

Cross and Dragon

Matteo Ricci and China

A Screenplay by

Edwin Kong

Praise for Cross and Dragon

Ricci presented new scientific concepts, such as geometry, modern astronomy, and metallurgy, to China. Ricci's most important contribution, however, was to give China for the first time a new sense of its position in the world, showing that there was at least one other civilisation to be taken into consideration.

This screenplay is an important contribution to wider dissemination of Ricci's role and personality. The story traces Ricci's life from his landing in China to his arrival in Beijing and his death in the Chinese capital and how he became a cultural translator.

—Francesco Sisci
Italian Sinologist

This remarkably imaginative and well-researched treatment of the adventurous China-Mission of Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) brings to life a crucial page in the history of Sino-Western relations. It brings into subtle focus the poignant meeting of two great world cultures at their zenith – that of the European Renaissance and that of the literary artistic and philosophical flowering of China's last native dynasty.

There have been numerous books written about Ricci and the Jesuit Mission in China, both in Western languages and in Chinese, some more academic than others. What this new screenplay succeeds in doing brilliantly – something that has never been done before – is to throw into vivid focus the dramatic quality of this cultural encounter.

The screenplay is conceived in vivid dramatic detail, without ever losing sight of the profound philosophical issues underlying the

great adventure it narrates. It will be certain to generate widespread discussion and intellectual debate, causing a renewed interest in the possibilities of a deeper understanding between China and the world, at a time when such understanding is sadly threatened by political prejudice and commercial rivalry.

—**John Minford**

*Emeritus Professor of Chinese Studies,
Australian National University*

The script contributes to our understanding of a very crucial intersection between Chinese and western culture(s). Ricci ventured into China at an exciting moment; even though the Ming was declining politically, it was the height of art and culture. While he arrived with the single-minded aim to spread Christianity to China, it was no easy task, not only because the Christian creed appeared to be heterodox in Chinese eyes, or that the Chinese were unduly xenophobic, but because they had such rich cultural resources of their own. Ricci himself was overwhelmed. He had to resist many temptations, not least the sexual seduction of Danran, but the seduction of superior minds, including those of Li Zhi, Tang Xianzu and Qu Taisu. Their intellectual, artistic and cultural encounters must have been very challenging to him, and yet they were liberating at the same time, liberating him from the restrictive, authoritarian grip of the Catholic church. Ricci himself was bound by the orthodoxy of the Inquisition that persecuted Galileo, whose astronomical ideas he shared, and by the methods he was allowed to use to convert Chinese pagans. Galileo and Ricci were both taught by the Jesuit Mathematician Christopher Clavius.

—**Elizabeth Sinn**

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Contents

- 2 *Foreword*
- 4 *Introduction*
- 6 *The Story*
- 8 *Historical Settings*
- 16 *Main Characters*
- 27 *Part I: Leaving Home*
- 51 *Part II: Building the Church*
- 125 *Part III: Fall and Rise*
- 153 *Part IV: Becoming a Mandarin*
- 235 *Part V: Converting the Emperor*
- 302 *Postscript*
- 304 *Illustrations*
- 305 *Acknowledgements*

Foreword

I felt inspired after reading the film script, *Matteo Ricci: Cross and Dragon*. Edwin Kong, who wrote the script, has been involved in the film and media industry in Hong Kong for many years. I found the story to be an ingenious re-creation of the Italian Jesuit priest's life in China, based on meticulous research.

In the script, Ricci, the prime mover behind the founding of the Jesuit mission in China, is represented as a point of conjunction between Chinese and Western cultures. Ricci journeyed to China from Italy in the 1580s after being ordered by the Pope to convert Chinese people. He lived there until his death in 1610. During this time, he introduced many different types of knowledge from the West to Chinese scholars of the late Ming Dynasty, who referred to him as the “Western Confucius.”

The script also features the radical Ming Dynasty thinker Li Zhi as a key figure. Li drew acolytes, including women, through his advocacy that history should be assessed pluralistically and change over time. In addition, he became one of the first to incorporate such thinking into his published works, which were characterized by ironic titles such as *A Book to Keep (Hidden)*. Though Li's free-thinking perspective was accepted by other Chinese literati, it sparked fierce opposition from the then powerful Neo-Confucians and their dogmatic belief that Confucius's right and wrong must be viewed as the only interpretation.

The brilliance of the script is that it assigns more than a strictly historical role to Li and Ricci, allowing one of the most daring intellectuals of the late Ming to form a friendship with a leading “Renaissance man.” In doing so, it presents the collision and blending of Chinese and Western cultures, allowing the characteristics and spiritual perspectives of both to be revealed.

