

Christian-Muslim Relations A Bibliographical History

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Jesuits and Muslims in 17th-century China

BIOGRAPHY

This entry deals with works by five authors who wrote in 17th-century China: Wu Mingxuan (Uming-huen), Antonio de Gouvea (He Dahua), Andrea-Giovanni Lubelli (Lu Tairan/Lu Ande), François de Rougemont (Lu Riman) and Ding Peng.

Wu Mingxuan (17th century; precise dates unknown) was a Chinese Muslim astronomer whose family had served on the Muslim Astronomical Board and in other positions since the Yuan dynasty. Following charges brought against the Jesuits by Yang Guangxian, Wu was made head of the Muslim Astronomical Board.

Antonio de Gouvea (Chinese: He Dahua, 1592-1677) was a Portuguese Jesuit who came to China in 1636 and remained there until his death in 1677, in Fuzhou. After studying Chinese in Macau, he spent the early part of his mission in Fukien and later undertook historical work preparing texts on Chinese history and the history of the Jesuits. Together with Andrea-Giovanni Lubelli, he published, in 1671, *Innocentia victrix, sive Sententia comitiorum Imperij Sinici pro innocentia Christianae religionis, lata juridice per annum 1669*.

Andrea-Giovanni Lubelli (Chinese: Lu Tairan/Lu Ande, 1611-85) was an Italian Jesuit from Lecce, who died in Macau in 1685. He came to China in 1649 following his entry into the Society of Jesus in 1628. There is some debate amongst contemporary scholars regarding authorship of the text generally attributed to him, with some favouring the idea that it was in fact written by François de Rougemont.

François de Rougemont (1624-76) arrived in Macau in 1658 for the purpose of evangelising in Hangzhou, Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Changshu and Guangzhou. He was exiled to Canton during the persecutions and published a number of catechisms in Chinese and an account of his exile. He died in Taicang, and was buried in Changzhou.

Ding Peng (1622-86) was a Chinese Muslim poet and official of Uyghur descent who was born in Zhejiang province.

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WORKS ON CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

Jesuits and Muslims in 17th-century China

DATE Second half of the 17th century

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Chinese and Latin

DESCRIPTION

This account focuses on texts written by Muslims and Christians that discuss the Muslim-Jesuit astronomical disputes in the 17th century. The texts written by Muslims tend to take an anti-Christian and sometimes polemical approach, whilst those by Christians, written for the most part after the Christian victory in the controversy, are generally apologetic or propagandistic in nature. Terminologically, the Muslim texts tend to use the common contemporaneous Chinese terms to refer to the Christians and their religion, terms that lack overt value judgment. It is the commentary within those texts that contains the judgment on Christianity. Similarly, the Jesuit texts written in Chinese also use the common, contemporaneous, neutral terms to refer to Islam and Muslims. When writing in Latin, however, the Jesuits tended to use terms related

to the Latin name *Mahometanus*, or terms that denoted an ethnicity. The latter illustrate that modern conceptions of religious identity had not yet developed, and that religious identities were understood to be inextricably linked to national or ethnic ones. In the Christian texts, however, the most striking feature appears to be the general divorce of religious identity from the controversy. Whilst there are fleeting references to the religious identity of the Jesuits' opponents, they are treated first and foremost as opponents, and only secondly as Muslim. The following provides some background information to set these texts and their authors in context.

Under the rule of Khubilai Khan (Chinese: Hubilie, r. 1260-94) the Muslim-controlled Office of Western Medicine (Chinese: *Xi yu yi yao si*) and the Muslim Astronomical Bureau (Chinese: *Hui hui si tian jian*) were established in 1263 and 1271, respectively. In 1292, two Muslim pharmaceutical bureaus (Chinese: *Hui hui yao wu yuan*) were established, in Dadu and Shangdu, and were brought under the control of the Broadening Benevolence Office (Chinese: *Guang hui si*), the renamed Office of Western Medicine, in 1322. Muslim scholars related to the Astronomical Bureau were also involved in the fields of mathematics and cartography. Following the establishment of the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), the Muslim Astronomical Bureau continued to function alongside traditional Chinese bureaus; its members were employed in calendrical reform, and they continued the translation and publication of Muslim texts. Under the Ming dynasty, Muslims also continued to publish Muslim medical and other scientific texts. Nevertheless, Muslim science remained peripheral, having little effect on Chinese methods, which were kept separate from it.

Following his arrival in China in 1581, the Jesuit Matteo Ricci (Chinese: Li Madou, 1552-1610), with the help of Chinese collaborators in 1584 printed his first world map (a Chinese work entitled *Yu di shan hai quan tu*) using European cartographical knowledge. He published further maps throughout the late 16th century, the most famous being his 1602 *Kun yu wan guo quan tu*, also known as the *Mappa mundi*, which was created with the assistance of Li Zhizao (1565-1612). Ricci continued this work alongside mathematical and astronomical pieces until his death. Through establishing himself as a scholar congruent with Confucian expectations in this and other works, he assured the possibility for further Jesuits to contribute to the exchange of European scientific ideas with the Chinese. However, as the 17th century commenced, Muslim scholars continued to retain their prominent positions, although both the Chinese and Muslim sciences were in a state of decline and there

was a dire need for calendrical reform. The Jesuits, who arrived at this time, thus encountered not only a Chinese interest in foreign learning, but indeed a need for it, and were thereby able to carve out for themselves both respect and status among the Chinese literati and court. The Chinese educated classes showed an interest in Western science and this created a unique situation, leading to a number of Jesuit missionaries entering the fields of mathematics and the natural sciences. This activity brought them into direct contact with Chinese Muslim scholars, which resulted in conflict.

The Jesuits soon demonstrated the efficacy and superiority of European astronomical methods. However, Buddhist opposition to Christianity, personal animosities, opposition to Western sciences amongst a number of literati and Chinese astronomers, and a memorandum written by the Jesuits' opponent Shen Que, led to the persecution of Christians and the Jesuit astronomers. Despite such setbacks, the Jesuits continued on the understanding that the Jesuit scientific project was essential to the work of evangelisation, grounded in Ricci's assertion that propagating European science in China would build the Jesuits' reputation, ease evangelisation and stabilise the mission. Eventually, in 1629, an imperial edict assigned to the Jesuits the task of reforming the calendar. This decision was influenced by the failure of Chinese and Muslim solar eclipse predictions, while Jesuit predictions had proved accurate. The new calendar was completed as early as 1634, but it was not until 1644 that debate on the validity of using a European calendar had subsided and, despite political upheavals, its use was imperially decreed from 1645 onwards. Further conflict between the Jesuits and Chinese Muslims continued, however. Charges were brought by members of the Muslim Astronomical Bureau, which had been disbanded in 1657. Several secondary sources note that a report or petition made to the emperor by Wu Mingxuan in 1657, which accused the Jesuit calendar of inaccuracy, was investigated and found to be groundless. The emperor's leniency meant that Wu's life was spared, although the Muslim Astronomical Board was closed as a result (see Zhang, *Following the steps*, p. 26; Jami, *Emperor's new mathematics*, p. 41). The anti-Jesuit campaign was implemented by Wu and Yang Guangxian (1597-1669), an opportunistic Muslim scholar and astronomer who had not held a position in the bureau. Yang published a series of texts attacking both Christianity and, later, the Astronomical Bureau. Whilst it is thought that Yang's writings preserve some of Wu's ideas and build upon his arguments, it appears that none of Wu's writings have survived.

As a result of the charges, the Jesuits in Beijing and a number of associated astronomers were arrested in 1664 and missionaries throughout China were called to the capital to await a ruling. In April the following year, the Ministry of Rites decided that the Jesuits were guilty of Yang's charges. In the event, three Chinese astronomers, as well as their relatives, and five other Chinese-Christian astronomers were executed; the Jesuits in Beijing remained under house arrest whilst all others were exiled to Canton and Macau. The Astronomical Bureau was taken over by Yang, Wu and a Manchu Director known as Mahu, and the Muslim Astronomical Bureau was re-established with Wu at its head. In 1671, the emperor allowed the missionaries to return to China, although they were never able to re-establish their prominence in the Bureau.

Following the reprise, Antonio de Gouvea and Andrea-Giovanni Lubelli published their *Innocentia victrix, sive sententia comitorum Imperij Sinici pro innocentia Christianae religionis, lata juridice per annum 1669* (Canton, 1671). The text consists of 45 folios, and is largely unique in that Chinese, Latin and Romanised Chinese are used alongside each other. The first section of the work propagates proudly the declaration of Jesuitical innocence in the astronomical controversy, with the focus on this victory rather than on Islam *per se*. Therefore, there is only a lone reference to 'Mahometorum', noting the destruction of their pride through the astronomical experimentation that crowned the Jesuit victors (p. 3). Rather than delineating between Muslim and non-Muslim opponents, the text more generally refers to the Jesuits' enemies without specifying their religious identity. These enemies are often regarded as having fabricated claims against the Jesuits. The majority of the text is a compilation of memorials made after the defeat of Yang, and includes decrees by the emperor and Ministry of Rites permitting the Jesuits to return to mainland China and stating the innocence of Johann Adam Schall. The text is primarily descriptive and propagandistic, but also has apologetic elements. That it is written in both Latin and Chinese suggests the intended readership was both Chinese and European, and therefore simultaneously a propaganda piece and an apology. Nicolas Standaert argues that modern evidence suggests that Gouvea and Lubelli were not in fact the authors, but that it is the product of François de Rougemont's (1624-76) hand (Standaert, *Handbook of Christianity in China*, p. 185).

Following the controversy, anti-Christian sentiment remained prominent for many years. In 1691, a preface that Ding Peng had composed was attached to a version of Mi Wanji's *Jiao kuan wie lun*. This preface

illustrates some of the ongoing animosity between Muslims and Christians following the astronomical controversy. In the work, Ding Peng notes that the message brought by the first man Adam was distorted by his successors (presumably Jews and Christians) until the coming of Muḥammad. Ding Peng's understanding is firmly grounded within a Confucian episteme in which Muḥammad is understood as having explained, clarified and spread the Dao of the sages (Benite, *Dao of Muhammad*, p. 173). Ding thereby directly connects Muḥammad to Confucius (p. 173). The text does not explicitly mention Christians, however, and their distortion of Adam's message is only implied. Furthermore, although the text is in this loose sense anti-Christian, it is not polemical. Rather, it is a text seeking to aid Islam in enculturating into Chinese culture (or expressing this already established reality). Anti-Christian sentiments within it probably reflect the realities of inter-religious competition.

SIGNIFICANCE

Latin texts generally use either terms related to the Latin *Mahometanus* or ethnic terminology, and the latter denotes previous understandings of religious identity as inextricably linked to national or ethnic identity. Nevertheless, the use of terms related to *Mahometanus* shows the development away from such conceptions, towards an idea of individual religious identity not present in earlier texts. As with other texts written in the period, it is interesting to note the almost complete absence of direct references by either Christians or Muslims to their opponents or rivals. The controversy itself was of little consequence to the Jesuits in the long term, as they were able to establish themselves as the victors. This long term insignificance of the event is marked in the paucity of writings.

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