Chinese Christian Books in Nagasaki:
From Censorship to Clandestine Circulation
舶載至長崎的漢文天主教書籍：從查禁到潛行流通

This lecture traces the "connected histories" that bound Christianity in China and Japan through the medium of the book. In the generation after Francis Xavier, Jesuit at the Ming and Qing courts composed works in classical Chinese that circulated across East Asia — not only those of Matteo Ricci (Li Madou, 利瑪竇), but also Francisco Furtado (Fu Fanji, 傅汎際), Giulio Aleni (艾儒略), among many others. Notably, the Edo authorities did not at first grasp that Christian works written in Chinese might enter Japan; the ban on books came only in 1630, well after the proscription of Christianity, and inspectors could be deceived by volumes whose titles betrayed nothing of their contents.

Once alert to the danger, the shogunate installed a censor of books (*shomotsu aratame yaku* 書物改役) based at Shuntokuji 春徳時 — a Buddhist temple in Nagasaki 長崎 built, ironically, on the site of the former Jesuit College; the office was later superseded by the *shomotsu bugyō* 書物奉行. The mere presence of characters such as "Lord of Heaven" (天主) could condemn a volume to the fire. Yet Japanese censorship of Chinese books never fully suppressed intellectual curiosity: numerous hand-copied contraband manuscripts — of *Zhifang waiji* (職方外紀) by Aleni (艾儒略), Ricci's *Jiren shipian* (畸人十篇), and others — still survive in Japanese collections, testifying to how widely these forbidden texts were circulated among inquisitive scholars.

The turning point came in 1720 under Shogun Tokugawa Yoshimune 徳川吉宗, whose calendar-reform ambitions, pressed by the astronomer Nakane Genkei 中根元圭, led him to admit Jesuit scientific books from China — provided all explicitly Christian content was excised. This story illuminates how the transmission of knowledge persisted in early modern Japan even under conditions of prohibition and state censorship.

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