The Bureau of Sinology and Its Early Development, 1927–1934

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Abstract

In 1927, the Jesuit-run Bureau of Sinology was founded in Shanghai to assist missionaries in their apostolic work via education and publications. The bureau's establishment was part of a longstanding effort to resume the Jesuit tradition of developing intellectual apostolate and pursuing Sinological studies. However, the bureau was soon beset by internal crises that limited its functionality. The bureau also competed with the Synodal Commission, which Celso Costantini (1876–1958), the first apostolic delegate to China, had established in the same year and with a similar objective. The ecclesiastical hierarchy and overlapping purposes of the two institutes disadvantaged the bureau in its early development and escalated tensions between the Jesuits in China and the delegate. This article is part of the special issue of the Journal of Jesuit Studies, “Jesuits in Modern Far East,” guest edited by Steven Pieragastini.

Keywords


On August 22, 1927, the Jesuits of the France province, who had been responsible for the Jiangnan mission in China since 1856, founded the Bureau of Sinology (Bureau Sinologique) in Shanghai.1 The bureau was created to

conduct research concerning China from religious, intellectual, and social perspectives, with the stated purpose of “assisting missionaries in their apostolic work, especially in schools, conferences, and the presses.” The bureau’s establishment was also a result of the Jesuits’ long Sinological tradition, which could be traced back to the first Jesuit China mission that began in 1583. The early Jesuits were predominant in the first large-scale cultural exchange between China and Europe. They studied Chinese languages and classics and published their first-hand observations of China in European languages. These works earned the Jesuits a reputation for scholarly achievement among European audiences and differentiated them from the other Catholic missionaries in China. However, due to the Qing government’s ban on Christianity in 1724, most of the Jesuits in the provinces went underground while the court Jesuits continued their scientific service and semi-open activities in Beijing. In 1773, the suppression of the Jesuits in Europe finally brought this first China mission to an end. The Jesuit order was restored in 1814. When the China mission was resumed in 1842, new Jesuits strove to reconnect to the past by reviving the order’s tradition. The bureau’s establishment in 1927 was praised in contemporary Jesuit publications as the fruit of a century’s worth of effort.\(^2\)

The present article offers an account of the bureau with a particular focus on its struggles during the early days of its existence, which have received scant attention in both contemporary Jesuit sources and current scholarship.\(^3\) Soon after its establishment, the bureau encountered several internal problems, including difficulty assigning tasks and functioning with minimal staff. Worse still, the bureau’s work overlapped with the Commission on Schools, Books, and Presses (later known as the “Synodal Commission”) that had also been established in 1927 with a very similar purpose by Celso Costantini (1876–1958), the first apostolic delegate to China, in Beijing.

In 1922, Costantini arrived in China to undertake the papal directive of Maximum illud, which called for Christianity’s indigenization, the training of local clergy, and the acquisition of proficiency in knowledge of all branches taking charge of Jiangsu and Anhui provinces. It was renamed the Nanjing mission in 1922 and the Shanghai mission in 1933 due to administrative and juridical rearrangements.

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\(^3\) This neglect is probably because the contemporary Jesuit publications, such as the two books listed in footnote 2, did not mention the difficulties the bureau faced in its early years but only publicized its later success. The current scholarship relying on these Jesuit accounts, even the latest and exhaustive archival research on the Jesuit missions in China by David Strong, pays little attention to this issue. See David Strong, S.J., *A Call to Mission: A History of Jesuits in China 1842–1954*, 2 vols. (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2018), 1:392.
of learning and languages by missionaries. The directive offered new principles and instructions targeting missionary operations. In this regard, Costantini considered creating an inter-order institute with a clear focus on publishing Chinese Christian books and pursuing Chinese studies to achieve the papal directive’s goals. He brought this idea to the First Plenary Council held in Shanghai in 1924 and won the support of the participating vicars apostolic and prefects of different orders. The commission was established and made responsible for fulfilling the directive. It recruited members from significant missionary orders in China, including foreign and Chinese priests, and all members worked directly under the delegate. At the same time, Costantini encountered resistance from French missionaries, whom he criticized for prioritizing their loyalty to their home country over submission to papal authority. The Jesuits were one of the orders accused of being loyal to France rather than the papacy by Costantini. In the early 1930s, the bureau came into conflict with the commission because of their respective engagements in similar publishing projects and employment. The overlap in publishing projects escalated the tension between the Jesuits and the Costantini and cast a pall over the bureau’s development.

Renewing the Sinological Tradition

When the Jesuits resumed the China mission in 1842, continuing their tradition of Sinological scholarship was one of their foremost goals. However, this goal soon gave way to a new, more urgent priority—that of addressing the extensive pastoral needs of about 48,000 Chinese Catholics in the Jiangnan area. In addition to this, from 1850 to 1864, the mission was devastated by Taiping rebels who were ravaging central and south China. It was not until 1864

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5 Primum Concilium Sinense anno 1924: A die Maii ad diem 12 Junii in Ecclesia S. Ignatii de Zi-ka-wei celebratum; Acta—decreta et normae—vota, etc. (Zi-ka-wei: Typographia Missionis Catholicae, 1929), 32–33.
6 For research on this topic, see Ernest P. Young, Ecclesiastical Colony: China’s Catholic Church and the French Religious Protectorate (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
7 Eugène Beaucé, the Jesuit superior of the Nanjing mission, wrote to Włodzimierz Ledóchowski, the Jesuit superior general, to address Costantini’s hostility toward the Jesuits. “Letter of Beaucé to Ledóchowski dated 1930,” Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu [hereafter arsi], Provincia Franciae–Missio Sinensis [hereafter Sin], 1009–1, doc. 3, 6.
that the Qing defeated the Taiping rebels with military assistance from their European and American allies, thereby ending a decade-long war. From then on, the Jiangnan mission began to recover, and, in the 1870s, it entered a period of significant growth.

