

Hsia, Florence C., *Sojourners in a Strange Land: Jesuits & Their Scientific Missions in Late Imperial China* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009), xv + 273 pp., illustrations, £31.00/\$45.00, ISBN 978 0 226 35559 7.

The figure of the missionary scientist has long fascinated scholars of the early modern period. Men such as the seventeenth-century Jesuits appear as liminal figures, with one foot in the medieval world of militant Christianity and the other in the modern world of scientific progress. The image of the Jesuits of the China mission is doubly intriguing: not only do they stand at the crossroads of two epochs, they straddle the divide between East and West. As such, commentators have judged them for their ability to create bonds between China and the West, regardless of whether the transmission of science (and thereby modernity) was one of the Jesuits' goals. Invoking the image of the missionary-scientist as it was represented in the European publications of the Society of Jesus from the mid-seventeenth until the mid-eighteenth century—yet without analyzing the specific projects or constraints of “missionary science” during that period—scholars have long faulted the Jesuits for their failure to give China true blessings from the West, whether scientific or religious.

This old story has been given a thorough revision in the past three decades, both in terms of the missionary and “scientific” dimensions. Recent scholarship has placed emphasis on the liminal aspects of the China Jesuits, but it has largely rejected the cleavages of medieval/modern and East/West in favor of more nuanced positions that underscore the early modern context for Jesuit natural philosophy. Florence Hsia's brief new study of the French missionary savants who sailed to Asia beginning in the 1680s offers a further revision of this theme. Despite the claim made in its title, this book is only partially about missionary science in Late Imperial China. Its proper subject is the creation of the image of the missionary scientist, and the tenuous links that the individuals who promoted themselves as such figures maintained with contemporary “scientific” institutions in Europe. Its primary subjects are the French Jesuits who, after decades of hearing pleas for help from their confreres in Beijing, decided to launch a “mathematical mission” to China with commissions from Louis XIV. As Hsia suggests, this project was an elaborate ruse to enhance the prestige of the Society of Jesus in France by linking its missionary enterprise to scientific projects that attracted the attentions of so many influential figures of the contemporary élite.

With the backing of the Sun King, a handful of Jesuits were accepted into the *Académie Royale des Sciences* and trained in the techniques of the *académiciens* so that they could take astronomical measurements throughout Asia and transmit their data back to Europe. The goal of these priests was to create a Beijing branch of the *Académie*, that is, a permanent outpost of French learning (and royal glory, of course) at the court of the Chinese emperors. While the foundation of the project was not new—Italian, German, Swiss, Spanish, Portuguese, and Flemish Jesuits had worked as astronomers at the Chinese court since before the fall of the Ming Dynasty in 1644—the combination of French academic projects with Jesuit missionary activities, as well as French imperial designs, was. *Sojourners in a Strange Land* is therefore a metaphor for the place of the Jesuits within the circles of French science on the eve of the Enlightenment in Europe rather than for their presence in the exotic corners of Asia.

Hsia employs the notion of the mask, referring to the Society's use of the Pauline ideal of being "all things to all men," to demonstrate how men such as Johann Adam Schall and Ferdinand Verbiest could promote the image of themselves as missionary-mandarins to European audiences in the mid-seventeenth century. She then examines how the French Jesuits grafted the persona of scientist onto this particular image of the China Jesuit, and how they went about employing this mask. The most important sections of this book come when Hsia shows how the first group of French Jesuits used their newly acquired scientific methods during their journey to China. Her analysis focuses on the observations that they made during a stopover at the Cape Colony and during their brief stay at the court of King Narai in Siam. Hsia's primary concern is with the scientific character of the French Jesuits' activities, and with how the data that they produced was received in Paris. Indeed, with the exception of a technical discussion of the accuracy of Jesuit methods within the context of seventeenth-century mathematical knowledge, she is almost exclusively concerned with how the data collected by French Jesuits in Asia was publicized in France. The conclusion that Hsia reaches is that serious scientists in Paris only paid attention to the China Jesuits during the reign of Louis XIV, and that the only true scholar of this cohort to work in Asia was Jean de Fontaney (1643-1710). As the years passed, the image of the French Jesuits in China as cutting-edge scientists was eclipsed by their image as purveyors of *lettres édifiantes et curieuses*. The same Parisian publishers who were employed to promote one image found more success