

# Christian Chinese cloisonné

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*Cloisonné* is the technique of creating designs on metal vessels with colored-glass paste placed within enclosures made of copper or bronze wires, which have been bent or hammered into the desired pattern. Known as *cloisons* (French for “partitions”), the enclosures generally are either pasted or soldered onto the metal body. The first written reference of *Cloisonné* in China is in Cao Zhao's *Gegu yaolun* (格古要論), or *Important discussions about assessing antiques* (1388), where it is called “Dashi (‘Muslim’) ware”. However, the oldest known pieces in China correspond to the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368). Similarly, in Cao Zhao's book, *cloisonné* was associated with the trousseau of elite ladies, but was not yet considered appropriate for the art collection of refined literati. In Chinese *cloisonné*, blue is the predominant color, and the Chinese name for the technique is *jingtai* (blue Jingtai objects) referring to Emperor Jingtai (r. 1449–1457), in whose times the production of these objects flourished. By the late Ming Dynasty, *cloisonné* passed from the trousseau of the Chinese elite ladies and Buddhist temples to the collections of the literati as an exquisite object to integrate into the Chinese artistic tradition. What is more, it was even part of sets of offerings in Confucian mausoleums and in the halls of representation of power in the Forbidden City. To achieve the definitive implantation of Christianity in China, since the 17th century the Jesuit missionaries used the adaptationist method in their preaching and artistic practices to be able to empathize with Chinese audiences. Thus, they used Western models, but adapting/adapted to the visual language and the ornamental and symbolic motifs of the Chinese artistic tradition. In any case, the Jesuits aimed to convert the elites first. To do this, they used artistic and literary means already established in the Chinese culture of the literati, such as *cloisonné* precious objects and Chinese inscriptions. Thus, these objects of art are not only situated within a dialogue between the West and the East but also within the stratification of the Chinese society that the Jesuits took into consideration.

Keywords: cloisonné ; hybridization ; Chinese art ; China ; Christianity ; missionaries ; westernisms ; occidentaloría ; Christian art

## 1. Introduction

China has been part of various artistic interactions at a global level throughout its millennial history, especially since the establishment of the Silk Road in the second century BC. Through this commercial and cultural exchange, external elements affected Chinese art, such as the use of cobalt blue—from Iran/Persia—and the *cloisonné* technique—from the Byzantine Empire. This phenomenon was particularly increased through the opening of alternative communication routes with the West, trying to circumvent the blockage of the Silk Road by the Ottoman Empire after the fall of Constantinople in 1453. In the context of these interactions at a global level, China specialized in products aimed at the international art market, such as export porcelain. From the establishment of enduring commercial exchanges with China in the 16th century by Portugal (*Carreira da Índia*) and Spain (*Galeón de Manila*), the so-called “*arte achinado*” or “*al remedo de la China*” (“*art in Chinese style*”) was even created in the Spanish American possessions. Later, the European phenomenon of the *chinoiserie*s also would emerge. Thus, a game of mirrors was generated among China, America and Europe in the world art scene, in which hybridization was one of the characteristic notes (See [Carr 2015](#); [Krahe 2016](#); [Curiel 2007](#)).

In this global cultural and artistic landscape, the religious factor played an important role, as it can be seen in the very penetration of Christianity in China, which made use of the possibilities that art offered. This article presents an approach to artistic hybridization in the panorama of Christian art in China. We will focus not so much on the art that is the result of the first contacts with the European missionaries—and particularly with the Jesuit adaptationist or accommodation method—but, fundamentally, on the art produced by a Christianity already established as a local religion in China from the 18th century onwards ([Menegon 2009](#)). This is the category that is least studied and that interests us the most in this work. In this context, we provide several case studies within the scope of productions in bronze with *cloisonné* enamel: four figurines of prophets from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (USA), the chalice and paten of the Musée départemental d'art religieux de Sées in Normandy (France) and the bell of the Cerralbo Museum in Madrid (Spain).