In 1872, Adrien Languillat, S.J. (1808–78), vicar apostolic of Jiangnan, founded the Scientific Committee of Jiangnan (Comité Scientifique du Kiang-nan) in Shanghai. The committee’s members aimed to renew the Jesuit tradition of combining religious preaching with scientific and Sinological studies. Also, the establishment of the committee was a way of responding to mounting competition from Protestant missionaries, who, from the Catholic perspective, simply imitated the Jesuit intellectual approach in their preaching. The committee comprised four sections, each of which had responsibility for a distinct aim: the management of a meteorological observatory and scientific publications, the investigation into China’s natural history, the compilation of history and geography about the mission in China, and Chinese-language publications of apologies and scientific brochures. The first two sections later became permanent institutions as the Zi-ka-wei Observatory and the Zi-ka-wei Museum, respectively.9 The latter two sections with their Sinological foci failed to become permanent institutions because they only had individuals working in them. Aloys Pfister, S.J. (1833–91) was responsible for the section on history and geography. He compiled biographies of the missionaries in the former mission and the correspondence of his own mission, and he also took charge of the writing of the mission’s annual letters, the fortnightly correspondence between Europe and China, and the mapping of the Jiangnan mission. Some of his works were published, but the crucial manuscript of his history of the Jesuit mission, which he had worked on for more than twenty years, was destroyed by a fire a couple of days before his death.10 Two Chinese men, Ma Xiangbo (Joseph Ma, 1840–1939) and his younger brother Ma Jianzhong (Matthias Ma, 1845–1900), had been expected by Jesuit superiors to take charge of publishing the mission’s Chinese-language apologies and scientific brochures. But their dismissal from the Jesuit order scuttled the original plan.11

11 de la Servière, Histoire de la mission du Kiang-nan, 2394–96. Based on Fang Hao’s account, Ma Jiangzhou had been a Jesuit scholastic but later left the order. The exact date of his dismissal is unknown. Fang Hao, Zhongguo tianzhujiao shi renwu chuan (Biographies of Catholic figures in China), 3 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988), 3:299.
In 1892, *Variétés sinologiques* (Sinological varieties), a monograph series created by Henri Havret, S.J. (1848–1901) and Louis Gaillard, S.J. (1850–1900), signaled the next wave of efforts to renew the Sinological tradition.12 The series began with a fortuitous invitation Havret received from the China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society in Shanghai to collect information on the road network and means of communication between the main cities in China.13 He began studying Chongming Island and Anhui province, where he had preached for several years and eventually published the results of his investigation in the first and second monographs in *Variétés sinologiques*. For him, such work was not a mere geographical investigation for the service of commerce, but a valuable contribution to the apostolic and apologetic goals of the Catholic mission. He believed that once the missionaries were trained to study the places they lived according to clear and consistent principles, they could produce comprehensive and reliable research that could be published in his series. This research would help establish the Jesuit missionaries’ authority on matters related to contemporary China and enable them to “take the lead in the intellectual movement in the Far East.”14

For Havret, *Variétés sinologiques* was not only an outlet for Sinological research but also a continuation of the previous Jesuit mission’s book collections. The Jesuit correspondence published in *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses* (Edifying and curious letters) and *Mémoires concernant les Chinois* (Memories concerning the Chinese) continued offering firsthand observations of China that satisfied the curiosity of European readers while bringing in funds for the Jesuits’ China missions. Therefore, he had asked Gaillard, who was then director of the Jesuit-run T’ou-sè-wè Press, to co-found *Variétés sinologiques* with Havret as its first editor.15 From 1892 to 1938, sixty-six titles were published
in the series that focused on subjects such as China’s geography, institutions, social customs, religions, and missionary history. The series won praise from many Sinologists for the detailed and accurate accounts it presented, and this enhanced the Jesuits’ reputation generally.16

Institutionalization: The Bureau of Sinology

In 1918, Włodzimierz Ledóchowski (1866–1942), the Jesuit superior general, addressed the necessity of mastering Chinese languages and literature for the China Jesuits as their predecessors had to win Chinese converts.17 In response, Yves Henry, S.J. (1880–1963), the consultant of the Jiangnan mission, proposed establishing a specialized institute in Shanghai. It would have one to two European Jesuits and two Chinese Jesuits to work together to promote Chinese studies and to defend the faith through publications.18 The realization of this proposal was postponed partially because of the political and social disturbances caused by anti-Christian movements in the early 1920s and the Northern Expedition launched by Chiang Kai-shek (1887–1975) in the period from 1926 to 1928. It was not until 1927 that Félix Mollat, S.J. (1871–1962), provincial of the France province, designed the bureau’s programs, which were instrumental in ensuring its institutionalization.

