
For more than a decade Huang Yinong, the dean of humanities and social sciences at Qinghua University in Xinzhu, Taiwan wrote over thirty articles about the cultural and religious interaction of the West and China during the late Ming and early Qing period. In this way he was following in the footsteps of Chen Yuan 陈垣 (1880-1971) and Fang Hao 方豪 (1910-1980), whose pioneering efforts in this field of history resulted in a corpus of well-known books and articles. Huang received his bachelor's degree at Qinghua University and attained a doctorate in physics, specifically in radio astronomy, at Columbia University in New York City in 1985. A few years later his scholarly focus shifted to the history of astronomy in China, especially in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Within that context he began assessing the role of Western astronomers at the imperial court in Beijing as an integral part of the history of Christianity in China. These interests became more pronounced when he was a visiting professor at Leiden University and had further access to materials in Western languages.

Since the target audience of this volume is the reader of Chinese who may be unfamiliar with the historical background of Catholicism in China, Huang faced the issue of how much detail to present. His solution was to include several insert sections per chapter that are typeset on a different background. The opening chapter portrays the expansion of Europe to Asia and the sending of missionaries there. In the text, he presents this theme in part as the result of the Treaty of Tordesillas. Rather than compress an explanation of that treaty in an obscure footnote, Huang highlights that significant international agreement by using an insert that covers more than one page. This allows him to use footnotes for citations, not for explanations.

The second chapter, revised from its first appearance in 1994, centers on the family of Qu Rukui 鄭汝夔, the open-minded scholar who became a friend of the Jesuit missionary, Matteo Ricci (1552-1610). Qu hoped to learn alchemy from Ricci, but instead the latter taught him arithmetic and the first books of Euclid as well as essential points of Christianity. Huang portrays the influential social status of Qu's family, which enabled him to arrange meetings for Ricci with various officials. After the death of his wife, Qu eventually married his concubine and was baptized in 1605, more than a decade after he first met Ricci.

In dealing with Confucian literati, Ricci adopted a policy of inculturation by showing interconnections of Christian doctrine with traditional Confucian principles. Huang notes in his third chapter that Ricci's influence extended beyond Xu Guangqi 徐光啓 (1562-1633), Li Zhizao 李之藻 (1565-1630), and Yang Tingyun 楊廷筠 (1562-1627) and also included Sun Yuanhua 孫元化 (1581-1632), Li Yingshi 李應試 (1560-1620), and Li Tianjing 李天經 (1579-1659). Moreover, other literati who did not become converts, such as Zhang...
Wenda 張聞達 (d. 1625) and Feng Yingjing 馮應京 (1555-1606), were also interested in Western learning. For each of these late Ming and early Qing scholars, Huang presents details about their lives and, above all, includes diagrams of their families even after the individual's death. Such exchanges of ideas between the Western missionaries and other literati did not always lead to improved relations, but on the contrary to misunderstandings, as the persecution in 1615-1616 amply illustrated.

The Confucian scholar Wang Zheng 王徵 (1571-1644) is the central focus of chapter four as a case study in explaining the practice of concubinage as an obstacle to conversion for such scholars. In his early years Wang was a firm believer in Buddhism, but his turning to Catholicism was due in part to his association with Yang Tingyun. Besides the data on Wang Zheng, the chapter includes a long discussion about the continued impact of his new status on his family, from his own days through the middle of the nineteenth century. The charts of the family genealogy and the facsimile reprinting of several of the older sources enhance this chapter and enable the reader to evaluate the arguments more readily.

Conversion to Catholicism by members of a scholarly family caused frustrations and tensions, as Wei Xuelian 魏學濂 (1608-1644) experienced. He was the second son of the prominent scholar Wei Dazhong 魏大中 (1575-1625), who had passed the jinshi examination in 1616. Wei Dazhong was one of the “Six Heroes” who were put to death because of their strong opposition against the powerful eunuch Wei Zhongxian 魏忠賢. As a result, Wei Xuelian faced even greater difficulties in converting to Catholicism, since he was expected to uphold the Confucian family traditions.

Chapters six and seven are devoted to a brief biographical account of Han Lin 韓霖 (c. 1598-c. 1649), a native of Jiangzhou 綏州 in Shanxi province, who met Xu Guangqi in Beijing, where he studied military science with him. Huang Yinong casts light on Han Lin's baptism by the Jesuit Giulio Aleni (1582-1649), and especially on Han Lin’s book, Duo shu 鐵書, which was published years later. In that volume Han Lin commented extensively and skillfully on the Shengluan liu yan 聖論六言 (Sacred instructions in six rubrics) of the first Ming emperor with proofs drawn from the Chinese Classics and from several Chinese works by the Jesuits Giulio Aleni, Giacomo Rho (1592-1638), Diego Pantoja (1571-1618) and Alfonse Vagnoni (1568-1640). Another significant book by Han Lin, dealing with the sensitive issues of military defense, was proscribed during the Qianlong period.

From his study of the biography of Han Lin, Huang Yinong discovered that Jiangzhou in Shanxi province was a key center in the development of Christianity as well as Chinese reactions against it. This serves as the eighth chapter, which not only briefly depicts the role of Han Lin in assisting the spread of Christian beliefs during the late Ming and early Qing periods, but also addresses the impact of the imperial court against the teaching of the Lord of Heaven (Tianzhu)