

THE FRANCISCAN FRIARS IN CHINA

DURING THE YUAN DYNASTY :

A Brief Introduction To Historical Sources And To Related Chinese Historical Books

BY LUDOVICUS LIU, O.F.M.
TRANSLATED BY B. LEUNG

Although there is no one specific book that gives a complete history of the Franciscan Friars in China during the Yuan Period, there are many accounts in other forms offering detailed descriptions and thorough research on that subject. These are scattered through the many historical works on the Church in China. For this reason, it seems to me unnecessary to write here a brief history of the Franciscan Friars of that time, as the Editor of TRIPOD requested. However, I feel it might be of special interest to offer the reader instead something on the works written in Chinese that relate to Catholicism during the Yuan Period. Therefore, in the first part of this article I shall give a general introduction to the History of the Franciscans in China, and in the second part discuss the historical work of Professor Chen Yuan (陳垣), The Research on Religion of the Arcaoun in the Yuan Period. The special characteristic of this work is in the sources used -- his book is based entirely on Chinese documentation.

Genghis Khan's westward expansion, and the occupation of China by him and by other Mongol Khans, occurred within the space of less than one hundred and fifty years (1220-1368). In all, the Mongols controlled China for less than one hundred years. Within this period, except for a few Dominicans who accompanied foreign legates into China, all of the Catholic missionaries coming to the East were Franciscans. There had been more than two hundred friars sent to the East, but only a few of them finally arrived in China proper. Johannes de Monte Corvino and a handful of Franciscans whose names appear in Chinese records were among the very few able to stay in China to do mission work. Archbishop Monte Corvino spent thirty-four years in Beijing (1294-1328). During his lifetime, he baptized over six thousand people, translated the New

Testament and part of the Psalms into Chinese, and managed to build two churches. Unfortunately, no one succeeded him after his death in Beijing. Three bishops came to Beijing from Quanzhou in Fujian Province (福建、泉州) for Monte Corvino's consecration as Archbishop. Yet after the death of these bishops, again no successors were available. The report of the second bishop of Quanzhou said of the situation that "not only is the harvest great and laborers few, but even sickles are lacking". The few available religious (apart from the bishop, there were three others) were elderly and they could not speak the local dialect. They needed simultaneous translation in preaching. The Armenian Christians made a collection to build the Cathedral with a religious house attached which could accommodate twenty religious and also had four guest rooms. It was also reported that there were no Muslim or Jewish conversions. In spite of the fact that there were baptisms, there were few practicing Christians. Quanzhou was a cosmopolitan port during the Yuan Period, in which people of various nationalities could be found. Sinica Franciscana, vol. 1, 1929 (the Chinese historian Fang Hao (方豪) called it The History of the Franciscans in China) has detailed records and personal reports of many Franciscans of that time. All these are excellent historical sources for the history of the Franciscans in China.

Part One of The History of the Franciscans in China has nine chapters. These record Father Johannes de Plano Carpini's writings on history, geography, and the bureaucratic system of the Mongol Empire. Chapter nine specifically dwelt on various places he had visited. (In 1246 he visited Karakorum (和林) in Mongolia.)

The report of Father Carpini's follower, Father Benedictus Polonus, on meeting the Great Khan of the Mongol Empire, was recorded at length in Part Two of the book, together with the full text of the arrogant letter sent to the Pope by the Mongol Great Khan.

There are thirty-seven chapters on the travels of Father Guillelmus de Rubruc in Part Three. They reveal that he also visited Karakorum in 1253.

The three letters of Archbishop Monte Corvino appeared in Part Four. From his second and third letters, written in Beijing in 1306 and 1307, one might gain some knowledge of the mission work in Beijing during his time.

In Part Five, there was a letter written by Bishop Peregrinus de Castello, Bishop of Quanzhou. The letter was written in 1318. Bishop

Andreas de Perusia, the third Bishop of Quanzhou, also had a letter written at Quanzhou which appeared in Part Six of the History. His letter goes back to 1326.

In Part Seven, there are thirty-eight chapters on the oral report of Blessed Odoricus de Portu Naonis. He gave a full account of events of his sixteen-year journey which began in Europe in 1314. He came to Guangzhou (廣州) on foot. From there he went to Quanzhou, Hangzhou (杭州) and Yangzhou (揚州). He took a boat through the Grand Canal and arrived in Beijing where he spent three years. He returned to Europe by way of the Near and Middle East, bearing a written request from Archbishop Monte Corvino to the Pope asking him to send more missionaries to China.

The contents of Part Eight to Part Eleven will not be discussed in this article.

The History of the Franciscans in China became the blueprint for later Western historians in their study of the history of the Christian Church in Yuan China. The amount of books in the West written on the subject are too numerous to mention here; however, I would like to list some Chinese books on the history of the Catholic Church in China written within the past fifty to sixty years. In these history books, the Christian Church during the Yuan Period has been explored in great detail. The collection can be found in the library of Studium Biblicum.

