

Book Review

East Meets West

The Jesuits in China, 1582-1773

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The nine papers contained in this book were delivered at the China Jesuit Symposium, commemorating the 400th anniversary of the arrival of Matteo Ricci in China, held at Loyola University in Chicago, October 7-9, 1982.

The authors of the papers discuss various aspects of the Jesuit effort to preach the Christian Gospel in China, from seeking points of harmony with Confucianism to teaching physical sciences at the court in Beijing. In the initial paper Jonathan Spence stated that Alessandro Valignano, the superior of the Jesuits in Asia at that time, chose China to evangelize over other countries in the region because, in Valignano's words, "the Chinese are the most capable, well-bred people in the entire East." Spence traces Ricci's "ascent" to Peking, through Zhaoqing (1583-89), Shaozhou (now Shaoguan, 1589-95), Nanchang (1595-98), Nanking (1599-1600), and Peking (1601-1610), and says it was marked by a continuing appreciation of Chinese culture, an appreciation fueled by Ricci's own European humanist education.

To gain an understanding of Chinese culture, Ricci undertook the translation of the Confucian Four Books between 1591 and 1593, during his stay in Shaozhou. In his paper David Mungello points out that the Jesuit translation project was also a means of teaching Chinese to the newly arrived missionaries. The translations were worked on by successive generations of Jesuit language students, with the idea of finding points of harmony with Christianity always in mind. *The Great Learning* was published in Latin at a Jesuit mission in Jiangxi Province in 1662, and the other books (except for *Mencius*) were published in Paris in 1687, under the title *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*. However, interest in the translation project diminished as the Jesuits became more involved at the court in Peking, Mungello writes.

An interest in China among European intellectuals was aroused by the publication of Confucius' works and by the 10-year sojourn (1682-92) in Europe of the ex-China missionary Philippe Couplet. Couplet was received by both Pope Alexander VII and King Louis XIV of France. Louis XIV was so enthusiastic that he encouraged the assignment of French Jesuits to China. In a hasty arrangement, six French Jesuits departed for China in 1685. John Witek takes up their story.

The French Jesuits finally arrived in Ningbo on the 23rd of July 1687. They got to Peking on February 1, 1688, only to learn of Ferdinand Verbiest's death four days previously (Jan. 28). Fathers Gerbillon and Bouvet were permitted by the emperor to remain in the capital and work at the court; the others could reside in any part of the country they wished. The Peking Jesuits taught the Kangxi Emperor mathematics, and according to Witek, appreciation for their work at court was one of the reasons the emperor issued the Edict of Toleration of Christianity in 1692. The Kangxi Emperor also granted the French Jesuits a residence near the palace, which became the site of Beitang in 1703, in order to save them from traveling across town to Nantang. The French Jesuits experienced the same good relationship with the emperor which Adam Schall and Verbiest had.

Besides teaching geometry, another way the French Jesuits were helpful to the court was through map making. Theodore Foss describes this in his essay. In 1700, Fathers Thomas, Bouvet, Regis and Parrenin were called upon by Kangxi to make a map of the environs of Beijing. The map was produced in 70 days. Later Regis, Bouvet and Jartoux were asked to map the northern section of the Great Wall. The project began on June 4, 1708, and a map 15 feet in length was presented to the emperor in January 1709. The French Jesuits were then requested to make a survey of the whole empire, a job which took them ten years to complete (1708-1718). The result not only pleased Emperor Kangxi, but the Jesuit maps served to introduce China to the Western world. Their work was incorporated into Jean-Baptiste Du Halde's four volume *Description de la Chine*, published in Paris in 1735.

What methods were used to pass on the Christian message? And if the Chinese accepted it, what was it about Christianity that attracted them to it? These two questions are handled by

Willard Peterson and Bernard Hung-Kay Luk. Bernard Luk discusses the missionary work of Giulio Aleni (1582-1649), based on a book Aleni wrote called *Learned Conversations at San Shui* (Fuzhou). The discussions described in the book took place over a two-day period in June 1627 among Aleni, Ye Xianggao, a Confucian scholar and retired court official, and Intendant Cao, a Buddhist. Having arrived in Macao in 1610, a few months after the death of Ricci in Beijing, Aleni entered China in 1613. He stayed for periods of time in Shanghai, Hangzhou, Shanxi (where he is credited with opening the mission), back to Hangzhou, and finally to Fujian in 1625, at the invitation of Ye Xianggao. Ye Xianggao (1562-1627), a friend of the Catholic convert Yang Tingyun, served for six years as an honest but ineffectual official in the corrupt court of the Wanli Emperor (1573-1620). Ye also served as senior grand secretary in the court of Wanli's successor, Tianqi (1621-27), but retired for good in 1624.

The discussions on the first day, as related in Aleni's book, centered around the difference between Buddhism and Christianity, especially regarding the cause of things in the world (the yin and the yang vs. creation by God as Ultimate Cause). Intendant Cao did not take part in the second day's discussion, which dealt with the problem of evil: Confucian Ye Xianggao wondered aloud to Aleni why the wicked eunuchs at court were successful, while at the same time they were murdering honest officials? Both protagonists agreed upon a person's need for self-cultivation. Luk comments: although minds did not overcome conceptual barriers, hearts met in mutual appreciation.

While many scholar-officials appreciated the Jesuits' virtue and erudition, it seems that not many of them accepted the Christian message and became Christians. Bernard Luk quotes from the introduction Ye Xianggao wrote for the book on the Ten Commandments published by his friend Yang Tingyun: "Many scholars and officials have studied with them (the Jesuits), but relatively few admire them so profoundly and believe them so wholeheartedly as to think they have truly found out about human nature and solved the problem of life and death."

As for those who did become Christians, like Xu Guangqi, Yang Tingyun and Li Zhizao, personal relationships seemed to play a great part in their conversions. Willard Peterson describes their path to conversion. Li Zhizao, from Hangzhou,

met Ricci in Beijing in 1601. Li was attracted to Ricci because he was kind and generous to others. Li was captivated by Ricci's map, marveling at the distance Ricci traveled to get to China. Li was baptized in Beijing in 1610, about two months before Ricci died. Yang Tingyun, also from Hangzhou, was influenced in favor of Christianity by his friend Li Zhizao. Li introduced Yang to Fathers Lazzaro Cattaneo and Nicholas Trigault in the Spring of 1611 at Li's father's funeral in Hangzhou. Two months later (in June 1611) Yang received baptism. As for Xu Guangqi, although he had met Ricci in Nanjing in 1600, it was not until the winter of 1603, again in Nanjing, that he received baptism at the hands of Joao da Rocha. Xu felt that Christianity supplemented Confucian teachings and provided answers to many questions in life.

While this book covers a lot of territory familiar to the reader, it still fills in many details regarding this great endeavor in east-west cultural exchange. For instance does the reader know that the number of Spanish missionaries going to China from the Philippines increased after 1580 because the Spanish king, Philip II, also ascended the throne of Portugal in 1578? Previously the Treaty of Tordesillas of 1494 had sent the Spanish missionaries to the Western hemisphere and the Portuguese (or missionaries of other countries who sailed from Lisbon in a Portuguese ship) to the East, where they entered China through the Portuguese enclave of Macao. Also, did you know that the 120 Jesuits residing in China in 1717 were divided into three provinces: 28 belonged to the French province, 52 to the Japanese province and 40 to the vice-province of China?

Topics for further investigation come to mind from reading this book. For instance, the figure 300,000 is given for the number of Chinese Catholics in the year 1700. But no breakdown is given as to where they lived, or their status in society. Whereas we have a lot of material about the outreach to the Confucian intellectuals, of whom apparently only a few became converts, we have scant information about the majority of believers scattered throughout the countryside.

A glossary of Chinese terms and a useful bibliography of the writings used by the authors of the book are appended. Both are helpful tools for further research. *East Meets West* is a valuable addition to the literature on the great evangelical effort of those Jesuit "giants" of late Ming-early Qing China.