

Florence C. Hsia, *Sojourners in a Strange Land: Jesuits and Their Scientific Missions in Late Imperial China*, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2009. xv, 273 pp., Figures, Tables, Bibliogr., Index.

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The author of the book under review is assistant professor of the history of science at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (USA). As she says: "This study has its roots in a remarkable senior seminar on the comparative history of science in Europe and China that was directed by Willard J. Peterson and Michael S. Mahoney [died in 2008], who together first led me to think about early modern Jesuits and their peregrinations through landscapes both sacred and profane" (p. xiii).

Thus, her book depicts many Jesuits who lived in China, and used their European "scientific method" for evangelization (mission work) there from the end of the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries. These Jesuit scientists are presented in the book under review from two basic perspectives.

In the first place, the author tries to present the China Jesuits from their own perspective. This perspective concerns the Jesuit understanding and presentation of their own scientific endeavors *ad intra*, i.e., in China, and *ad extra*, i.e., for their European supporters and future Jesuit successors in the mission field. Although the author does not want to "directly address the authenticity of the Jesuits' various personations, that is, the relationship between presumed true inner selves and the external masks that individuals choose or are pressured into playing by others" (p. 7), and is aware of various dangers of the hermeneutics of suspicion (*ibid.*), we still cannot get rid of a feeling that in her depictions there is more hermeneutics of suspicion at work than that of faith (e.g., cf. pp. 24ff., 29, 36 etc.). Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005) distinguished between two forms of hermeneutics: a hermeneutics of faith, which aims to restore meaning to a text, and a hermeneutics of suspicion, which attempts to decode meanings that may have been disguised in the text and go beyond it. Thus, from the viewpoint of the hermeneutics of suspicion, one problematizes the historical actors' (participants') text(s), and also discovers meanings which go beyond the

given text(s). It would be ideal to keep a balance between these two hermeneutic approaches.

The second perspective of the author, which is for her even more important in her book, is the study of "... the lifecycles of types of persons. This is biography in a collective mode. ... [This is] ... an alternative way of exploring the oscillation between socially recognized character types and their enactment by historical actors. Standing at the crossroads of the collective and the individual, personae are expressions of shared values as well as pathways that persons choose to follow. Thus they provide an appropriate unit of analysis for sketching the genealogy of the China Jesuit as a man of science ..." (p. 7). Thus, her own approach is supposed to be a kind of synthesis of prosopographical research (aiming at learning about patterns of relationships and activities through the study of collective biography, which is first done by collecting and analyzing statistically relevant quantities of biographical data about a well-defined group of individuals), and of a sort of historical study of individual life. With the help of these two basic perspectives, the author gives an account of her understanding of a genealogy of Jesuit conceptions of scientific life within the mission field in seventeenth- and eighteenth- century China.

There are altogether eight chapters: "1. What Was That Masked Man?"; "2. Writing Missions"; "3. Telling Missionary Lives"; "4. Making Jesuit Science Travel"; "5. Reading Jesuit Voyages"; "6. Jesuit Academicians"; "7. Observational Fortunes" and "8. Familiar Letters and Familiar Faces". Chapter 1 brings us some general information and methodological reflections, which we have already mentioned above. Chapters 2 and 3 are examinations of "... the emergence of mission *historiae* from the rich substratum of Jesuit correspondence that linked members of the Society, scattered as they were across the face of the early modern globe" (p. 11). These historical mission accounts begin with Matteo Ricci's *De Christiana expeditione apud Sinas suscepta ab Societate Jesu* (1615; edited by Nicolas Trigault, being the first history of the Jesuit mission in China with the aid of a life story of Matteo Ricci), then continued by Johann Adam Schall von Bell (the first Jesuit to take on official duties in the imperial Astronomical Bureau), and Ferdinand Verbiest (his successor in this post). According to the author, all these mission histories consolidated the image of the Jesuits in China as the missionary mathematicians. Chapters 4 and 5 focus on the entry into the China mission field of a new Jesuit man of science: "the apologetic voyager" (pp. 12, 78f.). With the great support of Louis XIV of France, French Jesuits first entered the China mission in greater number in 1688, increasing rapidly towards the close of the seventeenth century. In that way, they simultaneously challenged Portugal's well-established right of ecclesiastical patronage over the Asian missions. Thus, the China Jesuit as the *persona* of the missionary mathematician changed to a knowledge-

able man sent by the Parisian *Académie des sciences* to “make observations in foreign lands” (Chapter 4), as appeared in the travelogue *Voyage de Siam des pères Jesuites, envoyés par le roy, aux Indes & à la Chine: avec leurs observations astronomiques, & leurs remarques de physique, de géographie, d'hydrographie, & d'histoire* (Amsterdam: Chez P. Mortier, 1687; English 1688 edition: *A Relation of the Voyage to Siam: Performed by Six Jesuits Sent by the French King, to the Indies and China in the Year 1685*) by the Jesuit Guy Tachard (1651-1712); F. Hsia also shows (Chapter 5) the ways in which readers' expectations caused destruction to the image of the Jesuit “(apologetic) voyager” as depicted in *Voyage de Siam* and other travel accounts.

Chapters 6 and 7 investigate a kind of academic collection (such as the *Observations physiques et mathématiques... envoyées ...à l'Académie royale des sciences à Paris, par les peres jésuites*, in 1688 and 1692; ed. Thomas Gouye) that served as a mode of publication for the missionary man of science. Thus, the author identifies altogether three models of the Jesuit as the “missionary man of science” with reference to the three basic genres of Jesuit writing: mission history, travelogue, and academic collection. In Chapter 8, F. Hsia deliberates about the fate of the various Jesuit *personae* (or personations) within the pages of the familiar letters during the years of the Jesuit China mission. We have to be aware that in recent years or decades, there has been a growing interest, also within sinology as such, in the historiography of the China mission. Many works have been written on this subject, so it comes as no surprise that the bibliography of F. Hsia's book amounts to 42 pages. Let me mention only a few of these works: a still Eurocentric book by the Jesuit George Dunne: *Generation of Giants: The Story of the Jesuits in China in the Last Decades of the Ming Dynasty* (1962), then the work by Jacques Gernet from a Sino-centric perspective: *China and the Christian Impact. A Conflict of Cultures* (transl. Janet Lloyd, 1985; French original 1982); afterwards we could read David E. Mungello' *The Great Encounter of China and the West, 1500-1800* (1999) and Agustín Udías' *Searching the Heavens and the Earth: The History of Jesuit Observatories* (2003) and many, many other excellent works.

The book of F. Hsia fits well in this collection of valuable books on the Jesuit mission in China. It is an erudite book, but it is a pity that it has endnotes, not footnotes, so the reader has to skip to and fro if she or he wants to read the knowledgeable and scholarly notes. It is also a pity that this rich account of the Jesuit missionaries to China and their “scientific method” is not presented in detail in the table of contents, giving only the main titles and not the subtitles within each chapter. Although the book is provided with an index, however, such an enrichment of contents could make this work even more of a handbook for the history of Jesuit conceptions of scientific life within their mission work in China from the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries.