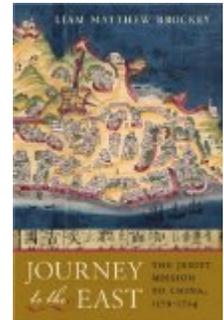


Liam Matthew Brockey. *Journey to the East: The Jesuit Mission to China, 1579-1724.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007. xiv + 496 pp. \$35.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-674-02448-9.



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The celebrated Chinese folktale *Xiyou ji* (*The Journey to the West*) (1590s) tells of the monk Xuanzang's travel to India to bring Buddhism from the West. Liam Matthew Brockey creates a strong analogy with this classic tale in his *Journey to the East*, which chronicles the Jesuit mission that brought Christianity to China in late Ming and early Qing dynastic times. What a story it is, detailing a century and a half of missionary efforts that carried the Jesuits from high hopes to the depths of frustration and despair. *Xiyou ji*, with the many trials of Xuanzang and his companions, allegorically represents the Buddhist path to enlightenment. Brockey carefully understates his book's role, but it, too, is a chronicle of trials and, less certainly, of enlightenment. His voluminous yet engaging account is neither heroic nor hagiographic in intent; nor is it an apologia or lament for failures. Despite minor flaws, this is a powerful book reflecting impressive, energetic, and doggedly persistent scholarship.

Brockey, assistant professor of history at Princeton University, displays formidable linguistic talents in translating newly found archival

documents as well as narratives and ecclesiastical texts from Portuguese, Latin, Spanish, Italian, French, and Chinese. He focuses on the Jesuits' adventurous journey because others have discussed in detail the religious dogma that they transmitted. Not allowing a retrospectively imposed heroic trajectory to determine what parts of the Jesuits' story were used, Brockey seeks an insider's perspective from missionaries' day-to-day writings and letters.

The book comprises a preface, an introduction, five chapters each of historical narrative and analysis, a conclusion, endnotes, and a sixteen-page index. A bibliographic note makes important recommendations for scholars using archives, especially in Lisbon and Rome, and the endnotes provide important cautions and definitions. The twenty text figures, including important maps, are neither numbered nor listed. The historical chapters span several generations of missionaries, from 1579 to 1724. Analytical chapters consider Jesuit practices imparted to the Chinese, development of the mission church, proselytizing strate-

gies, and institutional development within early modern Catholicism.

Journey to the East highlights the efforts of "Portuguese" Jesuits (from several countries but administratively tied to Portugal) as opposed to French Jesuits, who appear largely as antagonists. The narrative begins with the entry into China of Francis Xavier, one of Ignatius Loyola's founding group. Xavier died without reaching the Ming court, but Michele Ruggieri (the true Jesuit mission founder, in 1579), the celebrated Matteo Ricci, and others achieved this and more. By 1700, a small number of Jesuits, together with Chinese catechists, could claim two hundred thousand Christian converts. Yet two decades later they were expelled from China and Christianity was proscribed.

Christian missionaries rode the wave of Spanish and Portuguese empire building. In a colony, force of arms could coerce people to accept a new language and religion, but such was not the case with China, aside from the deeded trading enclave of Macau. Jesuits and others believed that Christian teaching was universally applicable and adaptable to disparate cultures. Some sought martyrdom, but for the China mission, this fate was rare and eclipsed by the 50 percent who died at sea before reaching the East.

The Society of Jesus had arisen in 1540 during the Catholic Reformation, which began in Italy and Iberia. Jesuits were entrepreneurial in the face of institutional changes at home and abroad. Intercultural and political challenges in China were daunting, but the ultimate demise of their mission was equally the result of changes in Europe, as the Counter-Reformation brought a paradoxical mix of devotional dynamism yet institutional repression. Jesuits were distinctive in receiving years of academic training before missionary work, in the tradition of Christian humanism. This lengthy training gave them a strong sense of group cohesion. Students learned grammar, rhetoric, philosophy, logic, mathematics, as-

tronomy, and theology, developing skills in oration and debate. Most missionaries had also served terms as teachers. They sought to become culturally sensitive communicators, using rhetorical and linguistic skills to win new converts.

Delivering their message to diverse peoples required adaptive planning. Thus were created the "Chinese Rites," which incorporated certain Chinese cultural elements within a Catholic frame. Such actions promoted a sense of innovation and independence from the European institution of Catholicism, and it was the latter's push toward papal primacy and against innovation that ended the mission. Acrimonious debates in Europe about the Chinese Rites overshadowed the issue of saving souls and eventually landed on the doorstep of a Chinese emperor already concerned about indigenous sectarian movements.

