



Paul Sou, C.M.:
A Missionary at His Country
*(A short story of the first Chinese Priest of the Congregation of
the Mission)*

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Abstract:

Paul Sou, the first Chinese priest of the Congregation of the Mission, stands out in the history of Chinese Vincentian missionaries, often overshadowed by European counterparts. Unlike many, Sou's life and contributions are well-documented in various diaries and letters. Born in 1692 in Guangdong, he was baptized at 8 by Fr. Appiani, the first Vincentian missionary in China (along with Fr. Müllener). Despite drifting from the Church, he reconnected through Müllener's influence. His journey as a missionary faced numerous challenges, from the Chinese Rites controversy to persecution under Emperor Kangxi's decree. Sou's mission work spanned various regions, including Sichuan and Huguang, where he faced imprisonment, torture, and persistent hostility. Despite these hardships, he established a lasting Christian community, engaged in pastoral work, and trained future clergy. His dedication continued until his retirement in Macao, where he focused on educating young Christians. Paul Sou's legacy is a testament to his unwavering faith and the enduring spirit of early Christian missionaries in China.

Paul Sou, le premier prêtre chinois de la Congrégation de la Mission, se distingue dans l'histoire des missionnaires vincentiens chinois, souvent éclipsés par leurs homologues européens. Contrairement à beaucoup d'autres, la vie et les contributions de Paul Sou sont bien documentées dans divers journaux et lettres. Né en 1692 à Guangdong, il a été baptisé à l'âge de 8 ans par le Père Appiani. Bien qu'il se soit éloigné de l'Église, il a renoué avec elle grâce à l'influence de Müllener. Son parcours de missionnaire a été confronté à de nombreux défis, de la controverse sur les rites chinois à la persécution sous le décret de l'empereur Kangxi. Le travail missionnaire de Sou s'est étendu à plusieurs régions, dont le Sichuan et le Huguang, où il a dû faire face à l'emprisonnement, à la torture et à une hostilité persistante. Malgré ces difficultés, il a établi une communauté chrétienne durable, s'est engagé dans un travail pastoral et a formé les futurs membres du clergé. Son dévouement s'est poursuivi jusqu'à sa retraite à Macao, où il s'est concentré sur l'éducation des jeunes chrétiens. L'héritage de Paul Sou témoigne de sa foi inébranlable et de l'esprit durable des premiers missionnaires chrétiens en Chine.

Paul Sou, el primer sacerdote chino de la Congregación de la Misión, destaca en la historia de los misioneros vicencianos chinos, a menudo eclipsados por sus homólogos europeos. A diferencia de muchos, la vida y las contribuciones de Sou están bien documentadas en varios diarios y cartas. Nacido en 1692 en Guangdong, fue bautizado a los 8 años por el padre Appiani. A pesar de alejarse de la Iglesia, se reencontró gracias a la influencia de Müllener. Su periplo como misionero se enfrentó a numerosos retos, desde la controversia sobre los ritos chinos hasta la persecución bajo el decreto del emperador Kangxi. La labor misionera de Sou abarcó varias regiones, como Sichuan y Huguang, donde tuvo que enfrentarse a encarcelamientos, torturas y una hostilidad persistente. A pesar de estas penurias, estableció una comunidad cristiana duradera, se dedicó a la labor pastoral y formó a futuros clérigos. Su dedicación continuó hasta su jubilación en Macao,



donde se centró en la educación de jóvenes cristianos. El legado de Paul Sou es un testimonio de su fe inquebrantable y del espíritu perdurable de los primeros misioneros cristianos en China.

Keywords: Paul Sou, Müllener, Vincentian Mission, China.

Introduction

Unlike European missionaries, who frequently appeared in our "Memoires de la Congregation de la Mission La Chine" (MCMC), Chinese Confreres have only occasionally been highlighted. There are several reasons for this: first, most of the information was recorded by Westerners, and second, Chinese Confreres rarely wrote their own stories. Paul Sou is an exception; his name appears numerous times in the MCMC, in the diary of Andreas Ly, a native priest who lived at the same time and in the same place as him, and he is frequently mentioned in the diary of Bishop de Martillat or by one of the procurators of the Foreign Missions in Macao. He also wrote some letters to our confreres in Latin, which can be found in the MCMC. These accounts provide abundant information about Paul Sou, especially compared to Stephanus Hsu and Peter Chu, two other Chinese priests ordained by Bishop Johannes Müllener (Chinese name: 穆天凡). Despite the challenges, it is worthwhile to document the story of Paul Sou, our first Chinese Vincentian.

Where the story began

In 1699, two Vincentian priests, Frs. Luigi Antonio Appiani (Chinese name 畢天祥) and Johannes Müllener (穆天凡), arrived in Canton with a specific mission: to establish a seminary in either Beijing or Canton. At that time, the Chinese Rites controversy, which had been ongoing for half a century, was at its peak. Given that both Canton and Beijing were centers of this controversy, the mission of these two confreres seemed nearly impossible. Therefore, they sought a more remote location that was not frequently visited by Europeans. Familiar with the reputation for charity and other virtues of Bishop de Lyonne of the Foreign Missions, who had recently been appointed bishop of Rosalie and apostolic vicar of Sichuan (四川), they decided to travel to that region to dedicate themselves to their apostolic task of establishing a seminary for native clergy. According to Appiani's report, the journey from Canton (now Guangdong 廣東) to Sichuan (四川) took about three months. He did not specify the means of transportation used (whether by boat or by horse).

Thus began the long story of the Vincentians' mission in China! Upon their arrival in April 1702, Fr. Appiani purchased a house in the town of Chungking-fou (now Chongqing Municipality 重慶), which marks the southern limit of the relatively low Huaying Mountains (華鎣山). Chongqing was described as the most commercial city in the province. The city is built on and around a hilly promontory of red sandstone and shale that extends southward from Sichuan. This promontory is bordered to the north by the Jialing River (嘉陵江) and to the east and south by the Yangtze River (長江), effectively forming a peninsula between the two rivers. The houses are arranged in an amphitheatre-like manner; the air is healthy with a humid subtropical climate, allowing

for a variety of fruits to be available year-round, and the rivers are teeming with fish. The city is known for its unique trunks made of interwoven canes, painted in various colors.¹

Before buying a house, Fr. Appiani had to visit the local mandarins² to seek their permission. The mandarins were already aware that four Europeans had arrived: two of them, Frs. Basset and de la Balvère of the Foreign Missions, had gone to Chengdu (成都), the capital of Sichuan province, while the other two, Appiani and Müllener, had stayed in Chongqing (重慶). This arrangement was agreed upon and took effect in 1703. It is important to note that the two Lazarists were there as the delegates of the Sacred Congregation, while the two Foreign Mission priests were sent by their own congregation. This distinction is significant as it impacted the future of the mission in Sichuan.

Emperor Kangxi had decreed that all foreign missionaries must apply for a *piao*³, (imperial license for a mission) if they intended to reside in China (decree of December 17, 1706). Missionaries without a *piao* had to conduct their mission clandestinely, risking deportation or imprisonment. This decree had serious consequences for the foreign priests in Sichuan, as none of them had a *piao*. During the persecution of 1706, all the missionaries, including the Vincentians and Foreign Mission priests, were banished. Appiani, who had just returned from traveling to Beijing with Bishop de Tournon, was captured and imprisoned upon his arrival in Sichuan. Similarly, Müllener had to leave Chongqing for Canton immediately. In 1707, Müllener was brought back to Sichuan and then went to Beijing to obtain a *piao*. However, after undergoing more than 90 interrogations, he was expelled again and sent back to Canton at the end of 1708. The military confiscated their house in Sichuan and allowed it to be occupied illegally.

In 1708, while in Canton, Fr. Appiani learned that another Vincentian, Fr. Théodoric Pedrini (Chinese name 德理格), was in Manila, awaiting his departure to Macao and Canton before eventually heading to Beijing. Meanwhile, Appiani was imprisoned in Canton, chained and tortured, with his only crime being a good man. Cardinal de Tournon was also not free. While Pedrini waited in Manila for the right moment to enter China, Müllener had been banned from China. Following the cardinal's advice, Müllener prepared to leave Canton for Batavia (Jakarta), longing for the day he could return to China. He spent about a year in Batavia (1709-1710) before eventually being able to return to Canton.