According to the plans laid out by Mollat, the bureau would launch four major programs, one in each of the following areas: research, education, press, and apology. The bureau members would dedicate their time to studying Chinese languages, literature, philosophy, and history, as well as the history of the Catholic missions in China. They would publish school textbooks and other teaching materials that complied with both the Chinese government’s requirements and with Catholic standards. They would also continue issuing periodicals and preparing other types of publications while researching the missionary history of China and debates on faith. The four programs would not have to be developed immediately. With the bureau director’s approval, the bureau members could explore the areas that were interesting to them. Mollat also promised that the France province would provide the bureau with assistance for the purchase of needed materials and funds to pay personnel.19

The first six bureau members, four Frenchmen and two Chinese men, were all recruited from the Jiangnan mission for their academic and linguistic expertise. Joseph de Lapparent (1862–1953), who was appointed as the director, was joined by Henri Boucher (1857–1939), Henri Doré (1859–1931), Pasquale M. d’Elia (1890–1963), Xu Yunxi (Simon Zi, 1870–1940), and Xu Zongze (Joseph Zi, 1886–1947). The following year, Fermin André (1879–1945) joined the bureau as its seventh member.20

These members were engaged in several publication projects. First, they took charge of three periodicals. One was a newly founded French bimonthly titled *Renseignement du Bureau Sinologique* (Information of the Bureau of Sinology). The other two were both existing periodicals: the Chinese monthly *Shengjiao zazhi* (Catholic magazine), which had been first published in 1912, and a yearbook of missionary statistics in French titled *Missions, séminaires, oeuvres catholiques* (Missions, seminaries, and Catholic works), which had been established in 1901.

Second, the bureau published nine new monographs in the * Variétés sinologiques* series between 1929 and 1938. Four of them were the latest volumes of *Recherches sur les superstitions en Chine* (Researches into Chinese superstitions), the results of a decade-long research project conducted by one bureau member, Doré, who had spent twenty years studying Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, and popular religions.21 During these same years, Doré also revised two manuscripts, *Histoire de la mission du Kiang-nan* (History of the Kiang-nan mission) by Auguste Colombel, S.J. (1833–1905), and *Notices biographique et bibliographique sur les Jésuites de l’ancienne mission de Chine, 1552–1773* (Biographical notes and bibliographical on the Jesuits of the ancient mission in China, 1552–1773) by Pfister, both of which were only circulated within the Jesuit order and never sold to the public. The revision of *Histoire de la mission du Kiang-nan* was abandoned after the death of Doré in 1931,

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20 The bureau’s directors were de Lapparent (1927–28, 1940–42), Yves Henry (1929–31), Boucher (1932–39), Zhang Beda (Beda Tsang, 1943–49). For the term of office, see *Status missionis Nankinensis* of 1927–1933 and *Status missionis Shanghai* of 1934–49, AFCJ, FCh. 234 and 235.

21 This work received a special award granted by the French Academy of “Inscriptions and Literature” and earned Doré a reputation as an expert on Chinese religions. Yet, Barend J. ter Haar claims it was “a plagiarized version of Chinese research by a fellow Jesuit.” The research he is referring to is *jishuo quanzhen* (Collected explanations of absolute truth) by Huang Bolu (Pierre Hoang, 1833–1909). See ter Haar’s personal webpage: https://bjterhaa.home.xx4all.nl/chinrelbibl.htm (accessed by May 7, 2023). Doré did mention Huang’s research in his reference list. The connections between these two books and Doré’s writing process deserve further investigation. Thanks to the anonymous reviewers for the reference.
whereas the revision of *Notices biographique et bibliographique* was completed by other bureau members and published in 1932.\textsuperscript{22}

Third, the bureau launched three book projects: Chinese textbooks for primary schools; a reprint project of *Chaoxing xueyao* (Essential summary of nature), the first Chinese translation of Thomas Aquinas’s *Summa theologiae* (Summary of theology) by Lodovico Buglio, S.J. (1606–82) in 1676; and a new Chinese book series, *Guangqi zalu* (Guangqi miscellany), which introduced Catholic education principles and current social issues, such as capitalism and communism. In addition to these projects, some members had taken on roles as regular correspondents and contributors to news and press outlets. For example, Boucher served as a correspondent for the Agenzia Fides, the first missionary news agency formed in 1927 by the Propaganda Fide. D’Elia was a significant contributor to English presses on the subject of Chinese Catholic missionary history.

The bureau looked productive on paper. However, all the members were preoccupied with ministerial and teaching obligations and often did not prioritize the bureau’s work. In 1931, a letter with a dozen-page report on the bureau’s purpose and its practice written by d’Elia, the main protagonist of the bureau’s early history, reached the desk of the Jesuit superior general, addressing the bureau’s poor efficiency.\textsuperscript{23}

In his report, d’Elia acknowledged that the bureau’s stated purpose of resuming the Jesuit intellectual tradition in a new era was on the right track.\textsuperscript{24} However, the gaps between the bureau’s purpose and its practice hindered its progress. First, there was a lack of direction and collaboration. The bureau’s director and members were occupied with other obligations and were working individually and sometimes even refusing to work together.\textsuperscript{25} For example,

\textsuperscript{22} The Bibliotheca Zi-ka-wei in Shanghai has one copy of Colombel’s manuscripts (the catalog number zkw L29–918) with Doré’s comments and emendations. Thanks to the librarian of the Bibliotheca Zi-ka-wei Xu Jinhua for the information. For the editing process of *Notices*, see Le Bureau Sinologique, “Introduction,” *Notices biographiques et bibliographiques sur les Jésuites de l’ancienne mission de Chine, 1552–1773* (Chang-hai: Imprimerie de la Mission Catholique, 1932), xvii–xx.


