

Jesuit Michele Ruggieri (1543-1607) and the Latin Poem on his Missions in China

Xie Mingguang, Beijing Foreign Studies University, Beijing

Massimiliano Carloni, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Wien

Italian Jesuit Michele Ruggieri (1543-1607, known in China as Luo Mingjian 羅明堅), who came to China in 1579 and left for Europe in 1588, is considered one of the pioneer China missionaries, who helped to lay a solid foundation for Matteo Ricci in preaching Christianity in China. Besides, he is also believed to be one of the sinology founders who played an important role in the mutual communication between China and the West and composed many works, both in print and in manuscripts, which are now preserved in several libraries and archives in Europe.

The Latin poem is found in the report “Relatione del successo della missione della Cina dal mese di novembre 1577, sino all’anno 1591 del padre Michel Ruggiero al molto V. P. padre Claudio Acquaviva Generale della Compagnia di Giesu nostro padre”, completed after 1591. The poem has a total of 437 lines, no title, and no clear writing date. The whole poem is a third-person account of the difficult process of how a hero from Catholic Rome - Michele Ruggieri - introduced Catholicism to China. The whole poem, with a strong classical color, is a great and touching *epicum carmen*, in which Father Ruggieri’s heroic deeds during his mission in China are fully described.

The heroic poem describes the causes and consequences of Michele Ruggieri's Catholic expedition to China, as well as what he saw, heard, and suffered, such as geography, nature, climate, products, arts, religious beliefs, etc. The poem also narrates the specific difficulties Michele Ruggieri confronted and the successes he achieved in China, including his success in repelling a Chinese infidel's accusation against him, the trust of Chinese government officials and, consequently, the establishment in Guangzhou of a chapel after his restoration, and most importantly, the gradual entrenchment of the Catholic cause in China. It should be pointed out, however, that this Latin poem describes only partly or just a fragment of Michele Ruggieri's mission in China, rather than the entire history of his China missions. Besides, the content recorded in this poem is not completely in line with the historical facts that Ruggieri experienced. By contrast, its content is a combination of fiction and reality and describes in a rhetorical manner the deeds of a frustrated hero.

Literary creation, including poetry and dramatic performance, is an important tradition in Jesuit humanist education, just as we can see in Jesuit Fathers Ferdinand Verbiest and Jean-Baptiste Du Halde. As a student of the Society of Jesus, Michele Ruggieri’s mission in China

profoundly reflected such Jesuitic education, as we can find in his several literary works, such as the Chinese poems, some Bible stories, and, in our case, the Latin poem.

There is no doubt that Michele Ruggieri was one of the first Europeans to introduce Western literature to China, such as the biblical stories he attached to his Chinese learning textbook *Tongsu gushi* (通俗故事, *Popular Stories*), as well as some of Aesop's fables in his Chinese poems conserved in the Roman Archives of the Society of Jesus (Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu). These Chinese materials show how great Michele Ruggieri achieved in learning Chinese; in particular, the Jueju (絕句, *Chinese quatrain*) sung in harmony with Chinese literati is a demonstration of his friendship with them (Xu Wei 徐渭, for example), following the tradition of the Chinese intellectual class in making friends. Undoubtedly, this is one kind of practice of the accommodation policy by the Jesuits in China.

Meanwhile, this Latin poem, with many mythological figures borrowed from ancient Greece and Rome, describes China's society, its exotic scenery, the pagans, and Catholic missions in China as well, to construct the image of China in the eyes of a European who then introduced this image into the vision of the West in early modern Europe.

Therefore, the Latin poem has the dual function of history and literature, and the study will also start from this dual function, conducting research on the following three aspects. The first is to discuss the historical background of the text, mainly from the following aspects: Michele Ruggieri's life, education, especially the humanistic education he received in Europe, so as to understand the context in which he was able to compose the Latin poem; consequently, the research, investigating other documents, will talk about Michele Ruggieri's missionary work in China, so as to reconstruct the history, society and background of the production of the poem, as well as its relationship with Michele Ruggieri (taking into account Ruggieri's missions).

Secondly, the study will revolve around the text of the Latin poem. It will discuss the authorship of the poem, the textual structure, and the text itself, so as to make clear the relationship of the Latin poem with Michele Ruggieri (especially there is no direct proof to attribute the authorship of the poem to Ruggieri) and with his missions in China, which will be helpful in better understanding the poem as historical writing and as literature.

In the end, the paper will also talk about the historical value and significance of the Latin poem. Firstly, this Latin poem undoubtedly embodies the humanist education in the Society of Jesuits. Obviously, Michele Ruggieri is a *good* student and a *good* missionary in adapting the accommodation policy in the field of literature; secondly, this Latin poem is an important historical text for describing rhetorically Michele Ruggieri's missions in China, but it cannot be regarded as completely trustworthy material, since many historical facts were misremembered and missed in the poem. Third, in terms of cultural exchanges between China and the West, this Latin poem is the continuation and enrichment of the narrative of China

since Luís de Camões (1524-1580) and Juan González de Mendoza (1545-1618), two Iberian writers who contributed greatly to the shaping of the image of China in European literature, and is unprecedented progress, because it is based on the personal experiences of Michele Ruggieri in China, and also reflects Michele Ruggieri's depressed thoughts in Jesuit missions.

Key Words: Michele Ruggieri, Latin Poem, Jesuit Humanistic Education, Jesuit Mission in China