Language Acquisition and Missionary Strategies in China, 1580-1760

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I. — PROLOGUE

The French Jesuit Emeric Langlois de Chavagnac (1670-1717) arrived in Guangzhou in China on 9 September, 1701. On 30 December, he wrote to Father Le Gobien in Paris, answering the latter’s query what would make a good missionary for China. Chavagnac replied that after three months in China and having talked to many missionaries, he had some notions: the ideal candidate would be someone who is determined to love Christ, prepared to accommodate to a climate, customs, dress, and food completely different from those of the French nation; he admonished further:

Il ne faut point de gens qui se laissent dominer à leur naturel ; une humeur trop vive ferait icy d'étranges ravages. Le genie du pais demande qu'on soit maistre de ses passions... Les Chinois ne sont pas capables d'écouter en un mois ce qu'un François est capable de leur dire en une heure. Il faut suffrir sans prendre feu et sans s'impatienter, cette lenteur et cette indolence naturelle ; traiter, sans se décourager, de la Religion, avec une nation qui ne craint que l'Empereur, et qui n'aime que l'argent, insensible par consequent, et indifférente à l'excès pour tout ce qui regarde l'éternité.

Moreover, one must constantly study the language and observe their numerous ceremonies, for the Chinese consider themselves the most civilized of all peoples; one must pass from action to study, from study to action. And studied he did. For five months after his arrival, Chavagnac spent eight hours everyday studying the language. “There are 45,000 letters in the alphabet!” He lamented. Sixteen months after his arrival in China, he only knew enough Chinese to administer the sacraments and preach on Sundays.

2 P. de Chavagnac to P. Le Gobien, LEC, vol. 3, p. 156.
3 P. de Chavagnac to P. Le Gobien, 10 Feb. 1703, Fuchou, LEC, vol. 9; quotation on pp. 333-334.

Chavagnac was not the only French Jesuit to find Chinese a hard language to master. His fellow Norman, Joseph Prémare (1666-1736), who arrived in Guangzhou on the same ship, the *Amphitrite*, reported in 1702 to his superior in the French Jesuit mission on the difficulty of learning Chinese:

*Je puis assurer qu’il n’y a point de travail plus difficile ni plus rebutant que celui-la. C’est un grimoire que ces caracteres Chinois, qu’il paroist d’abord impossible de déchiffrer. Cependant à force de regarder et de se fatiguer l’imagination et la memoire, cela se débrouille, et l’on commence à y voir clair. Les difficultez qu’on y trouve, sont incomparablement plus grandes par rapport aux Europeens, que par rapport aux naturels du pays; ceux-cy s’effrayent moins de ce qu’ils ont vu cent fois, et ils n’ont pas ces grandes vivacitez d’esprit, qui rendent un peu ennemi d’une geste constante.*

Far from being bad linguists, Chavagnac and Prémare later mastered enough Chinese to compose impressive works in that language. Their initial difficulties, quite understandable, reflected more than just the linguistic adjustment required for European missionaries in China. The key word, which Chavagnac enunciated, is “to accommodate”, and not to become impatient, for patience seemed indispensable for learning Chinese, to master one’s passions, to change one’s lively nature to one of native impassivity. This observation was shared by missionaries of other religious orders. In a letter to his fellow friar, dated 21 October, 1676, the Franciscan Arcadio del Rosario exclaimed: “Para entrar en este reino de China, mudar el pelojo!” His fellow friar, Augustin de S. Paschale, the author of five works in Chinese, says, in a statement that is reminiscent of Chavagnac’s observation of the opposite between French vivacity and Chinese *langueur*, that a Chinese was like “un espanol al revez”. One has to have patience in China.

Separated from the European enclaves of Macau and Manila, and far from their homelands, European missionaries adjusted not only to an alien linguistic milieu, but one in which they had to wear Chinese clothes, ingest Chinese foods, and immerse themselves totally in a milieu beyond the control of European colonial authorities. Evangelizing in Chinese therefore, represented an experience unlike that of the missionaries in the Americas, Portuguese India, or the Spanish Philippines, where linguistic ventures into non-European populations were an extension of the colonial authority of the Iberian kingdoms, and where the European missionaries could always retire to enclaves of their mother tongues, with the familiar duplica-

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4 The citation is from the report of P. de Prémare from the missions in Kien-tchang and Nanfang from February to August of 1702 reported in the letter of P. Fouquet. S.J. to duc de la Force, Pair de France. Nanchang, Kiangsi, 1702 Nov. 26, *LEC*, vol. 5, pp. 129-238; here pp. 229-230.
5 *SF*, vol. 7, part 2, pp. 1274-1275.
7 Ibid., p. 1125.
tion of metropolitan institutions and culture. The reluctance to learn Chinese, therefore, signified the unwillingness to accommodate culturally, as was the case with the Spanish Franciscan Juan de San Frutos, who arrived in Guangdong province in 1686 after two years in America and the Philippines. He desisted from learning Chinese because his heart was set on Japan and repeatedly asked to be sent there until his superior ordered him to mute his protests and cultivate the Chinese mission. The acquisition of Chinese, therefore, formed the cornerstone of a missionary strategy of cultural accommodation, first practiced by the two Italian Jesuits, Michele Ruggieri and Matteo Ricci, in the early 1580s. It is to their story we will now turn, before further reflections on the significance of linguistic knowledge for the missionary enterprise.

II. — THE JESUIT MISSION

Catholic clergy were present among the first Portuguese who settled in Macau in 1557. But after more then two decades on the coast of southern China, the Portuguese clergy, except for accompanying the bi-annual trade missions from Macau to Guangzhou, ministered exclusively to the Catholic community in the Portuguese enclave, with its mix of Europeans, mestiços, Africans, Indians, Timorese, and a small number of Chinese converts. It seemed that the Portuguese clergy had made very little effort to learn Chinese, and when the Italian Alessandro Valignano (1539-1606) was nominated Visitor for Japan and China in 1574, he wanted to find some Jesuits in Macau to learn Chinese in preparation for launching the mission. But some old fathers who had experience with China considered this an impossible task, so Valignano turned to a younger man, his fellow Italian Jesuit, as Ruggieri would recall:

L’origine et principio d’entrar gli Padri nostri nella Cina fu questo modo, essendo nell’India il P. Alex. Valignano visitator della Compania in quelle parti havendo notizia delle cose della Cina, et considerando il gran servizio che si poteva far a nostro Signore con la conversione di tanta migliara d’anime, si se potesse permetter’ il piede in quel regno, comincio pensar il modo che perciò potesse haver et buttar i fondamenti: per questa cagione nominò in Goa alcuni Padri che fussero inviati a quel posto della Cina nominato Maccao per imparar la lingua degli Cinesi, et provare quel che Dio nostro Signore circa questa e’trata de Padri disponesse. Fu mandato a chiamar dal P. Provinciale il P. Michele di Ruggiero che all’hora si ritrouava nella christianita del malauar et cominciava a confessar in quella lingua, che si partesse subito imbargasse nella nave della Cina che si partiva da Cacciu, co’ la patente pero in bianco, cioè che se il P. Ruggiero arrivasse a tempo per imbarcarse in quella nave che lui andasse, quando altrimente occorresse fusse per la China il P. Giovanni Battista de Ferraris che

9 F. Margiotti (ed.), SF, vol. 8, part 1, Relationes et epistolas fratrum minorum hispanorum in Sinis qui a. 1684-92 missionem ingressi sunt, pp. 4-5.
having entered the society in 1572, ruggieri left italy in november 1577 for india together with rudolfo acquaviva, nephew of the general of the society, and the novice Pietro Berno, the two later martyred at Salsete. During his short stay in South Asia, Ruggieri already showed his linguistic curiosity, having learned a smattering of the local language to confess the Malabar Christians. Chosen by Valignano for the China mission, Ruggieri sailed to Macau, arriving in July 1579, and immediately launched into learning Chinese.

Years later, Ruggieri recalled this experience. At the college of the Jesuits, he wrote:

Venivano dalla terra firma molti giovani di bello ingegno per curiosita di sapere la nostra doctrina et conferire con la loro, et finalmente restavano per si dall nostra et bruggiavano la loro, per il che si convertirono da vesti et si bat-tizzarono, restadò nella casa ch'era comoda per tutti a modi di seminario; in breve imparano la lingua portoghese, et diventarono buoni maestri per imparar a me la lingua Cinese con le lettere. E la lingua Cinese tanto difficile a imparar quanto ogni'altra del mondo in tanto che gli stessi Naturali alle volte tra loro no' s'intendono per l'equivocazione delle parole que no' sono ben pronunciate et col lor suono. Tutte le parole di Cinesi hanno quattro difficili suoni et co'seg-mente quattro diverse significazioni.

In spite of the difficulties, Ruggieri persisted. In a letter to General Acquaviva, dated 7 February, 1583, Ruggieri reported on the ridicule the Portuguese in Macau regarded his linguistic enterprise:

It was necessary to use pictures to teach me Chinese letters, and even the language, for example, when he [the master] wanted to teach me how to say “horse” in that language, and how to write it, he painted a horse and above it painted the character that signifies horse, and is pronounced “mai,” something certainly ridiculous for the Portuguese.

In spite of the tremendous difficulties in these early years, Ruggieri recalled with pride in the memoir he composed after his return to Italy, that he had learned 10,000 Chinese characters in six months that even the Chinese were stupefied.

11 Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (hereafter cited as ARSI), Jap-Sin, 101 I, ”M. Ruggiero Rela-ciones 1577-1591”, f° 18r²-v°.
12 For Jesuit martyrdoms in India, see I. G. ŽUPANO, Missionary Tropics, pp. 147-171.
13 ARSI, Jap-Sin, 101 I, f° 11v°-12.
14 Ibid., f° 12r²-v°.
15 Ibid., f° 137.
16 Ibid., f° 96.
Given to exaggerations of his own achievements, Ruggieri’s account is not entirely reliable. We have another picture of this initial linguistic enterprise in the journal of Matteo Ricci, who was called subsequently to assist Ruggieri in the China Mission, and who would eventually eclipse the older man in linguistic competence and fame:

Having arrived at our residence [in Macau], Father Michele Ruggieri followed the orders of Father Valignano and fervently studied Chinese letters, and the most universally used language called Mandarin. However, the Chinese who came from the interior [Guangdong province] were not so learned that they could read many of their texts, nor were the Chinese who had converted to Christianity and who dressed like us, in order to serve as interpreters for the Portuguese merchants, knowledgeable of Chinese texts and just as little of the Portuguese language. In any case, to make the best of the situation, [Ruggieri] began his training, learning from a Chinese painter, who knew little of the Portuguese language. And it often happened that, in order to explain a character to the father, he would paint the figure on a piece of paper to represent what he wanted to say17.

For three years Ruggieri concentrated on learning Chinese. Given that the Chinese in Macau originated from Guangdong and Fujian provinces, where the spoken languages are incomprehensible to Mandarin speakers, Ruggieri’s only occasions for conversational practices were limited to the bi-annual trade fairs in Guangzhou, where he could converse in mandarin with the officials whose native places were outside of Guangdong province, and made an impression with the Haidao, the mandarin of Maritime Affairs, as the first European who could converse in Chinese. The Haidao gave Ruggieri permission to reside in a separate house from the Portuguese merchants, who stayed on board their ships, and visited the Jesuit out of curiosity to see the ceremonies and images of Christianity18. In 1582, Ruggieri obtained permission from Chen Rui, the Governor of Guangdong and Guanxi provinces to reside in Zhaoqing, a day’s journey to the west of Guangzhou and the site of the governorship. In 1583, after a brief period of absence, Ruggieri was recalled to Zhaoqing by Wang Pan, his new mandarin patron because “the Chinese enjoy very much, and marvel at and admire the foreigners who could speak their language without an interpreter”, to use the words of Ruggieri19. This time, he took with him a younger companion, Matteo Ricci.

