Article

Two Approaches to Augustine’s Theory of the Trinitarian Image in Ming and Qing China

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Abstract: In some of the earliest Chinese works written by Catholic missionaries in the late Ming Dynasty, St. Augustine became associated with the mystery of the Trinity. When explaining the Trinity to Chinese believers, missionaries would often use an analogy of the mens (mind) and its activities in Augustine’s theory of Imago Dei, drawing parallels between “the One” and “the Three”. In the Ming and Qing periods, Augustine’s mental analogy gave rise to two approaches: the “Augustinian-Ignatian” and the “Augustinian-Thomistic”. The former, which was the mainstream interpretation, linked “Mind: memory-understanding-love” to “God: the Father-the Son-the Holy Spirit”, using “the word generated by memory” to represent “the Son begotten by the Father” and “love proceeded from memory and understanding” as an analogy to “the Holy Spirit proceeded from both the Father and the Son”. The latter, more of a minority interpretation, correlated “mind-understanding-love” to “the Father-the Son-the Holy Spirit”, using “word generated by mind” to represent “the Son generated by the Father”, and “love proceeded from mind and word” as an analogy to “the Holy Spirit proceeded from both the Father and the Son”. The former was mainly adhered to by the Jesuits and the Augustinians, while the latter was favored by the Dominicans. This article examines both approaches and critiques of Augustine’s theory of the Trinitarian image in Ming and Qing China.

Keywords: Augustine; the theory of Imago Dei; mental analogy; generation; procession; Augustinian-Ignatian Approach; Augustinian-Thomistic Approach

1. Introduction

St. Augustine has a significant impact on how the Trinity is understood in Western theology. In his work De Trinitate, Augustine claimed that the Trinitarian image of God should be sought in the mens (mind), the highest part of man, according to biblical accounts that God created mankind in his own image. He argued that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit were equal in status and used the analogy of “Mind: memory-understanding-love” to represent “God: the Father-the Son-the Holy Spirit”, where the mind was the entity and remembering, understanding, and love were activities. Augustine believed that the One was elevated over the Three. To differentiate the begotten Son from the proceeding Holy Spirit, he asserted that as word was generated by memory and love proceeded from memory and word, the Son was begotten by the Father, and the Holy Spirit proceeded from both the Father and the Son. The Western Church added the Filioque (“and from the son”) to the Nicene Creed, which became a significant reason behind the schism between the Eastern and Western churches.

Augustine’s Trinitarian theology was passed down to Western theologians, such as Peter Lombard, Bonaventure, and Ignatius of Loyola, but Thomas Aquinas made some modifications to Augustine’s thoughts. Thomas Aquinas changed the “Mind: memory—understanding—love” model to “mind—understanding—love”, which Augustine himself had earlier suggested and abandoned. He also revised Augustine’s doctrine of “word generated by memory” and “love proceeding from both memory and word” to “word generated by mind” and “love proceeded from both mind and word”⁴ (Aquinas 1964, p. 473).
Augustine abandoned the “mind—understanding—love” model because he considered the mind to be the entity while understanding and love were acts, and the three were not on the same level and therefore not analogous to the full equality of the Father—the Son—the Holy Spirit. Aquinas believed that memory and understanding were not equal, according to Aristotle’s distinction between potentiality and act, where memory was a habit (habitus) or potentiality (potentia) and understanding was a real act of intention. Aquinas had some philosophical differences with Augustine, which led to his rethinking of the Trinitarian image. Moreover, Aquinas’s understanding of memory differed from Augustine’s in that he followed Aristotle’s interpretation and attributed it to the sensual part, a function of imagination that had no activity of its own and was, therefore, not comparable to understanding and love.

In this paper, it will be argued that Augustine’s mental analogy played a pivotal role in shaping two distinct approaches during the Ming and Qing periods in China. These approaches can be understood as the “Augustinian-Thomistic Approach”, which emphasizes Aquinas’s Trinitarian Image Theory, and the “Augustinian-Ignatian Approach”, which adheres to the traditional Augustinian Trinity, with Ignatius of Loyola being a prominent figure in this regard. By examining the influence of Augustine’s mental analogy on these two approaches, this paper aims to shed light on the complex interplay between Western theological concepts and Chinese intellectual traditions.

Augustine’s Trinitarian Image Theory was introduced to China and translated into Chinese, leading to the development of the “Augustinian-Ignatian Approach” and “Augustinian-Thomistic Approach”. These approaches were subject to acceptance or criticism by the Chinese people, highlighting the intricate interaction between Western theological concepts and Chinese intellectual traditions. Despite the global significance of Augustine’s work on the Trinity in academic circles, the transmission history of these approaches in China has not yet been adequately studied, and related literature is limited. One prominent scholar in this field is Prof. Xiao Qinghe from Shanghai University. In his articles titled “A Possible Way to Study Sino-Christian Theology in the Ming and Qing Dynasties: Case Study on the Keyword ‘Trinity’ (Sanweiyi)”, Xiao delves into the formation and evolution of the Chinese translation for the term “Trinity” during the late Ming and early Qing periods and argues that the transliteration principles employed can be traced back to the influences of Jesuit missionaries in China during that time. In his other article, “Figurist Missionary Joseph de Prémare’s Theory of Trinity and its Cross-cultural Interpretation in the Early Qing Dynasty: Focusing on Sanyisan (On Trinity),” Xiao highlights how Joseph de Prémare’s understanding of the Trinity aligned with the accounts on the Trinity prevalent since the late Ming Dynasty. It is noteworthy that Joseph de Prémare adopted Augustine’s Trinitarian theology and uniquely employed Christian localization techniques while translating Chinese classics, allowing him to reconstruct the core concepts of Neo-Confucianism through a Christian lens. Overall, a thorough literature review is necessary to fill the gap in our understanding of the influence of Augustine’s mental analogy on Chinese theological discourse during the Ming and Qing Dynasties.

This article seeks to address the gap by examining Augustine’s mental analogy to shed light on the theological developments during the Ming and Qing periods and highlight the nuances and implications of these contrasting approaches in relation to the Trinitarian doctrine. Through a careful examination of primary sources, this paper aims to enrich our understanding of the intellectual landscape of the time and contribute to the ongoing discourse on the influence of Augustine’s work in Chinese theological thought.

As a result of cultural encounters and communication between China and the West starting in the late Ming Dynasty, a vast collection of valuable Chinese historical documents was produced, spanning a diverse range of subjects, including science, history, religion, philosophy, literature, and art. At present, this collection of “Western Chinese books” is mainly housed in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BNF), the Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, the Vatican Library, and Bibliotheca Zi-Ka-Wei. The relatively systematic compilation began roughly in the 1960s. The most representative are Tianzhujiao...
dongchuan wenxian 天主教東傳文獻 (Documents from the Eastward Transmission of Catholicism), Tianzhujiao dongchuan wenxian xu bian 天主教東傳文獻續編 (Continuations of Documents from the Eastward Transmission of Catholicism) and Tianzhujiao dongchuan wenxian san bian 天主教東傳文獻三編 (The Third Series of Documents from the Eastward Transmission of Catholicism) edited by Taiwanese Scholar Wu Xiangxiang 吳相湘. In the 1990s, a new wave of literature collection and publication emerged. Some of the documents collected in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, the Archivum Romanum Societatis Jesu, and Bibliotheca Zi-Ka-Wei have been photocopied and published, including Yesuhui Lushilou Ming Qing Tianzhujiao wenxian 耶穌會羅馬檔案館明清天主教文獻 (Chinese Christian texts from the Roman archives of the Society of Jesus, 5 volumes) edited by Professor Nicolas Standaert of Belgium and Professor Adrian Dudink of the Netherlands. Xujiahui cangshulou Ming Qing Tianzhujiao wenxian 徐家匯藏書樓明清天主教文獻 (Documents on Catholicism in the Ming and Qing in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France, 26 volumes) edited by Nicolas Standaert, Adrian Dudink, and Natalie Monnet, Dongchuan fuyin 東傳福音 (The Gospels and their Eastward Transmission) edited by Chinese mainland scholars Wang Meixiu 王美秀 and Ren Yanli 任延黎. In 2014, Fandigang tushuguan cang Ming Qing zhongxi wenhua jiaoliu shi wenxian congkan diyi ji 梵蒂岡圖書館藏明清中西文化交流史文獻叢刊第一輯 (Collectanea of Documents on the History of Culture Exchange between China and the West during the Ming and Qing held in the Vatican City Library, 44 volumes) edited by Professor Zhang Xiping 張西平 has finally brought back to light the collected books in the Vatican Library. The literature compilations mentioned above have greatly aided in the documentation of this paper and are deeply appreciated. Additionally, the authors also translated the literature from its original language to English.