## 2. Historical Background

Christianity in China has long history that dates back to the 7th century. Introduced by Nestorian ('Syriac' or 'Syro-Chinese') monks among eastern Turkic peoples such as the Uighurs and pre-Gengiskhanid Mongolian tribes such as the Khita, it would reach China ca. 635 through trade routes (Parry 2016). Among the first material testimonies are the church of Xi'an, from the Tang dynasty (the first Christian church in China), or the famous Stela of Siganfu, rediscovered in 1625 and which tells the religious persecutions by Emperor Wuzong towards foreign religions, including Buddhism.

Starting in the 13th century, a new Christian trend would break into the Chinese religious scene guided by the Franciscan monk Juan de Montecorvino (1247–1328), initiating the first Catholic evangelization in the region. He directed his ministry to the Nestorians, but also to the pagans, eventually building the first Catholic Church in Khanbalic in 1293 (present-day Beijing). One of the results of this action is the syncretism between Guanyin and the Virgin Mary. However, China's greater or lesser opening to the outside world has always had a cyclical nature. In 1368 the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) was established, initiating a isolationist movement that hermetically closed the borders of the empire. As a result, Christianity in China was dissolved during the 14th and 15th centuries.

However, the European missionaries would not give up their evangelizing efforts. The Portuguese and the Spanish arrived first, with Francisco Javier dying at the gates of Canton in 1552. There were also several failed expeditions of Augustinians, Franciscans and Dominicans. Finally, in 1583 the Jesuit Mateo Ricci managed to enter Zhaoqing and establish first contact with local authorities, to be followed by Suzhou (1589), Nanchang (1595), Nanking (1599) and finally the court of Beijing (1601).

Ricci's main collaborator at this time was the Spanish Diego de Pantoja (1571–1618), the first European who acceded to the court of Beijing in the Forbidden City and who would be known by the Chinese name of Páng Dí'é (Nong 2017; Soto Artuñedo 2018). Pantoja traveled with Ricci from Nanjing to Beijing, where by offering Western gifts (a world map, a Bible, a harpsichord, portraits of Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary, an etching of San Lorenzo del Escorial in Madrid and two clocks) they could pique Emperor Wanli's curiosity and obtain a pass to enter the Forbidden Purple City four times a year. However, the relationship between the Spanish missionary and his Italian companions deteriorated, especially when it became known that the King of Spain, Philip II, was contemplating the idea of conquering China from the Philippines, following the proposal of the Spanish governor in the islands, Francisco de Sande. This warmongering current was finally rejected by the King of Spain, who decided to be guided by the *Derecho de Gentes* (Law of Nations) theorized by Francisco de Vitoria and the School of Salamanca, which was a milestone in the recognition of the rights of the "Other" and that laid the ground of the current International Right. This change in strategy on the part of Spanish expansionism with respect to China has been explained finally through the replacement of the project of conquest (military power), with the Manila Galleon (commercial power) (Ollé 2002). In the same way that Portugal and Spain applied this policy in a factual way to their commercial and political objectives in China, for their part the Jesuits used the adaptationist method (Bailejesy 2001, pp. 82–111; Arnold and Corsi 2003). Thus, the Jesuits—and other religious operators who followed their example—even adopted the typical dress code of Chinese scholars and presented Christian doctrine as a belief compatible with Confucian ethics. For this they had coined the name Tiānzǔ (天主, "Lord of Heaven"), as a Chinese translation of "God", who they identified with Shàngdì (上帝), an ancient divinity from the remote times of the first dynasties (Wang 2020, p. 97). Presenting Christianity in this way, as a combination of Confucian morality and Shàngdì worship, there was a rapid spread of it throughout China. The constant news of the progress made encouraged other Spanish missionaries in the Philippines, particularly Franciscans and Dominicans, and later also Augustinians. In 1626, a group of Dominicans settled in Formosa, a mission that was considered a bridge to make the leap to mainland China (Arnold 2016, pp. 136–44; Arnold 1999). Of great relevance in this first stage would be the Dominican father Juan Bautista Morales, who arrived in China in 1633 together with the Franciscan Antonio Caballero de Santa María [利安当, known as Li Andang]. The latter would be in charge of baptizing, that same year, who would become the first Chinese priest and bishop, the Dominican Luo Wenzao [罗文藻, also called Gregorio López].<sup>1</sup>

