

Matteo Ricci and the Catholic Mission to China

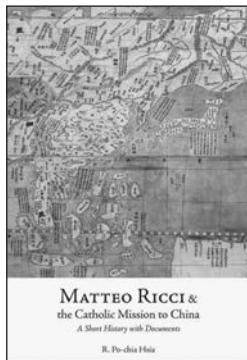
A Short History with Documents

By R. PO-CHIA HSIA

INDIANAPOLIS: HACKETT PUBLISHING COMPANY, 2016

176 PAGES, ISBN: 978-1624664328, PAPERBACK

Reviewed by Michael Laver



Professor R. Po-chia Hsia positions this new documentary history within a fairly well-received corpus of scholarly literature on Matteo Ricci: Jonathan Spence's *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci*, Mary Laven's *Mission to China: Matteo Ricci and the Jesuit Encounter with the East*, Liam Brockey's *Journey to the East: The Jesuit Mission to China*, and the author's own *A Jesuit in the Forbidden City*. The distinctive feature of this new book is not only that it is a short historical sketch with sources in translation, but that it also

seeks to place the people and events in the multiple historical contexts of the Catholic Counter-Reformation, Portuguese Asia, and late Ming dynasty China. To that end, Hsia divides his study into four distinct parts: Portuguese Asia, Catholic Renewal, Ming China, and the person of Matteo

Ricci. Hsia claims that much of the available English-language material on Ricci is "flawed and one-sided" (viii), noting that in order to fully grasp the subject, one must be able to navigate the Italian, Portuguese, and Chinese sources. In particular, most of the major biographies of Ricci seem to be written from the perspective of the West, often by historians of early modern Europe. Spence's book is an exception to this, although it is not, strictly speaking, a biography of Ricci, but rather a study of the memory techniques that Ricci used to be able to store vast quantities of information in his memory. In contrast, Hsia delves into both the Western and the Chinese sources to present a balanced picture of Ricci in particular and the early modern environment in which he worked in general.

Roughly the first third of this book is devoted to a brief history of Ricci, Ming China, Portuguese Asia, and the Jesuit order. Hsia does a good job of portraying Ricci's work in China against the backdrop of late Ming society. For example, rather than treating Ricci's Jesuit brand of Christianity in a vacuum, he outlines the general religious revival in the late Ming period and treats Catholicism as one stand of intellectual thought, alongside Daoism, Confucianism (both that of Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming), and Buddhism. This is important because this era of religious revival saw the Chinese literati quite receptive to intellectual debate. It is also important because it mattered quite a bit how the Jesuits portrayed themselves to the Chinese. At first, Ricci was careful to portray the Jesuit priests as something akin to Buddhist monks, although later he came to realize that Confucian scholar-gentlemen were much more esteemed in intellectual circles. Therefore, Ricci advocated dressing and acting like Confucian scholars so as to gain a hearing with Chinese officialdom.

Hsia depicts the decision to adopt the dress of a Confucian scholar-gentleman as a turning point in Ricci's activities in China. What goes unsaid, however much implied in the book, is that such a transformation was probably in keeping with Ricci's own temperament and disposition. That is to say that even though Ricci was a member of the Society of Jesus, he was by no means a recluse and seems to have enjoyed the company of other intelligent, inquisitive men. Furthermore, Ricci clearly valued his erudition and scholarship, and must certainly have relished the exchange of ideas that life amongst the Chinese literati afforded him. Perhaps this is one reason why Ricci found the Buddhist institution in China so distasteful when compared to Confucianism. At any rate, Ricci consciously adopted the "hair and beard" of a scholar and began to dress in the lavish clothing associated with such a rank, with the blessing of Father Valignano. Ricci was perceptive enough about Chinese intellectual trends to realize that Christianity could grow alongside Confucianism and made the apt analogy of the early Christian church and classical Greek philosophy.

Hsia concludes the brief history section with several successes that Ricci enjoyed in China with his newfound status as a literati. He details several key conversions and notes that his modest successes in China were greeted with outsized enthusiasm in Europe because the previously successful missionary endeavors in Japan were suddenly meeting with severe reverses that would see the religion essentially eradicated in Japan by the midpoint of the seventeenth century. Despite Ricci's success, he continued to insist that the church would have much more success if it would ordain Chinese people as priests. Ricci wrote to several people on this account, but to no avail, as the Society of Jesus continued to admit only Europeans to the priesthood, relegating Chinese to subservient status. Not until the early twentieth century did the Catholic Church finally begin ordaining native Chinese. This fact, combined with the "rites controversy" of the eighteenth century, ensured that the Catholic Church in China would never make serious inroads into the literati class, let alone the populous as a whole.

Key Issues in Asian Studies

Revised and expanded second edition
Gender, Sexuality, and Body Politics in Modern Asia
Michael Peletz

"Peletz's book addresses topics of the highest significance for multiple disciplines, effectively linking gender issues and gendered identities to many other matters of current and enduring import across Asia -- including public health, violence, industrialization, and media. Peletz has made an extraordinary effort to do justice to multiple complexities while delivering a wonderfully succinct and lucid text."

