

# *Macau: Center of Cultural Interchange*

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**A**t the International Conference on “Macau on the Eve of the Handover,” held at the University of Hong Kong on October 29 and 30, 1999, Father Luis Sequeira, superior of the Society of Jesus in Macau, made the point that in the midst of all the celebrations of the handover Macau’s historical role as a center of cultural interchange should not be overlooked. By this he meant the exchange which took place over a period of 450 years between Western thought, as exemplified in Christianity and Western science, and Chinese thought, as embraced in Confucianism and Chinese science. Macau served as the bridge permitting this exchange to take place. I think Father Sequeira makes a good point.

## *The Jesuits: Agents of Cultural Exchange*

The agents for this cultural exchange were European Jesuits (and members of other Orders), who passed through Macau on their way into China, and certain Chinese intellectuals steeped in traditional thought, especially Confucianism. This encounter, praised by the renowned sinologist Joseph Needham as one of the most extraordinary in history, has been well described in other works, like George Dunne’s *Generation of Giants* (1962), Charles Ronan and Bonnie Oh’s *East Meets West, The Jesuits in China, 1582-1773* (1988), the Instituto Cultural of Macau’s *The Jesuits 1594-1994, Macau and China* (1994) and Andrew Ross’ *A Vision Betrayed, The Jesuits in Japan and China, 1542-1742* (1994). However, on the eve of the return of Macau to the motherland, I think it is worthwhile to recall this glorious chapter in the history of East-West cultural exchange, and conjecture what that encounter portends for the future.

It was the Age of Discovery in the West. In the 1490s Portuguese navigators, like Vasco da Gama, sailed along the coast of Africa, finally rounding the Cape of Good Hope, and reached India in 1498. Christopher Columbus, an Italian in the employ of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain, sailing in a westerly direction had already “discovered” America in 1492. To avoid conflict between these two Catholic seafaring nations, Pope

Alexander VI in the Treaty of Tordesillas (1494) drew “a line of demarcation” in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, ruling that all countries east of the line belonged to the “patronage” of Portugal and those west of the line to the patronage of Spain. This meant that the exploring nations had responsibility not only for the colonial development of any newly discovered lands, but also for the preaching of the Gospel in these lands.

### ***European Explorers Reach the Far East***

From their base in Goa, the Portuguese reached the southern coast of China in 1513. They landed in Macau in 1517, and sent an embassy to Peking, under the command of Thome Pires in 1520. However the embassy was not successful, and they were expelled from China in 1521. Apparently the behavior of the newly arrived visitors was not very ideal, and they were put in the same category as Japanese pirates who launched periodic forays along the coast of China at that time, and so were likewise not welcome. The Spanish arrived in the Philippines in 1522, through Magellan’s around the world voyage (Magellan himself died in the Philippines). They had sailed across the Pacific Ocean from Mexico, and in apparent violation of the Treaty of Tordesillas, claimed the Philippines as a colony of Spain. However, the complete implementation of Spanish rule over the Philippines did not take place until Governor Lagazpi from Mexico landed there in 1565. In 1571, Lagazpi established the city of Manila. The Augustinian friars, who accompanied Lagazpi from Mexico, regarded the Philippines as a stepping stone to the Asian mainland.

### ***The Church in Turmoil in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century***

Meanwhile, Europe was in religious turmoil. Martin Luther had nailed his 95 Theses to the door of the Wittenburg Church in 1517 setting in motion the Protestant Reformation. Other reformers, like Calvin, Zwingli and Henry VIII, in France, Switzerland and England respectively, followed Luther’s revolt in Germany. Most of northern Europe came under Protestant influence. The Catholic Church was at first disorganized and undecided on the best method to handle the schism. Finally a church council was called at Trent in 1545, and sessions were held periodically over 18 years, until the

council's close in 1563. The Council of Trent consolidated church doctrine, and led to a so-called "Counter-Reformation."