By God's providence, the three missionaries managed to reunite in Canton in 1710/11. No one had imagined they would have the chance to see each other there! After enduring many difficulties and various sufferings, the three missionaries, separated for such a long time, were finally going to meet for the first (and the last) time in their lives. They were together for a brief time before embarking on another series of journeys. Appiani remained in prison, Müllener faced uncertainty about whether he could return to

¹ W. Winterbotham, *An Historical, Geographical, and Philosophical View of the Chinese Empire*, London, 1795, p. 101. Google books file:///H:/An_Historical_Geographical_and_Philosoph.pdf. I put the new Romanization as well its Chinese character so that the reader can follow the actual place now.

² In Chinese were called *shenshi* (紳士), Gentleman/Gentry, refers to a special stratum with rich, cultural, prestigious, and social status in the local area. Portuguese gave them the name Mandarin, from *mandar*, to govern. See Jean- Pierre Charbonnier, *Christians in China AD 600 to 2000*, Ignatius Press, San Francisco, 2007. Kindle edition, location 913.

³ A.L. Knt, *Contribution to an historical sketch of the Portuguese settlements in China, Principally of Macao, of the Portuguese envoys & Ambassadors to China, of the Roman Catholic Mission in China and the Papal legates to China, Macao, 1832*, p.124. The missionaries who wish to stay in China has to join special test. There are many questions that should be answered, but mostly a statement to follow Ricci's doctrine in doing mission. Then the applicant should have signed and sealed with his own seal.

Sichuan or had to go elsewhere, and Pedrini waited for the right moment to go to Beijing. Despite their different challenges and uncertainties, it was divine Providence that orchestrated this emotional meeting in such a unique place—Appiani's prison. What a gathering! Pedrini wrote, "*I have had the joy of embracing him twice in his prison. A third time we were all together in his prison, we the three missionaries of the small Company: Fr. Appiani, Fr. Müllener, and I. Fr. Müllener conducts Missions in certain mountains of China, which are not submitted to the Emperor; we write each other letters; several times before his departure, I had the occasion of embracing him ... like the first Christians in the deserts and the catacombs.*"⁴

In Canton, Fr. Müllener spent most of his time in hiding, waiting for the government's decision on Appiani's case, with plans to eventually travel together to Sichuan. When it became clear that Appiani's freedom was unattainable, Müllener decided to conduct a mission among the mountain peoples near Canton. As a follower of St. Vincent, he surrendered to God's Providence, which led to an encounter with an old catechumen. This meeting marked a new chapter in the Vincentians' history in China. The catechumen completely dedicated himself to God, renouncing the world, and, with mutual consent, left his wife, children, and parents to follow Fr. Müllener until death, becoming "the apostle of Sichuan." This man was Sulpice Sou (蘇), who would become the future catechist and father of the first Chinese Vincentian, Paul Sou.

The two attempted to evangelize the minority groups but soon realized it was unrealistic due to circumstances such as war and a chaotic social system that even Chinese officials avoided. With no hope of beginning a mission in Canton or the surrounding mountains, they considered returning to the old mission area in the mountains of Sichuan. From his prison, Appiani sought advice from Fr. Abbe Cordero and Fr. Terra on how to carry out the mission near Canton ... doing so in accord with the wishes of Cardinal de Tournon. After much discussion, they decided not to leave Müllener in limbo for too long; he had to go back to Sichuan.

However, they faced the challenge of securing the necessary funds for Müllener to undertake the three or four month journey, purchase a house, either in the mountains or another part of Sichuan province where he would be safe, and cover living expenses for himself and the laypeople accompanying him on his missions. Money was always their biggest problem.

The biggest donor, Cardinal Tournon, had passed away during the previous year. Pedrini, who had just arrived and was preparing to leave for Beijing, also needed financial assistance so he could begin his work there without worrying about money. Appiani expressed his frustration that the Italian confreres had not sent him any allowance ... as if they no longer cared for him. While Pedrini's problem was resolved with 500 piasters from Appiani for his travel to Beijing⁵, Appiani was troubled about how to fund the journey and the mission work in Sichuan. They needed to send Müllener with the best possible preparation, but finding the necessary funds was crucial; otherwise, Müllener would not reach his destination. Appiani's leadership and personality were severely tested, even while he was in prison, as he had to think through all these matters.

At the most critical moment, God sent help through Abbé Cordero. "*His zeal for preaching the gospel and his love for us pushed him to overcome obstacles that would*

⁴ MCMC revised ed. Vol 1 (Trans. by Henk De Cuijpers, CM), p. 114.

⁵ Appiani gave Pedrini 500 piasters for his travel to Beijing, (MCMC revised ed. *Ibid*, p. 122). This story was written by Appiani in a letter date 1st August 1711. The original letter is kept in Monte-Citorio, Rome.

have been insurmountable for others. Of the 1,000 piasters I had lent to our cardinal in Beijing in 1706, he made Father Cerù return 500 to me, risking being blamed by the Sacred Congregation⁶ for our sake." With the financial matter resolved, Appiani kept 30 piasters for himself. Müllener's long journey to Sichuan began; he brought his helper and the helper's two children. The helper acted as a courier, carrying letters to and from Appiani. They agreed to meet in a certain town, with those arriving earlier waiting for the others.

The first son, Paul Sou, was born around 1692 in Shunde County, Guangdong Province. He was baptized by Appiani in Canton when he was 8 years old. However, due to the lack of a permanent priest in Canton and Paul's interest in painting and other manual crafts, he drifted away from the church for a time. Müllener's return from Batavia was a blessing, allowing Paul and his father to reconnect with the church. Paul quickly won the priests' hearts; he was reliable and well-liked by the Italian Abbés. Cardinal Tournon even hired him as a personal secretary because of his beautiful handwriting. Unfortunately, prolonged exposure to ink affected Paul's health, particularly his lungs, leading to tuberculosis.

The second son, Antoine, was six years younger than Paul. Paul's interest in studying revived, perhaps spurred by Antoine's presence. Cardinal Tournon loved Antoine for his natural sweetness and curiosity, showing interest in learning new things. Appiani baptized Antoine at age 5 and taught him Latin, conversing with him in that language as well. Appiani hoped Antoine would continue his studies wherever he stayed. Antoine would join the group traveling to Sichuan, becoming the youngest member.

The small group of four—two adults and two young boys—was ready to depart. At the last minute, another adolescent, Philippe, asked to join them. Philippe, a former student from Macao, had left due to health reasons. He was a native of Sichuan, and one of his sisters had consecrated herself to God through a vow of virginity. After some consideration, the group allowed him to join, despite initial reluctance, recognizing his modesty, humility, and zeal. Appiani, who saw Philippe briefly, was impressed by his humble and devout behavior ... there are no further records about Philippe's fate.

For Müllener, determined to work on forming local clergy and catechists, the presence of these children brought hope for having good catechists and perhaps even future priests.

Now, he will travel to wherever the Holy Spirit leads him, much like Abraham was called by Yahweh to the promised land, moving forward guided by faith. He planned to enter Chongqing through the mountains at the borders of Huguang,⁷ Guizhou, and Sichuan. On July 29, 1711, after almost four months of travel, he arrived in Changde, Huguang (modern-day Hunan Province), a port city situated at the mouth of the Yuánjiāng River. The journey took longer than usual due to necessary detours for safety reasons. The small group paused here because it was too hot to continue traveling to Chongqing, and they needed to switch to a larger boat for the Yangtze River.

While waiting, Müllener, driven by his evangelical zeal, found an opportunity to preach to the citizens of Changde. He discovered only one baptized Christian in the town who had been away from the church for a long time. Müllener began teaching him, just as he had done with the Sou family in Canton, and even managed to preach to non-believers, converting some of them. The advantage of this location was the use of

⁶ MCMC, p.112.

⁷ Huguang generally refers to the two provinces of Hubei and Hunan, also known as the two lakes.

Mandarin Chinese, with no particular dialect hindering the gospel's spread. In a short time, Müllener and his companions connected with the locals, baptized them, and encouraged them to observe the Church's precepts. Despite revealing that he was a fugitive and quite poor, the people accepted him and his teachings.

