Christina Lee, ed.


This volume aims, as its cover indicates, to “investigate European visions of the Far East—particularly of China and Japan—and examine how and why particular representations of Asians and their cultural practices were constructed, revised, and adapted.” It functions in many ways, and as the editor notes, as a companion piece to Robert Markley’s 2009 book, *The Far East and the English Imagination, 1600-1730* (Cambridge) which argued that Europeans contended during the seventeenth century with a world dominated by powerful East Asian states, a political reality that quashed most fantasies of absolute European dominance or automatic superiority. Although the articles share similar themes, *Western Visions* is concerned with the absence of the Portuguese and the Spanish from such studies, noting that despite their role as the pioneers of European empire in Asia, the two groups are frequently sidelined, at least in English language scholarship. This situation stems in large part from the relative difficulty of dealing with Iberian sources, and this volume offers a welcome addition to the scholarship on the Western encounter with Asia by presenting ten carefully researched chapters based on a wide range of sources.

As with all edited volumes, the quality of the individual chapters varies, though this is a much more consistent collection than most. For one thing, the volume is beautifully produced and meticulously edited by Christina Lee, who has also contributed a short but useful introduction and a chapter. Second, and perhaps more important, there is a real coherence to the contributions which focus almost exclusively on the Iberian empires and their connection with China and Japan. The one exception to this is Nicholas Koss’ chapter on the translation and presentation of Matteo Ricci’s accounts of China in *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, which is concerned with the presentation and manipulation of Jesuit accounts in England. Although an important piece in its own right, it seems somewhat out of place in such a closely focused volume.

*Western Visions* is divided into three parts. Part One, “Imagining the Far East from Europe,” is concerned specifically with representations of Asia, either in cartography (Ricardo Padrón) or poetry, in the form of Luis Barahona de Soto’s *Las lágrimas de Angélica* (Christina Lee). Padrón’s contribution is particularly illuminating, showing how Spain’s official cartography defined Asia not as eastern but as the Indies of the West, that is the western extension of Spain’s empire in the New World.

Part Two, “Discovering the Far East,” seems caught between the wider question of representation and a more concrete discussion concerning the activities
of individuals on the ground in Asia. Liam Brockey, the author of an important study of the Jesuit mission in China, contributes a useful chapter on the role of Iberian travellers and missionaries as early Sinologists, while Haruko Ward is concerned with the theology of women martyrs by Pedro Morejón, a Jesuit active in Japan from 1590 to 1614. Robert Ellis examines Diego de Pantoja, a Jesuit missionary in China who is usually relegated to the shadows of the far better-known Matteo Ricci. His analysis shows that Ricci’s emphasis on accommodation was not uniformly shared by his fellow Jesuits in China and that some missionaries were far more willing to establish a civilizational hierarchy, which Ellis labels, in a manner similar to Richmond Barbour’s notion of “proto-Orientalism,” as “incipiently orientalist” (115).

Whereas Part Two occupies a somewhat uncertain middle ground, Part Three, “Sightings of the Far East in Europe,” is all about actual interactions and is, for this reason, perhaps the most exciting part of the collection as a whole. Chapters eight and nine explore two diverse categories, *Indios* and *Chinos*. The first refers to the indigenous inhabitants of Spanish colonies, who could not (at least in theory) be enslaved. The classification was set in opposition to a second category, *Chinos*, natives from different parts of Asia, including but not limited to China and Southeast Asia, who could be brought back to Europe as slaves because they did not originate from areas under Spanish control and hence did not fall under the 1584 crown decree. Tatiana Seijas (chapter nine) shows that “enslaved people from Asia willfully self-identified as *Indios*” even if they had no direct connection to this category “in order to gain the legal protections afforded to colonial subjects” (153). Her contribution reveals a fascinating contest over terminology: owners were keen to label their slaves as *Chinos* because it pushed them beyond the concerns of the state and hence outside punitive legal categories, while slaves were desperate to claim the label of *Indios*, which permitted maximum flexibility.

The controversy over terminology was not simply academic, and it translated into a series of hard-fought legal battles. In 1656, for example, two slaves, Manuel de San Juan and his wife, Mariana de la Cruz, petitioned the House of Trade in Seville and subsequently the General Council of the Indies for both their freedom and, perhaps even more remarkably, payment for the period during which they had been enslaved. Their ambitious request was based on the shakiest of grounds—that they were from Tidore, an independent state in Southeast Asia—that they argued, quite without basis, was part of the Spanish colony in the Philippines. Despite the geographical obstacles to such a claim, they won their appeal, moving successfully out of the category of *Chinos* and into the far more advantageous classification of *Indios*, although the Council refused to pair their freedom with an order of back-pay.