Now, more than 400 years on from Ricci’s arrival in China, exchanges between East and West have turned into a tidal wave. Thus, exploring this early connection takes on even greater significance.

Professor Wang Tianyou

Former Head, Department of History, Peking University

Introduction

How did this film script come into being?

In the early 1980s, renowned Italian film producer Mario Cotone (*The Godfather II* and *Once Upon a Time in America*) came to China to undertake the filming of the award-winning movie *The Last Emperor*. During his stay in the Forbidden City in Beijing, Cotone discovered that another Italian had lived there some 400 years earlier: Matteo Ricci. Cotone and his production team were astonished to learn about Ricci's life because few in Italy were aware of him.

Under the direction of Cotone and RAI, Italy's public national television broadcaster, many attempts were made to write a film script about Ricci. Yet the producers always felt the necessary insights into Chinese history were missing. I had once been a Cotone mentee, maintaining a strong friendship with him over the years. In 2002, he asked whether I could tackle the subject. When I said "yes," I had no idea how demanding the project would be.

Despite the difficulties, it proved a fascinating journey through diverse cultures and history. In Hong Kong, where I live, Eastern and Western cultures converge and collide every day, and I have always found the way that Westerners think to be so different from the way

Chinese people think that it is like using computers with different software. While the former seek to pursue “truth” through rigorous examination of facts, the latter strive to balance differences with the goal of achieving “harmony.”

Given the international nature of Ricci’s story, my project team and I turned to the long-tested structure of the “hero’s journey.” Following such a narrative model meant that alongside the leading role of Ricci (protagonist), our story needed a foil (antagonist) to highlight the lead’s personality and motivations. On that basis, we “discovered” Li Zhi, a rebel intellectual of his times, with credit for this discovery going to team members Professor John Minford and Chan Chan-ming.

Finally, my profound gratitude to Mario Cotone, whose sponsorship brought the script into existence, enabling this book to serve as a commemoration of Ricci’s “mission impossible” in China four centuries ago.

Edwin Kong

The Story

The epic saga of Italian Jesuit priest Mateo Ricci and his quest to convert China in the late 16th century and early 17th century is a tale for our times. The historic adventures of the Jesuit spanned three turbulent and colorful decades in China's Ming Dynasty, took him across the country, and brought him into contact with a range of extraordinary characters. Armed not with weapons but only his ideas, Ricci became – and remains – one of the most revered Western figures in China. Indeed, every schoolchild knows his name. Yet in Ricci's own country, his incredible odyssey is largely forgotten.

Growing up in 16th-century Italy, Ricci was a product of Renaissance Europe. Before the popularization of printed works, children were drilled in memory techniques from an early age. The young Ricci later received a first-rate education at the elite Jesuit-run Roman College, the Harvard or Cambridge of its time. Top students studied there, with Ricci excelling not only at languages but also the most advanced Renaissance science, including astronomy, mathematics, and optics.

When Ricci reached China, he soon became an expert in Chinese and a sought-after teacher, with his memory techniques proving invaluable to students preparing to sit the country's rigorous public examinations. Passing exams has held the key to social mobility for Chinese people for over 1,000 years. Ricci's skills, combined with his knowledge of the latest Western science, technology, and the creative arts, also attracted the attention of key Chinese intellectuals and Imperial Court figures.

Although it was next to impossible for foreigners to stay in China at the time, Ricci managed to remain for 30 years, opening a pathway for the Jesuits to gain acceptance and even work for several emperors in the subsequent Qing Dynasty.

In the script, his relationship with Buddhist lay nun Mei Danran presents a fascinating view of a Chinese woman who stands outside normal conventions of the time, while his acquaintance with Taoist scholar Qu Taisu brings the adaptive force of Chinese culture clearly into focus. However, it is the friendship with the “dangerous” liberal thinker, Li Zhi, that defines Ricci as a man, challenges his religious faith, and forces him to choose between his friend, his conscience, and his mission.

Ricci, or Li Madou as he called himself in Chinese, did not make his journey alone. His fellow Jesuits provide contrasting perspectives, from the righteous Nicolò Longobardi (Lung Wahman) to the practical Michele Ruggieri (Lu Minjian), the artistic Diego de Pantoja (Pang Tiwo) and Ricci’s mentor, Alessandro Valignano (Fan Leong). All, along with their adopted Chinese names, are now part of China’s history.