Seeing the success of his initial mission and the favorable conditions of the place—the openness of the people, the affordable living expenses, and the strategic location that allowed connection to all parts of China, especially for picking up yearly allowances from Canton—Müllener felt compelled to invest more time and effort in the Christian community of Changde. It would only take 25 days to travel to Canton by land from Changde. Müllener began discussing with Appiani his plan to buy property for a church and seminary there, using Sulpice's name to avoid unnecessary issues with the authorities, especially during times of persecution as experienced in Chongqing and Chengdu a few years ago.

Müllener managed to build a church in Changde, but the Christians in Sichuan were waiting for his return. On December 27th, two Christians from his former mission area came to ask him to accompany them back to Sichuan immediately. However, feeling a sense of responsibility to the newly established Christian community in Changde, he decided to stay until after Easter the following year, probably wanting to celebrate Easter with them. During this time, the small community of five continued their mission, teaching, evangelizing, and performing sacraments. Müllener also taught his pupils basic Christian morals and Latin, involving them as altar servers. In a sense, Müllener had already begun his "seminary in diaspora" in Changde.

Tragically, Antoine, the younger brother of Paul and one of Sulpice's sons, contracted smallpox. Within three days, he was near death. While there are no records of the treatment he received or whether a Chinese doctor was called, we know that Fr. Müllener was busy administering the last rites. Antoine died on February 17, 1712, at the age of 14 and was buried in the church garden rather than the common cemetery, with all the Christians present. This was a deeply sad moment for the small group, but they remained determined to continue their mission to Sichuan.

The group, now including the two Christians from Sichuan, planned to depart for Sichuan on April 8, 1712, shortly after Easter. It was an emotional moment for both the small group and the new community in Changde. One can imagine how difficult it was for Sou's family to say goodbye to Antoine and leave his grave behind. Müllener showed great courage in entrusting the care of the church to the new community. The Changde community likely felt reluctant to see them leave. Although it is unclear who would take charge of the newly built community, Müllener was confident that it would thrive under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, which proved to be true. This scene is reminiscent of St. Paul's farewell to the Ephesian elders, as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, heads to Jerusalem, knowing only that prison and hardships await him.⁸ Later, as a priest, Paul Sou regularly visited this place and helped solve property issues.

The journey to their destination was fraught with peril. Along the way, they encountered another Christian from Sichuan whom Müllener had sent from Canton to inform the Christians in Sichuan of his imminent arrival. He brought the troubling news that the mandarins were actively searching for Müllener. Consequently, they had to make further detours. The path ahead was often treacherous and difficult to navigate. They faced numerous rapids 35 miles above Chengde, complicating their journey. They

⁸ Act, 20, 22-23.

narrowly escaped three shipwrecks before reaching the border of Sichuan and Huguang at Pien-Tchou-Fou.⁹

Müllener and his companions did not always travel by boat; many times, they journeyed inland, traversing mountains and encountering various native tribes. He described these tribes as similar to the Chinese in most respects, except in their marital customs, where they only paid attention to the second and third degrees of consanguinity. They lived simply and honestly. Despite spending three months with them, Müllener found it challenging to preach due to the language barrier and the risk to the tribes if the mandarins discovered his presence. He left his Chinese companions to continue the mission work there.

On July 22, they departed from the mountain area, traveling overland for six days under the summer sun, eventually reaching another mountainous refuge, Sou-Nan-Fou (modern-day Sinan County, 思南县)¹⁰ in Guizhou Province (貴州省), now part of Tongren Prefecture (銅仁). This isolated area, surrounded by mountains and 46 small villages, was inhabited by indigenous people rather than Han Chinese. These indigenous people, likely the Miao (苗族) of northeastern Yunnan and northwestern Guizhou, lived relatively free from the empire's laws, providing a haven for Müllener's group and their evangelical work. Today, Tongren has a church and a small Christian community, whose origins might trace back to Müllener's efforts.

In Sinan, Müllener's work involved visiting people, proselytizing, and teaching his pupils basic Christian doctrines, morals, and Latin. Although the duration of his stay is undocumented, he eventually left two of his Chinese companions (possibly those who had met him in Changde) to continue the mission work there.

This narrative highlights the persistent efforts and challenges Müllener and his companions faced in their mission, emphasizing their dedication to spreading Christianity despite numerous obstacles.

After Easter in April 1713, Müllener and his small group arrived in Chongqing only to find that their church and the first house he and Appiani had purchased in 1703 had been occupied by unknown intruders. Undeterred, Müllener sought out new locations for his church and seminary. He eventually secured three different buildings, where he continued his ministry and was consoled by the many converts. Among these new Christians were several courageous girls who embraced celibacy and fulfilled their saintly duties with dedication.¹¹ This period was relatively calm for the mission in Sichuan.

Müllener continued training his pupils for the priesthood, serving the mission in Sichuan alone until 1715 when Father de la Baluère from the Foreign Missions arrived in Chengdu. Unfortunately, de la Baluère died shortly after his arrival, leaving Müllener once again as the sole priest in the province.

⁹ I cannot identify this place at the modern map.

¹⁰ James Playfair, D.D, *ibid.* p. 701. Se-nan-fou, a city in 27° 56' N. latitude, near the northern extremity of the province, in a narrow and level tract bounded by mountains almost inaccessible and lying between Sichuan and Huguang, on the bank of a river that flows from south-west to north east, and falls into the Kiang below Chongqing.

¹¹ As early as the 1640s, Catholic women in Sichuan are known to have chosen a celibate life in preference to near-universal practice of marriage (cf. Robert E. Entenmann, (1996) 'Christian Virgins in Eighteenth-Century Sichuan' in *Christianity in China. From the Eighteenth Century to the Present* Edited by Daniel H. Bays. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press). Also, Maria Jaschok and Shui Jingjun, (2011), "Women, Religion, and Space in China", New York, Routledge, p. 146.

The situation became increasingly complicated with the culmination of the "Rites Controversy" and the publication of the Papal Bull "Ex illa die" in 1715. This decree forbade the toleration of traditional Chinese rites and insisted on the practice of Catholicism according to its European traditions. Specifically, Chinese Catholics were forbidden from practicing ancestor worship, a culturally significant tradition that even the broad-minded Kangxi Emperor could not accept.

The missionaries themselves were deeply divided on this issue, leading to further complications. As a result, Christian teachings were officially banned in China. From that year onward, the church suffered many local and several general persecutions, fueled by the xenophobia of officials and the Emperor's deep suspicion and fear of secret societies and rebellions. The internal divisions among the missionaries only exacerbated the already tense situation.

Despite these challenges, Müllener's dedication to his mission and his community's resilience demonstrated the strength and faith of the early Christian communities in Sichuan.

Despite the challenges, Father Müllener managed to maintain his presence in Sichuan and was appointed apostolic vicar of the mission in 1716. This position also extended his responsibilities to the Huguang province, as Bishop Visdelou had been banished and could not serve there. One of Müllener's first initiatives as bishop was to continue the formation of native clergy and catechists, a critical task for the future of the mission. The number of seminarians under his care increased, with six Chinese students living with him and receiving education to prepare for the priesthood.

Müllener taught these students basic knowledge of morality and philosophy, but he noted to Propaganda Fide that Chinese boys at the age of 16 and 17 were not as determined to persevere in their vocation as their European counterparts. He considered this remark premature, given that the concept of priesthood was still relatively new to Chinese culture. His efforts were limited because he was often alone and had to travel extensively throughout the vast province that he administered, leaving his students at home under the sole direction of a Chinese teacher. Consequently, they often forgot much of what they had learned, and Müllener had to reteach them upon his return.

Between 1720 and 1725, Müllener conferred minor orders on several young Chinese and ordained three to the priesthood: Paulus Sou Hung-hsiao (蘇鴻孝), Petrus Chu (朱), and Stephanus Su (徐). The fate of these newly ordained priests after their ordination is somewhat unclear.¹² There are suggestions that they might have been sent to Rome for further study, but Müllener and Appiani did not provide detailed accounts of this.