1. Xu Zongze: General Mission History of Catholic Church in China.

Shanghai: Tushanwan Press. This is a rare book not to be found easily.

徐宗澤：中國天主教傳教史概論。上海土山灣印書館出版。

2. Zhang Xingliang: A Combined Source on History of East-West Relations.

6 vols. Fu Jen University Series Book no. 1. Beijing: Fu Jen University Press. 1930. (Vol. II pp. 40-288 deals with Church history in Yuan China. The subject is treated with detailed discussion and wide range of resources.)

張星烺：中西交通史料匯篇六冊。1930年輔仁大學叢書第一種。

3. Xiao Jingshan: Catholicism Prevails in China. Hebei: Xian Xian. 1931.

(This book is out of print)

蕭靜山：天主教傳行中國考。獻縣出版，1931年。

4. M. D'Elia: A History of Catholic Church in China. Commercial Press.

1935.

德禮賢：中國天主教傳教史。商務，1935年。

5. H. Bernard, (Translated by Xiao Yuehua): "The dawning of the Ancient Catholicism in Ancient China" in The Mission of Catholic Church in Sixteenth Century China. Commercial Press. 1936. pp. 26-42. (Catholicism in the Yuan period is mentioned in this article)
裴化行：(蕭濬華譯)：天主教十六世紀在華傳教誌。商務，1936年。
6. A. Ubierna, (translated by Didacus Yang): A Short History of Holy Catholic Church. Anking: Anking Press. 1st. ed. 1937. 2nd. ed. 1941. (A history of the Catholic Church in the Yuan Period could be found in pp. 253-258)
于炳南著：(楊堤譯)聖教會史綱。安慶，1937年初版，1941年再版。
7. Fang Hao: A History of East-West Relations. 6 vols. Taipei: HuaKang Press. 1953. (Vol. 3 Part 5-7 deals with Catholicism in Yuan China, with detailed description and extensive research.)
方豪：中西交通史(六冊)。台北：華岡出版社，1953年。
8. Lo Kuang: A History of Vatican Diplomatic Relations with China. Taipei: Guangchi Press. 1961. (pp. 26-57 deals with the interactions between the Vatican and Yuan diplomats.)
羅光：教廷與中國使節史。台北：光啓，1961年。
9. C.C. Elwes, (translated by Wang Jingxi): Missionaries in China Before Ming Period. Hong Kong: Catholic Truth Society. 1964. (Chapter 3 dwells on the Franciscans. cf. pp. 39-83. This book has excellent editing and is a fine translation.)
ELWES 著，王敬義譯：明前來華的傳教士。香港：真理學會，1964年。
10. Fang Hao: Personalities in the Chinese Catholic History. 3 vols. Hong Kong: Catholic Truth Society. 1967. (Vol. 1 contains 11 personalities in the Yuan Period, including 5 Franciscans, 5 Arcaoun, and Marco Polo. cf. pp. 16-57)
方豪：中國天主教人物傳(三冊)。香港：真理學會，1967年。
11. Ku Pao Ku: Chronology of Catholic Church in China. Taipei: Kuangchi Press. 1970. (The detail historical data are accurate and the chronological events are valuable.)
顧保鵠：中國天主教史大事年表。台北：光啓社，1970年。
12. J. Motte: A History of the Catholic Church in China. Taipei: Kuang-Chi Press. 1971. (pp. 14-28 dwells on the Catholic Church in the Yuan Period)
穆啓蒙：中國天主教史。台北：光啓社，1970年。

13. Chen Ziwen: A History of the Catholic Church in China. Shengxi Press. 1976. p. 4.
陳之邁：天主教流傳中國史。上智出版社，1976年。
14. Wang Chih-hsin: History of Christianity in China. Hong Kong: Council on Christian Literature for Overseas Chinese. 1959. pp. 45-62.
王治心：中國基督教史綱。香港：基督教輔僑出版社，1959年。
15. Yang Senfu: A History of Christianity in China. Taipei: Commercial Press. 1961. pp. 32-56.
楊森富：中國基督教史。台灣：商務，1961年。
16. Louis Yen: Tales of the Church. Hong Kong: Taosheng Publication House. 1970.
顏路裔：教會掌故。香港：道聲出版社，1970年。

CHEN YUAN: A RESEARCH ON THE ARCAOUN OF THE YUAN PERIOD

This is a historical work by Chen Yuan (陳垣), the former President of Fu Jen (輔仁) University, Beijing. When it was first published in 1917, it attracted the attention of both Chinese and foreign historians. The book has been reprinted five or six times, and it is reproduced as the first part of the recently published Selected Historical Works of Chen Yuan (Beijing: People's Press. 1980).