Historical Settings

The script travels between landmark locations East and West to unfold Matteo Ricci's story and the world of his era.

Europe in the time of Ricci

On the religious front in 16th-century Europe, successive waves of the Protestant Reformation and frequent disputes between church and state combined to sharply reduce the authority that the Catholic Church had once enjoyed. At the same time, Islam entered its second great age of expansion, with the Ottoman Turks under Suleiman the Magnificent capturing Belgrade in 1521 and almost taking Vienna in 1533.

To make up for its losses in Europe, the Vatican sought to reassert itself and expand its sphere of influence. It did so by encouraging its followers to go on global expeditions in search of new converts, a venture made possible by the great geographic discoveries and naval power of the Catholic states of Portugal and Spain.

Jesuits were among the pioneers in these religious endeavors. Initiated in 1534 and officially approved as an Order in 1540, the Jesuits were characterized by their quasi-military organization. The Order sought total obedience from members to the Society's Superior General, who was appointed for life and answerable only to the Pope. Adherents were all highly educated members of the European elite. In addition to their devotion to Catholicism, they prioritized education and the setting up of schools and universities. Many were brilliant thinkers and played an important part in the humanist movement of Renaissance Europe.

Religious fervor soon swept across Central and South America, India (at the court of the great Mughal Emperor Akbar), Southeast Asia (Malacca and the Philippines, which the Spanish conquered via Mexico), and Japan. Francis Xavier, one of the founders of the Jesuits, travelled extensively in India, Malacca, and Japan on a bare-foot preaching mission. In Japan, Xavier's foundational work eventually led to more than 300,000 converts, including several *daimyo* (feudal lords). However, China still defied repeated attempts at conversion, and he never succeeded in opening the door to the Middle Kingdom.

After Xavier died in 1552 on a desolate island off China's southern coast, he came to be regarded as a Catholic hero for his brave but unsuccessful efforts. He was looked to as a source of inspiration and strength for subsequent generations of Jesuits, while paving a way to convert China became one of the loftiest goals of the Catholic Church.

Ming Dynasty China

At this moment in Chinese history, the door was most definitely shut to foreign travelers and most overseas merchants. After the outward-looking Yuan Dynasty led by the Mongols, the Han rulers of the Ming Dynasty took the opposite approach. Leaders of the Yuan Dynasty expanded the Silk Road, developed the greatest seaport of the time at Quanzhou in Fujian Province, and allowed trade, knowledge, and religions to flow between the West and China (including Marco Polo's encounter with the empire). In contrast, the 16 Ming emperors mostly kept China closed from the outside world.

While China itself was largely off limits to outsiders during the Ming period, the third emperor, Yongle (ruled 1402–1424), launched seven major sea voyages to the Pacific and Indian oceans under the command of his eunuch admiral, Zheng He, to demonstrate China's might and demand tribute. He also built the Forbidden City and moved the capital to Beijing, keeping the former main city, Nanjing, as an auxiliary capital.

Politically, the Ming Dynasty's greatest difference from the dynasties that preceded it was the abolition of the position of prime minister to coordinate and execute governance of the state. The traditional checks and balances between the emperor and the prime minister that had been in place during the Han, Tang, Song, and Yuan dynasties were eradicated. The emperor became the supreme commander, directly conveying his order through the palace eunuchs to the mandarins. This form of absolute imperial authority continued throughout the Ming Dynasty and the following Qing Dynasty.

During Ricci's time in China, Yongle's descendant, the Wanli Emperor, was in power. The Wanli Emperor ruled for 48 years (1572–1620). However, for 30 of those years, he played little part in the actual governing of his empire. He went on to become the emperor who took the longest “leave of absence” in China's dynastic history.

Instead, the Wanli Emperor dwelt for years in the depths of the Imperial Palace, engaging in the pleasures of the flesh, song, and dance, adding to his collection of exotic animals, and accumulating curios. He used his eunuch Imperial Bodyguard (also known as the Embroidered Jackets) to oversee the civil service. Anyone under suspicion was taken to the Eastern Depot, the headquarters of the Emperor's secret service. There, they were tortured and often put to death. This inevitably led to conflicts between the civilian officials (mandarins) and the eunuchs.

Many of the mandarins, the nation's intellectual elite, abandoned their civic responsibilities, turning to Zen Buddhism or Taoist alchemy in search of a way to improve their earthly life. Some even led a hippie-like lifestyle, giving themselves up to sensual and material desires.