Paul Sou was ordained in 1723 and admitted to the Congregation in 1725, likely in Canton before Father Appiani. In that same year, Müllener moved the seminary to Canton, with plans to eventually open it in Macau. However, the Sacred Congregation ordered him to rebuild the seminary in Sichuan. As a result, they ended up establishing another seminary in Canton under Father Appiani's direction.

Stephanus Hsu, born in 1694 in Yaoshān xiàn (樂山縣), Jiāding fǔ (嘉定府) (modern-day Yaoshān 樂山) in Sichuan, studied with La Baluère and later with Müllener

¹² J. Van den Brant, *Les Lazaristes en Chine, 1697-1935*, Peiping, Imprimerie des Lazaristes, 1936. Indicates that Paulus Su was educated in Rome. The full Chinese names of Petrus Chu and Stephanus Su have not been preserved.

before attending the seminary in Siam. Despite his training by the Foreign Mission, he joined the Vincentians, was admitted to the Congregation in 1726, and ordained a priest in July 1729.

Petrus Chu is not listed in the "Les Lazaristes en Chine 1697-1935, notes biographiques" and is believed to have died of tuberculosis on November 14, 1732.¹³ Müllener's efforts in forming native clergy, despite the numerous obstacles, laid the groundwork for the growth and sustainability of the Christian mission in Sichuan and beyond.

Often, future priests were recruited among boys who were offered to the service of the Church by their parents. Paul Sou is an example of such dedication. He had been with the priests from an early age, traveling from Canton to Chongqing through rivers and mountains, enduring the loss of his younger brother, and saying goodbye to his mother and another sibling at the age of 18.¹⁴ There are no records indicating when Sulpice Sou was appointed as a catechist, but considering his long journey and faithfulness to Müllener, it was likely Müllener trained and appointed him.

Sulpice Sou was a respected catechist who had the privilege of meeting Cardinal Tournon personally. The Cardinal permitted him to engage in trade to support the mission. Like most of Sichuan's Catholic population, Sou's family came from humble backgrounds.

Catechists in early 18th century Sichuan were divided into several classes. There were permanent catechists assigned to a village or Christian settlement, and itinerant catechists who travelled from place to place. The itinerant catechists often preached to non-Christians, introduced them to the Catholic religion, baptized babies in danger of death, or ministered to Christian communities that did not have a permanent catechist.¹⁵

Catechists usually resided in the church, setting a good example for the faithful by practicing virtues like humility, patience, charity, and diligence. They were expected to meditate daily and take communion at least once a month.¹⁶ The Church provided financial support for the catechists, though it was modest—usually less than 30 taels per year.¹⁷ As a comparison, Linus Chang, who was appointed by Bishop Müllener as the catechist-general of the province, received a salary of 30 taels¹⁸ a year. This amount was comparable to wages earned by workers in the cotton factories of Suzhou.¹⁹

Paul's father continued to live with him at the church compound in Hia-sou-hian (下四鄉), along with other foreign missionaries, including the future bishop de Martiliat.

¹³ Sergio Ticozzi, *History of the Formation of the Native Catholic Clergy in China*, Holy Spirit Study Centre, Hong Kong, 2017, p. 63.

¹⁴ Robert Entenmann, "Chinese catholic clergy and catechists in eighteenth-century Szechwan" in *variétés sinologiques - nouvelle série*, vol. 78, p. 404-405.

¹⁵ REV. PAOLO MANNA, M. Ap, *Conversion of Pagan World*, Boston, 1921. P. 156.

¹⁶ The diary of Martiliat, 1744.

¹⁷ See the financial records of the mission from 1740 to 1746 in AME 434,1039-1041, 1043, 1047.

¹⁸ There is no written record about the wage of catechist in MCMC, it is only written that... "Bishop Müllener shares resources which he receives from Europe; he gives every priest 80 patacas a year; because of charity for the others he reduces himself and his two confreres, Etienne Su and Paul Sou to 20 piasters a year.

¹⁹ ROBERT C. ALLEN, "Wages, prices, and living standards in China, 1738–1925: in comparison with Europe, Japan, and India," in *Economic History Review*, 64, S1 (2011), pp. 8–38. Overall, the daily wages thus derived come to 0.09944 and 0.1144 silver taels in 1730 and 1772 respectively. Their job was 'to soften and polish cotton cloth after it had been pressed and rubbed, less dangerous compare to the work of catechist.

Sulpice Sou passed away at this location on March 1, 1740, at the age of 74, and was buried there.

This community's commitment and resilience amid challenging conditions highlight the enduring spirit of early Christian missionaries and their followers in Sichuan.

The procurator of the Foreign Missionary described Paul Sou as a short, virtuous, and witty person, particularly highlighting his talent for speaking about the Holy Religion.²⁰ This talent was significant because many priests trained outside of China for extended periods struggled with the local language upon their return. For instance, in 1759, the newly arrived Chinese priest Thomas Yen Chi-I (嚴己益), a native of Fukien, needed to learn more Chinese characters and struggled with the local dialect, making it difficult for him to hear confessions. This issue of language and dialect differences among priests has persisted, with Joseph Gabet C.M (1808–1853) noting that the training of native clergy was often at odds with their culture.

Paul Sou's education, both locally and possibly overseas, afforded him many advantages. He was able to speak and write in Latin, was fluent in Chinese (including local dialects), and was deeply rooted in his own culture. This combination of linguistic and cultural competencies made him an effective catechist and missionary, capable of bridging the gap between European missionary efforts and the local Chinese context.

Paul Sou's unique position and abilities exemplify the importance of culturally and linguistically integrated training for missionaries. His success as a catechist and priest underscored the potential benefits of combining local and overseas education to create a more effective and relatable clergy for the local population.

The Honours and disgrace

Under the guidance of Fr. Pedrini, Paul Sou was accepted around 1725 as a student astronomer (Tien-Wen-Sen 天文生).²¹ This entry-level position in the Calendar and Heavenly Signs section was viewed by the Qing bureaucratic system as a student or trainee (生) rather than an official (官). However, during public ceremonies, these students could wear the same official robes and adornments as the lowest civil service workers.²²

Student astronomers were categorized into two groups: shiliang (食糧) and shifeng (食俸). Shiliang student astronomers were junior to shifeng and only received monthly stipends. Shifeng students, in addition to receiving monthly stipends, had the possibility of being promoted to the department of astronomy and mathematics when a position became available. There was another category called yiyesheng (肄業生), designated for newcomers to the Astronomic Bureau. Given these distinctions, it is presumed that Paul Sou was a yiyesheng and needed more effort to advance to a shiliang (食糧).

²⁰ Martiliat, Journal, May 1733, AME 434;501, quoted in “Memoire” Vol 1.

²¹ Some publications translated *Tien-Wen-Sen* 天文生 as student of mathematic, (cf. MCMC, Robert Entenmann, *ibid*, p. 402) at this case, translate *Tien-Wen-Sen* 天文生 into astronomer is more accurate with the original language. Furthermore, the College of Mathematics officially commenced in December 1739, therefore it doesn't make sense if he called as a student of mathematics at this time (cf. Ping-Ying Chang, Chinese Hereditary Mathematician Families of the Astronomical Bureau, 1620-1850, CUNY, New York, doctoral dissertation, unpublished, 2012, p.177).

²² Ping-Ying Chang, *ibid*, p. 28.

These titles provided him with the legal status of lower gentry, potential protection against persecution as a Catholic,²³ and the right to own property. This was why Bishop Müllener and Pedrini worked to secure this status for him. However, this status may have distracted him from his priestly duties. One missionary complained, "*He is so preoccupied with worldly affairs that he neglects confession and often fails to say mass. The Christians are not well edified by this priest, who they say loves worldly glory and neglects their well-being.*"²⁴ Martiliat noted this because Paul Sou spent considerable time establishing his status as a disciple of Mathematics.

On the other hand, Paul Sou's actions were for the benefit of the church. There was an incident that involved the property of the Hia-Seu-Hian church, which was originally under the name of Fr. Peter Zhu. When Fr. Zhu passed away in 1732, the property was transferred to Fr. Paul Sou, with the help of Fr. Pedrini, who facilitated Paul Sou's registration in Kin-Tchang city as a student of Mathematics. Five years later, persecution broke out in Kin-Tchang, and the city's governor instigated numerous charges against him.