2. The Legend of Augustine by the Sea: The Unfathomable Mystery of the Holy Trinity

The re-emergence of Christianity in China dates back to the late Ming dynasty. During this period, the Jesuits played a prominent role among the missionaries who were present in China. Not only did the Jesuits account for the majority of missionaries, but they also developed the accommodation method for evangelizing China (Standaert 2001, p. 309). The Jesuits (Societas Jesu, SJ) were established by Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556) in 1540 and drew on the rich tradition of Ignatian spirituality and reflection. Additionally, the Dominican missionaries began their permanent presence in China during the 1630s but had a different perspective on evangelization compared to the Jesuits (ibid., p. 322). The primary issue that arose was how to introduce Christian teachings to the Chinese population.

Michele Ruggieri (Luo Mingjian 羅明堅, 1543–1607), the first Jesuit to set foot on Mainland China, published Tianzhu shilu 天主實錄 (True record of the Lord of Heaven) in 1584 in Guangzhou, or Zhaoqing 2, making it the first Chinese Catholic work written in the Ming and Qing Dynasties. In the book, Ruggieri conveyed the idea that God was a mystery that could only be understood through faith and not through reason. To explain this, he told a story, as follows:

Once, there was an ancient man of virtue who dedicated his life to seeking knowledge about the mystery of the Lord. He would spend countless hours pondering and reflecting on it, day and night. One day, as he strode along the seashore, he encountered a child rushing towards the sea, holding a bowl that seemed to leak. Curiosity piqued, and the man inquired, “where are you going with that bowl?” The child responded, “I am attempting to empty the sea with this bowl”. Amused, the man chuckled and remarked, “It’s absurd to think that you can scoop all the
water from the sea with that leaky bowl!” But, to his surprise, the child replied, “You understand the futility of trying to empty the sea with this bowl, so why do you engage in exhaustive contemplation to understand the teachings of the Lord of Heaven?” “Isn’t that even more absurd?” Instantaneously, the child disappeared, leaving the man in astonishment and with a newfound sense of enlightenment. It dawned on him that the child was, indeed, an angel.

(Huang and Wang 2013, vol. 1, p. 6)\(^3\)

Michele Ruggieri did not explicitly mention the name of the ancient “man of virtue” in his writing, possibly because he thought his readers lacked Western knowledge. Instead, he conveyed his ideas indirectly. In 1603, Matteo Ricci (Li Madou 利瑪竇, 1552–1610) published a Chinese work titled Tianshu shiyi 天主實義 (The True Meaning of God) in Beijing. In this book, Ricci utilized some materials from Michele Ruggieri’s Tianshu shilu 天主实录 (True record of the Lord of Heaven) and retold the Augustinian legend by the sea in the first chapter, albeit with some slight differences in the narrative. He referred to the ancient saint in the story as “Augustinus” (夢格斯悌諾) (Mei 2014, p. 88).\(^4\)

When the Jesuits Michele Ruggieri and Matteo Ricci were already active in mainland China, there was another Spanish Dominican friar named Juan Cobo (Gao Wuxian 高母羨, 1546–1592), who preached to the Chinese in the Philippines. Juan Cobo, born in Consuegra, arrived in Manila in 1588 and later traveled to Japan as a diplomatic envoy in 1592, unfortunately passing away in Taiwan during his journey. His work, titled Bian zhengjiao zhenchuan shilu 辯正教真傳實錄 (Testimony of the True Religion), also known as Wuji Tianshu zhengjiao zhenchuan shilu 無極天主正教真傳實錄 (Veritable Record of the Authentic Tradition of the True Faith in the Infinite God), was published in Manila in 1593. In chapter 3 of this work, both Chinese scholars and Western priests (referred to as seng 僧) claimed Tianshu 天主 (the Lord of Heaven) was associated with taiji 太極 (supreme polarity) and wuji 無極 (infinite), while the principle of taiji 太極 (supreme polarity), known as li 理, was beyond human comprehension. Within the text, a Seng 僧 shared a story from ancient times when an emperor wanted to grasp the mystery of wuji. He consulted one of his wise ministers, who requested a month to contemplate the question since Li 理 was extremely abstruse. However, each time the emperor inquired, the minister requested more time, frustrating the emperor. Eventually, the minister explained that Li was too enigmatic to understand fully. At this point, this Seng told the legend of Augustine’s encounter with a boy by the sea (Cobo 1593, p. 24).

In 1607, Thomas Mayor, a Dominican friar, authored a book titled Xinkan gewu qiongli bianlan 新刊格物窮理便覽 (Newly Printed Record of the Investigation of Things and Exhaustive Examination of Principle) and published it in Binondoc, Philippines. This book is a 317-page Chinese translation of a Portuguese work, divided into three volumes, encompassing the theology and general knowledge of the Catholic Churches at the time. In the book, when discussing the difficulty of comprehending the concept of the Trinity with reason, the author also references Augustine’s encounter with the boy by the sea\(^5\) (Mayor 1607, p. 85).

Multiple repeated references to Augustine’s legend by the sea indicate that, from the outset, Augustine has been closely associated with the mystery of the Trinity, leaving a lasting impact on theological discourse.

3. The Augustinian-Ignatian Approach

3.1. The Introduction of the Trinitarian Image

St. Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit order, published a manual called The Spiritual Exercises (Exercitia spiritualia)\(^6\) in 1548. This manual prescribes a rigorous four-week spiritual discipline course for believers, with the aim of first disciplining the soul and then regulating the behavior of the body through the soul. St. Ignatius of Loyola described “memory, understanding, and will” as the “three faculties of the soul”\(^7\). The exercises are designed to transform individuals into strong spiritual warriors. In this sense, the ideas of St. Ignatius of Loyola were profoundly shaped by the teachings of Augustine.
Michele Ruggieri did not mention the concept of “Linghun sansi 靈魂三司” (three faculties of the soul) in his work Tianzhu shilu (Huang and Wang 2013, vol. 1, p. 13). On the other hand, Matteo Ricci mentioned two “guan” (two faculties) of the mind: *si yu* 司欲 (governing desire) and *si wu* 司悟 (governing understanding) in his work Tianzhu shiyi (Mei 2014, p. 113). In 1605, Matteo Ricci presided over a revision of the Dottrina Christiana, Shengjing yue Lu 聖經約錄 (The Essentials of the Covenant), and standardized the Chinese translation of Christian terminology. According to Ricci, the Mind has three “si 司” (faculties): *si jihan 司記含者* (one governing memory), *si mingwu zhe 司明悟者* (one governing understanding), and *si aiyu zhe 司愛欲者* (one governing love) (Huang and Wang 2013, vol. 1, p. 36). Shengjing Yue Lu can be seen as a significant precursor to the modern understanding of “catechism”, with its influence passed down through successors, exerting a far-reaching influence. The book itself makes no mention of the Trinity or connects it with the three faculties of mind. However, it did establish a unified set of terms for the introduction of Augustine’s theory of the Trinitarian Image into China.

Tianzhu shilu 天主實錄 by Michele Ruggieri and Tianzhu shiyi 天主實義 by Matteo Ricci both acknowledged the mysterious and enigmatic nature of the Lord of Heaven, as illustrated by the legend of Augustine’s encounter with an angel by the sea. Due to the complexity of this concept, they did not delve into the discussion of the Trinity in their writings. However, Diego de Pantoja (Pan Diwo 斯彼利多) (1571–1618), a disciple of Matteo Ricci, mentioned in Tianzhu shiyi xubian 天主實義續編 (The Continued Works to the True Meaning of God, reprinted in 1617) that “The nature and *ti* 體 (substance) of the Lord of Heaven is, if elaborated completely, *yi ti gu you san wei* 一體固有三位 (three persons in one substance), *tianzhu badelei 天主罷德肋* (the Father), *tianzhu feilüe 天主費略* (the Son), *sibiliduosundo 斯彼利多三多* (the Holy Spirit), thus forming the Trinity” (Zhang et al. 2014, vol. 31, p. 218). However, no further explanation was provided on this matter.