### ***Ignatius of Loyola founds the Society of Jesus***

At this point in the history of the Catholic Church there arose a group of men who would have a profound influence, not only on the Catholic Counter-Reformation in Europe, but on missionary work among the peoples the newly discovered lands of Asia, Africa and Latin America. This group was the Society of Jesus, or Jesuits, founded in 1540 by the Spaniard Ignatius of Loyola. Right from the beginning the Jesuits recruited their members from the cream of the Catholic intelligentsia in Europe. Loyola's first recruits were from among his fellow students at the University of Paris, where he had gone, after his military career, to study theology with a view to becoming a priest. One of the six or seven members of Loyola's founding group was Francis Xavier, who was later to become famous as the "Apostle of the Orient." The Jesuits were imbued with a missionary spirit, and the newly discovered lands in the Far East beckoned to them. Xavier volunteered for this exacting work and departed Lisbon on April 7, 1541. Following the path of the Portuguese galleons which a few predecessors among Portuguese diocesan and Mendicant (Franciscan and Dominican) priests had embarked upon, Xavier spent months at sea, and several more months in places like Mozambique, Goa, Malacca and present-day Indonesia before reaching Japan and China.

### ***The Jesuits Arrive in China***

In December 1547, Xavier met a Japanese samurai in Malacca by the name of Yajiro, who convinced him to go to Japan to preach the Gospel to the Japanese people. Xavier arrived at Kagoshima, on Kyushu, the southernmost of the three main islands that made up Japan on August 15, 1549. After a promising start to the missionary work in Japan, Xavier heard that it was to China that a missionary ought to go if he wanted to convince Asian peoples to accept the Gospel. So much of Japanese culture, for instance, had come originally from China. Leaving the work in Japan in the hands of new Jesuit recruits, Xavier returned to Goa to prepare for his missionary journey to China. Arriving on Shangchuan Island off the coast of China in late 1552, Xavier tried in vain to book passage on

any ship, Chinese or foreign, which would take him to China. Finally, on December 2, 1552, worn out by his missionary labors, Francis Xavier died on Shangchuan, within view of, but never reaching his longed for China mission. He was 46 years of age. Xavier died in the same year (1552) that Matteo Ricci, who was destined to realize to an astonishing degree the missionary ideals of Xavier, was born.

In 1553, a year after Xavier's death, Macau was occupied by the Portuguese. The first Jesuit recorded in the vicinity of Macau was Melchior Nunes Barreto, the provincial superior of the Jesuits in India. From Lampacao, twenty-eight leagues from Macau, he visited Guangzhou twice. Each time Barreto stayed in Guangzhou for a month. He visited again in 1556, stayed only a short time, and continued on to Japan. Meanwhile, apparently in gratitude for help in fending off Japanese pirates, the Portuguese were allowed to settle in Macau in 1557. The Portuguese occupation of Macau is dated from that time, and so they will have been there for 442 years at the time of the handover on December 20 this year. The Portuguese were allowed to stay in Macau only, but not Guangzhou, which they could visit in the spring and fall each year for commercial purposes.

Father Joseph Sebes, Jesuit historian at Georgetown University, in an article entitled "The Precursors of Ricci" in the abovementioned Ronan-Oh book, lists twenty-five separate attempts to enter and reside in China on the part of twenty-five Jesuits, twenty-two Franciscans, two Augustinians and one Dominican in the thirty-one year period from 1552 (death of Xavier) to 1583 (settlement of Ricci and Ruggieri in Zhaoqing). In 1565, Jesuits Francisco Perez and Manuel Teixeira established a residence of the Society of Jesus in Macau. They had originally arrived in Macau in 1563 in the entourage of Diogo Pereira, the ambassador of the king of Portugal to the Emperor of China, an embassy that did not succeed.

### ***Macau Diocese under Portuguese Patronage***

In 1576, the bull "Super Specula" of Pope Gregory XIII erected Macau into a diocese comprising all of China, Japan, and the surrounding islands. Macau was to be a suffragan see to Goa and under Portuguese patronage. In 1579 Spanish Franciscans from Manila, after an attempt to reside in Guangzhou, succeeded in setting up a Franciscan convent in Macau. The distinction between the

Portuguese *padroado* and the Spanish *patronato* became somewhat blurred when the Spanish monarchy ruled Portugal from 1580 to 1640. However, the rivalry between the Mendicants (Franciscans and Dominicans) founded in the 13<sup>th</sup> century and the upstart Jesuits founded in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, as will be seen later, showed no sign of abating.

### ***Alessandro Valignano, Ambassador of Inculturation***

The second most important Jesuit, after Xavier, to influence Jesuit missionary policy in the Far East was Alessandro Valignano. Valignano was born in February 1539 in Chieto in the Abruzzi district of Italy. At first, the young Alessandro pursued a degree in Law at the University of Padua. He graduated in 1557, and after spending several years trying to find a position in church circles, Alessandro applied to enter the Jesuits in 1566. He then took the course at the Jesuit College in Rome, where his professor of Physics and Mathematics was Clavius who taught teach Matteo Ricci. Valignano was ordained a priest in 1571. Then in 1573, Everard Mercurian, the Jesuit General, surprisingly appointed Valignano, only thirty-four years old and in the Society only eight years, as Visitor to the then East, one of the top positions in the Society. This meant that young Father Alessandro was in charge of all the Jesuit missions and missionaries from Mozambique to Japan.

No doubt a change was in the wind for the Jesuit missions in the Far East. The first was in the number of recruits Valignano wanted to bring with him to the orient. Against the objection of several Assistants in the Society, Valignano wanted to bring as many as fifty-five new missionaries. This number was later reduced to forty. While waiting for the ships to sail from Lisbon, Valignano sought recruits among the Jesuit foundations in Spain. Interestingly he chose many with Jewish ancestry. Valignano's group set sail on March 21, 1574 and arrived in Goa on September 5, 1574. He spent the next five years traveling throughout the orient, getting to know the territory. He arrived in Macau in 1578 and stayed for about ten months. He then visited Japan, arriving there on July 25, 1579.

Valignano's vision for the Jesuit mission to China had been fermenting in his mind for several years. His plan was that the missionaries should learn the local language and culture. We can see from his writings, *Il Ceremoniale per i Missionari del Giappone* and *Resoluciones* of 1582, that in Valignano's view the Christian Church



was to be Japanese among the Japanese and Chinese among the Chinese. And yet what did he find in Macau in 1578? He found missionaries who did not learn the local language, but were working in Portuguese among Portuguese expatriates. The Chinese who converted to Christianity had to learn Portuguese and were given Portuguese names. This was not the idea of mission that Father Alessandro wished to implement. So he called Michael Ruggieri to come to Macau from Goa, and left instructions for him to study Chinese. Ruggieri arrived in Macau in 1579, a few days after Valignano had departed for a visitation of Japan. His fellow Macau Jesuits criticized Ruggieri for taking up the “useless exercise” of studying the Chinese language. Perhaps feeling the need for companionship in the lonely task of Chinese studies, Ruggieri recommended that Matteo Ricci be likewise called from Goa to join him. Valignano agreed, summoned Ricci from Goa, and the latter arrived in Macau in August 1582. With the permission of local authorities, both Ruggieri and Ricci went to reside in China, settling in Zhaoqing in Guangdong Province on September 10, 1583. The goal of many missionaries had finally been realized, that of establishing a residence in China itself.

### ***Matteo Ricci Realizes Xavier’s Dream***

The third influential member of the early Jesuit missionary triumvirate, after Xavier and Valignano, was Matteo Ricci. He was born in Macerata, Italy in 1552. After studying Law for three years at the University of Rome, Ricci entered the Jesuit novitiate in 1571. He studied philosophy and mathematics under Clavius, the friend of Kepler and Galileo, and a leader in the Gregorian reform of the calendar, published in 1582. Ricci also studied geometry, physics, astronomy, map-making and mechanics. He later translated many of these materials into Chinese. He was also familiar with the construction of sundials, astrolabes and clocks. He studied theology under Robert Bellarmine, from whom he learned how to make a clear exposition of the Christian doctrine, he would be put to good use later in China. Assigned to the Indian mission in 1577, he studied more theology at the University of Coimbra in Portugal before setting sail from Lisbon in March 1578. Ricci was ordained a priest in Goa in July 1580, and went to Macau in August 1582, having been summoned there for the China venture.