Paul Sou skillfully navigated these challenges by building relationships with the magistrates, socializing, attending theatre performances with them, and giving gifts on special occasions. These gestures earned their friendship, and in return, the magistrates resolved the trial against him favorably and promised to erect columns with inscriptions. Similarly, he managed to retain the church property in Tchang-Te-Fou (Changde city 常德市) in Huguang (湖廣) province under his name.

By 1742, Paul Sou had completed his major project of erecting the markers of his status as a disciple of the astronomer.²⁵ The magistrate kept his promise and erected columns with several inscriptions, which served as a distinction for bachelors, students of the imperial school in Peking, and astronomers. Paul Sou invited Christians and non-believer neighbors to the ceremony, which included formal greetings and a celebration with music and a feast for three to four hundred guests over two days. Although Bishop Müllener was distressed by these events, he acknowledged the difficulty of changing course once begun. Paul Sou was pleased, believing he had secured the church's safety, hoping it was God's will.

However, Paul Sou's happiness was short-lived. In 1745, he lost his status as a disciple of astronomy due to a new policy²⁶ or possibly because authorities suspected he was a priest. Consequently, the Council members sent a sergeant to inform Paul Sou that he had to return his letters, abandon the gold pompom on his hat, and dismantle the columns in front of his house. This disheartened him greatly, but since the reform affected others as well, it spared him from complete disgrace.²⁷

²³ Entenmann, *Ibid*, pp. 402. (cf. Ping-Ying Chang, *ibid*, p. 28).

²⁴ Entenmann, *Ibid*, p. 403.

²⁵ MCMC, *ibid*, p. 271. I change the disciple of Mathematic to disciple of astronomer for the same reason at footnote no.19.

²⁶ Ping-Ying Chang, *ibid*, p.179. In 1745, the Astronomical Bureau decided that maintaining a separate program to train its own apprentices, called astronomy apprentices (*yiye tianwensheng* 肄業天文生), was redundant.

²⁷ Chinese people put a high value on dignity. "Loss of face" (Chinese *Diu lian* 丟臉), or "no face" (Mei mianzi 沒面子) are typical Chinese phrases describing losing one's dignity. These two phrases translate into "losing face" in English.

The Privileges

In 1722, Emperor Kangxi (康熙帝) passed away and was succeeded by his son, Yongzheng (雍正帝). The new emperor was less sympathetic to Christians, and in 1724, he issued an edict that exiled all missionaries except those working at the Court. This occurred just a year after Paul Sou's ordination, leading to Christianity being banned in China and categorized as a heterodox ideology. This prohibition lasted for about 120 years, from 1724 to the 1840s. Despite the real danger to their lives, foreign missionaries who remained in China continued their work clandestinely. The Chinese Christian community, led by Chinese clergy, catechists, congregational leaders (會長) endured despite intermittent persecution.

Although Jesuit missionary policy generally emphasized the accommodation of Christianity to indigenous elements of foreign cultures, European missionaries had never encountered a culture as advanced as China's. In the midst of the new persecution, some French Jesuits attempted to introduce the Chinese liturgy. A proposal written on August 16, 1724, outlined two methods for obtaining Chinese priests: ordaining older catechists under the privilege of Pope Paul V or providing Latin training to young candidates. Only the first solution seemed likely to relieve the mission's shortage of priests. The congregation discussed this request on September 23, 1725, in Rome. Maigrot,²⁸ also in Rome, was among those consulted. He was not opposed to the Chinese liturgy but noted the difficulty of obtaining an accurate version of the sacred books. Two others were against the decision, and one took no position.

Early the following year, the Holy Office, which received the request, rejected it. This decision was influenced partly by missionaries in China under the Propagation of Faith: Pedrini CM (in a letter dated Nov 25, 1726) and Bishop Johannes Müllener, CM, apostolic vicar of Sichuan (letter dated Dec 19, 1726), both strongly opposed introducing the Chinese liturgy, fearing it would weaken the condemnation of the Chinese Rites. Their stance demonstrated complete obedience to the Pope rather than their own opinions on the matter. By the mid-eighteenth century, even local Chinese priests began to oppose the Chinese liturgy. Andreas Ly, a prominent Chinese priest, criticized the privilege of Alexander VII, arguing that Chinese priests needed to be fluent in Latin to avoid the condescension of European missionaries and access necessary ministerial knowledge from Latin sources. Inevitably, Paul Sou, a pupil of Müllener, shared his superior's opinion.

In some respects, just like today, Christianity was constantly vulnerable to persecution, arrests, and other forms of harassment. However, in regions far from the capital, such as Sichuan, Christians were often able to practice their faith openly. Foreign priests, however, were more susceptible to arrest and deportation due to the difficulty of concealing their identity. A priest could only stay in each locality for a few days, ministering to Christians, listening to their confession, performing baptisms, and celebrating the Eucharist before moving on to the next community of eagerly awaiting Christians. While it was easier for Chinese priests to travel, their numbers remained low until the late eighteenth century. The key point here is that, except for Beijing—where

²⁸ Charles Maigrot (1652-1730) the bishop of Fujian who ordered all churches in Fujian to take down the stele with the Chinese word 敬天 (respect the Heaven) inscribed by Emperor Kangxi, and forbade Chinese followers to pay worship to ancestors and Confucius. He was interviewed by Emperor Kangxi in August 1706 in regard of this dispute, however it was clear that Maigrot was not mastering Chinese language. The emperor had him be expelled from China.

aging Jesuits were already limited in the religious functions they could perform—there was virtually no place in China where a priest was permanently present.

From 1725 onwards, there were five Vincentians in China: Fr. Appiani in Canton, under house arrest or prison but still able to carry out his mission work; Fr. Pedrini in Beijing, working at the court as a musician; and three others (Bishop Müllener, Paul Sou, and Stephanus Hsu) in Sichuan. All of these Vincentians operated under the Sacred Congregation. Through their letters and the journal of Bishop Martillat, we know that they stayed in contact with one another, with Paul Sou sometimes traveling to Canton or Beijing to visit them. A brief but affectionate letter from Appiani indicates that they had met, and he had a good impression of Paul Sou. Paul Sou had become Bishop Müllener's right hand, handling numerous responsibilities from missionary work to managing church property and dealing with other priests, both native and foreign.

In Sichuan, most Catholics lived in small, scattered communities in mountainous areas, known as *chrétientés* in the writings of French missionaries. These *chrétientés* were typically small villages or hamlets. Andreas Ly mentions 130 such communities in his diary. Because they were spread across Sichuan province, priests had to travel continuously (by horse, on foot, or by boat) to serve them. A priest's visit was a cause for celebration in a *chrétienté*, with a feast day and offerings of fruit, cakes, and tobacco—a tradition still observed in Catholic villages today. During my visits to Catholics in Jiangxi in the South or Hebei in the North between 2008 and 2017, they always served their best meals, prepared delicate soups, provided abundant cakes and fruits, and never forgot to offer the best wine, requesting a “ganbei” (干杯), meaning to empty the glass in a toast and refill it with wine again. Anyone who visits them would experience their warm hospitality.

Paul Sou seemed to excel in his pastoral duties, leaving a lasting positive impression on Fr. Matteo Ripa (馬國賢). Despite being away for a long time, Ripa remembered him vividly. In a letter to Bishop Maggi, Fr. Ripa responded to complaints about Chinese priests by writing: “... *Paul Sou always travelled on foot, harvested crops himself, drove horses, and repaired his coarse canvas clothes—humiliating activities that I have never heard of a European missionary in Beijing (北京), Shandong (山東), Nanjing (南京), or Canton (廣東) doing. I know several European missionaries who have not administered as many sacraments in their entire lives as that priest has in two or three years.*”²⁹

As a native Chinese priest, Paul Sou was responsible for much of the secular business of the Church, tasks that his European missionary counterparts could not always handle. For example, in 1743, he purchased land worth 130 taels near the church in the nearby *chrétientés* of Hia-Sou-Hian (下四鄉). As a priest with the legal status of the lower gentry, Paul Sou also engaged in a lawsuit against a degree-holder who tried to seize church land in Shuāng méng zi (雙檬子), near Chengdu. This lawsuit brought him into contact with the local magistrate, who inquired about his family. Paul Sou stated that he was a widower with two sons (one deceased) and three daughters, with one son in Beijing and two married daughters. In reality, he had an adopted son and was passing off a Christian Virgin as his unmarried daughter. Adopting sons was a common practice among Chinese clergy to protect church properties and avoid societal troubles, given that celibacy was not favored.

²⁹ MCMC, p.200-201.

Paul Sou was said to have personally known the Governor-General of Huguang (湖廣總督), Prince Joseph Dé pèi (德沛), who was secretly a Christian converted by Jesuits. It was claimed that Prince Dé pèi was a devout Christian, never missing his daily morning meditation and adhering strictly to the commandments. Whenever Paul Sou visited Huguang, he would see the Prince and administer the sacraments.

During the persecution in 1746, Paul Sou, sponsored by Christians in Fujian who were distressed due to persecution, went to Beijing to seek the protection of Prince Joseph Dé pèi, who then held the significant position of Vice-President of the Board of Civil Office.

Battle lines are drawn

Rewind to 1731, when Fr. Enjobert de Martillat (Chinese name 馬青山), a young priest from the Foreign Missions, arrived in Canton with plans to enter Sichuan. Unable to enter Cochinchina due to ongoing persecution and believing he had the right to return to Fr. Basset's old Christian Community, he decided to sneak into Sichuan. At that time, it was customary for Christian Communities to belong to the religious institutes that had established them, so the Foreign Missions considered the southern part of Sichuan as their territory. Additionally, in 1732, the Foreign Missions superior sent Fr. Andreas Ly to work in Sichuan. However, Bishop Müllener reassigned him to a mission in Huguang (present-day Hunan and Hubei).

In 1733, Andreas Ly joined Fr. de Martillat, determined to find a way into Sichuan. In May 1733, they met with Bishop Müllener to discuss their intentions to stay and work there. The Bishop informed them that this was impossible due to his strict obedience to Rome. Nevertheless, he granted them authority for the Huguang province and entrusted them with a large Christian Community abandoned by Fr. Douarte, a Portuguese Jesuit. The Bishop then asked Paul Sou to visit them and organized a boat trip from Tong-Léan (Tongliang 銅梁) to Huguang (湖廣), where the two priests would work together. This arrangement would suffice until they received further instructions from Rome.

Meanwhile, another issue arose: three Vincentians had arrived from St. Lazare! These were Frs. Marc Gandon, François Monet, and François-Théodore Trogneux. For a long time, both Appiani and Müllener had been trying to persuade the Vincentians to send more priests to China. After a 20-year wait, Bishop Müllener learned that three confreres were sent to his mission. This assistance was a personal favor, as his mission was not entrusted to the Congregation of the Mission but to the Propaganda Fide. The Superior General of the Congregation of the Mission, in sending these reinforcements, had no intention of taking over the mission. The three Vincentians arrived in Macau after a challenging two-year voyage.

Their vessel reached the Sunda Straits near Batavia (now Jakarta) the previous year. Due to the lateness of the season and the threat of winds and typhoons, along with having many sick passengers, they withdrew and spent the winter in Bourbon or Maurice. This year, they faced almost as much misfortune; despite leaving early, they arrived late due to sailing downwind. They lost more than 34 people on board, and those who arrived in Macao were sick and starving. If they had arrived a few days later, all would have died from hunger. Even after they disembarked, misfortune continued to haunt them.

They had no hope of entering China given the current circumstances, despite Bishop Müllener sending Paul Sou with an acolyte, John Baptist Lieu, to fetch them; they returned empty-handed. This shattered the Bishop's assurances that they would face no

danger on the roads. Having left without informing the Sacred Congregation or the Nuncio of Paris, Fr. Archangelo Miralta, the procurator of the Propaganda, showed little concern for them. They risk being sent back even though Fr. Pedrini encourages them to wait in Macao. Their situation was worsened by carrying only a limited amount of money, and Fr. Miralta had no orders to provide for them. The Foreign Mission procurator in Macao sarcastically remarked, "that is what I call being truly in an apostolic way!"

As for Fr. de Martillat and other Foreign Missions priests, this situation was reminiscent of their encounter with Bishop Müllener in May of the same year. They felt the Bishop had unjustly denied them entry into Sichuan, so they did not consider themselves friends. It was unfortunate that despite their small numbers and shared hardships, the priests from the two societies quarrelled over territory, dragging newcomers and Chinese priests into the conflict. It was hard to believe these priests came as proselytizers and witnesses of God's love. The irony deepens when considering how close their motherhouses in Paris were to each other!

According to Gandon's diary, housed in the National Archives in Paris, despite the difficulties they faced in Macao, they eventually arrived in Canton where Paul Sou and John Baptist Lieu were waiting for them. However, they had to reconsider their presence in the hinterland of China. Entering without the Sacred Congregation of the Propaganda's approval might make them seem like intruders. This was not a matter of the simplicity and disinterestedness of the three, but a reflection of the Church Mission's situation at that time. The Church was compartmentalized and bound by the interests of groups like the Sacred Congregation, various societies, and the Portuguese rights granted by the Pope, known as the *Padroado*. Anyone entering the mission field had to be cautious to avoid stepping on others' toes. They feared their presence might destroy the Mission, causing irreparable harm.

They faced a great dilemma. On one hand, they saw Fr. Paul Sou's sincerity and high expectations. He took great risks to bring them into the country, despite having narrowly escaped violent persecution just weeks earlier, in which he was beaten and wounded.³⁰ His courage and determination were evident. On the other hand, they faced a Church hierarchy that was difficult to reach. They sought advice from distinguished persons like Mgr. Pierre Sanz, the Bishop of Fujian, who had been in China for a long time and was well-informed about the Mission. He found their plan praiseworthy and commendable, advising them to proceed. Pedrini gave them the same emphatic advice.

However, the circumstances and differing, even contradictory, ideas left them in a state of distressing uncertainty. In this situation, they could only trust in God's will. By January 1734, it became clear that returning to Europe was the best course for the greater good of the mission. Seventeen days later, they embarked for Europe. This situation appeared to contradict the judgment that Bishop Müllener would only accept and cooperate with Vincentian priests. While he wanted Vincentians to send priests to China to work with him in Sichuan, it was on the condition that they obtain a mandate from the Sacred Congregation. Without the credentialed letter, the prelate could do little. It is "closer to the truth" to say that the bishop intended to administer the Church with priests associated with the Sacred Congregation. Although the three priests were Vincentians,

³⁰ On the way to Canton to fetch the three Vincentians in 1733, Paul Sou, having been requested by the Christians of Chun-Te (Mission of the Franciscans near Canton) to come and give them confession, he was taken there and imprisoned, then he received 20 slaps in the face and 15 blows with a stick. He had said publicly that all the edicts given against missionaries were false and that the Christian Religion was very pure; and that he hated all that was contained in those slanderous edicts.

their failure to attain the credential letter from the Sacred Congregation barred them from entering the hinterland.

Their failure to stay in Sichuan dismayed not only the Vincentians but also Bishop Müllener and Paul Sou. The virtuous missionaries, disappointed, left China, taking their zeal and efforts elsewhere. This was a significant blow to Bishop Müllener, who had longed for the companionship of his European confreres for the rest of his life, only to see that hope evaporate. Accustomed to sacrifices, he accepted this setback with a big heart and continued working as an apostle in the Lord's vineyard with the workers sent by Providence. Paul Sou was devastated, his hopes and dreams completely shattered. Helpless and heartbroken, he wept. Despite the brevity of their meetings, these moments were cherished in their hearts, and later, even after Paul Sou retired to Macau, they remained in touch.

Bishop Müllener demonstrated his nobility just a few months after this unpleasant event. In March 1734, new directives from Rome authorized Fr. de Martillat and the Paris Foreign Missions to stay in Sichuan Province. Bishop Müllener then entrusted Andreas Ly with the areas where he had already worked, as well as the town of Yàoshān (樂山) further south, hoping he would attempt to enter Yunnan Province. Not only did the bishop welcome them to work in his diocese, but he also shared the resources he received from Europe, giving each priest 80 patacas a year. Out of charity, he reduced his own share and that of his two confreres, Stephanus Su and Paul Sou, to 20 piasters a year. His actions were proof of his blind obedience to Rome and readiness to follow whatever Rome decided.