As soon as these missionaries came into contact with the Jesuits, the first discrepancies arose due to the different apostolic methodology. This way the so-called 'Chinese rites controversy' began, in which Jesuit adaptationist ideas clashed with those who believed that Christianity should be presented as a belief that refutes any previous religious or moral system. Henceforth, the Chinese missions lived in the midst of the difficulties derived from this conflict. The Society of Jesus, stripped of its possessions after its suppression in 1773, would not return to its former missions until 1842, and although the Western powers had already entered the scene, persecutions were a constant by then. It would be after the Opium Wars, when the Christian missionary communities that were already in China were reactivated and new ones arrived, especially from France. Important in this sense was the Treaty of Whampoa (1844) which was a historical landmark in the reopening of China to Christian preaching. The Second Opium War culminated in the sacking of the

Summer Palace by British and French troops in 1860. For its part, France would end up putting all European missionary communities under its protection and bringing features from the prevailing artistic styles in Europe in that moment, which will be reflected in several of the artworks that we study here. Thus, the 19th century ended with the Boxer Revolution, which caused numerous casualties among the 740,000 Christians who existed at that time in the country. A decade later, in 1922, the apostolic delegation of China was erected and in 1926 the future native hierarchy consecrated its first six Chinese bishops, and would increase year after year.

## 2.1. Hybridizations in the Chinese Imperial Court and “westernisms”

Technical and scientific knowledge allowed the access of Jesuit scholars to the imperial court of Beijing, assimilated as Confucian scholars. Among them, some artists adapted to Chinese taste by painting Chinese ink with European influences such as physiognomic portraiture or monofocal perspective. Diego de Pantoja himself gave harpsichord lessons at the imperial court.

In the same way that the appreciation for Chinese art in Europe produced the international phenomenon of the *chinoiserie*, a similar phenomenon took place at the Chinese court but in reverse, which sometimes receives the generic name of Occidentalism, but which we suggest to call “westernisms” or “occidentalerías”. The most eloquent example of this phenomenon is the Old Summer Palace in Beijing, including the marble ship. The distinctive feature of these “occidentalerías” is that they consist basically on Chinese commissions carried out in China to Western artists who adapt their art style to what China expects from the West. This is a differentiating feature of China in its relations with the West, since no European sovereign took Chinese artists into his service, but European artists took to imitating Chinese art. In the Chinese court the process was different, since European artists also adapted Western art to Chinese tastes. Giuseppe Castiglione (Láng Shíning) (Milan, 1688—Beijing, 1766) and Jean Denis Attiret (Wáng Zhì Chéng) (Dole, 1702—Beijing, 1768) stood out in this area.

In addition to the Old Summer Palace, another ensemble that denotes this type of hybridization is the Old Astronomical Observatory in Beijing, which was the result of the collaboration between European Jesuit scholars and Chinese scholars. In it we observe scientific objects of European typology but adapted to the aesthetics of the great Chinese ceremonial bronzes. The person in charge of the works carried out between 1669 and 1674 was the Jesuit astronomer Ferdinand Verbiest/Nan Huai ren (1623–1688). After the project was completed, in 1674 Verbiest wrote in Chinese *Xinzhì Lingtái Yìxiàng Zhì* (新製靈臺儀象志) (*Revelation about the newly built astronomical instruments at the observatory*).

## 2.2. Chinese Christian Art

Some Jesuits also took aesthetic models of Chinese art to represent Christian scenes and thus facilitate conversion through a formal Chinese language albeit based on compositional schemes taken from Spanish Netherlandish engravings.<sup>2</sup> However, we emphasize that these works are the result of the initiative of the Jesuits who try to adapt them to Chinese art by themselves alone or by resorting to local artists ([Bailejesy 2001](#)). For this reason, we can speak of a kind of “editorial adaptationism”, which constitutes a major landmark in the consideration of the “Other” as a result of Catholic humanism. These Jesuits considered how to address an audience with a culture and codes of representation different from those of Europe. In other words, in a pioneering way, the Jesuits consciously adapted to the cultural practices and visual codes of a non-European public to whom their works were aimed. In this sense, this type of art manifests an interest in understanding the “Other”, similar to that reflected in the Spanish *Derecho de Gentes* (Law of Nations) and, on a historiographic level, the *Crónicas de Indias* (Chronicles of the Indies), which constitutes the basis of ethnohistory and modern anthropology. The *Crónicas de Indias*, the Spanish books which narrate the history of the Americas, were written even by native authors such as Guamán Poma de Ayala. This phenomenon is comparable to the making of works of art by Christian converts in America and Asia.

