the materials and conducting multifaceted investigations and analyses.