Though Bishop Müllener coped with his disappointment at being unable to keep the Vincentians in Sichuan, this failure always haunted his mind. In May 1738, the bishop came to Tong-Lean (Tong-Liang 銅梁) for confirmations. The Foreign Missions requested he stay with them, and he agreed for one night, leaving them the bulk of his money. During their conversation, he expressed confusion over why people had written to the Sacred Congregation, claiming he wanted to give the Mission of the province to the Vincentians, for which the Sacred Congregation blamed him. Martillat thought the bishop suspected them of this accusation, and it was true that one of their priests, Fr. de Laour, might have reported this to Rome. The brief conversation made de Martillat uncomfortable, but the bishop did not mean to accuse them directly.

When Fr. Maggi was appointed bishop and coadjutor of the Sichuan diocese, Bishop Müllener entrusted Paul Sou with preparing the consecration and the food for the event. The consecration took place on the second Sunday of October 1738, the 9th of the month. Fr. de Martillat served as the first assistant, Fr. Paul Sou as the second, Fr. Andreas as the master of ceremonies, and Fr. Stephanus Su as an assistant to the consecrator. An acolyte, a cleric of the bishop's named Gu Yaowen, also participated. Despite the very bad weather, the ceremony proceeded quite well and was quite magnificent. They had not announced the event to the Christians to avoid having too many people, so only the local Christians attended. Bishop Müllener gave Bishop Maggi full power over Huguang and ordered Fr. Stephanus Su to assist him.

In June 1741, Fr. de Martillat was appointed bishop of Ecrinee and apostolic vicar of Yunnan. He was consecrated on July 23 by Bishop Müllener, with Fr. Dartigues serving as the first assistant and Fr. Paul Sou as the second. After his consecration, Bishop de Martillat was tasked with working in the central part of Sichuan. Finally, he inherited the ancient mission of Fr. Basset. On October 27, 1742, while Bishop Müllener was returning from a pastoral visit, he passed by Bishop de Martillat's residence. Bishop de

Martillat invited him to stay overnight at his new yet unfinished house. He had run out of money to complete the building, so he seized the opportunity to ask Bishop Müllener for a loan to finish it. Bishop Müllener immediately promised to send 100 taels, which he did two weeks later via a special courier.

Before leaving for another mountain visit, Bishop Müllener informed Bishop de Martillat that he had written to the Sacred Congregation, requesting them to send workers to continue the mission. He did not specify that the workers had to be Vincentians. Alternatively, he asked that the mission be handed over to the Foreign Missions if they could manage it better, demonstrating his primary interest in ensuring the mission's continuity. If the Sacred Congregation could not provide sufficient priests, the Foreign Missions would be the sole congregation with the right to take over the mission. This approach, thanks to the virtuous representatives of each party, was handled with much calm and charity.

By 1742, there were three bishops (Millener, Magi, and de Martiliat) and six priests, namely Frs. Paul Sou and Stephanus Su (Vincentians), Andreas Ly, Antonius Tang (Foreign Missions), and Joannes-Baptista Gu, who was sent by the Sacred Congregation. Paul Sou and Gu were with Bishop Millener, Bishop Magi was accompanied by Stephanus Su, and Martiliat was with Andreas Ly and Antonius Tang. Bishop Millener had also appointed Linus Zhang Feng as the catechist-general of the province.

On December 17, 1742, Bishop Millener passed away at Bishop Martiliat's house after long service to the mission in Sichuan. His funeral took place on Saturday, December 22, 1742, led by Frs. Paul Sou and Antoine in mourning attire, followed by all the Christians of the town and several from the countryside, including two virgins who had walked about 18 km. He was buried in the Christian cemetery of Fenghudng shin, around 6 km north of Chengdu's town gate. This marked the beginning of a new chapter for Paul Sou.

The death of Bishop Millener marked a grim period for the Sichuan Mission. His successor died only eight months after taking office, Dartigues died the following year, and Antonius Tang Huairen passed away in 1745. The church also lost its best son, a Chinese unmarried layman appointed as catechist-general by Bishop Millener in 1718, who died in 1743. By early 1746, only two European priests remained in Sichuan: Bishop de Martiliat and Jean Hyacinthe de Verthanmon, who had recently arrived, along with three other Chinese priests, Paul Sou, Andreas Ly, and Gu Yao-wen. Stephanus Su was in Huguang.

Take heart!

The epic of the Chinese Rites controversy was decisively resolved by Pope Benedict XIV's Apostolic Constitution *Ex quo singulari* on July 5, 1742. The Pope, without consulting dissenters, annulled all permissions for adaptations of rites to prevent superstitious practices. He also mandated a new oath for missionaries, forbidding the practice of Ricci's rite. Predictably, this decree incited fresh persecutions and hardships, hindering the mission and causing the church to lose many followers due to uncertainty. Those who remained faced impending persecution and torture.

In Sichuan, the Christian community frequently became targets of official repression throughout the eighteenth century, driven by both local and national concerns. In 1746 and 1755, provincial officials, alerted by the court, were particularly vigilant

against rebellious sects like the White Lotus. The Christian community, already considered an illegal sect, suffered arrests, interrogations, and judicial mistreatment, leading some members to abandon the community to safeguard their lives.

Paul Sou's misfortunes began in 1745 when the magistrate revoked his status as an astronomy student, closely monitoring his residence and actions. During the rampant persecution in Sichuan and Huguang in 1746, the city governor of King-tang personally interrogated Christians about Paul Sou rather than their faith. Discovering European books, vestments, and Mass wine at his residence, the governor confiscated everything. As magistrates sought Paul Sou in Chengdu, Bishop Martiliat, three European missionaries, and Fr. Gu fled to Canton, while Paul Sou escaped to Fujian, leaving Fr. Andreas Ly behind.

Notably, the magistrates spared Andreas Ly while continuing to search for Paul Sou, who was well-known due to his public exposure and connections to European missionaries. Persecutions were fueled by rumors³¹ of Christians using foreign money to corrupt people and holding secret gatherings, making it easy for authorities to link Paul Sou to these accusations.

Fujian, where Paul Sou sought refuge, was also unsafe for Christians. Bishop Sanz had been beheaded in 1745, and many Christians and Dominican priests were imprisoned. When Paul Sou arrived in Fujian in 1747, Christians informed him that Sichuan authorities were aggressively searching for him. The vice governor-general of Sichuan, exhausted from the search, requested help from officials in Peking and Canton. Despite being in hiding, Paul Sou continued pastoral work, particularly visiting imprisoned Christians, including four Dominican priests. His last recorded visit was on December 10, 1747, when he informed them of his plan to go to Beijing to confront Prince Joseph Dé about false accusations. However, the priests advised against it, preferring martyrdom.³²

Determined, Paul Sou planned to travel with Fr. Dominique Yen to Macao in 1748. Before departing, they witnessed the cremation of Bishop Pedro Martire Sanz's corpse, collecting and preserving bone fragments afterward. The mandarins, noticing Paul's presence, issued an order for his and Fr. Stephanus Pong's arrest. Informed of their passage into Jiangxi, Paul had to be increasingly cautious.

Misfortunes multiply

On June 13, 1748, Paul Sou, accompanied by a catechist and his elder son, travelled to Tchang-Tcheou with the bones and ashes of Bishop Sanz, aiming to reach Macao. They were warmly welcomed by the Christian community throughout their journey, arriving safely in Macao after five days. Paul handed over the relics to Fr. M. Mathias, the procurator of the Foreign Mission in Macao. He brought three parcels of

³¹ The most prominent figure behind these rumours was Chou Hue-Chien, the Governor-General of Fujian. He was the person who sent the Emperor a memorial full of hatred toward Christianity. The Emperor reacted quickly by issuing an edict in August 2, 1746, ordered all provincial authorities to conduct a rigorous search for Europeans hiding in the provinces to arrest and deport them to Canton.