According to current literature, the earliest explicit discussion of the Augustinian theory of the Trinitarian image can be attributed to Francesco Sambiasi (Bi Fangji 高一志, 1566–1640) extensively quoted Augustine’s words in his book Tianzhu shengjiao simo lun 天主聖教四末論 (Discussion of the Four Last Things of the Sagely Catholic Church), which was published in 1636 (Jin 2015, pp. 75–76). In his book,
Vagnoni associated the consequences of one’s choices with the three faculties of the soul, drawing parallels to the torture experienced by the wicked in hell. He emphasized the importance of disciplining and regulating both the soul’s three faculties and the five senses of the body.

Giulio Aleni (Ai Rulüe 艾儒略, 1582–1649) discussed the fundamental manifestations of the soul in his work Xingxue cushu 性學觕述 (Crude Narration of the Study of Human Nature). He identified memory, understanding, and love as the essential yong 用 (phenomenal manifestation) of the soul (Huang and Wang 2013, vol. 1, p. 259). However, when Giulio Aleni explored the study of the heart and mind, he did not draw an analogy to the Trinity. Kouduo richao 口鐸日抄 (Diary of Oral Admonitions) records the religious and intellectual conversations and deeds of the Jesuits and local converts. Volume 6 of the book contains the questions and answers between Giulio Aleni and his students. During meditation, Giulio Aleni instructed his students to perform three actions: “jihan 記含 (memory), which involves memorizing Scripture and being ready to use it; mingwu 明悟 (understanding), to deepen their comprehension of Scripture, make connections and grasp implied meaning, and develop love; and aiyu 愛欲 (love), to ardently love after understanding the truth, deeply regret their mistakes, desire to correct them, and pray for the strength from God to repent and act resolutely. Meditation is an active process” (Zhang et al. 2014, vol. 27, pp. 87–88). Giulio Aleni’s approach aligns with Ignatius Loyola’s method of disciplining the spirituality of the soul’s triad.

Francesco Sambiasi, Giulio Aleni, and Alphonse Vagnoni all mentioned Augustine and incorporated his thoughts into the spiritual exercises of Ignatius Loyola. Although in the Catholic literature during the Ming and Qing dynasties, most Catholics, particularly the Jesuits, focused on the trinitarian image of “jihan 記含 (memory), mingwu 明悟 (understanding), and aiyu 愛欲 (love)” without explicitly referring to Augustine by name, in essence, their interpretations can be categorized as following the Augustinian-Ignatian Approach by using the triad of memory, understanding, and love.

Manuel Dias (Yang Manuo 陽瑪諾, 1574–1659) presented a more detailed explanation of the three faculties of the soul in Chapter 9, Volume 1 of his book Tianxue juyao 天學舉要 (Essential Teachings of Heavenly Studies):

The human soul, although unified, possesses three distinct capabilities. It encompasses the power of growth akin to that of plants, the power of sensation akin to that of animals, and the power of understanding akin to that of a divine being. Within this unified soul, there exist three faculties: jihan 記含 (memory), mingwu 明悟 (understanding), and aiyu 愛欲 (love). Memory acts as a treasury, storing both fleeting and enduring images. Understanding functions as eyes, discerning truth from falsehood, enabling progress or retreat, and determining movement or cessation. In its essence, love is comparable to hands, clinging to what is adored and relinquishing what is abhorred. The merits and moral character of an individual can be attributed to love. The sage once proclaimed that love was the fundamental force behind both good and evil, the underlying causes for receiving rewards or facing punishments. Without love, both heaven and hell would be void of purpose. By utilizing love wisely, one can become virtuous and benevolent; however, neglecting it may lead to malevolence and wickedness. It is through possessing these three faculties that humanity sets itself apart from animals, showcasing the elevated nature of our soul.

Similar to Giulio Aleni and Alphonse Vagnoni, Manuel Dias placed great emphasis on aligning the three faculties with God and anchoring them in love. According to Manuel Dias, both virtuous and malevolent deeds originate from love, as do the rewards and punishments bestowed by God.

In 1632, Giacomo Rho (Luo Yagu 羅雅谷, 1593–1638) authored a book titled *Shengji baiyan 聖記百言* (A Hundred Holy Quotations). This book records a hundred quotes from St. Teresa of Avila, a Spanish nun. Quotation No. 25 within this compilation reads as follows:

> 人有主之像，其說多端，見《靈言蠡勺》。今略言之。如主三位而一，人有記含、明悟、愛欲而一。

Man possesses *Imago dei*, as explained in the book titled *Lingyan lishao 靈言蠡勺* (A Ladle of Words on the Soul) through various interpretations. In essence, just as one *ti 體* (substance) has three *wei 位* (persons), man is endowed with the faculties of *jihan 記含* (memory), *mingwu 明悟* (understanding), and *aiyu 愛欲* (love).


Joseph Anne Marie de Maila (Feng Bingzheng 馮秉正, 1669–1748) noted in *Penglai jishuo 朋來集說* (ca. 1722) that previous scholars often employed analogies of *rilun 日輪* (sun’s disk), *riguang 日光* (sun’s light), and *ri'nuan 日暖* (sun’s heat) to symbolize the concept of the Trinity.

或比人的靈性，有記含、有明悟、有愛欲。

[referring to] man’s soul, which encompasses *jihan 記含* (memory), *mingwu 明悟* (understanding), and *aiyu 愛欲* (love).

*(Zhong 2009, vol. 12, p. 37)*

Juan de Leon García (Shi Yuese 施若翰, ca. 1605–1665), a Spanish Dominican, arrived in Manila in 1632 and was subsequently sent to Taiwan the following year. In 1637, he embarked on a preaching mission in Fu’an, Fujian Province, where he eventually passed away. His Chinese work, *Tianzhujiao rumen wenda 天主聖教入門問答* (Introductions to Catholicism: Questions and Answers, 1642), is the first publication in China by a Dominican. Within the book, the following is stated:

> 虽是有三位，却只是一體。比之日然，有日輪，有日光，有日暖，雖有三樣，只是一個日。又比之人性，有記含，有明悟，有愛欲，雖有三司，只是一個靈性。

Three persons but in one substance can be analogous to the sun, comprising the *rilun 日輪* (sun’s disk), *riguang 日光* (sun’s light), and *ri'nuan 日暖* (sun’s heat). Despite their distinct attributes, they are all integral to the essence of the sun, which remains a singular entity. Similarly, in relation to human nature, we can draw an analogy with three faculties: *jihan 記含* (memory), *mingwu 明悟* (understanding), and *aiyu 愛欲* (love). Despite the presence of these three distinct faculties, they are interconnected as part of a unified soul.


Francisco de la Concepción Peris (Bian Fangshi 卞芳世, 1635–1701), a Spanish Franciscan, arrived in China around 1672. He served as the president of the Franciscan Order in China, playing a crucial role in moderating the Franciscan’s stance in the Rites Controversy, which allowed for the veneration of Confucius. In his book *Jinjiao lingxi jielu 進教領洗捷錄* (Record of Conversion and Baptism), he outlined five requirements for converts: belief in the doctrine, reading the Holy Book, adherence to the commandments, repentance, and baptism. When he elaborated on the concept of the Trinity, he stated:

> 此三位雖各具全能全知全善，靈明自立，然其實共為一性一體，一能一知一善，無二主也。譬之太陽，有輪有光有熱，三件共成一目，人之靈性雖一，然包含三德，所謂明悟、記含、愛欲是也。

Although the three persons possess the qualities of omnipotence, omniscience, and perfect goodness independently, they are essentially unified as one in nature and
in essence, sharing a singular power, intellect, and goodness. An analogy can be drawn to the sun, which comprises *rilun* 日輪 (sun’s disk), *riguang* 日光 (sun’s light), and *ri’nun* 日暖 (sun’s heat), three distinct aspects but existing as one sun. Similarly, man possesses one soul, which encompasses three virtues known as *de* 德 (virtues): *jihan* 記含 (memory), *mingwu* 明悟 (understanding), and *aiyu* 愛欲 (love). These three virtues coexist within the unified essence of the human soul. 

(Zhang et al. 2014, vol. 41, pp. 469–70)

Tomás Ortiz (Bai Duoma 白多瑪, 1668–1742), a Spanish Augustinian, arrived in China in 1695. During his time there, he wrote several works, including *Shengjiao qieyao* 善教切要 (Fundamentals of Holy Catholicism), *Sizhong lüeyi* 四終略意 (Brief Introduction of the Four Last Things), and *Yaojing lüejie* 要經略解 (Concise Explanations of Holy Scripture). In *Sizhong lüeyi* 四終略意, which is divided into 5 chapters, Tomás Ortiz discussed the ultimate destiny of humankind. As an Augustinian, he inherited Augustine’s thoughts in the trinity of the soul. According to this theory, the three faculties of the soul—*jihan* 記含 (memory), *mingwu* 明悟 (understanding), and *aiyu* 愛欲 (love)—were depicted as being tortured in hell. “This implies that if one solely remembers, understands, and loves worldly things rather than God, they would be condemned to eternal misery in hell” (Ren and Wang 2005, pp. 135–36).

