

Book Reviews



Gang Song

Giulio Aleni, Kouduo richao, and Christian-Confucian Dialogism in Late Ming Fujian, Sankt Augustin: Monumenta Serica Institute, 2019, Pp xi + 418. Hb £140.

Among the works related to the Christian-Confucian encounter in Late Ming dynasty, the *Kouduo richao* is unique, since it records the conversations that the Italian Jesuit missionary Giulio Aleni (1582–1649) had with some seventy Chinese converts in the period of ten years, from 1630 to 1640. Those conversations have an historical value since they help us understanding the roles of the Chinese converts, mostly middle-level *literati*, in shaping Christianity in Late Ming period. In 2007, Erik Zürcher (1928–2008) published with Monumenta Serica a full annotated translation in English. Gianni Criveller (*Preaching Christ in Late Ming China* [Taipei Ricci Institute, 1997]) and Pan Feng-chuan (*Xilai Kongzi Ai Rulue* [Aleni the Confucius from the West, Taipei Olive Foundation, 2002]) contributed also important analysis of its content and historical context. Professor Song, from Hong Kong University, proposes here a monograph, which is largely based on his doctoral dissertation at University of Southern California: *Learning from the Other: Giulio Aleni, Kouduo richao, and the Late Ming Dialogic Hybridization* (2006), with Dominic Cheung as advisor. The five chapters of the present monograph follow closely the structure of his doctoral thesis, with a similar content.

In the introduction, the author discusses past approaches that have stressed the role of dialogue and interaction in the encounter of Christianity with China in Late Ming period, but those approaches tend to be framed with questions like, how much the transmission or reception was successful. Instead, the author proposes cultural dialogism as a new approach for reconceptualizing the Late Ming encounter. He argues that it is not enough to consider dialogue in general, but it is crucial to show how the concrete forms and patterns of dialogue between Aleni and the Chinese created new discourses with a high level of hybridization.

In the first chapter, the author discusses the theoretical framework of dialogism, drawing from the analysis of the self-other relationship. Also, he shows that the Christian dialogic texts of Late Ming have to be understood within the Chinese and Western traditions of dialogue as a literary form. The two independent traditions of China and the West came into contact in Late Ming, producing new dialogues like works written by the Jesuits: apologetic dialogues between a master and a disciple in Michele Ruggieri's (1543–1607) *Tianzhu shilu*, and in Matteo Ricci's (1552–1610) *Tianzhu shiyi* and *Jiren shipian*, as well as catechetical dialogues between a priest and a catechumen in João da Rocha's (1565–1623) *Tianzhu shengjiao qimeng*. Those dialogues became the basis for producing new dialogues, between newly converted Chinese and other Chinese people, like the ones written by Yang Tingyun (1562–1627) and Zhu Yupu (*fl.* 1623) in which new argumentations are creatively fashioned to win over the interlocutor. The author shows that dialogue “has the natural tendency to integrate diverse voices into a formal unity” and that it “reveals its essential characteristics of finitude, creativity and openness” (74–75).

The second chapter narrates Aleni's life and the mission in Fujian, especially during the ten-year period in which the conversations reported in the *Kouduo richao* were held. The author challenges the views of scholars who had argued that Aleni shifted from an intellectual approach to a pastoral approach, showing that this should not be understood as a strategy of substituting the former for the latter, but more as combining intellectual and spiritual problems. The author shows also the ambiguous attitudes of Aleni towards popular gods like Guan Yu: he rejects them as fake deities, and yet suggests that their worship may be integrated “in the Catholic system of belief as agents of the Lord of Heaven” (102). Next are presented Li Jiubiao (?–1646?) and Zhang Geng (*c.*1570–1646/47) as two important disciples of Aleni.

In the three following chapters, the author shows how those different voices dialogue in the domains of science (chapter 3), morality and cultivation of the self (chapter 4), and material culture (chapter 5). Among a total of 336 conversations, only thirty-six focus on science, yet this practical knowledge on heaven and earth constituted a common ground for mutual interaction, and the author shows with a few examples how the Western and Chinese scientific knowledge was concretely shared, and how the two different views of the universe were dynamically negotiated to form a new knowledge. In the second realm of spirituality and moral cultivation, God, angels, Mary, human soul, human nature, progressively found their Chinese expressions through a creative dialogue with local culture, evolving into a Christian-Confucian synthesis which openly rejected Buddhism and Daoism. The third realm under

discussion is the Christian material culture as it is reflected in the *Kouduo richao* and some other works by Aleni, showing that religious objects like crosses, images, musical instruments, as well as rituals were progressively embedded into the Chinese social fabric.