³² The four Dominican priests are Joaquin Royo, Francisco Serrano, Juan de Alcober and Francisco Diaz, all Spanish Dominicans. On December 28, 1746, the Governor-General of Fujian and Zhejiang, Chou Hsueh-chien, condemned them to be beheaded. (See, Joseph Krahl, *China Missions in Crisis*, Bishop Laimbeckhoven and his times 1738-1787, Gregorian University Press, Roma, p. 51). Their actual martyrdom was in 1749. Along with Bishop Pedro Martire Sanz, they were included among a group of 120 saints known collectively as the "Martyr Saints of China" who were canonized on 1 October 2000 by Pope John Paul II.

Bishop Sanz's bones, each sealed and accompanied by a certificate of authenticity, intended for their house in Paris, Bishop de Martillat, and Fr. Mathias.

After settling in Macao, Paul Sou wrote a detailed letter to Fr. de Bras, the Superior General, on June 25, 1748. He described the situation in Sichuan, the persecutions suffered by missionaries, the martyrdom of some Christians, especially Bishop Sanz, and the threats that forced him to flee to Fujian and then Macao. Despite facing severe afflictions, dangers, and sorrow, Paul found courage and consolation in conforming to God's will. He humbly admitted not being worthy of martyrdom but took solace in providing comfort and assistance to the confessors of Jesus Christ, visiting them in prison, and witnessing their martyrdom with holy envy.

By 1749, persecutions had decreased, and missionaries began spreading in the provinces. Paul Sou saw an opportunity to accomplish a mission entrusted to him by Christians in Fujian to meet Prince Joseph De pèi in Beijing. Despite opposition from four Dominican priests awaiting execution, Paul felt obliged to help them and the Christians in Fujian. However, the prince refused to see him to avoid revealing his secret Christianity, leading to the mission's failure.

In late January 1750, Paul Sou returned to Macao, exhausted and disappointed by his failed mission. He sought a meeting with Fr. Miralta, the Procurator of the Propaganda, only to find he had left for Europe. Fr. Guglielmi was the new procurator. Paul met with Fr. Mathias and Fr. Guglielmi to discuss the mission's future in Hia-Seu-Yang, Sichuan Province. They decided to sell the church's property to remove obstacles for apostates and tasked Paul with retrieving his adopted son, Laurent, who had harmed the Church. Paul agreed to return to Sichuan to carry out these tasks.

The procurators believed only Paul could accomplish these critical tasks. Paul had to coordinate with three Chinese priests serving under the Foreign Mission: Fr. Andreas Ly, known for his Latin journal sent to Paris, Fr. Stephanus Siu, a Lazarist who had served in Sichuan and Huguang, and Fr. Lucas Ly, a native of Fujian educated at the College de Saint Joseph in Siam. These priests had staffed the church in Sichuan for nearly a decade. Paul's arrival sparked mixed reactions, especially regarding property and family matters. The procurator of the Foreign Mission instructed the Chinese priests not to interfere with Paul's tasks.

Instead of immediately going to Sichuan, Paul decided to wait in Macao for Laurent. When Laurent arrived, he expressed remorse, begged for absolution, and swore he had not apostatized, although he had not borne witness to his faith. He admitted squandering Church property and agreed to make restitution despite having no funds or assets.

Around 1754-1755,³³ Paul Sou returned to Sichuan to manage the church's assets. Fr. Lucas Ly noted in his journal that Paul's return was for family matters, specifically selling his adopted child's property. Other Chinese priests held Paul in contempt, believing he contributed nothing to the mission and was preoccupied with personal affairs. Despite a letter from the Procurator of the Foreign Mission, misunderstandings persisted. Paul's adopted son's bad reputation, his delicate tasks, his absence during Sichuan's persecutions, and his temperament led to harsh judgments. Paul became an object of ridicule among Christians.

³³ Cf. *van den Brandt*, (1937), p. 7-8. Paul Sou left Sichuan for good in 1753. He probably counting that at that time, the Sichuan province officially entrusted to the Paris Foreign Mission, thus ended the service of the priests of Propagation of faith.

Realizing the hardened attitudes of priests and the Christian community in Sichuan,³⁴ and with a 1753 decree entrusting Sichuan Province to the Paris Foreign Missions,³⁵ Paul accepted his fate. He decided to return to Macao and retire to the residence of the Dominican friars. In 1756, Stephanus Su also returned to Huguang, ending the presence of Lazarist priests in Sichuan after more than fifty years of service.

Old soldier never dies; he just fades away

Paul Sou retired with the Dominican friars in Macao, worn out by the years and his relentless activities. Through his letters to the Superior General and correspondence with Fr. Monet,³⁶ one of the three Vincentian priests he met briefly in Macao in 1732, we gain insight into his retirement activities. In Macao, he devoted his time to instructing young Chinese Christians, preparing them either as candidates for the priesthood or as catechists, crucial roles at a time when European missionaries were barred from entering the provinces. Some of these young men were eventually sent to Naples for further study.

Within a year and a half of his arrival in Macao, Paul Sou managed to send four young Chinese seminarians to Naples. He closely followed the example set by his mentor, Fr. Müllener, by seizing every opportunity to train the youth, whether as priests or catechists, reflecting the congregation's charism of formation.

If Paul Sou had kept a regular diary, we would have a wealth of information about his pastoral work, the situations he encountered, and the Catholic communities he served. This documentation would allow us to compare his experiences with those recorded by Andreas Ly and Lucas Ly, providing a more balanced historical perspective. Nevertheless, the available documentation highlights his courage and perseverance during challenging times, offering today's generation a valuable example of effective missionary work.

The situation of the church in China, in many ways, remains unchanged. Persecution and oppression continue, as do internal divisions and conflicts within the church, though the actors may differ. Paul Sou's example serves as a testament to the enduring challenges and the unwavering dedication required for missionary work in any era.

Paul Sou regularly wrote reports to Paris and took the initiative to assist new European missionaries arriving in Macao by teaching them the Chinese language. In our culture, people often cling to a fanatical tenacity for human uniqueness, creating a perceived vast gulf between a hero and an ordinary person. Heroic acts such as martyrdom or establishing new mission regions are among the many qualities that define a hero. By these standards, Paul Sou might seem an ordinary, easily forgotten figure. However, despite not being as talented or charismatic as Andreas Ly, Paul Sou deserves more attention and appreciation for his contributions.

³⁴ The persecution just happened in June 28, 1754, the authority discovered a European priest Lefebvre, who just arrived in Chengdu and stayed at Andreas Ly's house along with Stephanus Siu, Lefebvre's guide Jacobus Ouang (王), and others. This incident called as "The Lefebvre Incident of 1754" has caused some punishment to above persons, including the deportation of Lefebvre. (cf. Robert Entenmann, *The Lefebvre Incident of 1754*, in *A Voluntary Exile: Chinese Christianity and Cultural Confluence since 1552*, Anthony E. Clark (ed.) Lehigh University Press, Lanham, Maryland, 2014. p. 63-71). Apparently Paul Sou came at the wrong time.

³⁵ Charbonnier, Fr. Jean. *Christians In China* (Kindle Locations 4207-4208). Ignatius Press. Kindle Edition.

³⁶ The archives in the house of Torino have conserved for us two of his letters to Fr. Monet.

The elderly Paul Sou likely died around 1767³⁷ in Macao, in the Dominican friars' monastery where Fr. Appiani had also passed away. Meanwhile, Stephanus Su had minimal contact with Paris. He left Sichuan for Huguang and probably remained there until his death. The last news about him that reached Paris was in 1762; after that, there was no further information. The deaths of these two Chinese Vincentians marked the end of the first episode of the Vincentians' history in China. For several decades following their deaths, the Vincentians were absent from the mission in China.

Paul Sou's dedication, his efforts in teaching new missionaries, and his consistent communication with Paris reflect a life of quiet but significant service. Though not a traditional hero, his steadfast work and perseverance in challenging times provide a profound example of missionary commitment. His story, along with the early history of the Vincentians in China, remains a testament to the enduring spirit of missionary work in the face of adversity.

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³⁷ Bishop de Saint-Martin, coadjutor of the ap. Vic of Sichuan wrote on 15 November 1785: Fr Sou died in Canton, 12 to 15 years ago; that would put his demise between 1770 and 1773. But judging to Fr. Sou's letter, he must have died in Macao instead in Canton.

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