Tomás Ortiz’s views are consistent with Augustine’s thoughts and bear similarities to the perspectives of Ignatius Loyola, Alphonse Vagnoni, and Giulio Aleni. In his book *Yaojing lüejie*, Tomás Ortiz offers insights into Catholic Canons and doctrines. Within the book’s elaboration on the Trinity, it says:

三位共是一性一體一個天主，略如日頭，有日輪、有日光、有日暖，雖有三件，只是一個日頭。曰聖父，因生聖子。但生聖子，非如人生子那樣，是略如人生自已之像在於鏡內。人自照鏡，就鏡內生得自己之像。天主聖父明照自己的性，就生自己之像，但人劣弱無能，故所生之像非活像，天主全能，故所生之像是活像。此像者，聖子是也。聖父與聖子相愛，就發活愛。此愛者，聖神是也。

In the Trinity, three distinct persons share one nature and one substance and are united as one God of Heaven. This can be compared to the sun, which possesses *rilun* 日輪 (sun’s disk), *riguang* 日光 (sun’s light), and *ri’nun* 日暖 (sun’s heat), three aspects yet combined as one sun. The Holy Father is referred to as such because he has begotten the son. The begetting process, nevertheless, differs significantly from the birth of a human son. Rather, it is analogous to a man seeing his own image in a mirror. When one gazes into a mirror, an image is formed. Similarly, the Lord of Heaven, the Holy Father, creates an image that reflects his own nature. Whereas human beings are frail and powerless, resulting in a nonliving image, God, being omnipotent, creates a living image, which is the Holy Son. The Holy Father and the Holy Son share a mutual love, which generates love itself, which manifests as the Holy Spirit.

(Zhang et al. 2014, vol. 38, p. 370)

Carlo di Orazi da Castorano (Kang Hezi 康和子, 1673–1755), an Italian Franciscan, arrived in China in 1700 and returned to his homeland in 1734 due to the Rites Controversy. He wrote a book in vernacular Chinese titled *Tianzhu shengjiao jingwen* 天主聖教經文 (Scripture of the Holy Religion of the Lord of Heaven). This book is an exegesis presented in the form of lively dialogues. One such dialogue discusses the Trinity:

Q: The Trinity is abstruse. Is there any analogy that can help explain it?
A: It can be compared to the sun, which possesses three aspects: *rilun* 日輪 (sun’s disk), *riguang* 日光 (sun’s light), and *ri’nun* 日暖 (sun’s heat), yet they are all part of one sun. Another analogy is the human soul, which possesses three *de* 德 (virtues): *jihan* 記含 (memory), *mingwu* 明悟 (understanding), and *aiyu* 愛欲 (love). Although there are three virtues, there is only one soul.

When discussing the analogy of “mind: jihan 記含 (memory), mingwu 明悟 (understanding), and aiyu 愛欲 (love)”, these missionaries often mentioned “sun: rilun 日輪 (sun’s disk), riguang 日光 (sun’s light), and ri’nuan 日暖 (sun’s heat)”, which is a more tangible analogy. The use of analogies involving wood, water, and the sun can be traced long back to Tertullian and was compiled in the Middle Ages (such as Lombard’s Sentences). These analogies continued to be used in doctrinal writings during the 16th and 17th centuries.

The analogies applied by the missionaries had an impact on the Chinese Catholics. He Shizhen 何世貞, who will be discussed in more detail later, wrote an apologetic work titled Chong zheng bi bian 崇正必辯 (Distinguishing and Admiring Orthodox) in 1672. In its 22nd section on the Trinity, he also made use of analogies:

三位總一性體，譬諸人之靈性，具有三德，曰記含，曰明悟，曰愛欲，實則是人身中一性。

The concept of three persons and one substance can be seen as analogous to man’s lingxing 靈性 (soul), which encompasses three de 德 (virtues): jihan 記含 (memory), mingwu 明悟 (understanding), and aiyu 愛欲 (love). These virtues represent a single nature within the human body.

Li Mei 李梅, a writer from Ningbo 宁波 (the birth and death years unknown, writing during the first year of the emperor Yongzheng’s reign), discussed the Trinity in his book Hai shui di 海水滴 (Sea Water Drop) (Part I):

聖教書有日輪、日光、日熱之喻焉，而皆為一日也。有我人性記含、明悟、愛欲之比焉，而皆為一性也。吾則更有進於此者，則以我人女主體之靈明，中土書所謂五倫、四德、六欲、七情之理而思之，且由我古人所傳太極一函三之語而釋之，而知我造命真主神妙之本性，必有此三位一體之理也。

The Holy Book offers the similes of rilun 日輪 (sun’s disk), riguang 日光 (sun’s light), and ri’nuan 日暖 (sun’s heat), representing one sun. Another analogy is human nature’s jihan 記含 (memory), mingwu 明悟 (understanding), and aiyu 愛欲 (love), representing one nature. Furthermore, we can explore the human soul by examining concepts such as the Five Cardinal Relationships (wu lun 五倫), the Four Virtues (si de 四德), the Six Desires (liu yu 六欲), and the Seven Affections (qi qing 七情) in Chinese ancient books. These can be explained through the concept of Taiji yi han san 太極一函三 (“three mixed in one, supreme polarity”), as passed down by our ancient ancestors. Thus, the mysterious nature of the creator, the Holy God, must possess the principle of the Trinity.

The concept of “Taiji yi han san 太極一函三” originates from the words of Liu Xin 劉歆 in the Western Han Dynasty, as stated in the Hanshu-Lüli zhi 漢書-律曆志 (Book of Han-Musical Tuning and Calendar)—Taiji Yuangui, han san wei yi 太極元氣，函三為一 (The three—heaven, earth, and man mix in supreme polarity, the original qi). San 三 (three) refers to heaven, earth, and man. Taiji 太極 (supreme polarity) represents yuandui 元氣 (the vital energy). Before the differentiation of yuandui, heaven, earth, and man mixed as one—the vital energy. Based on this, Shao Yong 邵雍 in the Song Dynasty created a system of cosmogenesis, which had a significant impact on the “Learning of Pattern” (Lixue 理學). Li Mei began with the Trinitarian analogy between God and man, incorporating the Five Cardinal Relationships (wu lun 五倫), the Four Virtues (si de 四德), the Six Desires (liu yu 六欲), and the Seven Affections (qi qing 七情). It appears that Li Mei intended to construct an analogy system, but according to the cosmogonies proposed by the “Learning of Pattern”, taiji 太極 (supreme polarity) and the world are yiti 一體 (one body). In contrast, in Christianity, God creates the world. God is distinct from the world, and the two cannot be confused.

The way missionaries used analogies exerted a big impact on the Chinese converts, and Chinese traditional literati tried to incorporate Chinese cultural resources into Christian theology in order to better understand the concept of the Trinity. Catholicism was introduced
to the literati by the missionaries, which sparked their curiosity about Christian concepts. Being intellectuals, they aimed to merge the principles and intellectual frameworks of Chinese traditional culture with Christian teachings to gain a more profound comprehension and interpretation of the Trinity. The introduction of the Trinitarian image to Chinese culture during the Ming and Qing Dynasties aimed to expand the reach of Christianity, and this had a significant impact that lasted well into the Republican era.

3.2. The Theory of Generation and Procession

Both Thomas Aquinas and Ignatius of Loyola subscribed to Augustine’s *Filioque*, but they differed in their application of the mental analogy. Thomas Aquinas believed that the word was generated by the mind, whereas Ignatius of Loyola argued that it was generated by memory. The Augustinian-Ignatian Approach proposes that the Son is the image of understanding, generated from memory (the Father), and love (the Holy Spirit) proceeds from the blissful union between understanding (the Son) and memory (the Father). Consequently, the Holy Spirit can be understood as proceeding from both the Father and the Son. The difference between these two approaches becomes more apparent when delving into the theory of generation and procession.

