

## MATTEO RICCI AND JESUIT MISSION

### LETTERS AND BOOKS

Both Rada and Ricci wrote a lot of letters. Of the 14 extant letters from Rada, five were addressed to Veracruz. They are rather brief and contain mostly complaints from Rada about the abuses of the Spanish in the Philippines and the misery of the natives, as well as bitter criticisms of the incompetence and cruelty of the governors.

On the other hand, of the 54 letters that remain from Ricci, 14 were sent to Claudio Acquaviva, the Superior General of the Jesuits. All of them contain extremely detailed information about the day-to-day life of the mission, some are very lengthy pieces and many were circulated around.

Letter-writing makes much more sense within a Jesuit context where the practice was fostered and the letters redistributed. Both Rada and Ricci were aware of the need to be fluent in the languages of those to be converted. While in Mexico, Rada had been assigned to preach to the Otomí people and he immediately learned their language and produced an Otomí grammar and a vocabulary.

While in the Philippines he is credited for having written also a Chinese grammar and vocabulary. This focus on language was not a Jesuit innovation; it was a very widespread missionary impulse. But even if they didn't invent it, the **Jesuits' efforts** were much more consistent, persistent and efficient.

Ruggieri and Ricci could speak Chinese when they first entered China. Moreover they spoke mandarin, which was the general language of scholars, and Ricci started learning Classical Chinese from the very beginning.

Jesuits in China will always excel in their linguistic capacities. Both Rada and Ricci brought European books to China. As we have already seen, Rada entered China with quite a bunch of scientific books, but he complained bitterly that these were the only ones he had, and that he had never been sent any other.

Ricci, on the other hand, entered China with only two scientific books, one being Euclid's Elements translated into Latin by Clavius, and the other Piccolomini's book about the sphere.

He also complained that he had no books available and that he had to rely exclusively on his memory.

After a while, however, books and objects were often sent to him. Both Rada and Ricci brought the basic religious books and breviaries and both also had with them some book by fray Luis de Granada, the most popular of 16th century religious authors.

Valignano even ordered it to be partly translated to Japanese. Both Rada and Ricci bought books in China. Both of them secured a copy of the *Guangyu tu*, the geographical compendium from which they extracted general and provincial statistics.

Both bought Chinese pharmacopoeias and both found them similar to the Classical Dioscorides book on *Materia Medica* that had widely circulated in Europe and the Arab world since Ancient times. In fact, both the Jesuits in China and the Dominicans in the Philippine's Parian will make ample use of these Chinese pharmacopoeias in their dispensaries and hospitals.

In his memoirs Ricci will praise the Chinese for the richness of their medicinal herbs. Among the great variety of books that Rada bought, the Chinese Classics are not mentioned. But Ricci procured for himself the Four Books, which are the basic texts of Confucian learning.

He even translated them for Valignano who claimed that the Four Books had to be understood before a Christian catechism could be written. And the Four Books became the texts that the Jesuits worked with on their arrival in China: they used them to stress any similarities between Christianity and Confucianism that could serve to foster cultural accommodation.

When we come to what Rada and Ricci published, the difference between them is huge. Ricci published more than 20 books in Chinese. Among them were religious, moral and philosophical treatises, astronomical and mathematical works, books on music, on various aspects of Western Classics, and also about mnemonic methods, in which Ricci excelled.

He had a prodigious memory and he retained word for word many of the Classical books that he had learned in the Roman College during his formative years.

This was the case for instance of the Greek stoic philosopher Epictetus, whose work *Enchiridion* Ricci knew by heart. He used fragments of it for at least three of his Chinese books.

When the Jesuit scientific and humanistic works faded in the 18th century, Ricci's works were among the very few that remained on view and were included in the great bibliographical compilation made at the end of the 18th century on the orders of the Qianlong emperor.

On the other hand, Rada is said to have published many scientific works before coming to the Philippines, although none of them is extant. He arrived in both Mexico and Manila with a glowing reputation for being an extraordinary mathematician and astronomer.

He was a reputed scientist, something that Ricci was not. When in Manila, Rada complains to Veracruz that he hasn't time to write the many books he has in mind. But there he seems clearly to be on another track.

To the dismay of Veracruz, he intends to publish a book on judicial astrology. He also talks about writing a book on geometry, but he wants to write it in Spanish, to foster the use of vernacular Spanish in Castilian universities.

While Ricci was completely focused on China, Rada was not.