

## THE EUROPEANS DISCOVERY OF XINA

### POMPEU FABRA UNIVERSITY BARCELONA

#### THE FRIAR'S MISSIONS AND MENDOZA'S BOOK

##### DUEÑAS: DEATH BY A THOUSAND CUTS

The second report from the Alfaro expedition comes from Francisco de Dueñas. Dueñas, like Loarca, was a soldier and not a friar, and like him, he was a keen observer. However, Dueñas does not have Rada's scholarly approach to guide him and, his report bears no titles inside and there is no evident method in its structure.

Like Loarca, Dueñas roamed around quite a lot, and was bemused by the unexpected richness of Canton's streets, where he found more things to see than in all Flanders. He states that it would take four days to load ten big ships with what was on display in just one street, and that once it was done it would seem as if nothing had been taken away from it.

He clearly understands the acquisitive power of silver in China, and witnesses the flow of silver that enters Canton from Japan. He is impressed by the Chinese standard of living when he realizes that the Chinese eat three times a day and often eat snacks in between meals.

Their eating habits surprise him: the variety of foodstuffs, the diversity of the cooking methods, the assortment of sauces and soups, the constant invitations among them, and the fact that they eat as quickly with their chopsticks as he does with his hands: no wonder the Chinese labeled these foreigners as barbarians. He marvels at the variety of the entertainments that he finds in the city, puppets and marionette shows, acrobats, jugglers, trained animals, and street theater.

He is also amazed at the quantity of their games; they play cards, dice, chess, checkers and many other games that he can't even name. Living as he did, outside of the official channels, he has more to say about everyday life than anyone else. He sees the richness of China but also its misery, the selling of children, the multitude of beggars. And he describes better than any other and without prejudice the penalties meted out by Chinese criminal justice.

Roaming through the streets he saw many punishments, beatings with the light stick and the heavy stick, big tattoos carved on robbers' chests and backs, and people bearing a canga, a big

wooden board around the throat that weighed a lot and prevented the convict eating by himself, the same as we can see in this 19th century photograph.

Dueñas was impressed by the inscriptions on the canga, stating what the crime was and for how long the convict had to wear the canga: that was a much more clear proceeding than the vagueness that characterized Castilian justice.

Dueñas is also an important source of information on the death penalty. He says that the main penalty is beheading, but he also saw a case of lingchi, the terrible death by a thousand cuts, applied to an adulterous woman. This is the very first mention of lingchi in western sources, 120 years before the next mention of it by a French Jesuit. We could infer that Rada, Loarca, Tordesillas and Dueñas were the main sources for González de Mendoza. But Mendoza also incorporated all the information gathered by the Portuguese.