We can observe three characteristics in these earliest years of linguistic contact in the Jesuit China Mission. First, the linguistic competence of the Jesuit missionaries (first Ruggieri, then Ricci and others) was stronger in reading and writing and weaker in conversations. As late as 1585, Ruggieri still relied occasionally on Chinese interpreters20, although he had composed and published the first Catholic

19 Ibid., f° 28v°.  
20 Ibid., f° 15, 26v°-v°.
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catechism in Chinese, the *Tianzhu shilu* (1584), with the help of his Chinese tutor\(^{21}\). In fact, Ruggieri explained that he composed the catechism because the interpreters could not explain very well Christian doctrines and answer the questions of the mandarins, and the fathers’ spoken Chinese was not fluent enough for the task\(^{22}\). Secondly, the Jesuits operated within a very narrow social circle since they could not communicate in the regional language, Cantonese; their limited command of Mandarin enabled them, however, to socialize with the officials in Zhaoqing, all of whom of course spoke Mandarin *ex officio*. And lastly, the content of the Jesuits’ language acquisition —heavily textual, focus on Mandarin to the negligence of dialects— predetermined their course of cultural accommodation. Ruggieri, Ricci, and their successors followed in fact the curriculum of the Confucian pupil, learning their Chinese characters from the easiest reading-primers, the *san ji qing* (the *Three Character Classic* with the opening lines: “The origins of human nature is good”) and the *Qian zi wen* (*Thousand Character Classic*), and progressing through the *Four Books* (*The Great Learning*, *Doctrine of the Mean*, *Analects*, and *Mencius*) and perhaps some books of the *Five Classics* (*The Book of Odes*, *The Book of Document*, *The Book of Changes*, *The Book of Rites*, and *The Spring and Autumn Annals*).

The Jesuit missionary, in other words, was schooling himself in the image of a Confucian scholar, learning the canonical texts requisite for the imperial civil service examination and speaking in Mandarin and not the many dialects of the empire, used by the majority of the populace. Partly pre-determined by their linguistic program, the Jesuit mission aimed at the educated elites, the literati and mandarins, and accommodated itself to the Confucian culture of the bureaucratic-literati elites of the Chinese empire. Ruggieri put it well when he wrote:

\[Et perche chi desidera entrar nella Cina, et esser accetto a gli governanti et gente cinesi, et no’ sia tenuto barbaro et rustico che per tali tengono gli rimanenti che non sanno quelle lettere, e necessario che sappia loro lettere et lingua, et non di qualsivoglia lingua, ma pulita, et cortegiana la quale ancor gli naturali l’imparano da fanciulli con grande difficoltà…\]

How did Ruggieri and Ricci learn Chinese? In the Roman Archives of the Society we have a unique text that documents that process: a Chinese Portuguese dictionary compiled between 1580 and 1588\(^{24}\). While the bulk of this manuscript is an alphabetical dictionary of Portuguese words followed by Chinese characters and their romanization (P\(^{\circ} 32-156; 157-169* supplementary word lists), the work itself represents a mixed genre: in addition to a dictionary, it is a ricordi, a journal or a memorandum, and a language primer. The manuscript begins with a dialogue of first meeting and polite greetings in romanized Chinese (P\(^{\circ} 3-7*), followed by the

\(^{21}\) The text of the *Tianzhu shilu* is reproduced in N. Standaert and A. Dudink (ed.), *Chinese Christian Texts*, vol. 1 (hereafter cited as *CCT*).

\(^{22}\) ARSI, Jap-Sin, 101 I, P 29.

\(^{23}\) Ibid., P 20.

\(^{24}\) ARSI, Jap-Sin, I 198. This is published by J. Witek, *Dicionário Português-Chines. Portuguese-Chinese Dictionary*. 
baptismal liturgy in Chinese character (fo 12vo), a fragment of the Gospel story in Chinese narrating Jesus’s birth, crucifixion, and the Virgin Mary; and the creation of the world by God (the word used here is Tianzhu; although the romanization for Jesus is Yesu [F13vo-16vo]). A folio (fo 15vo) in Chinese describes how Ruggieri had traveled by sea for ten thousands of miles for three years, introducing himself as a zeng (Chinese term for Buddhist monk) from Tianchu (India), and of his arrival in Zhaoqing, explaining that he was translating the sutra (again, a Buddhist term) of Tianzhu.

While these sections clearly bear the mark of Ruggieri, the following sections in the manuscript reflect rather Ricci’s scientific and geographic interests. There is a text on the longitudes and latitudes of the two Ming capitals and many provinces (fo 18); a list of constellations observed in the western sky (fo 18vo-19vo); a Chinese account of the Ptolemaic system depicting the earth as the center of the nine celestial spheres, above which are the 48 constellations (fo 20); notices on the rotation of the moon and sun, the eclipses (fo 20vo-22); the seasons and how they are marked on a sundial (fo 22vo-23vo); Chinese instructions for using the sundial to observe the sun’s movements for the season (fo 170-171vo). There are also lists of Chinese characters for the provinces, seasons, time, and days (fo 27vo-28). Finally, there is a curious Chinese text, a copy of the judicial ruling in favor of Ruggieri, who had been falsely accused of adultery in a case that involved the theft of Jesuit property by a convert (fo 183, 187vo-vo).

A diligent student and the pioneer in the Jesuit China Mission, Ruggieri had acquired enough Chinese to be able to compose poems in the classical style, a fact often overlooked in view of the dismissive and unfair comments made in regard to Ruggieri’s linguistic competence by Ricci and by his superior, the Visitor Valignano. While Ruggieri never became truly fluent in Chinese conversation, he had acquired respectable reading and composition skills in classical Chinese; and whereas Ricci was a truly gifted linguist, his critical comments of Ruggieri’s linguistic competence masked in fact a divergent and growing difference in missionary strategies in the years between 1583 and 1588, namely between Confucian and Buddhist accommodations, as I have argued elsewhere.

The initial pattern of language training, established in Zhaoqing, would become standard for the Jesuit China Mission for the next decades: an older priest, with more experience in the field and with a knowledge of Chinese, would train recent and younger missionaries. With the assistance of a Chinese tutor, hired from the large ranks of unemployed or underemployed literati struggling to succeed at the Imperial Civil Service Examination, the Jesuit missionaries would learn Chinese in the way of Chinese boys: acquiring a basic vocabulary of characters by studying thoroughly the Four Books, learning to pronounce characters in mandarin and not in the local dialect, copying characters and notating their sounds and meanings.