\textsuperscript{25} In his annual letter to the French provincial, Auguste Haouisée (1877–1948) also noted the conflicts between European and Chinese Jesuits. “Litterae consultoris de Haouisée dated January 20, 1928,” AFCJ, FCh. 286, no document number.
d’Elia noted that this was the case for Xu Zongze, who preferred to work alone in *Shengjiao zazhi* and therefore showed no interest in cooperating with the European priests on other projects. Second, the bureau had insufficient support and staff. He complained that the Jesuit-run Bibliotheca Zi-ka-wei in Shanghai did not have a book collection sufficient for a program of Chinese studies. The librarians there purchased books on French history and the Great War (1914–18) and novels, but they purchased very few related to China. The bureau’s annual budget for purchasing books was only two hundred Chinese dollars—an amount that could buy only ten to twenty European-language books, according to his calculation. Procuring books was also extremely time-consuming, requiring several months between initiating the paperwork and securing the book. In addition, the bureau had failed to hire enough translators and copyists to assist with its operations. He concluded that the bureau had stagnated in the four years between its establishment and his letter. A single example quickly illustrated the situation. In 1930, he received inquiries from the Bureau of Social Action in the National Catholic Welfare Conference in Washington, DC, which was interested in the bureau’s work and requested further information to know about the church in China. The bureau, however, had no publications or other materials to share.

In the face of these fundamental problems, d’Elia offered several ways in which the bureau could improve its functionality. To deal with the shortage of personnel, he suggested expanding the recruitment pool to all the Jesuit missionaries in China and Hong Kong. D’Elia made a list of the people he would like to see in critical positions at the bureau. The directorship, he thought, should go to Joseph Verdier (1877–1971), a responsible leader who served as the rector of the Zi-ka-wei College at that time. D’Elia, Fermin André, and Xu Yunxi would remain in their original positions, while André Gaultier (1898–1978) and Zhu Zanzu (André Tsu, 1890–1961), both of whom were from Shanghai, would join the bureau. Daniel Finn (1886–1936) from the Hong Kong mission would take charge of the English-language publications, and Eustasius Fernández de Cabo (1878–1964) from the Anqing mission would do the same for the Spanish. If funding permitted, he would have liked to recruit more Chinese Jesuits, as

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26 In a review of Xu’s candidacy to become a future vicar apostolic of Nanjing in 1933, Pierre Lefebvre and Joseph Verdier, the Jesuit superiors of the Shanghai mission, made similar comments that Xu was unwilling to collaborate and also incapable of working with others. “Curriculum vitae & informationes de P. Joseph Zi SJ,” *Arsi*, *Sin*. 1010–3, no document number.

well as an Austrian or Hungarian Jesuit, who he hoped would be responsible for the German-language publications.28

Next, d’Elia proposed a new plan concerning publications and public lectures. D’Elia argued that the bureau members should work together to create a modern Chinese Christian language—that is, to create appropriate terminology to express Christian doctrine in Chinese. Although Christianity had been introduced to China three centuries earlier, Chinese terminology for Christian concepts remained rudimentary and had never come close to being adequate for the expression of more complicated ideas. To solve this problem, the bureau should expedite efforts to translate European-language Christian books into Chinese and promote them so that they would reach more readers. He also believed that public lectures could serve the same purpose. In his time, lectures were gaining popularity among the Chinese population, particularly young students, who were eager to attend lectures to learn about contemporary political and social issues. Shanghai, where the bureau was located, was ideal for this kind of work, as the city already hosted students nationwide. For d’Elia, the lectures represented a tremendous apostolic opportunity, but the bureau must be careful when choosing the topics and venues. For example, he thought that the classes should not be held in Catholic-related spaces but instead in large public halls, as this would help to attract a non-Catholic audience. The lectures should not directly advocate Christian belief but begin with basic questions, such as what it meant to be human or what constituted dignity and spirituality—questions that would gradually lead to a discussion of God’s existence. In addition to the in-person attendance, the lectures could be made available via radio broadcast, and the lecture scripts could be offered for publication. Through publications and lectures, d’Elia believed that in time the bureau would achieve its goals and its influence would reach all of China.29

Viewed in retrospect, d’Elia’s criticism of the bureau was frequently valid, and some of his suggestions were implemented in later years. However, Édouard Goulet (1881–1965), a Canadian Jesuit preaching in Xuzhou, considered d’Elia’s criticism overly harsh and decided to submit a report to Ledóchowski to defend the bureau. In it, Goulet admitted that the bureau was far from perfect, but its main problem was that it did not have sufficient staff to carry out its work. The

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current members had striven to overcome many obstacles, he thought, and their efforts needed to be recognized.30

Furthermore, in Goulet’s view, some of d’Elia’s criticisms of the bureau were exaggerated. For example, d’Elia had seen only the poor European-language holdings regarding China at the Bibliotheca Zi-ka-wei. But the bibliotheca was actually much superior to most other libraries in China, particularly in regards to its rich collections of Chinese rare books, gazetteers, and newspapers. The bureau’s annual budget was sufficient to purchase at least two hundred Chinese books for research. In addition to this, Goulet thought that d’Elia had failed to recognize the challenging circumstances that the bureau faced, some of which made his suggestions impractical. A public lecture would be a dangerous undertaking during nationwide political chaos. Rather than attracting people who were curious about Christianity, it would probably draw those who were hostile to Christianity. More importantly, the Protestant missionaries who had introduced the lecture format to China had given it up because it had not delivered the hoped-for results. In this respect, it would be wiser and safer to focus on press work and postpone the lectures until conditions in China were more favorable. As for the candidates whom d’Elia had recommended for positions in the bureau, some of these would not be a good fit. Verdier, as the current rector of Zi-ka-wei College, was unlikely to have adequate time to lead the bureau. Finn did not know Chinese and so could not be successful in the role that d’Elia wanted to assign to him.31

