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The figure of Matteo Ricci SJ is well known and his contribution to bridge-building between Europe and China during the Renaissance has been the subject of much scholarly attention, but the historical evolution of the process of cultural accommodation promoted by the Jesuit Father through his writings is relatively little known.

In this magisterial work by Matthieu Bernhardt, an expert on Renaissance journey literature and interculturality, a new layer is added to our knowledge of the Jesuit missions to East Asia in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth centuries. In fact, this book provides a new interpretative key to understand the cultural accommodation promoted by Matteo Ricci and his brothers at the beginning of the Jesuit mission in China. *La Chine en partage* presents to the reader an account of Ricci’s missionary action in association with a careful reading of the textual accommodation that Matteo Ricci and the earlier Jesuits brothers devised to present China in a way acceptable to European readers.

Bernhardt explains how Ricci’s writing worked simultaneously as agent and object of this textual accommodation. As agent, Ricci’s vast corpus of writings offers an unusual representation of the Chinese nation and the intercultural encounter between Europe and China. As object, Ricci’s unpublished texts were used by his successors to mollify European impatience at the slowness of Chinese conversions and to feed new ethnographic narratives.

Bernhardt asserts that interpretations of the Jesuit textual accommodation produced to date have been limited in their achievements for a number of reasons. Whilst accepting that they may be not erroneous, he claims that even the best of them are incomplete. Bernhardt suggests that this incompleteness may largely derive from the fact that the original manuscripts compiled by Ricci, known as the *Mémoires*, were discovered at his death but subsequently disappeared for three centuries, to be republished in their integral form and attributed to his authentic authorship only in 1909, thanks to the editorial work of Pietro Tacchi Venturi SJ. Consequently, authors writing between Ricci’s death and the 1911 publication by Tacchi Venturi had no access to most of his work.

Bernhardt examines the Chinese scripts written by Ricci presenting them in five chapters corresponding to five themes. The first chapter focuses on the Renaissance representation of China. Bernhardt links the compilation of the *Mémoires*, which reached their
final draft in the biennium 1608–09, shortly before Ricci’s death in 1610, with Mendoza’s *Historia*, which had been the dominant European narrative regarding China before Ricci’s work. The chapter argues that Ricci intentionally wrote in a way which was congruent with the established contextual narratives of earlier scripts, most notably, Mendoza’s. Rather than challenging earlier narratives, Ricci absorbed elements of their content into his work, adapting them to his own narrative, so that his account would be seen as the most comprehensive account of China, making it the defining authority on the subject (92). It is this appropriation and adaptation which constitutes the basis for the process of textual accommodation.

This accommodative method was first elaborated by Alessandro Valignano SJ before being implemented by Ricci and was partially derived from ethnographic knowledge of China offered by contemporary Iberian literature. To existing geographical and historical information and ethnographic observations of the country and people of China, Ricci added significant new themes and knowledge. For example, in his focus on the moral conduct inspired by Confucian doctrine, he introduced the figure of Confucius to Europe even as he Latinized his name. The ultimate goal of Ricci’s process of textual accommodation was to match informative function to strategic vision, moving the late Renaissance European vision of China in directions which would promote a new intercultural dialogue. Ricci’s project was a success that outlived him by centuries, influencing the visions of Leibniz and other philosophers of the Enlightenment.

The second chapter explores the Jesuits’ studies in China and explains that Ricci’s project was in accordance with the missionary strategy envisioned by Saint Francis Xavier SJ, and Ricci was also able to link his work to the famous letter by Melchior Nunhes Barreto SJ (1555), which gave the Jesuits their first description of the Chinese interior and pointed out the dangers for the early mission. Essentially, Ricci set out to demonstrate the compatibility between the Chinese state and Christianity by showing that Chinese laws were convergent with Christian morals, and that Christianity would benefit the Chinese political system without transforming it (158–59). The chapter further explains how Ricci envisioned future missionaries benefitting from adapting to the local political and cultural demands of the Chinese. Bernhardt explains how a close reading of the scripts compiled by Alessandro Valignano, Michele Ruggieri SJ, Matteo Ricci, Melchior Nunhes Barreto SJ and Galeote Pereira show that the Jesuits, since their arrival in China, had been well aware that good relations with
the mandarins were vital for the success of the Jesuit mission. At the same time, he also shows that the Jesuits proceeded largely by trial and error and the practices they adopted were not always a matter of choice but sometimes the consequence of restrictions imposed by the mandarins. For example, Bernhardt provides clear evidence that the Jesuits did not choose to dress as Buddhist bonzes. Rather, this form of dress was a condition imposed by the mandarins. Had the Jesuit missionaries not conformed to this request, they would have been denied permission to enter and reside in China.

The third chapter examines ethnographic accommodation and the ways that the Jesuits adapted their evangelical method to the circumstances. Ricci endorsed a double adaptation based on the acceptance of reciprocal influences between the Other and the Self to facilitate the advent of a Sinicized Christianity (185), based on the idea that the Other can claim the Truth without being assimilated to the Self. From the outset, Ricci sought a form of interaction between Self and Other that respected difference and did not include any form of cultural assimilation. This attitude was shockingly provocative to his European readers, holding up a mirror to the ethnocentric perceptions of cultural superiority with which they approached dialogue with China.