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25 The wording is similar to the formula published in the Tianzhu shilu, CCT, vol. 1, pp. 78-79.
26 This incident is mentioned in Ricci’s journal. See FR I, p. 242, n. 6.
28 See my paper “The Jesuit Encounter with Buddhism in Ming China.”
in Portuguese or Latin, and doing translation exercises from the Confucian texts. After the arrival of the Italian Lazzaro Cattaneo in Shaozhou in 1594, Jesuit language training achieved a breakthrough for the musically trained Cattaneo succeeded in devising a tonal system to differentiate the numerous homonyms in Chinese, vastly facilitating the acquisition of conversational and comprehension skills. This trend of development culminated in the publication in 1626 of the *Xi ru er mu zhi (A Source For the Eyes and Ears of the Western Literati)* by the Belgian Jesuit Nicolas Trigault, which was a dictionary and language tool with Chinese characters arranged by vowels, consonants, and diphthongs.

The experience in learning Chinese by the first two generations of Jesuit missionaries determined the codification of the 1624 directive written by Visitor Manuel Dias Senior for the study of Chinese, the *Ratio Studiorum*29. Drawn up as a plan for the training of all future Jesuits in China, the *Ratio Studiorum* envisioned a four-year program for the new missionary. Under the tutelage of an older and experienced father, the newly arrived missionary, posted to a Jesuit residence in China proper, would acquire the fundamentals of conversational Chinese and social etiquette in the first six months of his arrival. Devoting himself exclusively to language studies (morning and afternoon sessions daily, except for feast days), the missionary would also begin classical Chinese reading in addition to acquiring conversational fluency. The latter skills would prepare him in managing the Jesuit residence (speaking to servants) and ministering to the Christian community (performing the sacraments and preaching), while the knowledge of classical Chinese would be deepened with the systematic study of the *Four Books*, the *Shujing* (Book of Documents) and parts of the *Yijing* (Book of Changes), while the other three texts of the *Five Classics* were deemed unnecessary for the formation of the missionary. Having acquired a good reading knowledge of Chinese texts, some fluency in conversation, and the rudiments of composition in classical Chinese after two years, the Jesuit student would enter the second part of his program, where a Chinese master, often a convert, would expound on the meaning of the Confucian Canon while supervising further compositional exercises. Thus the missionary would ideally have acquired a good grounding in the Confucian canon, with expositions sequentially from a Jesuit master and a Chinese tutor. He would thus be prepared linguistically and culturally to engage Chinese elite, that is literati, society, and be equipped philosophically and theologically to tackle issues of convergence and dispute between Christianity and Confucian philosophy. As an appendix to this system, the Society also widened its recruitment of “sons of Macau”, Chinese converts and mestico brothers born or raised in Macau, who would act as language auxiliaries and glorified catechists for the Jesuit residences.

There is evidence that this elaborate and costly system was practiced only for the decades of the 1620s and 1630s. A four year program of language immersion was

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29 The full title is “*Ratio Studiorum para os Nossos que ham de estudar as letras e lingua da China feyto no anno de 1624, pelo Padre Manuel Dias Senior…, etc. (1624)*”, Biblioteca Ájuda, Jesuitas na Ásia (hereafter cited as BA JA), 49-V-7, p. 310v°. This document has been analyzed at length in L. M. Brockey, *Journey to the East*. pp. 256-263. The subsequent discussion draws on Brockey’s work.
predicated upon the earlier experiences of Ruggieri, Ricci, and others, who enjoyed plenty of leisure for study due to the low numbers of conversions. As the mission slowly gained momentum after the opening years of the 17th century, the pressure increased for the few Jesuits in the China field. While there were still only about 2,500 converts in 1610, the year of Ricci’s death, the number had risen to 13,000 in 1627, when the *Ratio Studiorum* was being put into place, and to 70,000 by the end of the Ming dynasty in 164430. The number of Jesuit missionaries grew as well—from 8 in 1600 to 12 in 1616 and 28 in 1637—but hardly kept pace with the rapid growth of the Christian communities31.

The ideal of a mini Jesuit College in the manner of the Latin schools of Europe, as envisioned in the *Ratio Studiorum*, simply could not be institutionalized, except for a few years in Jiading between 1628 and 1632, due to the enormous and rapidly growing demand on Jesuit manpower. Dispersed throughout the many residences, most newly-arrived Jesuit missionaries continued to learn Chinese as apprentices to an older missionary, with the help of Chinese tutors and Chinese Jesuit brothers.

The turmoil of the Manchu conquests in mid-17th century and the persecutions during the Calendar Case (1664-1665) further disrupted the ideal language program. The renewed growth of the Mission after the late 1660s rendered imperative an intensification and shortening of the training. In spite of these constraints, the Jesuit Mission produced an enormously impressive corpus of works, a direct result of the intensive language training of the Society. By 1700 Jesuit authors and translators had produced more than 200 scientific, liturgical, catechistic, theological, spiritual, humanistic, and geographical works in classical Chinese. In addition, as a direct result of their studies of the *Four Books*, and the cumulative effort of several generations of Jesuit scholars, the Confucian canon was introduced to Europe by the *Sapientia Sinica* (1662), compiled and translated by Inácio da Costa (1603-1666) and Prospero Intorcetta (1625-1696), and the *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* (1687), compiled mainly by Philippe Couplet (1622-1693), based on the work of previous Jesuits32.

These achievements, however, were the work of Jesuits trained in an earlier rigorous language program. Da Costa arrived in China in 1634; Intorcetta and Couplet both in 1659: they still received a rigorous formation in the Confucian texts. By the time of a new generation of Jesuit missionaries, for example José Monteiro (1646-1720), who arrived in China in 1680, the practical demands of the mission had rendered Confucian studies an unachievable luxury. It is noteworthy that Monteiro compiled a short grammar for the quick training of the new generations of Jesuits, *Vera et Unica Praxis breviter e discendi, ac expeditissime loquendi Sinicum idioma*33,

which dispenses altogether with learning to read classical texts and focuses on the rapid acquisition of everyday conversational skills. Instead of learning the Confucian vocabulary of the Five Ethical Relations, the metaphysical terms for Heaven, Essence, etc., Monteiro’s text introduced Chinese terms on practical subjects: “God, Church, Sacristy”, “Christian and his obligations”, “Household things”, “Kitchen Things”, “Human Body and its parts”, “Dignities, Officials, and Justices”.