Nevertheless, Goulet agreed with some of d’Elia’s suggestions aimed at streamlining the bureau’s operation by collaborating with other Jesuit-run vicariates in China. For example, one of d’Elia’s complaints was that his daily duties included teaching a two-hour Chinese-language course for new missionaries. At the time, each Jesuit-run vicariate offered its language course with its own Romanization and teaching materials. Designing and offering all these separate language courses entailed a significant duplication of effort. Goulet suggested that all newly arrived Jesuits should reside in the same house where they would learn Chinese together and use the same language textbooks so that some teaching staff could turn their attention to other missionary work.32

31 “Note du P. Goulet,” ARSI, Sin. 1009–3, doc. 3a, 2–5.
32 “Note du P. Goulet,” ARSI, Sin. 1009–3, doc. 3a, 4.
Reading both reports from d’Elia and Goulet, Ledóchowski agreed with most of d’Elia’s criticisms, although in his view, circumstances rather than the individual bureau members were to blame. The idea of collaboration was taken into serious consideration. However, like Goulet, Ledóchowski preferred not to radically change the way the bureau functioned.

The Overlapping Nature of the Work

It is worth noting that both Goulet’s and d’Elia’s reports brought Ledóchowski’s attention to the overlapping nature of the bureau and the Synodal Commission. Goulet did not think the overlap was of great importance. He believed that the Jesuit representative serving on the commission would help prevent possible conflicts. However, d’Elia took a more pessimistic view. He pointed out that the bureau had already had arguments with the commission and that the bureau’s lower status within the ecclesiastical hierarchy had disadvantaged it.

After gaining the approval of the Propaganda Fide for establishing the Synodal Commission, Costantini started recruiting members in 1926. He had expected each significant Catholic order to send a representative with Chinese-language competence and a passion for Chinese youth ministry to serve in the commission. He turned to the superiors of the respective orders and requested they select appropriate candidates. The first members to join the commission were Auguste Bernard (b.1889), a French Jesuit and rector of the Institut des Hautes Études et Commerciales in Tianjin; George Barry O’Toole (1888–1944), an American Benedictine and president of the Catholic University of Beijing; Cheng Youyou (Pierre Tcheng, 1881–1935), a Chinese Lazarist; Franciscus Roeb, a Franciscan; and Georges de Jonghe d’Ardoye (1887–1961), a Belgian

33 Haouisée wrote to Ledóchowski to second the idea and recommended Georges Germain (1895–1978) as the bureau’s director to further collaboration between Chinese and European priests. “Letter of Haouisée to Ledóchowski dated October 1, 1931,” ARSI, Sin. 1009–3, doc. 40. Haouisée’s recommendation was under discussion, but Germain’s new position as the rector of the Aurora University took priority over the bureau. For a discussion of Germain’s appointment, see “Letter of Ledóchowski to Beaucé dated November 10, 1931,” ARSI, Sin. 1009–3, doc. 28; “Letter of Lefebvre to Ledóchowski dated May 10, 1932,” ARSI, Sin. 1009–4, doc. 3, 2.
35 “Note du P. Goulet,” ARSI, Sin. 1009–3, doc. 3a, 5.
37 For the correspondence between Costantini and superiors of religious orders, see Archivio Apostolico Vaticano [hereafter AVA], Archivio della nunziatura apostolica in Cina (1922–1933) [hereafter ANC], box 85, fasc. 156.
member of the Society of Foreign Missions of Paris. The following year, Cheng and Roeb were replaced by a Chinese Lazarist, Wu Dehui (Philippe Ou), and a German Divine Word missionary, Theodore Mittler (1887–1956). The members appointed to the commission, irrespective of their religious order and nationality, worked together under the delegate to promote the study of China and Catholicism. They published booklets and monographs and also ran a monthly multilingual periodical entitled *Collectanea commissionis synodalis* (Digest of the synodal commission), both of which provided information about China’s politics and history and functioned as communication platforms to exchange ideas regarding apostolic methods. Because the commission was directly controlled by the apostolic delegation, its work was viewed as authoritative and unquestionable. Any criticism could be taken as a potential challenge to the delegation and, to some extent, the papacy.

On August 1, 1928, Pope Pius XI (r.1922–39) sent out a telegram in which he congratulated all Chinese people on the establishment of the Nanjing government and called on Chinese Catholics to contribute to peace, development, and progress within China. The commission was responsible for offering an accurate Chinese translation of the papal message. However, de Lapparent, the bureau’s director, was dissatisfied with the Chinese translation. He wrote to Costantini to express his objections to some usages and offered alternatives to improve the accuracy. This act irritated O’Toole, the commission member who worked on the original translation. He accused de Lapparent of ignorance of the Chinese language and being unqualified to be the bureau’s director. In his view, de Lapparent’s objection to the terminology that the delegation had authorized also showed de Lapparent’s hostility toward the authority of the commission and delegation. Worrying that this charge might be used against the bureau and even the whole Jesuit order, the Jesuit superiors in Shanghai had de Lapparent apologize for his imprudence. This clash over a translation, for the Jesuits, revealed that the bureau was in a vulnerable position.

Because they had similar publishing goals, the two institutes had by coincidence each reprinted *Chaoxing xueyao* based on their respective copies of the original in 1930. The texts of the two original copies had only slight differences. Yet, the commission’s copy had two Chinese prefaces that were not found in the bureau’s, and the original Latin titles and subtitles had been added to the commission’s reprint so that readers could cross-reference Aquinas’s own words. It was also important that the commission’s version, priced at 2.4 Chinese dollars, was much cheaper than the one published by the bureau, which was priced at 18 Chinese dollars in 1931. Moreover, the commission worked faster than the bureau; it had already published the first four volumes of the work before the first volume of the Jesuit version came out. Knowing there were slight content differences but a huge price gap, d’Elia believed that the reprint would burden the mission financially. He doubted if anyone would purchase the Jesuit reprint, given that the commission’s version was much more affordable.

The conflict between the two institutes worsened when it came to recruiting Jesuits for the commission. D’Elia became involved in the conflict, and his appointment to the commission revealed the competition between the Jesuits and the apostolic delegate.

The story began in 1930 when Costantini received a request from Willem van Rossum, prefect of the Propaganda Fide, to assist in compiling an encyclopedia focused on China and China-related subjects. At the time, several encyclopedias were already available on the subject of China. One of the popular ones was *The Encyclopedia Sinica*, compiled by Samuel Couling (1859–1922) and published in Shanghai in 1917. However, for van Rossum, Couling’s encyclopedia, as well as most of the others that were available at the time, included numerous errors and focused entirely on subjects in scientific fields. He thus obtained papal support for the compilation of a new encyclopedia. It would include discussions of contemporary social and political phenomena. The materials should be in accordance with Catholic doctrines as well. Van Rossum planned that a committee of scholars in Europe would be formed to take charge of the compilation and that the commission would be responsible for its Chinese translation and imprint. Upon receiving van Rossum’s proposal, Costantini discussed it with the commission’s members, and all agreed that


they should assist with the project. However, because many members were already fully occupied with their existing duties, Costantini sought to recruit new candidates to work on this encyclopedia project.

It was d’Elia who drew Costantini’s attention at this time. D’Elia has recently published two works. One was an English booklet entitled *Catholic Native Episcopacy in China: Being an Outline of the Formation and Growth of the Chinese Catholic Clergy, 1300–1926*. It was later published in abridged form in the *Chinese Recorder*, a widespread English periodical in Shanghai, at the request of Protestant readers interested in the Catholic China mission. In a letter to Cardinal Secretary of State Pietro Gasparri (1852–1934), Costantini praised d’Elia’s work for complying with the papal directive to promote the indigenization of the clergy and for offering an excellent means to reach English Protestant readers. At the same time, d’Elia’s French translation of *Sanmin zhuyi* (Three principles of the people) by Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925), one of the founders of the Nationalist Party and the provisional president of the Republic of China, came into print. The Nanjing government esteemed Sun as the founding father of the Republic of China. His *Sanmin zhuyi* was held as China’s official ideology and was taught in schools as an examination subject. For the Catholic Church, d’Elia’s French translation appeared at the right time to help foreign missionaries quickly grasp the essence of Sun’s ideology. For the Nanjing government, it showed that the church observed the instructions of the new government and encouraged its adherents to be loyal to their own country. The Nanjing government even ordered five thousand copies of the translation.

These two books impressed Costantini because they demonstrated d’Elia’s language competence and his observance of papal policies. On September 18, 1930, Costantini wrote to d’Elia to ask if he would serve as the director of *Collectanea commissionis synodalisis* so that Mittler, the current editor-in-chief,

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44 “Costantini’s circular dated May 2, 1930,” AAV, ANC, b.100, fasc. 171, 5–8.
47 D’Elia, trans., *Le triple démisme de Suen Wen* (Shanghai: Bureau Sinologique de Zi-ka-wei, 1929). He also took charge of the English translation and had it published in 1931 by the Franciscan Press in Wuchang, China.
could lead the Chinese encyclopedia project instead. D’Elia declined the offer citing his busy schedule, so Costantini appointed another commission member, Auguste Bernard, to lead the encyclopedia project. However, Bernard’s poor health prevented him from taking charge of the project. In November 1931, Costantini decided to approach d’Elia again. This time, he had his secretary, Ildebrando Antoniutti (1898–1974), ask Eugène Beaucé, S.J. (1878–1962), superior of the Nanjing mission at the time, to allow d’Elia to participate in the encyclopedia project. Beaucé agreed, but only on the condition that d’Elia’s duty would be to “collaborate” with the commission, meaning that he would write several essays instead of leading the project. With this conditional permission, Costantini soon announced d’Elia’s appointment to the project. To the surprise of both d’Elia and his Jesuit superiors, d’Elia was named a commission member and the project’s director instead of being appointed as an outside collaborator.

After receiving the announcement of his new position, d’Elia immediately spoke to his Jesuit superiors in Shanghai and then wrote to Costantini to decline the appointment. In his letter to Costantini, he stated that the Jesuit superiors had clarified to the delegate that he would join the project as an outside collaborator instead of becoming its director and a new commission member. He also stated that he had no confidence in his ability to provide effective leadership or to collaborate with Franz Biallas, S.V.D. (1878–1936) and Louis Schram, C.I.C.M. (1883–1971), the two commission members assisting the encyclopedia project, because of their differences in character, nationality, and order affiliation. Moreover, he was afraid that his identity as a Jesuit would disrupt the current balance of representation among the religious orders in the commission and heighten the general suspicion of the Jesuits held by members of the other religious orders.

