

Editors' Word

Essays of this issue are drawn mainly from the papers presented at the Conference on Matteo Ricci – Inspiration from an Iconic Missionary held by the Centre for Catholic Studies of The Chinese University of Hong Kong on May 11-12, 2023. In addition, we also include two other essays on the same theme and a book review.

The first article in this issue is “The Saintly Virtues of Matteo Ricci as Seen in the Letters of the Venerable” by Fr. Robert Ng, S.J. Regarding the contemporary East and West cultural exchange, Matteo Ricci made an irreplaceable contribution. It is commonly accepted in both Chinese and overseas academic circles. Fr. Ng pointed out in his article, however, that “Ricci is declared as a Venerable by the Catholic Church, not because of his cultural contribution but rather on his virtue as a model for the Catholic faithful. His virtue has been reflected from his whole life, from the accreditation by other people, and from his writing and letters.”

Rather than giving a general admiration, Fr. Ng carried out a thorough study on Ricci’s work and his 54 letters to his superiors in Europe, his family members and friends and restructured a 3-dimensional image of Ricci. In the last section of his paper, Fr. Ng followed the three different aspects of Jesuits’ spirituality, namely Obedience, Humbleness and Discernment of Spirit, and analyzed the deepness of Matteo’s virtue. Interestingly enough, when I repeated reading Fr. Ng’s paper, I also found that Fr. Ng himself is rich in these three spiritual aspects. Perhaps our readers might have similar feelings after reading it.

The paper co-written by Stephan Rothlin and Dennis McCann titled “The Ricci Paradigm of Dialogue and Catholic Social Teaching in and

for China” is an innovative research approach toward the typical Ricci mentality on religious dialogue. Obviously, the two scholars do not avoid the typical understanding of Ricci’s missionary approach, such as his actual dialogues appeal to the Confucian classics, to detach them from what he considered the metaphysical errors of Buddhism (揚儒抑佛) and neo-Confucianism. He sought to define the common ground shared by Confucian and Roman Catholic morality. (p.37) But from the development of Catholic Social Teachings, the two scholars built a new platform to enhance the dialogue between Buddhism and Ricci’s paradigm in the light of modernity.

The following one is the paper titled “A Preliminary Study of the Evaluations on Matteo Ricci’s Cultural Strategy” by Professor Ku Wei-ying. Ku is very humble and classifies his paper only as a preliminary study, but the paper, actually, can be treated as a full assessment, covering most of the positive and negative critics on Matteo Ricci’s contributions as well as weaknesses in cultural exchange. The author takes the cultural missionary characteristics of Ricci as the discussion framework, focusing especially on the “Silent Missiology” (啞式傳教法) to create a trans-centurial and multi-dimensional platform of Dialogue.

As Professor Ku mentioned, Matteo Ricci in the late Ming Dynasty could be counted as living in a multi-level cosmology, where Ricci had to change frequently his identity as a monastic member, as an Italian, as a Westerner in China, as a person-in-charge of the religious congregation in the locality, as a clergyman and as a scientist. His words and acts have different appearances in different cosmos. And there are very often different, or even contradictory, interpretations. Surely, this paper is very helpful for those who already have a fixed image of Ricci, no matter whether such an

image is positive or negative, to dig deeper into their understanding of Matteo Ricci.

The “Bible Translation and Cross-culture Evangelization—Enlightenment from Father Matteo Ricci’s Missionary Strategy” by Fr. Jing Baolu is a paper discussing the interaction between the language and culture of the preacher (the first culture) and those of the listener (the second culture). With the interpretation of the listener during the process of acceptance, Fr. Jing searched out different kinds of difficulties in biblical translation. Through the above analysis, the reader can understand the translation strategies applied by Matteo Ricci, such as working with Confucius learning (合儒) and supplementing Confucius learning (補儒) then eventually reaching the ultimate aim of surpassing Confucius learning (超儒) and consolidate the self-identity.

“The Chinese Rite Controversy: Discussion Starting from Matteo Ricci” by Fr. Thierry Meynard is an in-depth interpretation of this issue, which should be considered the most heart-breaking event in the history of Catholic evangelization in the East. Professor Meynard also cited many lately found material from the 17th century personal correspondence so that his elaboration became 3-dimensional.

The next paper is “A Perspective of Matteo Ricci’s Cultural Evangelization: An Integrated Vision of Vatican II, Pope Francis and Sima Qian” by Professor Edmund Kwok. Kwok matches his hermeneutic approach with the perspective of Sima Qian’s famous historiography framework on “studying the relationship between heaven and man, understanding the changes of the past and present, and forming one’s own thinking system” in his “Letter to Ren An.” From this, he analyzed systematically the historical meaning of the cultural evangelization done by Matteo Ricci. Through the paradigm of

dialogue established in the Second Vatican Council and the globalization concern enhanced by Pope Francis, Kwok also accredits the contribution of Ricci's cultural evangelization.

“‘Close a Contract, Pay Money and Stamp the Seal:’ An Analysis of Matteo Ricci's Principle and Characteristics in Registering a Deed” by Professor Kang Zhijie is a paper with a very interesting but long-neglected topic: the financial management and the taxation problem faced by missionaries in China. Just as Kang mentioned in the paper, following his approach towards inland China, Matteo alerted that he should find a reliable person to help him obtain the valid “Red Deed,” which can guarantee the reliability and the validity of the purchasing contract, so that the ownership of the related Church property is legal and secured.

“An Iconographic and Scriptural Study of the Christian Prints in the *Chengshi moyuan* (程氏墨苑)” by Chen Hu is a 17,000-word long article exploring the understanding and interpretation of the meaning of Christian artworks and the problems emerged during the re-printing process of such Western engraving works.

Chengshi Moyuan was compiled by Cheng Dayue (程大約), a prominent merchant leader in the Ink Cake manufacturing business. It is generally treasured as one of the top Collections of Engraving Printing in the Ming Dynasty. There are four re-engraved Biblical story plates with captions in both Chinese and Romanization Pinyin done by Matteo Ricci. Such re-engraving work is historically the first tier of Western religious artwork entering Chinese civil society.

Last but not least, Dr. Sun Xuyi pointed out in his article “The Deep Friendship between Matteo Ricci and Xu Guangqi” that their friendship can be credited as a great model in the contemporary history of evangelization

work. He highlighted the encounter between Ricci and Xu put the different fields of scientific study, rational thinking and Catholic faith into a brilliant match. They not only taught us with their wisdom but also witnessed the great love for the Truth in their lives.

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