These types of artistic productions are difficult to classify, since they are halfway between Western art (European compositional model and Christian message) and traditional Chinese art (Chinese aesthetics and motifs linked to Confucianism and Taoism), and on many occasions their creators were Chinese artists led by the Jesuits. In this context, three religious books stand out in which Christian scenes were adapted to the codes of representation of Chinese painting: João da Rocha (1565–1623), *Song Nianzhu Guicheng* (Method of Reciting the Rosary, Nanjing, c. 1620), with engravings by Gaspar Ferreira (Fei Qikuei, 1571–1649); Giulio Aleni (1582–1649), *Tianzhu Jiangsheng Chuxiang Jingjie* (Illustrated Explanations of the Lord of Heaven’s Incarnation, Jinjiang: Jing Jiao Tang press, 1637) and Johann Adam Schall von Bell (1591–1666), *Jincheng Shuxiang* (*Images in a booklet presented to His Majesty*, Beijing: Jincheng Shuxiang, 1640).

The Jesuits helped Chinese converts create their own Christian art. They developed Christian content through the vernacular artistic tradition in China. This type of art would be framed in Catholic Christianity as a “local religion” of China.<sup>3</sup> However, it should be noted that Catholic missions supervised the native communities. Because of that, the Chinese Catholic communities remained connected to the theoretical and artistic models established from the West. In this sense, it is worth highlighting the work of Celso Benigne-Louis Costantini (1876–1958), named Archbishop of Theodosia and Apostolic Delegate to China in 1922, as well as that of his successor Mario Zanin (1890–1958). Costantini opted for a Chinese Christian art, theoretically without Western stylistic influences. This model would give rise to the artistic movement known as *Ars Sacra Pekinensis*, promoted by the Art Department of the Catholic Fu Jen University since 1933 ([Bornemann 1950](#); [Lawton 1995](#); [Walravens 2018](#)).

### **3. Case Studies: Objects in Cloisonné**

In this work we intend to analyze, as a case study, several works from China decorated with *cloisonné* enamel. This technique came to China in the 13th-14th centuries from Byzantium and from the Islamic sphere.<sup>4</sup> During the Yuan Dynasty, at the same time that *cloisonné* was established in China by Central Asian influence, the use of cobalt blue and Central Asian decorative motifs in porcelain began. The permeability of Chinese art to foreign influences is also reflected in the assimilation of Indianizing floral patterns and Tibetan Buddhist stylistic and icono-graphic influences. In particular, *cloisonné* took influences from Tibetan Buddhist art and used five basic colors since the Yuan Dynasty. Furthermore, those five colors were also introduced into porcelain, although in the Ming Dynasty.

The first written reference of *Cloisonné* in China is in Cao Zhao's *Gegu yaolun* (格古要論), or *Important discussions about assessing antiques* (1388), where it is called “Dashi (‘Muslim’) ware”. However, the oldest known pieces in China correspond to the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368). Similarly, in Cao Zhao's book, cloisonné was associated with the trousseau of elite ladies, but was not yet considered appropriate for the art collection of refined literati. In Chinese *cloisonné*, blue is the predominant color, and the Chinese name for the technique is *jingtai* (“blue Jingtai objects”) referring to Emperor Jingtai (r. 1449–1457), in whose times the production of these objects flourished. By the late Ming Dynasty, *cloisonné* passed from the trousseau of the Chinese elite ladies and Buddhist temples to the collections of the literati as an exquisite object to integrate into the Chinese artistic tradition. What is more, it was even part of sets of offerings in Confucian mausoleums and in the halls of representation of power in the Forbidden City. Among the innovations applied to *cloisonné* as a result of contact with the West is the use of pink color called “Cassius purple”, a pigment that had been introduced by the Jesuits in China at the end of the 17th century and which began to be used in Chinese *cloisonné* during the reign of Yongzheng (r. 1723–1736). On the other hand, from the beginning of the 18th century, Emperor Kangxi (r. 1661–1722) had a *cloisonné* workshop among other imperial factories in Beijing.

