Book Reviews

Hieromonk Feodosii Smorzhevskii

Notes on the Jesuits in China, Translated by Afinogenov Gregory. Chestnut Hill: Institute of Jesuits Sources, Boston College, 2016. Pp. 116. Hb, \$30.

The Jesuit mission in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century China has been the subject of many studies. These embrace a wide range of sources: the correspondence and books the Jesuits left behind, the accusations raised against them by other Roman Catholic missionaries, and favorable as well as critical accounts from Han Chinese and Manchu officials. Still it is easy to forget that Catholic missionaries were not the only Westerners in the Qing capital. Beijing capital was also home to a Russian Orthodox community. The writings of these Russian observers seem less well-known and deserve closer scrutiny. By providing the original Cyrillic text of *Notes on the Jesuits in China* and an English translation, altogether seventy-eight pages in length, Gregory Afinogenov of Harvard University has taken a good step toward making these sources available to researchers not familiar with the Russian language. He prefaced the *Notes* with a useful introduction on the Catholic missions and the Russian mission in eighteenth-century China.

Following the treaties of Nerchinsk in 1713 and Kiakhta in 1728, the Qing court had granted Russia the right to maintain a permanent mission in Beijing to facilitate diplomatic relations between the two countries. This “ecclesiastical mission,” as it was then called, was also responsible for attending to the spiritual needs of descendants of the Cossacks who, after the Russian defeat at Ya-ke-sa (Albazin) in 1685, had opted to resettle in the Chinese capital. In addition, the Russian College of Foreign Affairs expected the staff of the mission, replaced every five years or so, to provide intelligence reports.

Feodosii Smorzhevskii, the Orthodox priest and author of the *Notes*, was part of the fourth Russian mission led by Archimandrite Gervasii Lintsevskii. His account provides a valuable and different perspective from other available sources on the Jesuits and their dealings with the Chinese court between 1745 and 1755. His natural curiosity and his encounters with some of the Jesuits, in

particular Johann Walter, whom he referred to by the Chinese name Lu-lao, made him an acute observer of the living conditions of the Jesuits, their finances, and even their burial. Since the days of Matteo Ricci, the Jesuits positioned themselves as the educated elite by offering their services as astronomers, mathematicians, painters, and musicians. They led a decent lifestyle, each one having a personal servant and owning a vegetable garden. Smorzhevskii acted like an acute anthropological observer, and has provided interesting glimpses of the mundane daily life that the Jesuits in Beijing did not deem worth mentioning themselves. He was impressed by many of their life styles which were later copied by the Orthodox mission. These Jesuits were treated as informants and not rivals for winning Chinese souls.

The Jesuits whom Smorzhevskii met in 1745 were still holding onto high social status in Beijing despite circumstances being strained by both the Kangxi emperor's passing from the scene and the Rites controversy. The Qianlong emperor's era spelled further doom. In the *Notes*, the Jesuits did not seem to have close contact with Han Chinese literati like in the Ming and early Qing dynasties. Instead, they carried out a low-key conversion process, starting from people they hired as translators and servants. Smorzhevskii estimated there were some 200,000 Christians in North China and even more in the South.

The Jesuits appearing in the *Notes* are Florian Bahr (Wei-lao), Giuseppe Castiglione (Lang-lao), Alexandre de La Charms (Sun-lao), Giovanni Giuseppe da Costa (as doctor), Antoine Gaubil (Song-lao), August von Hallerstein (Liu-lao), Jean-Etienne Kao (John Ko), Ignatius Kogler (Dai-lao), Domingos Pinheiro (Chen-lao), Polycarpo de Sousa (Suo-lao), and Johann Walter (Lu-lao). Non-Jesuit missionaries include the Lazarist Teodorico Pedrini (De-lao), the Dominicans Pedro Sanz and Francisco Serrano, and the Augustinian Sigismondo di San Nicola. In the index, Afinogenov mistakenly identifies the elderly Father Paul Xu as Xu Guangqi, who, according to the *Notes*, witnessed the execution of Dominican bishop Pedro Sanz in 1747. This cannot be the case because the long-time friend of Matteo Ricci had never been ordained and was already dead for some one hundred years. In fact, the father the *Notes* referred to was Paul Su Hongxiao (correctly identified as Su in the Cyrillic original), one of the first Chinese Lazarists ordained in 1723.

In the mid-eighteenth century, the Qing empire had also passed its zenith, with rebellions rising in distant places. According to the *Notes*, it is revealing that one hundred years after the Manchu conquest of China, the remnant Ming loyalists still posed as a potential threat—especially in Fujian, and later in the Sichuan campaign against the Miaos. While Smorzhevskii's information is reliable when he describes what he saw or heard firsthand, he is, however, less credible when he relates hearsay or gossip going around Beijing. For example,

he relishes recounting the Emperor Yongzheng's usurpation of the throne, which has no truth in it.

The *Notes* are only a portion of Smorzhevskii's larger intelligence account of Qing affairs he wrote for the Russian College of Foreign Affairs. This account, which apparently was never forwarded to the Russian authorities in St. Petersburg, was discovered in Irkutsk in 1820 where Grigorii Spasskii, publisher of *Herald of Siberia*, decided two years later to print the portion entitled *Notes on the Jesuits in China* in two successive issues of his journal. As for the rest of the manuscript, it was deemed unpublishable and destroyed, mainly because of its explicit description of the internecine rivalry and debauchery among members of the mission in Beijing. As for the *Notes* they remained hereafter mostly untapped by scholars working outside of the Russian context.

Gregory Afinogenov new publication of the *Notes* can be compared to the discovery of the contemporary Chinese account of Matteo Ricci in Zhaoqing, which provides a different perspective and hitherto unknown details on the life of early Jesuits in a provincial town in the late sixteenth century China. (The "Biography of Li Ma" [*Lima Zhuan*] was written by Liu Chengfan, a local Ming official who, between 1589 and 1591, met Ricci in Zhaoqing on seven occasions. This account, in which Chen described how impressed he was by this foreigner's demeanor and erudition, was included in the *Family History of the Liu Clan* [*Liu shi zupu*]. Thanks to Liu Mingqiang, a thirteenth-generation descendant of Liu Chengfan, the biography was brought to public attention in 2010 to commemorate the four-hundredth anniversary of Ricci's death. It is one of the lengthiest account [4,100 Chinese characters, or about three thousand English words] left by a contemporary Chinese observer of Ricci's early days as a missionary in Guangdong. Since 2010, Several Chinese scholars have researched and authenticated the account.)

By making the *Notes* available in English, Afinogenov has made a valuable contribution to future scholarship; although, the introduction and the translation could have benefited from more careful editing.

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