Ricci’s method was also tightly focused on essential issues, avoiding questions which he regarded as irrelevant. For instance, in his writing on Buddhism and Taoism, Ricci presented only what was needed to refute them as incompatible with Christian doctrine. In contrast, he scrutinized Confucianism in great detail and appropriated any aspects he considered compatible with a Chinese form of Christianity. In so doing, he reoriented the missionary purpose from assimilation of the Other to cultural accommodation.

Bernhardt shows how Ricci’s tactics within the Ming court amounted to a form of cultural hybridity. Buddhism had a strong influence on court politics, and so the Jesuits allied with the literati who aspired to implement changes that would have side-lined the Buddhist influence and led to the reinstatement of Confucianism, which, as noted above, the Jesuits saw as fundamentally compatible with Christianity. It was in this context that Ricci made some selective concessions, such as toleration of ancestral rituals, which were nevertheless limited to practices perceived as external signs, rather than internal beliefs. At the same time, Ricci presented these practices to the European readers of his Mémoires as entirely compliant with Christian ethics. Bernhardt remarks that Matteo Ricci favoured
a progressive cultural hybridity over the ethnocentric assimilation of the Catholic hierarchy. It is for this reason that Ricci can be considered to be the first Western sinologist.

Chapter 4 examines Ricci’s triumph through a historiographical study rooted in a philological reading of the Mémoires. Bernhardt notes that as the Rites Controversy expanded, Jesuit writings assumed an apologetic function. In fact, comparing the “official” texts to “unofficial” correspondence, Bernhardt underlines how Ricci adapted his behaviour and decision-making in line with Chinese reactions. In order to maintain control of this process, Ricci decided that his Mémoires had to be the only reference for the apostolic mission to China and he began to edge Michele Ruggieri, his long term missionary partner and intellectual rival, out of the mission.

Although Michele Ruggieri had been the first Jesuit missionary to be granted a residence permit in China, his method was incompatible with that of Ricci. Ricci and Alessandro Valignano joined forces to marginalize Ruggieri, who finally left China and never returned. Bernhardt asserts that the initial success of the Jesuit missions can be attributed to Ruggieri’s catechism, the first in Chinese, and Ricci’s map of the world which placed China at the centre. Bernhardt further argues that Ruggieri’s departure meant that to validate his evangelical method, Ricci had to fuse historical truth with self-aggrandisement. Consequently, Ricci’s glorification of the missionaries and justification of the intellectual apostolate resulted in all writings compiled by Michele Ruggieri, Luis de Guzmán SJ, Pierre Du Jarric SJ, and Fernão Gerreiro SJ, which might have challenged Ricci’s interpretation, being excluded from the textual narrative concerning Jesuit China.

In Chapter 5, Bernhardt examines Ricci’s legacy in the centuries following his death, scrutinising Nicolas Trigault SJ’s (1615) adaptation of Ricci’s journal as well as other early publications and the text discovered and edited by Tacchi Venturi in 1909–11. Bernhardt’s findings show that the Jesuit hierarchy had very little control over the circulation of the manuscripts. Two attempts to manipulate Ricci’s Mémoires with opposed objectives were made in the 1580s. The first, in the Philippines, used Ricci’s writings in an attempt to persuade Philip II of Spain to undertake the conquest of China to gain access to its inexhaustible material wealth. The second, emanating from Mexico, drew on Ricci to argue against this warmongering enterprise.

In 1653, the historian of the Society of Jesus, Daniello Bartoli SJ, used Ricci’s Mémoires to compile a history of the Chinese mission published in Italian with the title La Cina, an oeuvre closer to Ricci’s vision of
Confucianism than that presented by Trigault. Yet, Bernhardt concludes this thorough research by revealing how Trigault’s *De Christiana Expeditione* remained the official account of the Jesuit mission to China until Tacchi Venturi’s 1909 discovery. Ricci entrusted his *Mémoires* to Nicolò Longobardo, his chosen successor, who altered them, whilst the copyists in Macao also made some changes. When Trigault received the text in 1613, he cut out some paragraphs, added information favourable to himself and repurposed Ricci’s ideas to reduce differences between Ricci’s understanding that China was ripe for evangelization (because its political system accorded with natural law) and more traditional views that it was ripe for evangelization (because it had previously been visited by St. Thomas). Trigault thus sought to connect to a broad European readership. His intuition was correct, as the book became a success, which in turn contributed to the attainment of Longobardo’s demand for the suppression of Confucian rites. Over the longue durée – even if the text did not reflect strictly Ricci’s vision, it was faithful to Ricci’s method of seeking convergence between different cultural traditions. This attitude certainly contributed to the survival of the Jesuit mission in China.

This authoritative work is based on a meticulous textual and philological analysis of different manuscripts and editions of Ricci’s work in many languages, including Latin, Italian, French, Spanish and Portuguese. For this work, the author should be commended. As a result of this painstaking work, the author has undoubtedly achieved his central objective of revealing the historical evolution of the cultural accommodation and cross-cultural hybridity which characterised Ricci’s evangelical method. This study is therefore an important addition to the scholarship on Matteo Ricci and on cultural hybridity in China which will be essential reading for academics in the field.

Queen’s University Belfast

Aglaia De Angeli


Il libro è frutto di una lunga storia che coinvolge Gianpaolo Romanato, docente di Storia contemporanea e di Storia della Chiesa moderna e contemporanea all’Università di Padova, con l’America Latina e specialmente con il patrimonio monumentale e document-