After Ricci and Ruggieri settled in Zhaoqing in September 1583, Ricci never left China. However, Valignano sent Ruggieri back to Europe in 1588 to ask the Pope to send an embassy to China. But the death of four popes in the space of less than two years spelled the defeat of this plan. Ruggieri never returned to China, and died in Europe in 1607. Ricci stayed by himself in Zhaoqing until 1589. In that year a new governor of the “Two Guangs” (Guangdong and Guangxi) took steps to expel him from China. Ricci was able to convince the official to allow him to move to another place in Guangdong. Thus Ricci moved in 1589 to Shaozhou (present day Shaoguan), and stayed there until 1595. In that year Ricci went with an official friend to Nanjing, but he was not allowed to reside there. So he retreated to Nanchang, the capital of Jiangxi Province, where he stayed until June 1598. At that time he again set out for the north hoping to establish himself in Beijing. He was not allowed to do this, but this time retreated only as far as Nanjing, where he stayed until May 1600. Ricci succeeded in establishing his residence in Beijing in January 1601. He never left Beijing until his death on May 11, 1610 at the age of 58. At the time of Ricci’s death, the number of Catholics in China had reached 2,500, with Christian communities set up (and churches built) in Zhaoqing, Shaozhou, Nanchang, Nanjing and Beijing. Thirteen foreign priests and seven Chinese Brothers were living in these communities. It was an auspicious beginning to the Christian mission.

In 1594, during his last year in Shaozhou, Ricci decided to change his garb, from that of Buddhist monk to that of Confucian scholar. He felt that this was more in line with the Jesuit mission policy of the time: to seek points of dialogue with Chinese intellectuals. In 1593, Ricci translated the Four Books of Confucius into Latin. He gave it the title *Tetrabiblion sinense de Moribus*, and sent it to Italy for publication. It marked the beginning of the diffusion of Chinese thought in Europe. In 1595, Ricci published his own first literary work, *A Treatise on Friendship*. Other works followed, including in 1603 his doctrinal presentation in the form of a dialogue between a Christian believer and a Chinese inquirer, *Tianzhu Shiyi*, or *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*. In 1606, in collaboration with Ricci, Xu Guangqi translated Euclid’s *Principles of Mathematics*. This is but one example of the many works of Western science translated, or written by, Ricci and his Jesuit successors in China. Professor Huang Qichen of the

Department of History at Zhongshan University in Guangzhou wrote an in-depth article on this East-West cultural exchange in the Instituto Cultural of Macau's *Review of Culture*, published in 1994 to mark the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of St. Paul's College in Macau. In the article, entitled *Macau, A Bridge for Cultural Exchange between China and the West in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, Professor Huang gives many examples of the Jesuit role in introducing Chinese learning to the Europe, as well as Western learning to China.

Space does not permit treating the work of other famous Jesuits, like Terrenz, Adam Schall, Verbiest, and Giulio Aleni, who worked in China during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. They survived periodic persecutions instigated by jealous officials and the change of dynasties from the Ming to the Qing in 1644. So successful was the Jesuit apostolate that it led to an edict of toleration for Christianity promulgated by the Qing Kangxi Emperor in 1692.

### ***The Rites Controversy***

However, trouble loomed on the horizon, and it came in the form of a different view of the rites in honor of Confucius and the ancestors taken by the Mendicant Orders (for the most part), who began arriving in China (Fujian) in 1632 from Formosa. In general it can be said that Ricci and his fellow Jesuits had permitted the rites, considering them merely civil, and therefore Chinese converts need not abandon them when they entered the Church. Again space does not allow us to cover this controversy in detail. The controversy raged back and forth between Rome and missionaries in China for the better part of a century, and involved eight popes, two Roman congregations (Propaganda and the Holy Office) and two apostolic legations to China. The first condemnation of the Rites was in 1645. But Rome reversed itself in 1656, on appeal from the Jesuits, and ruled in favor of the Jesuit practice. The 1656 permission seemed to be bolstered by a 1659 decree of the congregation of Propaganda (established in 1622 in the Roman Curia to wrest control of mission work from the national patronage system) exhorting missionaries to adapt the Gospel message to local customs. But three further (and final) condemnations of the rites were issued in 1704, 1715, and 1742. It meant the demise of Valignano's policy of missionary accommodation.