The older missionaries felt and lamented the decline of linguistic training. Above all, they felt the continued need to engage the Chinese literati through an ongoing Christian-Confucian dialogue. Criticizing the attitude of the new missionaries, the Visitor Francisco Nogueira (1632-1696), issued an order in 1699:

There is a complaint that the padres who have newly entered in China do not apply themselves to the study of Chinese letters from whence today there are very few—who can write a letter or compose Chinese books, with such prejudice for the Christian community that was augmented more by means of books than by way of preaching. Good example was given us on this particular point by our old padres that one finds only one who did not write and compose. Therefore, I highly recommend all to not content yourselves with only learning the language, but that you also apply yourselves to the study of letters.34

One of the signs of this transition from classical to colloquial Chinese is in the Jesuit press: for the first time, the Society published more works written in colloquial rather than classical Chinese, reflecting a new emphasis on evangelizing to the popular classes among a new generation of missionaries. Classical learning, however, was not altogether abandoned, but only a few enjoyed the leisure to pursue prolonged textual studies. The Jesuits at the imperial court of Beijing, in both the Portuguese Vice-Province and the autonomous French Mission, could boast of erudite men steeped in the Confucian classics as well as conversant in Manchu, the native language of the Qing ruling class.

III. — THE MENDICANT FRIARS

One of the very few Jesuits with experience in both China and Japan, João Rodrigues (1576-1629), the author of the first western grammar of Japanese, stated there were two ways for Europeans to learn the difficult languages of East Asia. One could either learn in daily use with the native speakers, or learn through an arte, namely

... grammatical precepts with good masters, listening to lessons from books in which the pure and elegant language is contained, composing and

34 Ba Ja, 49-V-23, ”Ordens para as Residencias da China que deixou o P. Visitador Francisco Nogueira visitando esta Provincia no anno de 1699”, fº 337rº-340vº. The instructions regarding language training appear on fº 340rº-vº. See also L. M. Brockey, Journey to the East, pp. 285-286.
doing other appropriate exercise, in the manner of those who learn Latin, Greek, and Hebrew.35

While both approaches were involved in the learning of Chinese, the Jesuit Mission clearly privileged the latter approach. An interesting contrast is provided by the other religious orders that established missions in China. For the first fifty years of the Catholic Mission in China, the Society of Jesus represented the sole order. In the 1630s, in spite of the strong opposition of the Jesuits, Dominicans and Franciscans from the Philippines penetrated what the Fathers had hitherto considered their exclusive missionary field. It is instructive, therefore, to examine the programs for language study of the two mendicant orders.

Long before entering China, the Dominicans had already acquired a long experience of evangelizing among the Chinese immigrants in Manila. When the Spaniards consolidated their rule in Manila in 1571, a Chinese community had already established itself nearby. Entrusted with the task of evangelizing the Chinese community of Parian in 1587, the Dominicans developed their own linguistic approach, which combined both textual studies and conversational immersion. The pioneer was Juan Cobo, who arrived in Manila in 1588. The best linguist among the Blackfriars, Cobo published a dialogue in nine chapters, written in classical Chinese, *Veritable Record of the authentic tradition of the true faith in the Infinite God*, published by Chinese printers in Manila in 1593.36 Inspired by Ruggieri’s 1584 catechism, the *Tianzhu Shilu*, Cobo’s work was significantly entitled *Tianzhu Zhengjiao Zengzhuan shilu*. While Cobo showed familiarity with Confucian learning in this text, his training in Chinese was strongly marked by the regional character of Chinese immigrants in Manila, almost all of whom originated from the coastal strip of Fujian province, and spoke the Minnan or Hokkien dialects of the south or the Fuzhou dialects of the north.

Cobo’s next publication was very much influenced by the Minnan dialect. A translation of the 1441 work by Fan Lipen, the *Ming xin bao jian* (*A precious Mirror for Rectifying the Heart*), Cobo’s work carried however the romanized title, *Beng sim po cam*, the Minnan pronunciation of the Chinese characters. Throughout the texts, numerous words and expressions represented Minnan colloquialisms rather than classical written Chinese, as van der Loon has shown.37 Thanks to the Fujianese immigrant community, Dominican missionaries, when they first arrived in Fujian in the 1630s, had received some preparation in the spoken language of their mission territory. Before Francisco Diez (1606-1646) came to China, for example, he had studied Mandarin with the Chinese in Manila, and would become one of the leading linguists of the Dominican mission in China, as we shall see.38 Some friars were gifted in both the Minnan dialect and Mandarin, such as Pedro Barreda, who

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37 Ibid., p. 19.
died however at the young age of 33. The Dominicans seemed to have prided themselves on their knowledge of spoken dialects and their method of direct evangelizing among the lower classes. Three Dominican missionaries — Victorio Ricci (1621-1685), Magino Ventallol (1647-1732), and Francisco Caballero (1677-1738) — even compiled grammar and word lists for the dialects of Xiamen and Moyang.

The strong commercial and migratory connections between southern Fujian and the Spanish Philippines shielded the Spanish Dominicans from having to confront a totally alien linguistic and cultural milieu. Traveling by Fujianese merchant junks and sheltered by local Christian families, the Dominicans could also count a Fujian native as one of their own (the only Chinese in the 17th century Dominican mission, although there were more in the 18th century): Gregório Lopez, alias Luo Wenzao (1617-1691), born near Funing in northern Fujian, educated in Manila, and fluent in both Spanish and Minnan, became the first Chinese Bishop to be ordained in the late 17th century. For these reasons, during the Ming and Qing periods the Dominicans confined themselves almost exclusively to Fujian, preferring the cultivation of their own intense patch of mission territory, rather than venturing into the other linguistic and cultural regions of the vast Chinese Empire.

More adventurous geographically than their mendicant brethren, the Franciscans maintained mission stations in several provinces: in the northern province of Shandong, the interior northwestern province of Shaanxi and Shanxi, and in the southern coastal province of Guangdong. Unlike the Jesuits, we have relatively few sources on the linguistic training of the mendicant orders. There is no evidence that the friars provided for the systematic training of their own in the Confucian canon, although individual missionaries became quite proficient as demonstrated by their Chinese publications, and at least one Commissioner (the head of the Franciscan China Mission) voiced his strong support for it.

Bonaventura Ibañez, (1610-1691) arrived in the Philippines in 1644 and traveled in 1649 to China. His long missionary sojourn in China was interrupted by a prolonged absence (1663-1672), during which he procured reinforcements and fresh finances from Europe and spoke on behalf of the Chinese Rites controversy in Rome. In his 1668 response to questions posed by the Congregation for the Propagation of Faith regarding Chinese Rites, Ibañez answered that:

He necessario che’l ministro apostolico impare la lingua generale de quell regno, alla quale chiamano mandarina, acioque con essa possa predicare et essere intesso per tutto il regno; e di piu ogni una provincia tien la sua particolare lingua. Ancora debe imparare le letere chine per convincere a li literati con le sententie de suoi libri.

39 Id., Misiones Dominicanas en China, here vol. 1, p. 147.
40 Id., Historia de las misiones dominicanas de China, vol. 5, pp. 63, 74, 153.
41 The Dominicans established scholarships for Chinese boys in Manila for seminary training in the early 18th century.
42 SF, vol. 3, pp. 3-5.
43 Ibid., p. 59.
Ibañez reckoned three years to be the minimum for learning Chinese. In a letter to the provincial in Manila, dated 18 January, 1676, he wrote:

Para que un missionario pueda aprender esta lengua china lo precisamente necesario para predicarles a estos gentiles en su lengua la ley de Dios, ha menester tres años continuos de estudio y ejercicio, poniendo en ello todo cuidado y sentido; que como tenga esto, aunque sea de poca memoria, vendrá a ser grande lengua, porque en esta lengua solo hay mil quarto cientos y 64 vocablos, y no mas; y así poco tiene que trabajarse la memoria; solo el entendimiento y la voluntad y buen sentido.

For this reason, Ibañez advised a later provincial, that younger men under thirty years should be selected for the mission for they could more easily learn the difficult language.

Not only were memory and diligence necessary for learning Chinese, more important perhaps was the attitude of the student. Ibañez reported on a particularly difficult case to the Provincial in Manila; it concerned the friar Juan de S. Frutos (1656–1693), whom I have already mentioned at the beginning of this paper. In his letter dated 30 November, 1685, Ibañez reported that

… el hermano predicador Fr. Juan de S. Frutos, que V. C. nos embio el año pasado de 84, el qual ha un año que esta aca, y aun no ha aprendido los rudimentos de la lengua chinica, y, si no muda de carretilla, tarde o nunca llegara a ser lengua, y, sin ella, ni a ser ministro. Es lastima haverle sacado de essa santa comunidad de Manila, donde con su buen exemplo haria mucho fruto; mas para el officio de missionario apostolico no basta el dar buen ejemplo para sacar a los gentiles de sus errors, para lo cual no solo deve el missionario aprender su lengua, mas tambien sus letras o caracteres, para enterarse por sus libros de sus errors para sacarles de ellos. Ha sido muchas vezes exortado para que con efficacia estudie esta lengua, mas no ay sacarle de su estilo. El por la mañana, en disponerse para reconciliarse y en confessarse, va de vagar, y antes de vestirse para dezir missa, puesto de rodillas se esta el tiempo que otro en dezir missa; luego se viste muy dispacio, y assi mesmo dize su missa como la dizen los demas missionarios, solo que en los mementos gasta mas tiempo que el espacio de toda la missa. Acabada su missa, se recoje y no sale hasta bien tarde; y en esto gasta la mañana hasta cerca de hora de comer. Todo esto es cosa loable, puesto en essa santa comunidad; mas para el officio de missionario no basta el ocio santo de Maria a los pies de Cristo, si quiere ganar estas almas gentilicas para Dios; y esto no se puede hazer estandose recogido en su celda, sin estudiar la lengua.

The young friar was in fact on strike. Juan de S. Frutos requested repeatedly to be sent to Japan, hoping no doubt for martyrdom in Tokugawa Japan, a country that had exiled and outlawed Christianity after 1614. Eventually yielding to obedience,

44 Ibid., p. 153.
Juan was assigned to the mission post at Chaozhou in Guangdong province, where he fervently cared for the lepers. Suffering from asthma, he returned to die in Guangzhou in 1697 in the odor of sanctity. If knowledge of Chinese was a prerequisite for the missionary, a good command of the language proved indispensable for leadership in the Franciscan mission. Writing to Provincial Michele Flores in 1688 on the possible choices for the post of commissioner, Ibañez stated that a good knowledge of Chinese characters was indispensable: the commissioner must intervene with the viceroy and other high officials in order to help Christians in small communities and towns molested by lower-rank mandarins and gentiles; he must gain the friendship of high mandarins by demonstrating a command of Chinese letters. Only two Franciscans in China at the time, Ibañez counseled, were qualified: Agustín de San Pascual and Jaime Tarin; a third candidate, Bernardo de la Encarnacion, spoke Chinese less well and read poorly.

Like the Jesuits, the friars also used the apprenticeship system to train new missionaries: Bonaventura Ibañez, an old China hand by 1674, taught Chinese to the new comers; Jaime Tarin (1644-1719), one of the ablest Franciscan linguists of the late 17th century, owed his proficiency to Agustín de San Pascual (1637-1697), author and translator of four Chinese works. There seems to be no defined length for the initial language course; reports of the late 17th century suggest a period of six to nine months being the norm for the Franciscans.

IV. — THE MISSIONARY SINOLOGIST

A direct result of language studies was the compilation of grammars and dictionaries, most of which remained as manuscripts for the training of newly arrived missionaries. Similar to the Sino-Portuguese dictionary compiled by Ruggieri and Ricci in the 1580s, the Dominicans also distinguished themselves with their lexicographical fervor. In addition to the Arte de la Lengua China and a Vocabulario Chino compiled by Cobo in Manila, who incidentally never went to China, having perished at sea on a 1592 voyage to Japan. Other works by Dominicans included Cabecillas, o simpliciter necesario para todos. Libro para los principiantes en lengua china compiled by Juan Bautista de Morales (1597-1664) and Francisco Díez, the latter also credited with a Vocabulario de letra China con la explicacion castellana (1640), and Francisco Varo’s (1627-1687) Vocabulario de la lengua Mandarina con el estilo y vocablos conque se habla sin elegancia.

48 Ibid., pp. 296-297.
49 Ibid., p. 138
51 N. Standaert, Handbook, p. 268.
52 Ibid., p. 871. This work has been edited and published by W. S. Coblin, Francisco Varo’s Glossary. Vol. 1 presents Varo’s manuscript with English translations for the Spanish and Chinese characters for Varo’s romanizations; vol. 2 consists of pinyin and English indexes supplied by Coblin.
Besides language tools, the various missionary orders also published works in Chinese, which provide an interesting source for measuring the direction and success of the linguistic preparation of the different orders. The first fact is size. The list of Jesuit Chinese titles dwarfs the other religious orders: in 1707 the Jesuit printing press in Beijing had published 212 Chinese books composed or translated by the fathers (123 titles in religious subjects, and 89 in secular subjects); Jesuit presses in the residence of Fuzhou had published 51 titles, and that in Hangzhou another 40. Their nearest competitor, the Franciscans, had a mere 19 titles to their credit. The Dominicans and the Augustinians had six and four titles respectively in the holdings of the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

The second contrast is subject matter. Except for two works by the Franciscan Antonio Caballero de Santa Maria (1602-1669), the first friar from that order to arrive in China (in 1633), all Chinese works by members of the mendicant orders were catechisms, prayer-books, confraternity rules, and hagiographies, often translated from Spanish works. The two books by Antonio Caballero, unquestionably the best linguist in his order, demonstrated a good knowledge of the Confucian Canon. In *Tianru yin* (Concordance between Christianity and Confucianism), published in 1664, Caballero offered a Christian exegesis of selected sentences from the *Four Books*; *Zheng xue Lo shi* (Pure Gold of Righteous Learning), published posthumously in 1698, proffered a critique of Song neo-Confucianism written in good classical Chinese.

A final point emerges in this comparison. In all religious orders, only a minority of missionaries became proficient in Chinese to author or translate books in that language, but the proportion was higher among the Jesuits than the mendicants. Xu Zongze lists 70 Jesuit authors/translators in his compilation of Jesuit Sinica in the Ming-Qing period; they represented a higher percentage of the European Jesuits (ca. 415, excluding Chinese Jesuits) active in the mission than the mendicant missionaries. The Franciscans, numerically second to the Society, and totaling around

53 BnF chinois, 7046.
54 This number is compiled from the Chinese collection of the Manuscripts orientaux of BnF. SF, vol. 7, pp. 1273-1279, “Opera sinica fratrum Hispanorum”, lists 17 titles in Chinese by Ibañez, Piñuela, Paschale, and Peris, but leaves out Antonio Caballero de Santa Maria, Manuel de San Bautista, and Eugene Piloti.
55 BnF chinois, 7148.
56 BnF chinois, 7154.
57 Xu Zongze, *Ming Qing jian Yesuhui shi yizhu tiyao*. Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1989. The problem of calculating the exact number of Jesuits active in China is complex but not insurmountable. The comprehensive list compiled by J. Dehergne, *Répertoire des jésuites de Chine*, contains 920 names. However, the actual number active in China was far lower than this figure. The 920 names collected by Dehergne were compiled from lists in Roman and Portuguese archives of Jesuits who had ostensibly left for the China Mission. In fact, some died en route; others were diverted to the missions in India, Japan, or Southeast Asia; still others spent only a few weeks visiting China, but not in a missionary role, such as the famous Spanish Jesuit Alonso Sanchez. In my initial tally, I have come up with 415 names of European Jesuits who were involved in the China Mission, either as active missionaries in the field (including those who spent only a short time there), those affiliated with the Vice-Province of China but operating out of Macau (those Jesuits based in Macau but affiliated with the Japan
60 missionaries for the 17th and 18th centuries (with a maximum strength of 29 friars in 1701)\textsuperscript{58}, numbered 7 authors/translators, with three friars (Piñuela, Paschale, and Caballero de Santa Maria responsible for nearly all the books). A total of 60 Dominicans (including 5 Chinese) worked in China between the 1630s and 1770s; altogether 13 of them composed or translated works into Chinese, with the first generation of missionaries, men such as Morales, Varo, and Díez, responsible for the larger-scale grammatical and lexicographical works\textsuperscript{59}. The Augustinians, who numbered 8 at their maximum strength in 1706, boasted only 4 titles from the hands of just two friars, the Shi ke wen, a dialogue in classical Chinese by Álvaro de Benavente (1646-1709) and three short translations of prayers and catechisms by Tomas Ortiz (1668-1742)\textsuperscript{60}.

V. — SINOLOGY AND THE CHINESE RITES CONTROVERSY

Learning Chinese was not merely a necessary tool for the missionary; the origins of the bitter Chinese rites controversy, which pitted the religious orders against one another and led directly to the conflict between Beijing and Rome, hinged on the understanding of a Chinese character, pronounced either as ji to denote sacrifice or zhái to mean worship. The Dominican Morales, one of the instigators of the controversy, recalled:

\begin{quote}
Desde la entrada del P. Angel [Cocchi] en este reino, transcurrieron mas de dos años, sin que él ni yo supieramos cosa alguna de lo que en China pasaba acerca de lo que se dirá luego. Dijele un día al P. Antonio de Santa María [Caballero]: Vaya usted a la iglesia de Fogan, que yo me estaré en la de Tingeu. Estaba a la sazón dicho padre estudiando un libro impreso en caracteres chinos. Y como topase con una letra, cuya voz es Chy\textsuperscript{61}, no supo su significado ni podía entenderlo por más que se esforzaba en explicárselo un cristiano llamado Tadeo, que le estaba enseñando. Por fin, Tadeo, no pudiendo dárselo a entender, le dijo: “Padre, esta letra significa sacrificar, y explica lo que vosotros decís en la Misa.” Preguntado luego por el Padre si los cristianos en China tenían aquellos sacrificios, respondió que sí. Con esto quedó confuso el Padre, y me escribió que averiguase lo que era aquello\textsuperscript{62}.
\end{quote}

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\textsuperscript{58} N. \textsc{Standaert}, \textit{Handbook}, p. 307.

\textsuperscript{59} Figures compiled from J. M. \textsc{Gonzalez}, O. P., \textit{Historia de las misiones}, vol. 5.

\textsuperscript{60} N. \textsc{Standaert}, \textit{Handbook}, p. 307. BnF chinois, 7023, 7042, 7326, 7426.

\textsuperscript{61} Ji in the pinyin system of Romanization.

\textsuperscript{62} J. M. \textsc{Gonzalez}, O. P., \textit{Historia de las misiones}, vol. 1, p. 115.
Together, the Franciscan Caballero and Dominican Morales then challenged the Jesuit latitude in allowing Chinese Christians to continue participation in rites the friars deemed superstitious: the annual ritual honoring Confucius required of all scholars, and the private rituals to honor departed ancestors crucial to familial and lineage maintenance in Chinese society.

Very soon, the rites controversy assumed the tone of a linguistic strife: Who was the better linguist? Who had a more accurate understanding of Chinese texts? The Franciscan Paschale, himself a good linguist, was sensitive at the Jesuit critique that the mendicant friars were poor Sinologists. In his 1680 work, *Malleus, scriptum Latinum de ritibus sinicis*, Paschale commented on the self-claimed greater linguistic abilities on the part of the defenders of the Chinese rites. Since the time of Ricci, Paschale said, he had heard that no more than 2 or 3 Jesuits could compose in classical Chinese. Yes, the Jesuits had produced 300 works in Chinese, but most were actually composed in good style by Christian Chinese literati who listened to the verbal exposition by Jesuits or who helped in translations. It was clear that the Jesuits could not be credited with authorship of all these 300 works. It was unfair to accuse the mendicants of neglecting the study of Chinese. In a gesture of mendicant (and Spanish) solidarity, Paschale then praised four Dominicans: Francisco Diez, who had compiled a Sino-Spanish dictionary of 7,169 characters, Morales, who had composed the first Chinese grammar, Francisco Varo, who spoke excellent Mandarin as well as the Fujian dialect, and of course Gregorio Lopez, a native of China. Probably with the Rites controversy in mind, Varo, who compiled his Mandarin-Spanish dictionary in the 1690s, included no less than eight entries under the headings “sacrificar” and “Sacrificios” to denote the various Chinese and Christian usages of the terms in the Chinese language.

It came to the point that some newly arrived missionaries, such as Artus de Lionne (1655-1713), a member of the newly founded Missions Étrangères de Paris (MEP) and one of most vigorous critics of the Jesuits and Chinese religion, studied controversial Chinese text fragments for his language preparation.

After de Lionne’s return to France, the struggle was continued by another MEP missionary, Charles Maigrot (1652-1730), successor to François Pallu (1626-1684), one of the founders of the MEP and among the first three vicars apostolic appointed by Rome to supplant the Portuguese *Padroado* in Asia. On arriving in Fuzhou in 1698 to take up his position as Vicar Apostolic, Maigrot, who had acquired the reputation of a learned Sinologist among some missionaries, immediately headed

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65 BA JA, 49-V-22, f° 88v°-89r°: Letter of Abbot de Lionne (MEP) to P. Fillippuchi, Fuzhou, 12 April, 1692. Lionne has been studiously reading controversial literature composed by the missionaries for his Chinese language studies since his arrival in China.

66 Maigrot was praised by Joseph Francisco Boccardo de Langasco (1665-1712) (Lu Jo-se), an Italian reformed Franciscan who arrived in China in 1698. He stayed with Maigrot in Fuzhou for several months learning Chinese and later praised Maigrot’s learning. See SF, vol. 9, *Relationes et Epistolae fratrum minorum hispanorum*, p. 745.
for a collision course with the Jesuits and Chinese Christians by proclaiming an edict excommunicating all who did not adhere to his strict condemnation of Chinese Rites. He promptly suspended the Jesuits Giampaolo Gozani (1659-1732) and João da Sá (1672-1731), who had raised difficulties about enforcing the decrees among the Chinese, thus provoking a direct confrontation with a group of enraged Chinese Christians. An anonymous Jesuit source hostile to Maigrot commented:

\[O \text{Senhor Cononense [Maigrot] tinha de satis annos quasi confimos de assistência en Fochey com larga experiencia e infimo conhecimento da quelles Christaons, tem tal sciencia de lingoa e letra e livras sinicos, e tal eminencia em todas a letras europeas, que chegou a dizer por escrito o Illm Senhor Attraz de Leone Bispo de Rosalia, que podia o ditto Senhor disputar e convencer aquelles padres da Companhia de Jesus havia em todo o mundo tinha confucimento etrado intimo (como elle diz) com os Mandarinis mais supremos da provincia, couza que muito costuma grangear a authoridade com os Christaons.}\]

According to Maigrot, a doctor of the Sorbonne, Gozani had only been in China for 6 years and did not know enough Chinese language or books; and Sá had only been in China for one year. Maigrot told the Chinese Christians that Gozani had been suspended for teaching idolatry and superstitions.

To settle the bitter controversy between religious orders, Carlo Maillard de Tournon, legatus a latere appointed by Clement XI, departed Europe in May 1703, bearing a papal bull condemning the purported superstitious practices in Chinese rituals. Tournon reached Beijing in the winter of 1705-1706; he was granted two audiences with the Kangxi emperor but failed to make a good impression. At the end of June Maigrot arrived at the imperial capital; on 22 July he was summoned to the imperial palace at Rehe. During the audience Maigrot, conversant only in the Fuzhou dialect, was unable to speak mandarin with the emperor, and had to rely on the Jesuit Dominique Parennin as interpreter. At one point, Kangxi asked Maigrot to identify the four Chinese characters painted on a scroll behind his throne, of which Maigrot only recognized one. Kangxi then demanded Maigrot to expound on the differences between Confucianism and Christianity. Again, Maigrot failed to answer, to the visible displeasure of the emperor. On 2 August, Kangxi wrote out his judgement: “[Maigrot is] ignorant and illiterate, how dare he venture an opinion on the philosophy of China”. The next day, the emperor wrote to Tournon:

\[Yendang [Maigrot’s Chinese name] does not know characters; he speaks Chinese badly and needs an interpreter. People like him who dare to discuss the meaning of Chinese texts are like those who stand outside a house, never having set foot inside, and discussing its domestic affairs. Their arguments have no basis.\]

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67 BA JA, 49-V-23, p. 172r.  
68 On Kangxi’s audience with Maigrot see H. FANG, *Zhengu Tianshujuan*; here vol. 2, pp. 323-324.
Shortly after Tournon’s departure from Beijing, Kangxi issued an edict requiring all European missionaries to subscribe to the “way of Father Ricci” and promising never to leave China if they wished to receive an imperial certificate of residence. The Chinese Rites Controversy, which began with the meaning of a Franciscan missionary’s encounter with a Chinese character, found its denouement with the failure of another missionary’s ignorance of other Chinese characters.