CHAPTER 2

Macau and the Spread of Catholicism in Mainland China during the Late Ming and Early Qing Dynasties

It is perhaps the consensus of all researchers on Macanese history and the history of Chinese Catholicism that Macau served as the principal base for Chinese Catholic missionary work from the introduction of Catholicism during the middle and late Ming dynasty onwards. Prior to the First Opium War (1839–42), Macau was the most important channel, and sometimes the only channel, for missionaries to enter mainland China. This is attested to by an abundance of evidence with regard to the spread of Catholicism in mainland China in the period between the late Ming dynasty and the First Opium War.

1 Macau as a Waypoint for Catholic Missions in Mainland China

Following the introduction of Catholicism into China during the middle and late Ming dynasty, Macau served as the most important channel for missionaries seeking to gain entry into mainland China. In the words of the French scholar-priest Louis Wei Tsing-sing 衛青心 (1906–2001):

Since the sixteenth century, Macau had always been a transfer station for European missionaries to enter China for missionary work, and a place for missionaries who are expelled out of China to hide. In Macau, missionaries from Europe could wait for the Chinese authorities to issue the permit to enter China, or found opportunities to sneak into China, Tokyo Bay in Japan, or Indochina.1

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The statement above clearly indicates that Macau was the most important conduit for missionaries seeking to enter mainland China during the Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911) dynasties. However, some European missionaries entered the Chinese mainland directly through other ports along the southeastern coast. In particular, Franciscan and Dominican missionaries used Manila in the Philippines as their headquarters for missionary work in the Far East. At certain times, such as when the Ming or Qing dynasty relaxed the ban on maritime trade, or the Chinese government opened a few ports for foreign trade from the reign of Emperor Kangxi 康熙 (r. 1662–1722) to the reign of Emperor Qianlong 乾隆 (r. 1736–95), some European missionaries from the Franciscan and Dominican orders entered mainland China directly through the coast in Fujian from Taiwan or Manila. Let us look at the following examples.

1. In 1632 (the fifth year of the reign of Emperor Chongzhen 崇禎 [r. 1628–44] of the Ming dynasty), the Italian Dominican Angelo Cocchi 高琦 (1597–1633) landed in a boat at an island along the coast of Fujian from Taiwan, and from there entered Fuzhou. In 1633 (the sixth year of the reign of Emperor Chongzhen), the Spanish Dominican missionary Juan Bautista de Morales 黎玉范 (1597–1664) and the Spanish Franciscan Antonio de Santa María Caballero 利安當 (1602–69) entered Fujian from Taiwan.2

2. In 1634 (the seventh year of the reign of Emperor Chongzhen), the Dominican Francisco Díaz 蘇方積 (1606–46) and the Franciscan Francisco de la Madre de Dios 馬方濟 (d.1657) reached Fuan 福安 in the same boat from Taiwan.3

3. In 1655 (the twelfth year of the reign of Emperor Shunzhi 順治 [r. 1644–61]), the Italian Dominican missionary Vittorio Ricci 利畸 (1621–85), Domingo Coronado 郭多敏 (d.1665), Diego Rodríguez 丁迪我, Raímundo del Valle 賴蒙篤 (1613–83), and the Chinese Dominican Luo Wenzao 羅文藻 (1615–91) entered China directly via Xiamen from Manila.4

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3 Ibid., 89.