Ann Grodzins
Syracuse University

ISBN 978-0-924304-81-1. Pb: 142 pages.
List Price: \$12 (AAS Member Price: \$10)

Association for Asian Studies, Inc.
www.asian-studies.org

The second part of the book is a series of thirty primary documents, ranging from letters describing the journey from Europe to Asia to Ricci's letters from China to excerpts from Ricci's voluminous literary output to Chinese reactions to Ricci's activities in China. In short, the primary texts follow roughly the same fourfold topical division as the brief history. An interesting inclusion is document 24: Ricci's famous world map set against a Ming dynasty map from the same period. This is an illustration of how maps, paintings, or other visual media can be just as much primary texts as literary texts and can be "read" just as much as an excerpt from a learned discourse. Particularly valuable in the documentary section is the inclusion of Chinese descriptions of Matteo Ricci. Document 13, for example, is an excerpt of a biography of Ricci by the Chinese official Liu Chengfan. Liu describes Ricci as a Buddhist and includes many of the main objections to Westerners then current at the Ming court, namely that Westerners were pirates in the South China Sea and that Western missionaries posed a security threat, especially if they were allowed to reside outside Macao in the interior of China.

The documents are well-chosen for their diversity of vantage points: both Westerners and Chinese voices are represented, descriptions of the Chinese are included alongside Chinese descriptions of Ricci, and a good mix of personal letters and official literary output is included. In the classroom, it would be difficult to use Hsia's book as a stand-alone resource, but combined with a more comprehensive, narrative work on world history or East-West interaction, it could serve as a valuable resource for both high school students and university students. Perhaps the most useful strategy for using this book as a teaching resource would be to hold up behavioral/theological norms at the time and contrast them with what most people today would consider a more enlightened stance on these norms. For example, Ricci rails against not allowing natives to become fully functioning priests. Hsia provides no commentary on why the Catholic Church at the time did not allow this; however, by including the rationale, students will be in a better position to deduce the absurdity of such theological exclusivism. This might then lead into a fruitful discussion of how our own modern-day preconceptions might color our thinking as twenty-first-century critical thinkers.

Similarly, using Ricci's maps in an uncritical way as paradigms of scientific superiority, as opposed to Chinese maps of the period, can lead to the danger of students accepting cultural assumptions uncritically. For example, if we simply present two maps, one a product of Western enlightenment and another a product of medieval China, and then contrast them, of course most Western students will immediately accept that the Western map is the most "accurate." However, reading maps involves much more than simply a sense of accuracy. All maps are inherently biased and inaccurate, so a discussion of how maps are biased would be much more fruitful than a simple side-by-side comparison for accuracy, and yet the reader of this volume is not led toward such a discussion.

These are minor quibbles, however. They should in no way take away from Hsia's valuable contribution to the field. Paired with a suitable companion volume, this book can lead to many fruitful and critical discussions about the nature of East-West encounters in the early modern period. This alone makes Hsia's book a valuable addition to the field of early modern history. ■

MICHAEL LAVER is Assistant Professor of History at the Rochester Institute of Technology, where he teaches East Asian history, as well as classes on European interaction with Asia. His research focuses primarily on the Dutch East India Company and, more broadly, early modern Japan. His most recent work is titled *The Sakoku Edicts and the Politics of Tokugawa Legitimacy* (Cambria Press, 2011).

China's Twentieth Century

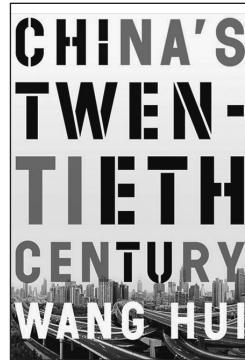
Revolution, Retreat, and the Road to Equality

BY WANG HUI

NEW YORK: VERSO BOOKS, 2016

368 PAGES, ISBN: 978-1781689066, PAPERBACK

Reviewed by Zach Smith



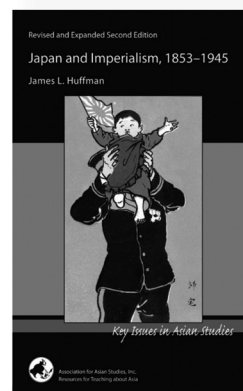
What positive lessons can China take from its tumultuous twentieth century? Given the tragedies of the Mao era and the relentless pace of ongoing economic and social change in China, it may be tempting to simply ignore China's revolutionary period, as the 2008 Olympic opening ceremonies did in its retelling of Chinese history for a global audience. Yet in his new book, *China's Twentieth Century*, leading literary critic and intellectual historian Wang Hui argues that the twentieth century is not only essential for explaining China's present, but may even provide solutions for its future. As a member of China's "New Left," Wang's intervention into both Chinese- and English-language histories of China is both politically charged and theoretically rich, exploring the possibilities for equality and justice that were created and then suppressed during this period in China's recent past.

As a member of China's "New Left," Wang's intervention into both Chinese- and English-language histories of China is both politically charged and theoretically rich, exploring the possibilities for equality and justice that were created and then suppressed during this period in China's recent past.

Key Issues in Asian Studies

Revised and expanded second edition
**Japan and Imperialism,
1853-1945**

James L. Huffman



"This concise and readable introduction to a complex subject—the rise and fall of Japan as an imperialist power—will be a splendid addition to the reading list of any course on modern Japanese history. Teachers will appreciate Huffman's ability to raise key issues of analysis and interpretation, and students will appreciate his ability to discuss them with clear and lively prose."

Peter Duus
Stanford University

ISBN 978-0-924304-82-8. Pb: 108 pages.
List Price: \$12 (AAS Member Price: \$10)

Association for Asian Studies, Inc.
www.asian-studies.org