The fourth *juan* 卷 of *Kouduo richao* 口鐸日抄 (*Diary of Oral Admonitions*) contains a record of a discussion between Yan Zanhua 嚴贊化, a Chinese convert, and the missionary Bento de Matos (Lin Bendu 林本篤, 1600–1651) during the second month to the ninth month in the sixth year of the emperor Chongzhen’s reign (1633). They delved into the distinction between the “generation” of the Son and the “procession” of the Holy Spirit. Bento de Matos inquired about Yan Zanhua’s comprehension of this difference, questioning why the Son was described as being generated while the Holy Spirit was said to proceed instead of being generated. Yan Zanhua explained that the Son participated in the Father, resulting in generation, while the Holy Spirit proceeded from love. However, Bento de Matos thought Yan’s understanding was incomplete and thus provided an example to clarify his point. When one saw the Chinese character “zhi 之”, he could immediately recall its meaning because he remembered the character pattern of “之”. Bento de Matos argued that one remembered the character pattern and then generated the understanding of the Chinese character, that is, “memory governed understanding”. In other words, the understanding of the Chinese character is generated by recalling the Chinese pattern, which is facilitated by memory. Thus, understanding is closely linked to memory and generated by it. On the other hand, love is contingent upon memory and understanding, and it is not yet in existence. Love can only proceed and grow when memory and understanding are both present, leading to a state of blissful joy. Consequently, love proceeds instead of being generated. In the Trinity, generation and procession are different in connotation (Zhang et al. 2014, vol. 26, pp. 718–20).

Joao Monteiro (Meng Ruwang 孟儒望, 1603–1648), a Portuguese Jesuit, wrote *Mengshibiao xiansheng bian jing Lu* 孟士表先生辨敬錄 (1642). This short work focused on Systematic Theology. In the second treatise of his book, Joao Monteiro sought to elucidate the doctrine of the Trinity, and to aid in his explanation, he utilized analogies derived from Augustine’s teachings to differentiate between “generation” and “procession”.

The human soul governs three faculties: *jihan* 記含 (memory), *mingwu* 明悟 (understanding), and *aiyu* 愛欲 (love). *Jihan* represents the image of the Father. By remembering His things, one comes to understand His truth, and thus, the Father generates the image of the Son. Both remembering and understanding are encompassed by love, which can be seen as the image of the Holy Spirit proceeding from both the Father and the Son. It is important to note that generation and procession are organized in a logical sequence rather than representing a chronological order. (Zhang et al. 2014, vol. 31, pp. 349–50)
In his other book, *Tianxue liuyi* 天學略義 (published in 1642, with Zhu Zongyuan 朱宗元 as one of the emendators), Joao Monteiro employed the three faculties of the human soul (*jihan*, *mingwu*, and *aiyu*) as an analogy to the three persons of the Lord of Heaven (*Zheng* 2003, vol. 2, p. 49). Within this context, while explaining the distinction between “generation” and “procession”, he provided a specific explanation:

聖神雖與第一及第二位相似，然非有其子及其像之義。何也？夫第一位，明達其本性無窮之妙，生第二位。第一位與第二位，愛其本性無窮之妙，發第三位。如何可見，第二位乃父明功之界，而第三位乃父子愛功之界也。則有其子與其像之義者，不在愛能之內，而在明能之中明矣。

The Holy Spirit, although it resembles the Father and the Son, is not an exact representation or the image of the Father. So what is it exactly? The First Person, in understanding its infinite nature, brings forth the Second Person. The First Person and the Second Person both appreciate the magnificence of its infinite nature, from which the Third Person proceeds. But how can we grasp its essence? The Second Person exists within the realm of the Father’s understanding, while the Third Person exists within the realm of love shared by the Father and the Son. The Son, being the image of the Father, is not governed by love but by understanding.

(∗Zheng 2003, vol. 2, p. 50)

Then, he proceeded to explain that generation and procession within the Trinity indicated a certain sequence, but it was not a sequence in terms of time, as the three Persons are eternal. Instead, they followed a logical order rather than a chronological order.

Francesco Brancati (Pan Guoqiang 潘國光, 1607–1671), an Italian Jesuit, wrote and published two Chinese commentary books in the style of questions and answers, namely *Tianshen gui ke* 天神規課 (*Standardized Lessons of the Angels*) and *Tianshen hui ke* 天神會課 (*Duties of the Congregation of the Guardian Angels*), with slight variations between them. In *Tianshen gui ke* 天神規課, Franciscus Brancati employed concepts such as “*wu si* 五司” (five faculties), “*nei san si* 內三司” (three internal faculties), “*jihan* 記含” (memory), “*mingwu* 明悟” (understanding), and “*aiyu* 愛欲” (love)” and more when discussing the human soul (*Zhang et al.* 2014, vol. 39, p. 96). Additionally, he used common metaphors like “*Zhaoxiang* 照像” (looking into an image) and “*zhaojing* 照鏡” (looking into a mirror) when addressing the notions of “generation” and “procession” in the Trinity. The metaphor of a mirror has been widely employed throughout history, from Paul to Augustine.

Q: How do we understand “*badelei* 罷德肋” (the Father) begets “*feilüe* 貴略 (the Son)”?
A: The concept can be quite intricate. To explain it, let us use an analogy. Imagine someone wanting to see their own face by looking at their reflection in a mirror. The image (*xiang*) of the original person is generated from the mirror. From this analogy, we can understand that when there was no beginning, the First Person, *badelei* 罷德肋 (the Father) of the Lord of Heaven, reflected his own fundamental nature (*benxing*) and created the image of his nature, which is the Second Person, *feilüe* 貴略 (the Son). Thus, *feilüe* 貴略 (the Son) and *badelei* 罷德肋 (the Father) share one *xing* 性 (nature) and one *ti* 體 (substance).

(∗Zhang et al. 2014, vol. 39, p. 121)

Q: ……now, could you please explain how the Third Person *sibiliduosanduo* 斯彼利多三多 (the Holy Spirit) was generated?
A: The Third Person *Sibiliduosanduo* 斯彼利多三多 (the Holy Spirit) was not generated but proceeded from the love between *badelei* 罷德肋 (the Father) and *feilüe* 貴略 (the Son).

Q: Would you please elaborate on how *sibiliduosanduo* 斯彼利多三多 (the Holy Spirit) proceeded from *badelei* 罷德肋 (the Father) and *feilüe* 貴略 (the Son)?
A: Let us use the analogy of the sun in the sky. The sun has three aspects: *rilun* 日輪 (sun’s disk), *riguang* 日光 (sun’s light), and *ri’nuan* 日暖 (sun’s heat). *Rilun* 日輪
(sun’s disk) generates light, which is the same as *riguang* 日光 (sun’s light). *Rilun* 日輪 (sun’s disk) and *riguang* 日光 (sun’s light) together emit *ri’nuan* 日暖 (sun’s heat). These three aspects are united as one sun. *Badelei* 罷德肋 (the Father) begets *feilüe* 費略 (the Son), and through their mutual love, *sibiliduosanduo* 斯彼利多三多 (the Holy Spirit) proceeds. Three persons share one *xing* 性 (nature) and one *ti* 體 (substance), representing the Lord of Heaven without the constraints of time or the difference in size.


Francesco Brancati acknowledged and embraced the Jesuits’ concepts of “*nei san si*” 內三司 (three internal faculties). He consistently used this terminology when referring to the metaphors of “*generation*” and “*procession*”. In this framework, *Badelei* 罷德肋 (the Father) can be seen as equivalent to *jihan* 記含 (memory). The analogy of “sun: *rilun* 日輪 (sun’s disk)—*riguang* 日光 (sun’s light)—*ri’nuan* 日暖 (sun’s heat)” (corresponding to God: the Father—the Son—the Holy Spirit) indicates a logical connection similar to that of “mind: memory—understanding—love”.

Chinese Catholics also understood and interpreted “*generation*” and “*procession*” in a similar manner. Yang Tingyun 杨廷筠 (1557–1627), one of the three “pillars” of the Chinese Church during the Ming and Qing Dynasties, wrote and published *Daiyi pian* 代疑篇 (Essays on Replacing Doubts) around 1621. This work further expounded on these ideas:

蓋天主原為至靈,自照本體無窮之妙,而內自生一無窮之像,與己全同。……三位無大小先後之別,共一性也,一主也,一體也。譬諸人之靈性,具有三德: 一日記含,二曰明悟,三曰愛欲,實則一人之性。又譬諸日焉,有輪,有光,有熱,總一日也。譬諸水焉,能濕,能寒,能下,總一水也。

The Lord of Heaven, the supreme God, reflected the infinity of his inner being. From this inner essence, he brought forth an image of infinity, which was identical to himself. .......The three persons of the triune God, all of equal magnitude and existing outside the constraints of time, share one *xing* 性 (nature), one *zhu* 主 (God), and one *ti* 體 (substance). To illustrate this concept further, an analogy can be drawn from a human’s soul, which encompasses three virtues: *jihan* 記含 (memory), *mingwu* 明悟 (understanding), and *aiyu* 愛欲 (love). Another analogy can be drawn from the sun, which possesses three aspects: *rilun* 日輪 (sun’s disk), *riguang* 日光 (sun’s light), and *ri’nuan* 日暖 (sun’s heat). All three aspects are distinct, yet they comprise a unified sun. Similarly, water can be seen as having the properties of wetness, coldness, and the ability to flow downward.

(Zhou 2013, pp. 1583–84)

Building upon this trinitarian view, Yang Tingyun emphasized the mental image of *jihan* 記含 (memory), *mingwu* 明悟 (understanding), and *aiyu* 愛欲 (love). It can be logically inferred that in terms of “*generation*” and “*procession*”, he also held the belief that memory, as the Father’s reflection of his inner being, generated the Son (representing understanding). During Yang Tingyun’s lifetime, *Daiyi xiu pian* 代疑續篇 (Continued Essays on Replacing Doubts) was written. Although it was not published, it circulated in the Catholic community. In 1635, Zhang Geng 張賡, a local in Fujian, printed this book at Jinjiang 景 景 Church. This book offers a more detailed explanation of the concepts of “*generation*” and “*procession*”.

Badelei 罷德肋 (the Father) reflected the infinity of his own inner being: from his inner essence, he brought forth the image of infinity, known as *feilüe* 費略 (the Son). *Badelei* 罷德肋 (the Father) is the Father who begets *feilüe* 費略 (the Son), and *feilüe* 費略 (the Son) is the son begotten by *Badelei* 罷德肋 (the Father). *Sibiliduosan-
duo 斯彼利多三多 (the Holy Spirit) represents the love shared between the Father and the Son. This is what constitutes the Trinity… An analogy can be drawn from the human soul, which possesses jihan 記含 (memory), mingwu 明悟 (understanding), and aiyu 愛欲 (love). There are no limits to their nature and capacity. Similarly, the Lord of Heaven, as the supreme God, exists as three distinct persons and creates all beings, whether spiritual or non-spiritual, possessing omnipotence and incomparable power.

In addition to discussing the concepts of jihan 記含 (memory), mingwu 明悟 (understanding), and aiyu 愛欲 (love), the text also states that mingwu 明悟 (understanding) is generated by jihan 記含 (memory) and aiyu 愛欲 (love) proceeds from the love between the Father and the Son.

During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, there were notable Chinese theologians, and one among them was Zhu Zongyuan (朱宗元, 1609–?). He gained prominence in his early twenties, and at the age of 22, he wrote two significant books. One of them is titled Da ke wen 答客問 (Answers to the Questions of a Guest, 1631), which offers a detailed account of the relationship between Catholicism and Confucian tradition, as well as Buddhist and Taoist beliefs. The other book, Zhengshi Lüeshuo 拯世略說 (Short Explanations of the Salvation of the World), is a Systematic Theology work that systematically and clearly expounds the Trinity.

The Father does not actively intend to beget the Son, much like when someone looks into the mirror and a reflection naturally appears without any deliberate action. The love between the first and second Persons is reciprocal, from which the third Person receives the nature of both the Father and the Son, thereby becoming the Holy Spirit. When someone thinks of another person in their heart, it is as if they hold that person dear to them. However, human love is often directed outward, so the object of human affection can sometimes turn out to be empty or unsatisfying. When one’s thoughts cease, whatever they are thinking of will also fade away. God’s love is inwardly directed, and what God loves is the true essence of being. Love itself is eternal, so whatever proceeds from love is also eternal and constitutes a unified substance. Therefore, the Father and the Son did not deliberately initiate the procession of the Holy Spirit, much like when someone encounters something exceptionally beautiful, there is no need to consciously admire it. One simply cannot but enjoy and appreciate such beauty when two forms of goodness intersect. The Father’s generative power is transferred to the Son, while the capacity for procession is passed on to the Holy Spirit by both the Father and the Son. Thus, it does not result in a sum total of three, as the Father cannot restrain reflecting to prevent the Son from being begotten, and the Father and the Son cannot impede love and prevent the Holy Spirit from proceeding. Hence, the maximum manifestation is three.
ror. Furthermore, he used the metaphor of love to expound upon how the Holy Spirit proceeded from the love between the Father and the Son, similar to how one’s love for another person emerged when they thought of that person. He also emphasized that time did not exist within the Trinity. The Trinity was eternal. Therefore, “generation” preceded “procession” in a logical sequence rather than occurring in chronological order. He illustrated this by using the analogy of the sun: “sun: riti 日體 (sun’s body)—riguang 日光 (sun’s light)—Rizhao 日照 (sun’s illumination)” as an analogy to “God: the Father—the Son—the Holy Spirit”. It is evident that he adopted the Augustinian-Ignatian Approach rather than the Augustinian-Thomistic Approach, which used “mind—understanding—love” as an analogy to “the Father—the Son—the Holy Spirit” (God has no true analogy).

4. The Augustinian-Thomistic Approach

During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, theologians like Raimundo del Valle (Lai Mengdu 賴蒙篤, 1613–1683), a Dominican, advocated for the “Augustinian-Thomistic Approach”, using the mental analogy of “mind—understanding—love”. In 1673, Raimundo del Valle published a significant work titled Xing shen shiyi 形神實義 (True Meaning of the Body and Spirit). This book examines the nature of the human body and soul from a Thomist perspective. In his book “Notes on Usage”, del Valle expressed his disagreement with the prevailing practice of dividing the soul into three faculties, a concept initially proposed by the Jesuits.

In the fourth section titled “Lun mingwu shou neng you jihan 讨明悟受能有記含” (“Discussion on memory as an endowed ability of understanding”), Raimundo del Valle reiterated his viewpoint (Zhong 2009, vol. 3, pp. 229–33). Differing from the Jesuits who considered memory, understanding, and love as the three faculties of the soul, as seen initially in Ignatius of Loyola’s Spiritual Exercise, Raimundo del Valle, a conscious Thomist, merged memory with understanding, rejecting the idea of the independent place of memory. However, prior to Raimundo del Valle, Johann Adam Schall von Bell (Tang Ruowang 湯若望, 1592–1666) and Louis Buglio (Li Leisi 利類思, 1606–1682), though they did not explicitly challenge the concept of “three faculties”, they had already used “mind—understanding—love” as the Imago Dei (Zhang et al. 2014, vol. 11, p. 408).

Although the Augustinian-Thomistic Approach played a smaller role in the theory of Imago Dei, it gains prominence when discussing the issues of “generation” and “procession” within the Trinity. Many proponents of the Augustinian-Thomistic Approach argued that the mind generated the word and love proceeded from both the mind and the word, rather than suggesting that memory generated the word and love proceeded from both memory and the word. Probably, it is more comprehensible to state that the mind contemplated itself, akin to a reflection in a mirror, to generate another self (word), while love proceeded from the mutual joy experienced by the mind and the word.

Michele Ruggieri’s original work, Tianzhu shilu 天主實錄 (True Record of the Lord of Heaven), was revised by the Jesuits, leading to the publication of a new version titled Tianzhu shengjiao shilu (True Record of the Holy Catholic Church) around 1638. In the newly-added seventh chapter titled “Tianzhu Shengxing Zhang 天主聖性章” (“The Holy Nature of the Lord of Heaven”), an important concept emerged. It states that all with divinity possess mingwu 明悟 (understanding) and aiyu 愛欲 (love). This statement aligns with the principles of the Augustinian-Thomistic Approach. Subsequently, Ruggieri employed this analogy to elaborate further on the concepts of “generation” and “procession” in the Trinity.
天主必至靈、至神者也，至靈神則不能不明盡其性之妙也。明盡其性，則不能不生其象也。此象因為天主內發之全象，故於天主必同性體、同知能，無多少之異焉。……又父明其所生之子，必不能不愛之；子明其所授生之父，必不能不親之。父子相親愛，則愛情由發矣。此愛情因為天主內發之情，則於天主必同性體，必同知能，無多少之異焉……直因其為二位相親之所由立，故特有次第之殊，而謂之斯彼利多三多；聖神也，第三位也。天主一體三位，此之謂也。

The Lord of Heaven is the supreme spiritual entity and supreme deity, embodying a nature of unparalleled excellence. Upon understanding His nature, the Lord naturally generates an image of Himself. The image, being generated within the Lord of Heaven, is entirely complete and shares the same essence, substance, understanding, and capacity as the Lord of Heaven, exhibiting minimal difference…… The Father’s understanding of his begotten son leads to an irresistible sense of love for the son. Similarly, the Son understands his begetting Father, engendering an intimate connection with him. Within this profound bond of love between the Father and the Son, love inevitably emanates. This love for proceeding within the Lord of Heaven retains an identical nature, body, and understanding with the Lord of Heaven, maintaining little disparity. ……As the mutual love between the Father and the Son extends forth, a hierarchical distinction emerges, commonly referred to as sibiliduosanduo, or the Holy Spirit, symbolizing the third person within the Trinity and showcasing the intricate dynamics between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

(Zhang et al. 2014, vol. 24, pp. 283–84)

The Holy Father generated the image, and through mutual understanding between the Holy Father and the Holy Son, love blossomed. This love gave rise to the Holy Spirit, who became an independent person. The terms “ming 明” (understanding) and “ai 愛” (love) were adopted, reflecting the Augustinian-Thomistic Approach.