#### **3.1. Biblical Figurines from the Metropolitan Museum of Art**

Among the oldest pieces in *cloisonné* resulting of the assimilation of Christianity in China at the time of the preaching of the Jesuits, the group of four biblical figurines stands out. This group of four biblical figurines, probably used in a small oratory or domestic altar, is now kept in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (Accession number. 1997.115a—d). The figurines represent the prophets David, young Isaiah, Moses and old Isaiah and were made in the 18th century (**Figure 1**) ([Bailey 2004](#), pp. 119, 121, Figure 8.23; [Quette 2011](#), pp. 55, 276, cat. n. 102, Figure 3.44).



**Figure 1.** Figurines of prophets, 18th century, China. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Photo: Metropolitan Museum of Art, Public Domain.

Each figurine is approximately 12 cm tall. They are based on contemporary European models, possibly copied through engravings. The most interesting element is the Chinese inscriptions on the tablets and documents that the prophets hold and that suggest that these pieces were intended not only for Western preachers, but also for upper-class Chinese converts—those wealthy enough to be literate:

- 開治主道 (prepare the way of the Lord) Isaiah 40:3, it corresponds to the figure of young Isaiah.
- 前三誡，後七誡 (the first three Commandments, the last seven Commandments), it corresponds to the figure of Moses.
- 將有童女生子名曰瑪奴珥耳 (A virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel), Isaiah 7:14, it corresponds to the figure of old Isaiah.

These figures were probably part of a larger group of prophets who developed more clearly the connection between the Old Testament and the New Testament, that is, between the prophecies and Christ. Their small size suggests that they were not designed for display in a church. We believe that these figurines could have been part of a small oratory, in whose intimacy probably some literate Chinese converts and the Jesuit missionaries would reflect on the Christian texts written in Chinese. In evangelizing policy it was essential to raise the historical character of Christianity to integrate the “Other” in the great story of Salvation, as it was done in the evangelization of America. Likewise, through the adaptationist method, we believe that it would be sought to equate the prophets with the ancient sages and ancient Chinese scholars, such as Confucius and Lao-Tse. Obviously, a society such as the Chinese, which appreciated the antiquity of the lineage and worshiped their ancestors, would more easily accept an ancient religion and a powerful written tradition of a moralizing character. Antiquity, literary culture and moral paradigm that the prophets would perfectly personify, presided over by Moses himself with the Commandments of the Law of God.

On the other hand, also following the adaptationist method, these figurines could have been assimilated to traditional Chinese deities, such as the Eight Taoist Immortals, the Buddhist arhats—usually in groups of sixteen or eighteen—or Caishen, the god of prosperity who usually carries a scroll with an inscription. This assimilation with divinities of the Chinese Buddhist or Taoist tradition could also explain why the figure of Isaiah is repeated within the same set of prophets. This is something that normally happens with divinities that manifest in different ways in the same iconographic cycle, for example the nine manifestations of Caishen or the different personifications of the virtues of Buddha through the bodhisattvas. Likewise, the statuettes of the Chinese deities were exhibited in small domestic altars in the shape of a niche or a small building in which several shelves were arranged. On these shelves figurines were placed to receive worship through prayers and offerings of incense and food. An example of this type of domestic altar is preserved in the Museo de Arte Oriental of Santo Tomás Convent in Ávila, Spain (**Figure 2**). Perhaps the Metropolitan's figurines of prophets were arranged on such a domestic altar too.





