

MATTEO RICCI AND JESUIT MISSION
THE WORLD AS DEPICTED BY MATTEO RICCI

Looking at Ricci's map, it is obvious that for the general silhouette, he follows a European map, most probably Ortelius, published in 1570. Even if his first draft was probably drawn from memory, later on he had Ortelius' map sent to him. In any case, the gross errors of Ortelius' map are all to be found in Ricci's map. North-America is oversized - a fact that minimizes the Pacific distances; significant prominence is given to a great south continent that almost melds with South America; and four large islands fill the Arctic regions. The Far East is also badly drawn: Korea is nowhere to be seen; nor is the Yellow river; all the Japanese islands are fused into one; and the Philippines are hardly drawn at all. Although Ricci's map followed Ortelius, the European part is poorly represented: even the boot of Italy gets blurred. This European part of the map is so badly drawn that it suggests hands other than Ricci's were active in putting it together. By contrast, for the part of the map depicting East Asia Ricci used Chinese maps as a basis, and the result provides much better information than previous European cartography had done.

Following the Chinese cartographic tradition, Ricci appends long captions to the sensitive points of the map. In Asia, for instance, we find captions for China, the Indian Ocean, Korea and Japan, of which the caption says that "The people are much more addicted to the arts of war than of peace. The country produces silver." The map also reflects the growing importance of the Pacific traffic linking America and the Philippines. The size of the Philippines is very much exaggerated but Luzon is explicitly identified and the Manila bay is clearly drawn. On the American side, Potosi is identified and a caption says that "this mountain produces much silver." Ricci's map also has a caption on the discovery of America that he dates to a hundred years before and that he attributes to the Europeans in general. It is when presenting Europe that Ricci's captions become biased. One inscription says that "European states follow no heterodox doctrines, but are reverent adherents of the holy Christian religion, which recognizes one Supreme Deity." And in another he affirms that "the Pope lives in the State of Rome, where he is revered by all the countries of Europe. Like Valignano had done a few years before, when organizing the itinerary of the Japanese embassy to Europe, Ricci hides the Protestant split in Europe from the Chinese, while overemphasizing the religious authority of the Pope.

Ricci's new map was an immediate success, attracted a myriad of visitors, was re-published again and again, and soon became a curiosity that all well-placed officials wanted to possess. Even the Emperor, who never met Ricci, asked for 12 copies of it, one to be exhibited in his palace and the others to distribute as presents to high dignitaries. It was even reproduced immediately in Chinese works, like in this Chinese Geography published in 1607. Although here the circular display of the map and the general outline of land masses remind us of Ricci's map, the original forms of the continents seem close to dissolving. And, more important, there is no trace of the reference lines: parallels, meridians, and even the equator, the tropics and the poles have all gone.

Even with this fairly wide initial circulation, Ricci's map made no lasting impression on Chinese cartography, and Chinese cartographic practices continued unchanged until the 20th century. The Jesuits went on mapping China, especially when the Kangxi emperor in the 17th century asked them to do so, but their influence on the provincial and local mapmakers, who went on making the periodic geographical surveys of China, was nil.

The fate of Ricci's map is in tune with the Chinese reception of the so-called western learning. The Jesuit translations of religious texts were preserved in the Chinese Christian communities, but by the 18th century their scientific translations and works were forgotten and soon disappeared almost completely from China's cultural horizons. Only 7 of the 120 scientific works that they published in China appear in the great bibliographical compilation made at the end of the 18th century by order of the Qianlong emperor. A completely different picture arises if we talk of **the map's impact in Europe**. Ricci sent several copies to his Superiors, to the Pope, and to the Jesuit colleges. Many copies of the map are still on display in European libraries, and Ricci gained immense prestige with it.

The highly-praised book of Kircher, *China Illustrata*, shows Ricci on its frontispiece, holding a map. Once again, with **Matteo Ricci's map, the Jesuits** show their startling ability to adapt to and accommodate the realities of China while always exploiting the potential for propaganda.