

Christian-Muslim Relations A Bibliographical History

Volume 11. South and East Asia, Africa and
the Americas (1600-1700)

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CONTENTS

Foreword	vii
List of Illustrations	xi
List of Maps	xiii
Abbreviations	xiv
Peter Riddell, <i>Introduction: Christian-Muslim Relations in the 17th Century (Asia, Africa and the Americas)</i>	1
Barbara Watson Andaya, <i>Islam and Christianity in South-East Asia 1600-1700</i>	15
Martha Frederiks, <i>Enforced migration: an Indian Ocean Africa narrative</i>	29
David D. Grafton, <i>Enforced migration: an Atlantic narrative in Christian-Muslim relations</i>	49
Works on Christian-Muslim relations 1600-1700	69
South Asia	71
South-East Asia, China and Japan	269
Africa and the Americas	467
Index of Names	623
Index of Titles	632

Yang Guangxian

Yang Kuang-hsien, Yangquangsenius

DATE OF BIRTH 1597
PLACE OF BIRTH Anhui
DATE OF DEATH 1669
PLACE OF DEATH En route to Anhui

BIOGRAPHY

Yang Guangxian was a Chinese Muslim who made a career out of fraudulent and slanderous claims aimed at increasing his social standing. In particular, his challenges to the Jesuit astronomical system eventually led to his becoming an astronomer and head of the Imperial Observatory. However, during a period of exile he learned about astrology, and upon his return used this skillset to publish, in 1659, his first work on Western astronomy. Within this and other works, he argued against the use of Western mathematical calendrical models, and eventually came to write against the Christian religion more generally.

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WORKS ON CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

Pi xie lun, 'On exposing heterodoxy'
'On refuting heresy'

DATE 1659

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Chinese

DESCRIPTION

Published in three parts, *Pi xie lun* is primarily concerned with exposing the faults of Christianity. It opens with a challenge to the elevation by the Chinese of the Jesuit missionaries as saints or holy men, and contests the concept that these people and their teachings are complicated to understand. On the contrary, Yang asserts that the Jesuits (described here using the term *Sheng ren*) and their teachings are easily understood, and it is only due to their exoticness and foreign appeal that they are elevated in the minds of the Chinese. The text contains criticisms of prominent Jesuits such as Johann Adam Schall and Giacomo Rho (Chinese: Luo Jianshao/Luo Yagu, 1593-1638), but generally targets Christianity as a whole rather than focusing on individuals. The text occupies 31 pages (pp. 1103-34) in Wu Xiangxiang's 1966 edition of *Bu de yi*.

The text also includes passages stylised as conversations, following an approximate pattern of question and answer sessions between a priest and his potential converts. These are similar to contemporaneous Christian catechisms used in the East Asian mission field and illustrate good knowledge of basic Christian doctrine on the part of Yang. Following such passages in which the basics of the religion are outlined, Yang proceeds to ridicule and criticise Christian truth claims. Yang rejects the claim that Christ is the creator of heaven, and denies the existence of the Christian God, instead affirming the Confucian principals of *yin* and *yang*. The text is polemical, taking a staunchly anti-Christian stance. Terminologically, Christianity is referred to as *Tian zhu jiao*, the standard contemporary term used by Christians and Chinese alike. Other terminology, such as *Sheng ren* (holy person/saint) and *Xi yang ren* (Westerner), lack negative connotations. The term *Pi xie* (heresy/heterodoxy), which features in the text and its title, has a polemical connotation. There are no early copies of the text outside Yang's *Bu de yi* (1665) and *Ju xi ji* (1663).

SIGNIFICANCE

Pi xie lun is written in the genre of anti-Christian polemic with some short sections more properly defined within the genre of Muslim science.

Whilst it features descriptive elements about the nature of Christianity, this is a literary device used to illustrate the shortcomings of the religion through the addition of commentary and value judgment. The text was instrumental in the build-up to the Jesuit-Muslim controversies of the 1660s, and its inclusion in *Bu de yi*, *Ju xi ji* and later anti-Christian literature illustrates its ongoing importance. Nevertheless, it lacked significant influence over mainstream opinion until the charges made by Yang, Wu Mingxuan and others in the mid-1660s and associated political struggles. It is the 33 statements found in *Pi xie lun* that Lodovico Buglio criticises in his *Bu de yi bian*.

PUBLICATIONS

Yang Guangxian, *Pi xie lun*, 1659 (reprinted as part of *Bu de yi* in Wu Xiangxiang (ed.), *Tian zhu jiao dong chuan wenxian xu bian*, Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 1966, pp. 1103-34 – *Pi xie lun* is the first chapter in *Ju xi ji*, on which see below); WDL 7090 (digitalised version available through World Digital Library/ Library of Congress)

STUDIES

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Zhuo Xiping, *Christianity*, trans. Chi Zhen and Caroline Mason, Leiden, 2013, pp. 328-9

Elman, *On their own terms*

Klaue, 'Wider das Budeyi gelevgen oder scheitern einer Christlich-Konfuzianischen synthese in der apologetischen schrift Budeyi Bian'

Zheng guo ti cheng gao, 'A call to rectify the country'

'A plea to rectify the country'

DATE 1660

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Chinese

DESCRIPTION

In this work, Yang directly attacks Jesuit astronomers by arguing that the acceptance of Western calendrical models and Christianity places power in the hands of the Europeans, thereby weakening Qing dynasty rule. The text was presented to the Ministry of Rites as a plea against

Christianity and Christian involvement in Chinese astronomy, and was published the year following the closure of the Muslim Astronomical Bureau. The text was included in Yang Guangxian's compilations *Ju xi ji* and *Bu de yi*, and can be categorised as anti-Christian and polemical in genre. The text occupies 22 pages in Wu Xiangxiang's edited edition of *Bu de yi* (pp. 1143-55).

SIGNIFICANCE

The inclusion of the text in both *Ju xi ji*, *Bu de yi* and later anti-Christian publications illustrates its ongoing importance, although as a plea made directly to the Ministry of Rites it was rejected, and therefore did not have a lasting effect. Following its publication, Yang's writing subsided somewhat between 1660 and 1664, although texts such as *Nie jing* and *Ju xi ji* were still published. It was not until 1664, when the Chinese-Christian astronomer Li Zubai published his *Tian xue chuan gai*, which argues amongst other things that the Chinese were descendants of Adam and Eve and that Christians had come to China earlier, that Yang's arguments began to gain greater popularity.

PUBLICATIONS

Yang Guangxian, *Zheng guo ti cheng gao*, 1660 (contained in *Bu de yi*, 1665, pp. 1143-55)

Wu Xiangxiang (ed.) *Tian zhu jiao dong chuan wen xian xu bian*, Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, 1966, pp. 1143-55

Ju xi ji, 'Reject the West. A collection'
 'Apart from the West'
 'Separate from the West'

DATE 1663

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Chinese

DESCRIPTION

Ju xi ji is a recently discovered collection of eight texts, six of which feature in *Bu de yi*. These include *Pi xie lun*, an imperial edict from 1660, *Zhe miu lun*, *Zheng guo ti cheng gao*, *Nie jing*, *Jing yu*, *Xuan ze yi*, and a further imperial edict from 1661. The edicts are the two texts that do not feature in *Bu de yi*. Since *Nie jing* was written in 1662 and Yang writes of *Ju xi ji* in 1664, scholars have dated the work to approximately 1663. The

contents shared with *Bu de yi* will be discussed below, here it is worth noting that all are anti-Christian and polemical in nature dealing with either Christian truth claims themselves or with Western (and therefore Jesuit) astronomy.

SIGNIFICANCE

The fact that this text is a recent discovery, suggesting that few copies have survived, indicates that it was not of great significance following its composition. The likely reason for this is that the publication of the comparatively expanded *Bu de yi* reduced the value of this earlier collection. Furthermore, at the time of writing Yang had not yet ascended to his later position of power. Despite all this, as the first collection of Yang's works, it is important as a precursor to *Bu de yi*.

PUBLICATIONS

Yang Guangxian, *Ju xi ji*, 1663 (one copy at the National Central Library of Taipei); A. Dudink and N. Standaert, *Chinese Christian texts database (CCT-Database)*, <http://www.arts.kuleuven.be/sinologie/english/cct>

STUDIES

Huang Yilong, 'Yang Guangxian zhu shu lun lue', *Shu mu ji kan* 23/4 (1900) 5-6

Bu de yi, 'I cannot do otherwise'
 'I could not do otherwise'
 'I no longer support it'
 'I can no longer stand it'

DATE 1665

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE Chinese

DESCRIPTION

Following Li Zubai's publication of *Tian xue chuan gai* (1664), Yang quickly issued a response. Throughout 1664 and 1665 he published a string of works, which were collected in *Bu de yi* (1665). This is in two volumes and was printed by the publisher Siqueshanfang. It contains works of a number of genres, including letters, treatises, petitions and rebuttals. The first volume contains 60 folios, one for the introduction, and 59 for the main text. Each half folio is divided into nine columns with 20 characters

in each. The beginning of the volume contains the text *Qing zhu xie jiao zhuang*, which was the first petition made by Yang to be accepted by the Ministry of Rites (in 1664). The second work is a letter from the author to the censor Xu Qingyu (Xu Zhijian) from 1664 which includes a reference to *Ju xi ji* (allowing scholars more accurately to date that text). It attacks Li Zubai's *Tian xue chuan gai* for which the very same Xu Qingyu had composed a preface. Thereafter is *Pi xie lun*, followed by images taken from Johann Adam Schall's *Jin cheng shu xiang*, and this is then followed by *Zheng guo ti cheng gao*, *Xuan ze yi* and *Zhe miulun*. Other works are also included. The second volume, which appears to be 53 folios in length, includes *Nie jing*, *Jing yu*, and a series of other works.

These works can be divided into two interrelated themes: attacks on Western science (e.g. *Nie jing*, *Zhe miulun*) which will therefore not be dealt with here, and attacks on Christianity. To some extent these themes cannot be clearly separated, because, for example, works such as *Zheng guo ti cheng gao* contained criticisms of both calendrical and astronomical methodology as well as criticisms of Christianity. Given the extensive nature of the collection, it is difficult to offer comments on every aspect, although a brief overview of some of the arguments in it may be given.

The work begins by attacking Li Zubai's claim that the Chinese were descended from Adam and Eve. For Yang, such an assertion implies that Chinese knowledge is but a remnant of some forgotten Judeo-Christian heterodoxy. Moreover, Zubai's claims, he argues, aim to incite rebellion. It is pertinent to note that, despite being a Muslim, Yang criticises Christianity from a Confucian standpoint. He notes that, in rebelling against his country, Christ disregarded the Confucian relationship of ruler-subject, and that, in rejecting ancestor worship, Christians refuse to recognise the relationship of parent and child. Prominent within the collection is the petition to the Ministry of Rites, *Qing zhu xie jiao zhuang*, which argues that Schall and the Jesuits were guilty of three major sins: inciting rebellion, confusing the population over religious matters and identity, and the incorrect calculation of the calendar. On the last front, Yang strove to show that Schall's calendrical calculations had led to the death of a prominent imperial consort by selecting a bad day (astrologically) for the burial of her son. This confirmed a prediction he made in his 1659 *Xuan ze yi*, which is also included in the collection. The work is anti-Christian and generally polemical, although the range of genres and texts within it means that its nature varies.

SIGNIFICANCE

Bu de yi stands out as Yang's most prominent contribution. It was the object of a number of Jesuit rebuttals such as Lodovico Buglio's *Bu de yi bian* and Verbiest's book of the same name, and it has experienced great longevity, being republished in anti-Christian works until the modern period. Yang's focus on Confucian rather than Muslim thought is probably one aspect that has given the text this longevity, and contemporaneously its popularity (it must be remembered that Muslims were a minority of the population). However, this is probably also linked to the fact that Yang's polemic attacked Christianity from several standpoints; for example, not only was Christianity politically dangerous, but it was also theologically incorrect, and scientifically inaccurate.

Such is the stature of this text that many no longer treat it as a compilation of separate texts, but as a composition in its own right, with all its contents referred to by the one title *Bu de yi*. In its immediate setting, it contributed greatly to the persecution and exile of the Jesuits and the re-creation of the Muslim Astronomical Bureau. Even after the persecution had ended, it continued to influence popular opinion.

PUBLICATIONS

For details of MSS of the work in Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, Rome, Bibliothèque interuniversitaire des langues orientales, Paris, and Fujen University, see A. Dudink and N. Standaert, *Chinese Christian texts database (CCT-Database)*, <http://www.arts.kuleuven.be/sinologie/english/cct>

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- Zhu Weizheng, *Coming out of the Middle Ages*

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