

## *China Matteo Ricci Conference in Beijing Centers on Academic Exchange*

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**A**n international conference in Beijing to mark the 400th anniversary of Jesuit Father Matteo Ricci's arrival in Beijing turned out as planned: a purely academic exchange among scholars. Previous media speculation on Sino-Vatican relations taking place at the time proved unfounded.

The commemorative symposium "Encounters and Dialogues, An International Symposium on Cross-Cultural Exchanges between China and the West in the Late Ming and Early Qing Dynasties" was held at the Beijing Institute of Technology in October 14-17.

The Ricci Institute for Chinese-Western Cultural History of the University of San Francisco in the United States and the Institute of World Religions (IWR) of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing co-sponsored the event.

The eight exchange sessions touched upon topics such as diplomacy and mission, religion and science, arts, memorials, historiography, means of evangelization and reactions at grassroots level.

Co-chairpersons, IWR director Zhuo Xiping, and Jesuit Father John Witek of Georgetown University in the USA expressed their delight at the outcome of the meeting. Father Witek has recently re-edited the earliest Portuguese-Chinese Dictionary by Michele Ruggieri and Ricci, both Jesuit missionaries to China in the 16th century.

About half of the 160 participants came from China while others came from Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan and 15 other countries. The large number of China's scholar-participants was considered a breakthrough as researchers of this field have usually been confined to Western academic circles, and the majority of conferences on the China Mission have ordinarily been held outside China.

The conference duly emphasized the principle that the China Mission, in all its various and complex aspects, should be

interpreted from the point of view of history rather than from ideology for apologetic purposes.

Witek's re-edited dictionary, and two ancient facsimiles of the world maps by Ricci and Jesuit Father Ferdinand Verbiest were presented to the guests during receptions given by the Portuguese and Italian embassies in Beijing.

According to the organizers, it was Jesuit Father Edward Malatesta, Ricci Institute's founder, who proposed the idea of holding an international symposium in the year 2001 to mark the 400th anniversary of Ricci's arrival in Beijing, and to celebrate the new millennium.

Before his death in 1998, Father Malatesta had expressed the hope that the venue for the conference would be the former Jesuit residence (later a Marists' brothers school) on the grounds of the Zhalan cemetery in Beijing. His dream was not realized. Since 1949, the school has been the Beijing Party School, and renamed only recently as the Beijing Administrative College.

Meanwhile, the Institute for the Chinese-Western Exchanges of the Beijing Administrative College and the Macau Institute of Culture have published a new Chinese and Portuguese edition of "Zhalan, the Oldest Christian Cemetery in Beijing."

During the conference, the participants visited the Zhalan cemetery, where the tombs of Jesuit Fathers Matteo Ricci, Adam Schall, Ferdinand Verbiest, Giuseppe Castiglioni and 60 other missionaries and Chinese clergy are preserved.

They also visited another graveyard located near an Indian style Wutasi Buddhist temple where gravestones mark the remains of 25 French scholar-missionaries, one Irish and 10 Chinese priests originally interred in the Zhenfusi cemetery, destroyed in 1966.

Father Ricci arrived in Macau, gateway of China at the time, in 1581 and reached Beijing in 1601. He is renowned as an outstanding scientist, humanist and missionary who has made a great contribution to China.

His fourth centenary's arrival was also commemorated in two symposiums held by the Centre for Cross-Cultural Studies of City University of Hong Kong, October 13-17, and by the Italo-Chinese Institute for Economic Exchanges in Rome at the Gregoriana University, October 24-26.

(Adapted from UCAN Beijing)