We can certainly give credit to the author for his vast and deep knowledge of the Christian literature in late Ming. He does not restrict his analysis to the conversations which took place in Fujian in 1630–40, but he replaces each theme and question within a historical dynamic, showing how they were addressed starting from Ruggieri, Ricci and their Chinese interlocutors, and taking into consideration different trials, oppositions, and objections which happened in the previous fifty years. All questions are not all resolved (the question of the rituals to the ancestor was still pending), but the *Kouduo richao* gives an image of a Chinese Christianity which has already grown in a quite mature form, with its own specific identity in Chinese culture and society.

As we have said this monography is based on a doctoral dissertation defended in 2006. The following year, Zürcher published his monumental study, and he mentioned in the preface having read in August 2006 the doctoral dissertation of Song, but “unfortunately at this late stage it was no more possible to do justice to Dr. Gang Song’s interesting and thought-provoking study in the present work” (8). In this present monography by Song, the debt towards Zürcher is obvious since the author cites constantly the *Kouduo richao* using Zürcher’s translations, and not his own translations inserted in the doctoral dissertation. Many analyses of the author recoup the ones of Zürcher, especially concerning sciences, morality and cultivation of the self, but material culture is not discussed specifically by Zürcher.

The author attempts to take distance from Zürcher who “claims that Aleni’s religious instruction of the Fujian converts was carried out by means of an ‘authentic,’ purist, and ‘much less hybridized, or Confucianized pattern’” (256). This criticism, already present in the doctoral dissertation, refers, in fact, to a quote of a 1997 article of Zürcher, and in his 2007 study, Zürcher had greatly changed his overall evaluation of the *Kouduo richao*, stressing the dimension of hybridization (for example, 1:147). The author quotes also Zürcher as saying that the *Kouduo richao* looks unsatisfactory as “a mosaic of bits of conversation about everything,” and he himself holds: “What he [Zürcher] does not recognize, however, is that such a work ‘about everything’ indicates the essential mechanisms of dialogue—openness and flexibility—that allows a greater capacity to include people from different social status and cultural backgrounds, whether Chinese or foreigners, converts or non-converts, elite or lower-class, officials or commoners” (21).

The author claims to bring a new approach in the field to reshape our traditional way of understanding, and indeed his refined analysis allows us to understand better the complex mechanism of those dialogues in action, yet it seems to me that the author's claim of offering a new, or even alternative, approach is somehow overblown. Also, the insistence on dialogism makes him lose sight of the limitation of dialogues. For example, in the *Kouduo richao*, Aleni tends to present a strong dichotomy between the rational soul and the body, but in his *Xingxue cushu* which follows quite closely the Latin commentaries from Coimbra, the dichotomy is not so sharp, and in fact, Aleni spends six *juan* out of eight to discuss the sensitive soul. This suggests that the more theoretical treatise presents a much more nuanced view than the short answers given during oral discussions.

Factual information in the work are correct and precise, but a few minor mistakes have crept in. The author gave 1623/46 as dates of publication for the *Xingxue cushu* (84), and this shows a confusion between an early version with the name of *Lingxing pian* published in the late 1620s and the final version published in 1646. Also, the author states that Dominicans and Franciscans "were shocked at seeing the idolatrous ancestral rituals performed by some local converts" (99), but those rituals were not idolatrous for Aleni and most Jesuits, and this question precisely became later the heart of the Rite Controversy. Concerning the settings for the conversations, the author states that the Fujian converts "collected notes of [Aleni's] homilies to print the eight-volume work *Kouduo richao*" (111), but, in fact, homilies or sermons constitute a very small part, for example, in the eighty records of the first two volumes, fragments of only five sermons are found. Most of the content represent instructions or discussions which happened outside mass.

It is interesting to note that in the title of his work, the Westerner Zürcher had completely left out the name of Aleni, and had instead the name of the Chinese editor Li Jiubiao. In contrast, the Chinese Song Gang in his title has completely left out the name of Li Jiubiao, and instead has the name of Aleni in the front. This suggests to me that this dialogue between the self and the other in Late Ming still continues today under new forms.

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