D’Elia’s response was not what Costantini had expected. In his reply, Costantini corrected d’Elia’s misinterpretation of the Jesuit superiors’ words and emphasized the good intentions behind his decision. Costantini’s interpretation of the situation was that the Jesuits would fully support the project and relieve d’Elia of his obligations. Including d’Elia in the commission expressed Costantini’s regard for d’Elia and of affording him the high authority he would need to lead the project. However, Costantini stated that d’Elia did
not need to accept membership on the commission if he preferred to take charge of the project without it. He could also work from Shanghai instead of moving to Beijing.\textsuperscript{54}

D'Elia’s next reply made the situation worse. In it, he complained that Costantini’s announcement undermined his superiors’ trust because they had had no idea that he was to receive the appointment. Then he complained that Costantini had exaggerated expectations of the encyclopedia project’s success and had failed to recognize the insufficiency of the staff assigned to work on it. For this enormous project involving multilingual materials, recruiting many more qualified people, including writers, copyists, and translators, would be necessary to carry it through. However, only three staff members would be recruited to work on the project. D’Elia was not sanguine about the possibility of recruiting more staff, as it had taken the commission a long time to assemble even the current members. D’Elia suggested that it might be impossible to complete the project.\textsuperscript{55}

Costantini was outraged by such pessimism and decided to bring the issue to the attention of Ledóchowski, and Pierre Lefebvre (1885–1955), the newly appointed superior of the Nanjing mission. He criticized d’Elia’s pessimism and uncooperativeness and claimed that it challenged the church’s full support of the encyclopedia. Frustrated with the ineffective communication between him and the Jesuits in Shanghai, Costantini decided to cease attempting to collaborate with them.\textsuperscript{56}

Before receiving Costantini’s letter, Ledóchowski had already been informed of the situation by d’Elia and Lefebvre. Both asked for Ledóchowski’s intervention but took different approaches. D’Elia made it a personal issue by emphasizing his devotion to his beloved Jesuit community in Shanghai and by expressing his reluctance to leave.\textsuperscript{57} On the other hand, Lefebvre focused more on the possible adverse effects of d’Elia’s appointment. Lefebvre had talked with several commission members and was aware of their complaints against

\textsuperscript{54} “Letter of Costantini to d’Elia dated January 25, 1932,” ARSI, Sin. 1009–6, doc. 1–no. 9. It is worth noting that Beaucé and Lefebvre both wrote to Costantini to confirm that there was no misunderstanding between d’Elia and his superiors. That is, they thought d’Elia’s interpretation was right. See “Letter of Beaucé to Costantini dated February 2, 1932,” ARSI, Sin. 1009–6, doc. 1–no. 12; “Letter of Lefebvre to Costantini dated February 5, 1932,” ARSI, Sin. 1009–6, doc. 3–no. 1.

\textsuperscript{55} “Letter of d’Elia to Costantini dated February 5, 1932,” ARSI, Sin. 1009–6, doc. 1–no. 11.

\textsuperscript{56} “Letter of Costantini to Ledóchowski dated March 5, 1932,” ARSI, Sin. 1009–6, doc. 2. In this letter, Costantini attached eight documents to present the issue of d’Elia’s nomination, in ARSI, Sin. 1009–6, doc. 2–A–H. “Letter of Costantini to Lefebvre dated March 5, 1932,” ARSI, Sin. 1009–6, doc. 2–H.

\textsuperscript{57} “Letter of d’Elia to Ledóchowski dated February 27, 1932,” ARSI, Sin. 1009–6, doc. 1.
Bernard, who was then a member of the Jesuit order and who had spent most of his time in Tianjin, rarely traveling to Beijing to take care of his commission duties. The commission members already had an unfavorable impression of Bernard and so would probably not welcome another Jesuit member who also did not intend to move to Beijing. Given these circumstances, Lefebvre thought the Jesuits should not be involved in the project and the commission.

After examining all the correspondence between the Jesuits and the delegate, Ledóchowski instructed d’Elia. In his reply to d’Elia, he first expressed sympathy for d’Elia’s situation and the burdensome appointment. However, he indicated that d’Elia’s imprudent letter would severely affect the Jesuit China mission. Rather, d’Elia’s tone in his correspondence with Costantini had offended the delegate. By insisting that “the appointment should be agreed upon by my superiors first,” he had challenged Costantini’s authority. He had offered no acknowledgment of the compliment Costantini had paid him by offering him the appointment and membership in the commission. Second, d’Elia had failed to properly express his concern over a project that had won the church’s full support. Any of his words could be easily misinterpreted as criticisms against papal authority. To remedy this undesirable situation, Ledóchowski instructed d’Elia to undertake a three-day penance and then seek Costantini’s forgiveness. Then, he wrote to Costantini to apologize for d’Elia’s inappropriate response and promised that the China Jesuits were willing to send another Jesuit to collaborate on the project.

Following his receipt of the instructions from the superior general, d’Elia made a humble apology to Costantini for his reckless criticisms and for the displeasure he had caused and also offered to do any missionary work that the commission required. The delegate accepted the apology and assured d’Elia that he had never doubted the latter’s righteous intentions, which had been proven by his longstanding observance of the cultural approach of the ancient Jesuits in his research and writings. Costantini believed that d’Elia’s past work and the cultural approach he had taken were a benefit to the Catholic church.

59 “Letter of Lefebvre to Ledóchowski dated February 24, 1932,” ARSI, Sin. 1009–6, doc. 3.
and would continue to help dispel prejudice and to foster the church's progress in China.\textsuperscript{63} D’Elia’s case finally came to an end.

