R. Po-chia Hsia

Matteo Ricci and the Catholic Mission to China: A Short History with Documents.

Cambridge: Hackett, 2016. Pp. 176. Pb, \$18.

During the quadricentennial of Matteo Ricci's death in 2010, a proliferation of books, articles, and commemorative pamphlets appeared throughout Asia and the West to celebrate his legacy. Among them was R. Po-chia Hsia's monograph, *A Jesuit in the Forbidden City: Matteo Ricci, 1552–1610* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010). Hsia's study distinguished itself as, in my estimation, the best work published during that year. His new work related to Matteo Ricci's mission to Asia, *Matteo Ricci and the Catholic Mission to China*, is a short book comprised of a brief introduction to the Jesuit enterprise in China, along with thirty well-selected primary source documents, each with succinct remarks intended to contextualize its authorship. Far from what some scholars have perceived to be a tradition of Jesuit agitprop, almost hagiographically praising Matteo Ricci as an exemplar of a "generation of giants," Hsia's collection of source materials allows the reader to formulate her or his own conclusions—positive or pejorative—about the East-West encounter between Ricci and China. Included in Hsia's collection are examples of Ricci's well-known intellectual genius, but also there are examples of his often-caustic interlocutions with important Buddhists of the late-Ming dynasty, providing insight into both views of the Sino-Jesuit encounter inaugurated by Matteo Ricci and his confrères.

In distinction from most other surveys of the Jesuit mission in China, Hsia begins with an account of the increasing trade networks of Portugal during the sixteenth century, and he rightly underscores the important role that Macau played in the history of Catholicism in Asia, recalling that "This was the city that welcomed the first Jesuit missionaries into China" (5). After summarizing the contours of early European trade with China, Hsia describes the Chinese cultural landscape into which Matteo Ricci, Alessandro Valignano, and Michele Ruggieri entered as the Ming was declining under the inattentive Wanli emperor. The orthodoxy of state Confucianism, the bureaucratic examination system, Buddhism, and the more localized religious cults of Guanyu and Tianfei are explained to equip the reader with the necessary vision of Chinese society for apprehending Jesuit strategies once the Society found itself within Ming society. After this contextualization, Hsia draws upon the standard sources of Ricci historiography, such as Pasquale D'Elia's *Fonti Ricciane: Storia dell'introduzione del cristianesimo in Cina* (Rome: La Libreria dello Stato, 1942–49) and Francesco D'Arelli's *Matteo Ricci: Lettere* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2001), to recount the missionary's life from his hometown in Macerata to Beijing, where he spent his last

decade. What appears here has already been written in several other works, including Hsia's own 2010 volume; what gives this book utility is the judiciously chosen series of original documents, some of which Hsia himself has translated in order to fill in areas previously missing in Ricci studies.

The first document, taken from a chronicle by the German Carthusian, Theodor Loher, helps situate the Jesuit missionary initiative into the framework of the Protestant Reformation. Loher's writing represents the Roman Catholic impulse to promulgate Catholic Christianity in distant lands while vast sweeps of Europe were adrift from the Roman Church. From here, Hsia includes examples of trade debates between Ming officials who diverge in their notion of whether non-Chinese "barbarians" should be permitted to trade with China. Subsequent documents include Gregory Martin's sixteenth-century description of the Roman College, where Ricci received his illustrious Jesuit education, mastering the topics that served to fuel his popularity in imperial China, such as philosophy, geometry, cartography, and astronomy. Tracing Ricci's journey east, letters from Ricci to the Society's superior general, Claudio Acquaviva, and other confrères, such as Martino de Fornari and Juan Bautista Román, provide examples of Ricci's intellectual evolution as he acclimated to life as a missionary. What one discerns from these correspondences are first-hand examples of Ricci's genuine admiration for Chinese philosophy, technology, and statecraft, but the excerpts from the words of Ruggieri and Ricci's later writings set the two men apart, and functions to represent well the inner disagreements of the Jesuits in Asia. While Ruggieri comfortably adopts Buddhist terms into his Christian lexicon, Ricci decidedly excises the use of Buddhist terms once he changes his identity from Buddhist monk to Confucian *literatus* around 1595.

Among the documents that more effectively reveal how Matteo Ricci formed his opinions of Chinese religion and influenced his missionary "method," are those that recount his discussions with Chinese Buddhist clerics and Confucian *literati*. Perhaps the most famous debate involving the ambitious Jesuit was with the Huayan Buddhist monk, Xuelang Hong'en, in 1599; Hsia astutely includes an excerpt of this disputation taken from the *Della entrata*. This debate demonstrates Ricci's Scholastic preparation as he engages the monk's argument that creation existentially occurs in the mind, rather than from the "first principle," or God, suggested by Christian doctrine. Such documents as this are useful examples of how East-West intellectual dialogue can be both creatively informative, while also being a frustrating illustration of how these disparate modes of thinking elude one another in veils of misunderstanding. That Hsia has now published these critical documents in one volume is a significant service to the field of China studies.

It is timely that this collection of source materials follows after several other recent works centered on the history of early Jesuit efforts to evangelize, and perhaps somewhat Westernize China, such as Vito Avarello's *L'œuvre italienne de Matteo Ricci: Anatomie d'une rencontre chinoise* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2014) and Thierry Meynard's *The Jesuit Reading of Confucius: The First Complete Translation of the Lunyu* (Leiden: Brill, 2015). Hsia's new book is an important contribution to the work of scholars and students interested in Matteo Ricci and Sino-Western history, but unlike his previous works it is not an attempt at original research. He has given us a cogent and elegant précis of the early Jesuit encounter with China, and has provided a convenient sourcebook for undergraduate and graduate students. Notably absent in this sourcebook, however, is one rather conspicuous lacuna; while Hsia has included the letter by Matteo Ricci's Buddhist detractor, Yu Chunxi, he neglects to include Ricci's expressive response to his critic, in which the Jesuit missionary defends the accuracy of his understanding of Buddhism. Including this response would have provided a better purview of both sides of Matteo Ricci's debate with his Buddhist interlocutors, rather than leave the reader with the sense that he was neither charitable toward his religious "opponents," nor willing to exert the effort to understand their views. One wonders, too, why a map is included of Francis Xavier's voyages to Asia; it seems somewhat out of place in this book. These trifling quibbles aside, R. Po-chia Hsia's new "short history with documents" is a welcome addition to the scholarly project of better understanding how the Jesuit mission to China planted the seeds of cultural engagement and dialogue that have grown into the academic disciplines that look critically at Asia's historical past and cultural present.

Anthony E. Clark

Whitworth University, Spokane

aclark@whitworth.edu

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