**Figure 2.** Domestic altar, Vietnam, 19th century. Museo de Arte Oriental, Ávila. Photo: Alberto Vela.

### 3.2. Chalice and Paten of the Musée Départemental d'Art Religieux de Sées

There are several *cloisonné* chalices and patens for Christian liturgical use made in China during 19th century. The chalice owned by the Missions Étrangères in Paris is decorated with Christian scenes and symbols such as crosses, the hand of God and beasts from the Chinese calendar symbols, including the dragon (VV.AA., [Musée National des Arts Asiatiques-Guimet 1997](#), pp. 156–57, cat. n. 49). The chalice of the Park Abbey in Heverlee (Belgium) is decorated with vegetal motifs and stars, and its paten represents the Lamb of God surrounded by stars. According to its inscription “Beijing Dianzhutan zhi cao”, it was made by the cathedral of Beijing, called Xuanwumen Tianzhutang or Nantang ([Bisscop 2010](#), cat. n. 6.77). The chalice owned by the Apostolines of Berchem in Anvers (Belgium) is decorated with Christian scenes, vine leaves and several traditional Chinese flowers such as peonies. It has the inscription “Dil. Fratri Henrico, Jubilanti Sacerd. & Profess. Sem. Hoogstratani/dedit Hubertus Otto/Epsc. assurae. vic. ap. Kan-sou, Olim Alumnus Huj. Sem./Artifex Sienensis Fecit Peking/1866–1891” ([Bisscop 2010](#), cat. n. 6.76). That is to say, “To dear Brother Henry, retired priest and professor at Hoogstraten seminary, Hubert Otto, Bishop of Assuras, Apostolic Vicar of Kan-su (Lanzhou), formerly his student at the seminary, I dedicate (this chalice). A Chinese craftsman did (it) in Peking. 1866–1891”. It is a work made in Beijing in 1891 and bears a mark in the shape of a lotus flower with a letter D.

We also know two 19th century Chinese chalices sold by Christie's in Paris on 26 June 2013 (lot 141)<sup>5</sup> and on 7th November 2013 (lot 271).<sup>6</sup> Both of them have the inscription in Chinese characters “Beijing Tianzhutang Zhizao” (Made in the Hall of Heaven in Beijing) that allude again to the Beijing Cathedral (Tianzhutang or Nantang). In its decoration, the white background stands out, as well as green palm leaves and red, yellow and blue stars. Additionally, an important chalice and its paten were sold by Bonhams in London on 8th November 2012 (lot 257).<sup>7</sup> The paten is decorated with the coat of arms of Pius X as the Patriarch of Venice, a position which he held from 1893 to 1903. This coat of arms also decorates the main façade of the Cathedral of Beijing (South Church) ([Sweeten 2019](#), Figure 3.11, p. 101).

The case study of the unpublished chalice and paten of the Musée départemental d'art religieux de Sées (Accession number 2008.01.01.01) (**Figure 3**) is especially interesting because of its early date in 1877, its decoration and the long Chinese inscription on its paten.



**Figure 3.** Chalice and its paten, 1877, China. Musée départemental d'art religieux de Sées. Photo: Musée départemental d'art religieux de Sées.

The chalice is 26 cm height and 17.5 cm width (**Figure 4**). The paten has a diameter of 16.5 cm. We observe the pink color in several of the flowers represented on the chalice and on the paten, on the cross of the foot of the chalice and on the IHS (Christogram) of the paten. If to this fact we add the neo-Gothic typology of the chalice and the different elements of the same inspiration that appear on the paten, such as the tetralobe and the calligraphy of the letters IHS topped in a cross, everything leads us to propose a chronology framed in the 19th century.



**Figure 4.** Chalice of **Figure 3**. Photo: Conseil départemental de l'Orne/Thierry Ollivier.

These observations are consistent with the French inscription under the base of the chalice “+ Offert a Monseigneur Delaplace par les missionnaires de Pe-King. Souvenir de la consécration Episcopale 25 Juillet 1852–1877” (**Figure 5**). As

we can see, the chalice and its paten were offered to Louis-Gabriel Delaplace (1820–1884)—Bishop of Hadrianopolis in Honoriade from 1852—by the Beijing missionaries in 1877 on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of his episcopal consecration.