The result of Rites Controversy was that the Kangxi Emperor, in 1720, rescinded his 1692 edict of toleration of Christianity, and forbade the preaching of Christianity throughout the empire. All the missionaries had to leave China except those who had accepted Ricci's view of the Rites. The prohibition of Christianity was reinforced by Kangxi's successor, Yongzheng Emperor in 1726. Many missionaries left China at this time. They did not come back, unless clandestinely, until after the Opium War of the 1840s. During the interim Chinese priests and a handful of foreign missionaries cared for the Chinese Christians, who numbered over 200,000 at that time? Joseph Dehergne, S.J. in his book *Repertoire des jesuites de Chine de 1552 a 1800* (Rome/Paris, Letouzy & Ane, 1973) gives the statistic for the year 1810 as 215,000 Catholics in China served by seventy-eight Chinese priests and thirty-five foreign missionaries.

### ***A Risk Based on Love***

What motivated the Jesuits to risk their lives to come to China (one statistic reports that fully one-third of the Jesuit recruits who set sail for China never made it, dying along the way from either ship wreck or disease)? Father Edward Malatesta, S.J., who passed away in Hong Kong at the comparatively young age of 66 in January 1998, said that it was the spirit of wanting to take up one's cross to follow Christ, imbued in each Jesuit from Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises*, that caused them to do it. The Chinese people noticed this quality of the love of Christ in the missionaries, and it had an influence upon them. In this regard, it is worthwhile to quote the observation of a couple of young, present day Chinese scholars. In a review in *Tripod* of Gianni Criveller's 1997 book, *Preaching Christ in Late Ming China*, Wang Zhicheng and Wang Guicai have this to say:

"In our view, the most important reason for the Jesuit breakthrough in China was not dependence on theories, but because they brought with them the Good News of Christ's love. Everything they did in China was imbued with this love. The offering of their lives for Jesus in China and their loving actions influenced thousands of Chinese people. In the process of preaching the Good News of Christ's love, and in order to accomplish the purpose of evangelization, they adopted the method of accommodation. This was a matter of means only.... Aleni (for instance) only influenced

the people around him through acts of love. Because his love was from Christ, many people from the lower social classes were impressed by this love and converted to Christianity. Out of love, he also held friendly, open, and sincere conversations with the literati. In this way he established a new model of accommodation for Christianity, namely, dialogue.” (*Tripod*, No. 111, May-June 1999)

This is the same spirit that motivates missionaries today: they want to share the love of Christ with the Chinese people. They can still bring Western learning, e.g., knowledge of foreign languages. But the spirit of the Christian Gospel can only be perceived by the Chinese people if the missionary himself, or herself, is filled with the love of Christ. Despite the mistakes, frustrations and upheavals, the Jesuit effort at evangelizing China proceeded from the motive of loving Christ.

Jesuits and others are still carrying out Christ’s mission of love in Macau today. One thinks of Father Luis Ruiz, S.J., aged 88, who works among the poor of Macau, and even extends his charity to lepers in China. Another example is Father Lancelot Rodrigues, Macau diocesan priest, who just celebrated his 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of ordination to the priesthood. In his position as director of Catholic Social Services in Macau, Father Lancelot has been instrumental in finding funds for many social development projects in China. At the time of the handover, then, “tiny” Macau’s 450 year old role in, and its contribution to, cultural exchange (which the reader will see involves the Christian faith) and mutual understanding among nations should not be underestimated, nor should it be forgotten. Finally, it is hoped that besides commercial and scientific links between East and West, practiced in Macau these last 450 years, the intellectual exchange begun by the Jesuits can be taken up and flourish again.

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