Johann Adam Schall von Bell explicitly used “mind—knowledge—love” as an analogy to the Trinity in his book Zhu jiao yuan qi 主教緣起 (Origins of the Catholic Faith) (Zhang et al. 2014, vol. 32, pp. 72–73). According to this analogy, the mind generated the image of the self, and because this image represented the self, love was directed towards it, resulting in the manifestation of the Holy Spirit. In contrast, in the Lord of Heaven, the generated image and the proceeding love were both independent, therefore giving rise to three independent persons: the Holy Father, the Holy Son, and the Holy Spirit.

In Louis Buglio’s work, Zhu zhi yao zhi 主教要旨 (Essentials of the Catholic Faith), around 1668, he drew a parallel to Johann Adam Schall von Bell by using the concept of “soul—understanding—love” as an analogy to the Trinity. His writings highlighted this as follows:

父明其所生之子，必愛之，子明其所受生之父，必親之。既相親愛，則愛性情所由發矣。此愛情因為天主內發之情，故於天主，亦必同性體，但因其為兩位相親之所由立，不得不有次第之殊，而謂之聖神，乃第三位也。

The Father, who has given life to the son, naturally loves the Son. Similarly, the Son understands the father, who has given him life, and cherishes the Father in return. This mutual love and affection between them gives rise to the emotion of love. This sentiment of love, being an inherent part of the Lord, shares the same essence with Him. However, because it is expressed through the reciprocal affection of two distinct people, there is a distinction in order. This manifestation of love is referred to as the Holy Spirit, the third person in the Holy Trinity.

(Zhang et al. 2014, vol. 24, pp. 674–75)

This account is quite similar to Chapter 7 added to Tianzhu shengjiao shilu 天主聖教實錄 (1638). It is highly likely that both of them originated from the same Catholic doctrinal book of the time. Augustin de San Pascual (Li Anding 利安定, 1637–1697), a Spanish Franciscan, arrived in China in 1671. In his work titled Yong fu tian qu 永福天衢
In his discussion on “generation” and “procession” of the Trinity, he expounded on these concepts in detail:

人明悟所生，僅為虛像，不得言明悟實子。愛欲所發，僅為虛情，不得有愛情實
體。至若聖父，從無始明照己體，己善、己美，滿備無際諸情，遂於己性內，生
一本體之像，即為實像，即為真子。與第一位聖父惟有一體，故聖父稱天主第一
位，而聖子稱天主第二位也。聖子既由聖父而生，則聖父明見己之全像，自然愛
其聖子，聖子亦愛其聖父，父子愛情所發，即為聖神，亦與聖父聖子惟有一體，
故聖父稱天主第一位，聖子稱天主第二位，而聖神稱天主第三位也。

The image generated by human understanding is merely a false representation, lacking the authenticity of true understanding. Similarly, the love that is generated is insincere and lacks the essence of genuine love. God the Holy Father, who is eternal and encompasses being, goodness, and beauty, possesses boundless emotions and generates the true image of Himself within His nature. This image is the genuine representation, known as God the Son, sharing the same essence with God the Holy Father. Thus, the Holy Father is the First Person, and the Holy Son is the Second Person of the Lord of Heaven. The Holy Son is begotten by the Holy Father, who comprehends the complete image of Himself and naturally loves the Holy Son. In return, the Holy Son reciprocates this love for the Holy Father. This mutual love proceeds to be the Holy Spirit, who shares the same essence with the Holy Father and the Holy Son. Therefore, the Holy Father is the First Person of the divine Trinity, the Holy Son is the Second Person of the divine Trinity, and the Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the divine Trinity.


The Augustinian-Thomistic Approach often associates “generation” and “procession” with the creation of an image and looking into a mirror. This approach involves the mind reflecting upon itself to create a true self-image, much like how looking in a mirror allows for the perception of one’s self-image, which fosters self-love. However, for humans, image and love are not independent entities. In contrast, for God, the image becomes self-reliant and takes the form of the Holy Son, while mutual love produces independent love, represented by the Holy Spirit.

5. Chinese’s Critique of the Trinity

As the Trinity was introduced to diverse religious cultures, individuals naturally interpreted and translated it through the lens of their own religious beliefs. This was done with the aim of emphasizing both the similarities and differences in order to facilitate better understanding. For instance, in the Tang Dynasty, in the stele known as “Da Qin jingjiao liuxing Zhongguo bei 大秦景教流行中國碑” (“Stele on the Propagation of the Luminous Religion of Da Qin in China”), the popular Buddhist term “kaya” (shen 身, body) was used to translate the different persons of the Trinity. The Holy Father was referred to as “san yi miao shen 三一妙身” (Transcendent Person of the Trine-Unity), the Holy Son as “san yi fen shen 三一分身” (Separated Person of the Trine-Unity), and the Holy Spirit as “san yi jing feng 三一淨風” (Pure Wind of Trine-Unity). This translation initiated the comparative theology between Christianity and Buddhism, although later interpretations described the Holy Father as “fa shen 法身” (the dharmakaya), the Holy Son as “bao shen 銷身” (the sambhogakaya), and the Holy Spirit as “hua shen 化身” (the nirmanakaya). In Buddhism, the dharmakaya refers to the more metaphorical body, representing the Buddha’s good qualities and teachings, in which one should seek refuge. The sambhogakaya, the emanation body, signifies a manifestation of bliss or clear light. Lastly, the nirmanakaya represents the Buddha’s physical human form, appearing in time and space and visible to ordinary humans.
Yang Tingyun, a converted Buddhist, acknowledged the challenge of comprehending the Trinity through reason alone and emphasized the importance of pious faith. He suggested a better understanding of the Trinity by using the Buddhist terms “the dharmakaya, the sambhogakaya, and the nirmanakaya”. However, he cautioned against making far-fetched analogies between the Trinity and Buddhist concepts due to the difficulties in explaining the existence of numerous Buddhas and their omnipotence (Zheng 2003, vol. 3, p. 112).

From the Buddhist perspective, the Trinity bears resemblance to the concept of “san shen yi xing 三身一性” (three bodies, one nature). In the book titled Sheng jiao po xie jie 聖朝破邪集 (The Collected Works of Exorcism of the Holy Dynasty) compiled by Xu Changzhi 徐昌治 (1582–1672) in 1639, the essay titled “Sheng jiao zuo pi 聖朝佐辟” (“Assisting in Exorcism of the Holy Dynasty”), Xu Dashou 許大受 (ca. 1575–1645) pointed out that some people considered the Catholic doctrine of “one nature, three persons” to be highly sophisticated. However, if they had read certain Buddhist books, they would have noticed that the Catholic Church had plagiarized the idea of the three bodies, namely the dharmakaya, the sambhogakaya, and the nirmanakaya, and formed a wrong interpretation (Mei and Yang 2018, p. 100; Zhou 2013, p. 1799). It is worth noting that the accusation of plagiarism made by Xu Dashou is not historically accurate.

During the Ming and Qing Dynasties, Zhong Shisheng 鍾始聲 (1599–1665) compiled and edited a book titled Pi xie ji 辟邪集 (The Collected Works of Exorcism), which collected various anti-Catholic writings from the Buddhist community of that time. In this book, the Buddhist scholar Shi Jiji 釋寂基 refuted the concept of the Trinity in his article “Zhao Jian 昭奸” (“Revealing Evil”). It was noted by Shi Jiji that the Trinity was not mentioned in Matteo Ricci’s Tianzhu shiyi 天主實義 and that some Chinese scholars, such as Shen Que 沈澤, challenged the notion that God had become human in the form of Jesus, died on the cross, and then rose again to life.