To succeed in China, the Jesuits built close linkages with the emperor's court and with elite literati in Peking. To ease integration they dressed in silk robes after the mandarin fashion and lived in well-appointed houses that contrasted sharply with their vows of poverty and egalitarian ideals. To facilitate communication they delved into Confucianism and argued that it was not a religion but a secular system of politics and ethics; hence, its practices could be recast within a Christian mold. Critics pounced on their tolerance of ancestor tablets within the Chinese Rites, despite Jesuit protestations that these were no longer for "worship of ancestors" but simply paid "gratitude" to forebears. Some scholars see the China Jesuits and their cultural accommodation as forerunners of "modern" or "tolerant" attitudes, but debate remains (p. 61). A cynic could seize on the fact that when Ricci died in 1610 and was allowed to be buried near Peking, other Jesuits appealed to their Confucian duty to care for an ancestor's tomb to justify their continued presence. Illustrations from Chinese Jesuit publications show a mix of standard Christian and Chinese motifs not pursued by Brockey. For example, a seventeenth-cen-

tury Madonna and Child image from Shaanxi province shows the Christ Child with a topknot, a class indicator marking the Ming scholar/official.

As Brockey recounts, the Jesuits found that rhetoric could win the day only with the literati. For "rustics" in the countryside, missionaries behaved as "wandering holy men," relying on gravitas, theatrics, and gifts of religious objects to win converts (p. 96). New converts were not burdened with large numbers of spiritual obligations, such as the Catholic feasts and fasts. An enterprising missionary claimed credit for a much-needed rainstorm that occurred during one of his masses. Some converts also attributed magical powers to their new devotional objects, and Jesuits allowed such beliefs to assist in spreading their message.

A fascinating aspect of the China mission was the Jesuits' use of science as a Trojan horse for their goal of religious conversion. Science gave them the power of prediction, particularly in astronomy. They identified gaps in Chinese knowledge and corrected the Chinese calendar, which played a central role in selection of auspicious dates for activities. Several Jesuits pursued careers as writers, translators of European scientific texts, cartographers, and scientific advisors; some assumed leadership roles in the Imperial Astronomical Bureau in Peking. Several collaborated with Chinese scholars to produce world atlases and treatises on astronomy and mechanics. Typically, Jesuits are praised for transmitting European science and technology to China, but Brockey concludes that they were not grandly trying to build a bridge between civilizations; rather, they had "ulterior religious motives" (p. 15). With the Manchu invasion and the slow collapse of the Ming state, Jesuits proclaimed loyalty to whoever was in power and quickly expanded their field in the absence of strong authority, then offered their services at the court of the new Manchu (Qing) emperor. Two even became Qing representatives at border negotiations with Russia.

When possible, Jesuits shrewdly appropriated existing religious loci for their own sanctuaries; old icons were smashed and new symbols emplaced. In the case of a failing Buddhist temple, this created "sadness" among its former devotees (p. 325). But small groups of converts became legion, and in time a religion of converts became a faith of families. Increasing numbers and geographical expansion stretched missionary abilities to the limit, for priests were few. Chinese lay catechists and trained coadjutors were delegated some of the needed roles, as priests traveled around carefully planned circuits. By 1700, there were Jesuit residences in North Zhili, Shanxi, Shaanxi, Henan, South Zhili/Jiangnan, Zhejiang, Jiangxi, Fujian, Shandong, and Huguang provinces, as well as Macau, the entire field tended by only thirty-six priests and six coadjutors. They organized an infrastructure of women's and men's confraternities devoted to piety, charity, penitence, and teaching of children. Prayer leaders and regular meetings reinforced discipline, drawing on the Chinese "national pastime" of associations (p. 368).

Yet the system remained a house of cards, poorly provisioned by a mother church increasingly alarmed by Jesuit accommodation of Chinese ritual and dress. Worse still, when Rome accepted that Chinese Christians could train as priests the Jesuits demurred, possibly because Chinese clergy, not being exotic, might cloud their cultivated public image as scholar-priests and weaken the potency of the message. The Jesuits displayed elitism if not racism in defending their moral superiority as scholars of Christianity. They saw China as a "vast and highly fertile vineyard of the Lord that needed tending by Europeans" (p. 177). Despite the chronic lack of manpower, they sought to exclude other Christian orders from China, lest the emperor realize that Jesuit practice was not synonymous with Christianity as a whole. Even French Jesuits were viewed with suspicion reflecting the competing imperial goals of the two groups' royal sponsors. Other missionary orders

ultimately undermined the Jesuit mission by appealing to European authorities. Nor did this competition escape the attention of the Yongzheng emperor, who saw threats in the orders' ambitions. Much as Jesuits had exhorted converts to burn pagan religious images, in 1723, the emperor consigned all Christian images to flames, and, in 1724, the Jesuits (save for a few serving the court or hiding in the countryside) were exiled to Macau.