After this incident, the bureau and the commission acted almost entirely independently of each other, neither collaborating nor coming into conflict. This was partially because the two figures left China for Rome a few months later. D’Elia was appointed as a chair of missiology at the Pontifical Gregorian University, while Costantini entered the service in the Propaganda Fide.\textsuperscript{64} The conflict with the commission did stir some reflection on the bureau’s work and, more broadly, the ecclesiastical hierarchy behind it. As his Jesuit confrères were working to solve the conflict with the commission and the delegate, Verdier, superior of the Nanjing mission, developed a far more pessimistic view of the bureau’s future. For him, the bureau had made a great mistake by arriving so late after the approval of establishing the Synodal Commission in the First Plenary Council. The two institutes were engaged in a rivalry over similar publishing projects, but the commission worked directly under the apostolic delegation. Both institutes faced the same staff shortage problems. As d’Elia’s conflict with Costantini showed, it was difficult for the Jesuits to decline an offer from the commission while engaging in parallel work. In this regard, Verdier admitted, the bureau might be a transient institute and was perhaps destined to disappear to make way for a similar one that would be established by the highest religious authority in China.\textsuperscript{65} The Jesuit superior general took a different attitude, however. Perceiving the bureau’s value to the China mission and the Jesuit legacy it represented, Ledóchowski decided to maintain its operation. After settling the dispute with the commission, he warned the China Jesuits to pay more attention to hierarchy when interacting with the delegation. The bureau should remain aware of the Synodal Commission’s business and avoid any rivalry with it. It should also work in collaboration with the commission if necessary.\textsuperscript{66}

\textsuperscript{63} “Letter of Costantini to d’Elia dated May 7, 1932,” ARSI, Sin. 1009–6, doc. 11.

\textsuperscript{64} Ledóchowski asked Lefebvre and Haouisée to send a qualified person to take this position. Two candidates, Xu Zongze and d’Elia, were under consideration. Lefebvre and Haouisée mentioned d’Elia’s conflict with Costantini but both assured Ledóchowski that he had learned a lesson. Finally, d’Elia was offered the position for his considerable knowledge and better performance in research. “Letter of Lefebvre to Ledóchowski dated September 17, 1932,” ARSI, Sin. 1009–4, doc. 5; “Letter of Haouisée to Ledóchowski dated September 1932,” ARSI, Sin. 1009–4, doc. 44. For d’Elia’s contribution to Sinology, see Roman Malek S.V.D., “The Legacy of Pasquale d’Elia S.J. (1890–1963): Mission Historian and Sinologist,” Sino-Western Cultural Relations Journal 32 (2010): 18–62.

\textsuperscript{65} “Letter of Verdier to Ledóchowski dated January 28, 1932,” ARSI, Sin. 1009–4, doc. 11.

\textsuperscript{66} “Letter of Ledóchowski to Lefebvre dated June 12, 1932,” ARSI, Sin. 1009–6, doc. 12.
The bureau’s work continued operating with newly recruited members after d’Elia’s official departure in 1934. Some of d’Elia’s suggestions for the bureau’s improvement were acted upon, particularly the suggestion that they collaborate with different Jesuit missions in China. For example, in 1936, Georges Marin, S.J. (1895–1956), the Jesuit visitor to China, proposed that the Jesuits establish a publication committee and writers’ house to bring Jesuits from different apostolic vicariates in China into collaboration. The Second Sino-Japanese War broke out the following year, making inter-vicariate collaboration impossible. It was not until the Catholic Church established the local ecclesiastical hierarchy in 1946 that a promising start for national and inter-order collaboration began. However, it ended soon after this due to the full-scale Chinese civil war that broke out within a few years.

Conclusion

To this day, the bureau’s publications are reprinted and digitized for modern readers and scholars. However, much of the history of the bureau’s operation is only accessible through the order’s internal correspondence and reports, which are mostly not published. This article has attempted to reveal some little-known histories of the bureau’s early existence. It was founded to carry on the Jesuits’ intellectual legacy and their Sinological tradition, which had characterized the first Jesuit mission to China. The bureau looked productive on paper, but d’Elia, the bureau’s most significant member, had a different point of view. His proposal for the bureau’s reorganization and the subsequent discussions that the proposal generated reveal the harsh realities that the bureau was forced to live with. While struggling with the long-term financial and staff shortages pervasive in almost every missionary enterprise across China, the bureau found that its work often overlapped with that of the Synodal Commission, which was directly under the apostolic delegation. The two institutes had been established with similar purposes. They were both intended to promote research on China and Catholicism and consequently, their publication projects and member appointments often overlapped. These overlaps may have been the result of coincidence; however, Costantini had experienced


68 “Compte-rendu du Père Georges Marin,” ARSI, Sin. 1010–8, doc. 3.
much hostility from missionaries because of the papal indigenization directive and, for him, they, along with d’Elia’s refusal to lead the encyclopedia project and his pessimism about the viability of the project, seemed to be a challenge to his authority. Perceiving the escalating tension between the China Jesuits and Costantini caused by d’Elia’s conflict with the delegate, the Jesuit superior general intervened and settled the dispute. To avoid further conflict, he instructed the bureau to be attentive to the commission’s business to prevent more overlaps in the future.

The bureau continued its operation, although it still needed to cope with the same internal problems that d’Elia’s had pointed out in his proposal of 1931. As for the commission, after the Holy See established the Catholic hierarchy in China in 1946, it was reorganized as the Catholic Central Bureau and led the national cultural apostolate campaign through publications. Did the bureau and the China Jesuits believe they had lost an opportunity to increase their national influence by collaborating with the commission and the delegation? Did they feel they were marginalized within the missionary community after the incident? Maybe some of them did have these thoughts. But the bureau carried on with its mission, and its work was still recognized in China and the world thanks to the Jesuits’ global network and the excellent location of the bureau’s headquarters in a cultural and media hub, Shanghai.

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