Noël Golvers

Libraries of Western Learning for China. Circulation of Western Books between Europe and China in the Jesuit Mission (ca. 1650-ca. 1750). Vol. I: Logistics of Book Acquisition and Circulation. Leuven: Ferdinand Verbiest Institute KUL, 2012. Pp. 679. Hb, 75.00 Euros.

After reading the acknowledgements and introduction to this hefty volume ("This book deals with the intellectual and spiritual interests of the Jesuits in China as determined by the books they desired to have at hand, which they tried to acquire from Europe and apparently used for their mission" ([9]), I searched the index for Jean-François Foucquet, the long-suffering French Jesuit whose adventures returning to France from China accompanied by John Hu were so entertainingly described by Jonathan Spence in *The Question of Hu* (1988). Those who have read that account can now (at least in part) answer one question never raised by Spence: which books did Foucquet own? I do not raise this to trivialize the achievement of Noël Golvers, but to point out that this is a very useful reference book. The value of Golvers's endeavor in this first volume is to supply modern historians of libraries and of religion in both Europe and China with massive amounts of evidence of how books were collected, what they cost, who owned them, and in what ways they were used by missions from the mid-seventeenth through the mid-eighteenth centuries.

Like similar studies of Jesuit libraries (e.g. by Claudio Fedeles and Paolo Tinto), this study provides readers with identifications of specific books; unlike these earlier volumes, it does not provide inventories of those books, but focuses instead on those who collected them, when, and for what reasons. The following two volumes, one of which is already in print (vol. 2: *Formation of Jesuit Libraries*), will complete the picture by both analyzing the book collections and comparing them to contemporary European Jesuit libraries.

The Society of Jesus valued literacy and the printed book very highly, and found similar sympathies within China. In return, the Chinese respected Jesuit learning. Hence, studying the exchange of ideas and culture between Europeans and the Chinese people via the exchange of printed books is both a natural and fruitful endeavor—thousands of books moved from one continent to the other at the request of Jesuit missionaries. Golvers has done exhaustive research on letters, book inscriptions, inventories, and treatises used by those members of the Society who collected books for the mission territories of China. The sources vary considerably and require an excellent command of multiple written languages and paleography, as well as tremendous patience in collecting and organizing data.

Among Golvers's findings are the following: the most popular "science" topics were astronomy and mathematics; theology and spiritual works were in great demand, for personal reasons and to teach converts; hagiography was a popular request; those making requests kept their book collections current, since Jesuits in China had news of new European books from different sources and made requests for them; books on preaching and sacraments which would be used on a regular basis in the execution of regular duties were popular requests; in all categories, the authors in greatest demand were Jesuits; some requests were, to use his words, "[c]omprehensive, unspecified and undecided" (92), as for example one request for "books on whatever topic, of which many copies could be scraped together, if each individual [Jesuit] province with a well-stocked library would destine to the China mission the superfluous [i.e., supernumerous] books in their possession" (92); and the Jesuits asking for books were aware of the costs of purchasing, shipping, and maintaining a library, and in that spirit tried not to ask for too much.

From a discussion of letters sent from China, Golvers moves to responses from Europe. Much of the European correspondence is lost, but French and Portuguese documents provide evidence about agents sent out to purchase books, for example detailing both the search for specific volumes and the attempts to raise funds for such acquisitions. One especially exciting document reproduced by Golvers includes the 1717 budget for the Beitang residence, which allotted a mere 1.5% of its funds "[p]our des livres achetés du revenu de la Bibliothèque" (258). Many of the books, however, were donated by Europeans—religious orders, including of course the Society, sent books to missions, as did libraries, princes, private individuals (including military officers and librarians); and authors (particularly Jesuits) sometimes donated their own works. Much of this information is again teased out of various sources, including inscriptions within the books, jottings on copies of letters sent from China to Europe, records kept in France, etc.

The shortest chapter in this volume is called "The Final Transmission." As Golvers points out, many of the books did not reach their destination, although it seems impossible to determine how many. Part of this chapter concerns the actual process of transportation, and includes attempts to estimate the size of containers carrying books and to trace the route of the volumes on land and by sea. Upon reaching their destination, the books were dispersed from a clearing house in Canton, which also distributed other European material items to the missions, or from Macau. Some inventories were created along the way, and some items were added to the transport from sources within China (e.g. other missionaries, private citizens, etc.).

Golvers's accomplishments in this first of three volumes are impressive. He has taken many hints, both maddeningly unclear and irresistible, and expanded them into a study of books, their travels, and their collectors in the Chinese mission. While I found some issues with his prose—historians should avoid phrases like “since time immemorial” and overreliance on italics to provide emphasis—in general I would recommend the book highly and I look forward to reading volumes two and three. It would be most useful for graduates and reference librarians, but upper-division undergraduates who have particular interests in cultural interchange and libraries will also find it useful.

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