**Figure 5.** Chalice (detail under the base) of **Figure 3**. Photo: Conseil départemental de l'Orne/Thierry Ollivier.

According to the information provided to us by the Museum, both pieces are a work of Geffroy, a goldsmith possibly active in the missionary environment of the Lazarists in Beijing. The decoration of the Sées chalice and paten follows, as in the case of the Cerralbo Bell that we will see later, the Chinese floral and animalistic tradition. This decoration was connected with ethical and moral symbolism. In the objects with study here this symbolism seems to be adapted to Christian discourse, mainly the meaning of the Eucharist (**Figure 6**). The white plum flowers, reminiscent of winter, the yellow chrysanthemums of autumn and the red orchids of spring indicate the passage of time and the flow of life, which together with the representation of blue irises (it was thought that they prolonged life by eating them) referred to the eternal life of Christ and in Christ. For their part, the insects represented follow the Chinese tradition that seeks to attract good luck. In particular, the butterfly (蝴蝶 *hú dié*) among the plum blossoms refers to the search for a happy love, in this case the love of God, a symbolism reinforced by the bees (蜜蜂 *mì fēng*), which allude so much to the aspiration to a superior position as to love. In turn, cicadas (蝉 *chán*) represent immortality due to their own life cycle, in which they emerge as if by magic from the ground after many years living in the dark as a larva that feeds on roots (**Figure 7**). Completing this symbolism is the scarab (甲虫 *jiǎchóng*), represented here as *Anoplophora chinensis* and symbolizing creation, resurrection and new life in Chinese culture. In the same way, the human soul will be reborn from the dead in the light of Christ, and the idea of that same light is reinforced by the presence of the firefly (萤火虫 *yíng huǒ chóng*), which also refers to beauty, perseverance and loyalty, virtues that all Christian followers of the Gospel message need and profess. The turquoise blue background decoration (青色 *qīngsè*) of the paten and chalice represents healing, confidence and long life.





**Figure 6.** Chalice (detail of the upper side of the base) of **Figure 3**. Photo: Musée départemental d'art religieux de Sées.



**Figure 7.** Chalice (detail of the upper side of the base) of **Figure 3**. Photo: Musée départemental d'art religieux de Sées.

On this background, in the case of the paten, in addition to the floral and insect decoration, there are, in black with gold edging, twelve Chinese characters in a circular arrangement around the tetralobe with the monogram of Christ (**Figure 8**). Without forgetting the symbolic value of the number twelve in Christianity (twelve are the tribes of Israel, twelve are the apostles, twelve are the legions of angels), the characters, read from the upper central part in an anti-clockwise direction, refer to Psalm 23: 1 of the Bible. These are the Chinese characters and their Latin transcription in the *pīnyīn* system: 耶穌吾牧且吾真食憐視我等 (*Yēsū wú mù qiě wú zhēn shí lián shì wǒ děng*) whose approximate translation would be "Jesus is my shepherd and my true food, he has shown me mercy". The meaning of the inclusion of this psalm is directly related to the usefulness of the paten itself in the Eucharist, used to support the body of Christ at the moment of Communion, after the *fractio panis*.



**Figure 8.** Paten (detail of the upper side) of **Figure 3**, with the Psalm 23: 1 inscribed. Photo: Manuel Parada.

In short, the chalice and paten of the Musée départemental d'art religieux de Sées are hybrid works of art. Their typology corresponds to those of Christian liturgical vessels, in this case inspired by a neo-Gothic morphology. In turn, they present Chinese technical and decorative elements, that is, metal with *cloisonné* enamel that shows animals and insects linked to the passing of the year, love, good luck and immortality. These traditional elements of the Chinese decorative and symbolic heritage join traditional Christian elements (the IHS, the cross and the neo-Gothic typology of the chalice and paten), as well as the Eucharistic message of Psalm 23. Furthermore, this chalice manifests the conceptual fusion between the Christian chalice and the Chinese gold cup of eternal stability. This kind of cup or goblet was used by the emperor to drink *tusu* wine during New Year ceremonies, which would ensure the continuity and stability of China (**Figure 9**). Christian chalices have a certain resemblance to this liturgical symbolism, since they serve for the priest to renew the promise of Salvation—that Christ made at the Last Supper—over and over again during the liturgical cycle.