彼夷自知情偽敗露，難以欺人，遂著《遺詮》(按指龐迪我《龐子遺詮》)一冊，竊佛典一性具三身之義，謂天主有三位：一位名罷德肋，二位名費略，三位名斯彼利多三多。第二位費略雖降生為耶穌，而罷德肋猶在天，將以遁逃上帝化為胡人，胡人返為上帝，天主降生以後，天遂無主之詰。

They themselves knew that the fabricated information was exposed, and it was difficult to deceive others. In response, Yi quan 遺詮 (referring to Diego de Pantoja’s Pang zi yi quan 龐子遺詮) was written, plagiarizing the concept of “one nature, three bodies” from Buddhism. It claimed that the Lord of Heaven consists of three persons: the first, “badelei 罷德肋”, the second, “feilüe 費略” and the third, “sibiliduosanduo 斯彼利多三多”. The second person, “feilüe”, was born as Jesus, while “badelei” still remained in heaven. The fleeing God would be incarnated to be a barbarian and return as God. After the Lord of Heaven was born, there was no longer a Lord of Heaven in heaven.

(Zhou 2013, p. 2002)

The distinction between the Immanent Trinity and the Economic Trinity is an essential aspect of the doctrine of the Trinity. The former deals with the internal relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, while the latter focuses on their roles in the history of salvation. Shi Jiji failed to grasp this distinction, and he questioned why God the Son turned into a human, Jesus, in the earthly world. Similar to Xu Dashou, Shi Jiji believed that the Catholic Church had borrowed the concept of the Trinity from Buddhism. He compared this doctrine to the Buddhist principle of “three bodies, one nature”, claiming that the latter was simple and easy to understand, whereas the former seemed to be a contradictory blend.

Shi Jiji’s exposition delves into the Buddhist concept of the three bodies and how it relates to Confucianism by using Confucian terms ti 體 (pattern, form, body) and yong 用 (use, function) to illustrate their shared li 理 (principle). He argues that a clear understanding of the “three bodies, one nature” concept can be achieved by reflecting
on one’s own nature and behavior. Additionally, he asserts that the Confucian principle of *zi xing ti yong* 自性體用 (the body and the use of the self-nature) can serve as a simple and coherent explanation of the concept. Conversely, Shi Jiji critiques the Trinity, categorizing it as a contrived interpretation and labeling it as both “incorrect” and “immoral”.

“Why didn’t the Holy Father create the first man wise?” This was the question posed by Shi Jiji, who accused the Holy Father of being “partial”. He confused the concepts of “generation” and “creation”, but his core question was a challenging one for the Catholic Church to answer. If the Father was all-powerful and all-good, why did he not create humans as wise as the Holy Son? This inquiry delved into the realm of theodicy and questioned why humans were not created as perfect beings and instead were endowed with a natural inclination towards disobedience and susceptibility to demonic disturbance, allowing evil to enter the world. These were difficult questions for the church to grapple with.

Critiques like those of Shi Jiji can be seen as broader critiques of Augustine’s trinitarian image theory and the challenges of cross-cultural communication. Such criticism had the potential to trigger reflections among the believers. The Trinity is considered the most profound mystery in Christianity and has been debated among various denominations throughout history. Theologians have recognized it as a “mystery” to be believed in and then understood. When Christianity made its entrance into China, despite the determined efforts of missionaries and Christian scholars alike, some of its most basic teachings remained difficult to grasp in terms of their theological significance. However, the way that Christianity has been able to integrate with Chinese intellectual traditions is truly fascinating and adds a unique layer to the study of both religions and cultures.

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**Notes**

1. In chapter 6 of book 15 of *De Trinitate* (15:46), Augustine discussed the difference between “generation” of the Holy Son and “procession” of the Holy Spirit. He drew from the *Sermon on the Gospel of John* to support his argument. Augustine believed that the main difference lied in the fact that the Holy Spirit proceeded from both the Father and the Son, whereas the Son was solely generated from the Holy Father. Later, Thomas Aquinas modified Augustine’s mental analogy “mind: memory—understanding—love” to “mind—understanding—love”, but in the issues of “generation” and “procession”, Aquinas was consistent with Augustine. He also asserted that the Holy Son was “generated” from the Holy Father, while the Holy Spirit proceeded from both the Father and the Son. See *Summa Theologiae* I q.36 a.2, or Hill’s English translation vol. 1, pp. 182–88. In *Summa Theologiae* I q.36 a.2, one passage of response is very relevant to our discussion. “The Son proceeds by way of the intellect as Word, and the Holy Ghost by way of the will as Love. Now love must proceed from a word. For We do not love anything unless we apprehend it by a mental conception. Hence also also in this way, it is manifest that the Holy Ghost proceeds from the Son” (*Aquinas* 1964, p. 184). In *Summa Theologiae* I q.93 a.6, Thomas Aquinas discussed the image: “as the uncreated Trinity is distinguished by the procession of the Word from the Speaker, and of Love from both of these; so we may say that in rational creatures wherein we find a procession of the word in the intellect and a procession of the love in the will, there exists an image of the uncreated Trinity, by a certain representation of the species” (*Aquinas* 1964, p. 473).

2. According to Fei Laizhi (Pfister), the book was published in Guangzhou in November 1584. Fang Hao suggests that it was probably written in Zhaoqing and published in Guangzhou in November 1584, based on Fei Laizhi’s account. Thierry Meynard, on the other hand, states that Ruggieri published the book in Zhaoqing in November 1584, making it the first

3 In about 1628, Michele Ruggieri’s *Tianzhu shilu* 天主實錄 (True record of the Lord of Heaven) was reprinted as *Tianzhu shengjiao shilu* 天主聖教實錄 (A Veritable Record of the Holy Catholic Church) with major revisions and modifications by the Jesuits. In this paragraph, “賢士” (man of virtue) was changed into “聖人” (the saint), and “天人” (heavenly man) into “天神” (heavenly God).

4 The original edition of *Tianzhu shilu* 天主實錄 (published in 1584) written by Michele Ruggieri is different from the later revised version titled *Tianzhu sheng jiao shilu* 天主聖教實錄 revised by Manuel Dias and others several decades later. The latter made many modifications, such as changing names, and added some paragraphs. Zhang Xiping 張西平 included the later version of *Tianzhu sheng jiao shilu* 天主聖教實錄, and did not realize that it was not the original version. Zheng Ande was clear about the two versions but failed to find the original version. Meanwhile, there are some problems with the textual criticism of *Tianzhu sheng jiao shilu* 天主聖教實錄 included in Zheng’s compilation. The version of *Tianzhu shilu* 天主實錄 in Thierry Meynard’s works is correct, so his version is used in this paper. The 1584 version of *Tianzhu shilu* 天主實錄 is also included in *Yesuhui Luoma dang’anguan Ming Qing Tianshu jiao wenxian* 耶穌會羅馬檔案館明清天主教文獻 (5 volumes) edited by Professor Nicolas Standaert (vol. 1, pp. 1–86); *Ming Qing zhi ji xifang chuanjiaoshi hanji congkan* 明清之際西方傳教士漢籍叢刊 edited by Zhou Zhenhe 周振鶴 (vol. 1, Book 1).

5 The edition, which the author encountered, was downloaded from archives and was published in 1607 with 85 ye 叶 (leaves) and about 170 pages. It was generally translated as *Shen cao* 神操. It was completely translated into Chinese in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, *Sheng yinjue shen xing gongfu*, included in *Yesu hui li* 耶穌會例 (Zhong 2009, vol. 22). The original document appears to be written by an unknown author, as it lacks any information about the author’s identity, publication date, or page number.

6 There are several English translations of *The Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola*, and this article references the Louis J. Puhl, SJ translation. In “First Exercise on the First, Second, and Third Note on Colloquies” of “First Week”, it writes, “This is a meditation on the first, second, and third sins employing the three powers of the soul”. “This will consist in using the memory to recall the first sin, which was that of the angels, and then in applying the understanding by reasoning upon this sin, then the will by seeking to remember and understand all to be the more filled with shame and confusion when I compare the one sin of the angels with the many sins I have committed”. (“The First Point”) https://spex.ignatianspirituality.com/PuhlTranslation.html (assessed on 12 July 2017).

7 The date of its publication is based on Jin Wenbing’s research. This book, engraved in 1636, is now preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France (no. 6857). The edition the author encountered lacks any information about its publishing date and place. It is probably the 1636 edition.


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