The Selected Works, include many writings on religion, especially on the history of Catholicism. For example, Chen wrote "Judaism in Kaifeng", "The Coming of Zoroastrianism to China", "The Coming of Manicheism to China", "A Short History of the Coming of Christianity", and "Catholic Royal Personages in the Courts of the Yung-cheng (雍正) and Ch'ien-lung (乾隆) Emperors". His selected works also contain articles on "Viewing Catholicism in the Late Ming and Early Qing Period Through Secular Writings", "The Biography of Wu Rushan (吳漁山)", "In Commemoration of the 250th Anniversary of the Priestly Ordination of Wu Rushan", and "The Chronology of Wu Rushen", etc.

The writing of A Research on the Arcaoun of the Yuan Period is based entirely on Chinese documentation. Chen Yuan himself specialized in researching Yuan history, the systems of the Yuan Dynasty, and also stone tablets and local records of that period, e.g. Zhishen (至順) (1330-1333), the "Record of Zhengjiang" (鎮江志).

In his book, Chen Yuan affirmed that "Arcaoun" is a general term

for Mongols who embraced Christianity in any of its forms, such as Nestorianism or Catholicism. (Nestorianism was found in all parts of China, including the Northwest, as far back as the Tang and Sung Periods.) "Arcaoun" (也里可湫) is a Mongol term deriving from the Arabic word "Arekhawiun". It means "the blessed one". We might translate it in modern terms as "those who believe the good news".

In the Yuan bureaucracy, a bureau for Honouring the Blessed was established to take charge of the Arcaoun. The Mongol government not only exempted religious and priests of all religious sects from taxation, but also gave them a state salary. The Franciscans in Yuan China often mentioned that they were awarded handsome amounts of money by the emperor.

In his The History of the Yuan Dynasty, although there is no particular chapter devoted to the Arcaoun, Professor Chen Yuan depicted more than twenty great personalities from Yuan History and other sources, and all of these people embraced Arcaoun religions (Chapter 5). Most of them were not Han people but they were people of "coloured-eye" -- that means foreigners who came to China with the Mongols. Most of them belonged to the peoples of the Near and Middle East. The majority of them had been sinicized. Not only did they study the Chinese language but also their descendants became Chinese officials after passing public examinations. For example, Marco Polo had been the Deputy Military Official in Yangzhou for three years.

After the termination of the Yuan Dynasty, Catholicism in China also disappeared. The reasons for this are as follows:

1. In spite of the fact that there were six thousand baptized in Beijing at that time, most of them were Mongols or foreigners and very few of them were Han people.
2. Archbishop Monte Corvino adopted forty children and taught them Latin, Church Liturgy and hymns, giving them a formation very similar to that of seminarians. But, unfortunately, for a long period he worked alone, without reaping the benefit of having an indigenous priest ordained. After his death, he had no successor.
3. Due to the extreme distances and difficulty in travel, the bishops and clergy sent by the Pope to Quanzhou, were not successful in reaching their destination.
4. Due to persecution and the slander caused by jealous Nestorians, Archbishop Monte Corvino found it difficult to make advances in mission work.

APPENDIX: ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDINGS FROM THE YUAN PERIOD

In our own time, two tablets relating to the Catholic Church in the Yuan Period have been unearthed:

1. In 1952, at Jiangsu, Yangzhou (江蘇, 揚州) when demolishing the city wall, a stone tablet was discovered with the Latin inscription: In nomine Domini. Amen. Hic jacet Katerina de Viljonis quae obiit in anno Domini milesimo CCCXXXII de mense junii... "In the name of God. Amen. Katherine Viljonis died in June 1342, and was buried here." (Cf. 26th April 1952 Osservatore Romano.) From the Latin words on the gravestone of this woman, it was concluded that in Yangzhou at that time there were Europeans. From 1271 to 1287, Marco Polo spent sixteen years in China, including three years in Yangzhou. The report of Blessed Odoricus's travels had also mentioned that around 1322 he passed by Yangzhou where there was a house for Franciscan Friars and three Nestorian churches. The Christians there were generally very well off.

On top of the stone tablet, a picture of the Madonna and Child was inscribed. The inscription was rich in Chinese colours (23rd July 1953, Osservatore Romano). It is regarded as the most ancient picture in China of the Madonna and Child.

2. In 1946, at Quanzhou Tunghuimen (泉州, 通淮門) near Long Gong (龍宮), again a piece of gravestone was excavated from the foundation of a wall. Part of the inscriptions on the gravestone reads in part according to the British archaeologist, John Foster, as follows: His (in PFS) Sepultus est Andreas Perusinus (de Votus ep. Cayton) ... Ordinis (fratrum min.) (Jesus Christi) Apostolus ... (in mense)... M(cccxx)xii.

The discovery of this gravestone again gave evidence that the consecration of Andreas de Perusia as Bishop of Quanzhou is an historical event. (In the previous part of this article, one of his letters from Quanzhou was mentioned.) (Wu Wenliang: Religious Stone Inscriptions of Quanzhou. 1957).