**Figure 9.** Gold cups of eternal stability, probably 1739–1740 and 1740–1741, Beijing, China. Wallace Collection, London. Photo: Wallace Collection.

The chalice and paten of the Musée départemental d'art religieux de Sées were offered in 1877 by the active priests in Beijing for Bishop Louis-Gabriel Delaplace, who is well known for his eventful life of evangelization in China as Vicar Apostolic of Beijing and Zhili North from 1870 to his death in 1884. In fact, this chalice may have been the one Delaplace used to preach to the native population in Beijing and during his travels through rural China (*Vie et Apostolat de Monseigneur Louis Gabriel Delaplace, Évêque Titulaire d'Adrinople, Vicaire Apostolique de Péking, décédé à Péking le 24*



*mai 1884 [écrite pour les deux Familles de saint Vincent de Paul] 1892, p. 252*). This chalice, as a hybrid work of art, is comparable to the fifth West Church of Beijing, which was promoted by Delaplace. Although he wanted a church built à l'europpéenne, in Neo-Renaissance style, the building included several features of the local tradition, such as Chinese floral designs on the entablature, several lotus flower roundels and Chinese monumental inscriptions that “conveyed Christian sentiments with Confucian undertones” (Sweeten 2019, pp. 105–7).

### 3.3. The Bell of the Cerralbo Museum in Madrid

The last analysis of our study will focus on a piece for decorative and symbolic purposes designed and made in China during the Qing dynasty (probably between 1776 and 1825). It is the bell of the Cerralbo Museum in Madrid (Accession number 03649) (Figure 10), which is part of a more extensive collection of high-quality Chinese pieces that Enrique de Aguilera y Gamboa (1845–1922), 17th Marquis of Cerralbo, collected during his life together with hundreds of other oriental objects from Japan, the Philippines, Portuguese India and Southeast Asia.



**Figure 10.** Bell, between 1776 and 1825, China. Museo Cerralbo, Madrid. Photo: Museo Cerralbo.

Made of copper and *cloisonné*, with dimensions of 36.5 × 35.7 cm, in its upper part it presents a rounded shape in which a golden two-headed dragon hanger is inserted, the fifth symbol of the Chinese zodiac and related to the emperor. This solar symbol, which expresses Yang energy, that is, virile power and strength, applied to a Christian element could refer to Christ as the center from which power and glory emanate. The skirt with a turquoise blue background, partitioned with a geometric grid, presents plum (winter), peony (spring) and chrysanthemum (autumn) flowers, with birds on the branches and butterflies in flight (蝴蝶 *hú dié*). This type of motif dates back to the Song dynasty (960–1279), to the paintings of traditional naturalistic landscapes of mountains, flowers, fruits and birds. Closely linked to Taoism, these floral representations pursued the integration of nature and man, and the experience of their vital rhythms. The references to the seasons in the decoration of the bell complete the iconographic program of the Chaflán Hall of the Cerralbo Museum, which was once a private home. This room, intended for gatherings and rest after dancing, also presents a pictorial mural decoration based on the cycle of the seasons of the year, with elements that refer to the process of cultivating the land. The bell also has a border with bats on a green background on the lower edge, on which there is another, narrower, of red and white triangles, motifs introduced at the end of the Qing dynasty as a symbol of good omen for the owner of the object. In Chinese, the word bat and happiness are homophones (*fu*), so this type of representation would be very common during this time, which coincides with the reign of Emperor Qianlong (1735–1796). In the upper area, a radial pattern of chrysanthemum surrounded by other flowers, stems and floral border with butterflies frames the ensemble, also similar to another enamel bell with bronze dragon fittings preserved in the Museo Nacional de Artes Decorativas in Madrid (Accession number DE10240).

Regarding the original function of the Cerralbo bell, it can be said that it would be a decorative or symbolic object, since the enamel would come off if the bell rang regularly. It could be an ornamental export work intended for the West or a symbolic bell for the Chinese Christian community, just as Buddhist *cloisonné* bells were made not to be tolled but to be displayed among the objects with religious or moral connotations in the dens of monks and scholars.

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