Brockey's writing ranges from breezy narrative to tedious but necessary litanies of names and places. It is difficult to pinpoint his attitude toward the Jesuits, for chapter titles range from mundane ("Opening the Door") to tongue-in-cheek ("Confucian Canon Fodder"). Thus, one is not certain if there are double entendres in "The Business of Conversion" or in "Forging a Chinese Christian Identity." His decision to use "more recognizable forms of Chinese place-names" means the use of "Peking" and "Canton" (instead of Beijing and Guangzhou) alongside others in pinyin form, resulting in the anachronistic couplet of "Peking/Nanjing" (north capital/south capital) (p. xii).

Despite Brockey's superb scholarship, there is insensitivity in the simplistic casting of *Xiyou ji* as a "fairy tale" and abbreviation of the Japonica-Sinica archival collection as "Jap-Sin" (pp. 4, 428). Use of compound surnames is inconsistent (for example, "da Rocha," but only "Veiga" for da Veiga [pp. 251, 357]). The index is idiosyncratic: astronomy, despite its importance, is found only by searching under "science." Understandably, "Jesuit" is not in the index, but nor is "Society of Jesus" there. How does one find the discussions of the founding of the society and of institutional reactions to it?

Historical geographers will find much of interest in the organizational and geographical pattern descriptions in the text, revealing the gradual spread of missionary efforts from a few primary loci to much of early Qing China. Nevertheless,

key maps are unacceptably laid out, a fault of the publisher. In a two-page map of Maritime Asia, the focal Peking-Macau region is largely inaccessible in the centerfold. For an old drawing of Macau, the focal Jesuit church and college again fall in the centerfold: one must nearly break the binding to see them. A better color image is on the dustcover, but librarians may not realize how vital it is for this to be saved. The Jiangnan map is reduced beyond visibility, its symbols barely legible without magnification.

A few questions remain. What part did the taking of confessions play in Jesuit intelligence gathering, and did this facilitate their activities? And Brockey himself asks: as the missionary field expanded, how did the Jesuit rank and file really communicate with people with dialects different from *guanhua* (spoken Mandarin)? Romanized phrasebooks providing sample dialogues, prayers, and recitations did facilitate verbal communication in later years, when the manpower shortage meant that missionaries went into the field with only rudimentary *guanhua* and few if any Chinese characters. Brockey laments the fact that Chinese characters were not phonetic, providing no inkling of the sounds in different dialects. But he incompletely addresses the counterpoint: Chinese characters are pictograms that can be read in any language (even Latin) once their meanings are known. Communication to new groups can be made through written messages, even (as I found in my Chinese travels) by finger-writing signs on the palm of the hand. Use of characters also facilitates metaphor by combining signs to evoke another concept, so a limited lexicon could have had considerable value.

Brockey's research sheds new light on the "Portuguese" Jesuits who emerge as flesh-and-blood personalities aside from their corporate identity. The newly introduced archival material ensures the book's lasting value. He provides valuable insights as to the linkages between missionary efforts, European imperial expansion, and

traders. The Chinese are nevertheless reduced to secondary players, a fact that he acknowledges in noting that Chinese sources have been well covered by other authors. Thus an individual such as Xu Guangqi appears on cue where needed as a supporter, helper, and coauthor, well short of his recognition by Western scientists as a towering polymath and innovator.[1] Xu has been compared favorably to Leonardo da Vinci and Francis Bacon, but his portrayal here seems almost to echo the Jesuit view of Chinese inferiority. Considering Xu's conversion to Christianity (baptism 1603) and his consistent adherence to Confucian philosophy, he may have been a more central player with Ricci in the innovation of the Chinese Rites than is evident here.

Scholars of East Asian and religious studies, both historical and geographical, will find this book indispensable and will refer to it often. Its discussion of global patterns in Jesuit mission organization will also attract scholars interested in other regions. Brockey deserves congratulations for bringing this ambitious study to generous fruition.

Note

[1]. Richard Stone, "Scientists Fete China's Supreme Polymath," *Science* 318 (2007): 733.

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