Late Ming was also a period when China's economy soared to new heights. A booming merchant class engaged in the production of porcelain, textiles, silks, printing, furniture, and other crafts. Intellectual culture thrived, and the atmosphere was highly dynamic. Schools of thought that challenged conservative thinking frequently

emerged, opening a pathway to humanism. Indeed, if such dynamism had not been stifled and splintered by the ruthless and culturally stagnant rule of the Manchu invaders, who established the ensuing Qing Dynasty, perhaps Chinese culture might have avoided its subsequent fossilization until the 20th century.

India: The Mughal Empire and Goa

While Mughal also means Mongol, the two empires cover different eras and geographical territories. Around the 13th century, India comprised many ethnic groups and kingdoms, along with diverse religious beliefs. To the north were grassland khanates established by the descendants of Genghis Khan, founder of the Mongol Empire. These khanates converted to Islam and continued to span large expanses of Central Asia and Arabia.

At the start of the 16th century, Babur, a descendent of Timur (Tamerlane) and Genghis Khan, engaged in a series of battles to retain power in Central Asia. Babur, born in present-day Uzbekistan, later turned his sights to the Indian subcontinent, founding the Mughal Empire in 1526 in the north of India. The Mughal Empire reached its peak in the second half of the 16th century, during the reign of Babur's grandson Akbar (ruled 1556–1605), who extended its reach across a larger area of the subcontinent and the different ethnicities living there. While the dominant faith of the Mughal Empire was Islam, Akbar was actively interested in dialogue between religions. It was during this time that Matteo Ricci visited Goa.

The Portuguese had occupied Goa on the southwest coast of India since 1510, to assist their international trade with Asia. A Catholic Diocese was established there in 1534. As Ricci wrote: “[Goa] has the best products in the world: first-class cloth, goldware, silverware, spices, incense, medicine and malachite. Throughout the year, businessmen from all parts of the world flock from afar to do business here.”

Ricci did not include that Goa was also the center of the opium trade. But at that time, Portugal's prosperity was partly related to



*RICCI'S JOURNEY IN CHINA.**

drinking and banquets; and this, on top of a heavy workload, took a serious toll on his health.

** The script refers to major cities in China by their earlier Western names, for example, Beijing is Peking and Nanjing is Nanking, in keeping with the historical times in which it is set.*

Main Characters

Matteo Ricci (1552–1610)

Jesuit priest Matteo Ricci was a pioneering force in the spread of European culture in China and Chinese culture in Europe. Born in Italy in 1552, he joined the Jesuit order in 1571 and studied at the Jesuits' eminent Roman College. There, he added theology, mathematics, and astrology to the memorization techniques he had learned at school. One of his teachers at the College was the extraordinary Christopher Clavius, who modified the Gregorian calendar into its present form. In 1578, Ricci departed Europe with fellow Jesuit Michele Ruggieri to realize the Vatican's goal of converting China. They headed first to India. In 1582, Ricci arrived in the Portuguese enclave of Macao on the southern edge of China. The following year, Ricci and Ruggieri entered a nearby small town in China itself to carry out missionary activities. They dressed as Buddhist monks to help them gain entry.

In 1589, Ricci moved to Shaozhou in the north of Guangdong Province. There, he translated several Chinese classic works,* setting out the core beliefs and values of Confucianism in Latin for the first time. Not only was Ricci undaunted at having to learn Chinese in his early years in the country, but his determination, talent for languages, and memorization techniques also inspired great enthusiasm for the challenge. Li Madou, the Chinese name that Ricci gave himself, next traveled to Nanjing, China's former capital city and a booming cultural hub. On the advice of his Chinese friend, Qu Taisu, he also adopted the Confucian style of dress and grew out his hair and beard. Finally, he made it to Beijing, where he was eventually given

* *The Confucian Analects, Doctrine of the Mean, Great Learning, Works of Mencius.*



A YOUNG MAN IN RENAISSANCE ITALY.

permission to reside and continued to try to reach and convert the emperor. He even remained there after his death in 1610, being granted the rare honor as a foreigner of being buried in the city.

In addition to his Latin translations of Chinese works, Ricci collaborated with local scholars to translate many key Western scientific texts into Chinese, including Euclid's *Elements* and *The Universal Language of Arithmetic*. Another of his significant endeavors in China was the *Complete Map of the Myriad Countries of the World* (*Kunyu Wanguo Quantu*). The map was reprinted numerous times, greatly expanding the Chinese worldview at that time, such as the Earth being a sphere and the existence of five continents.

Ricci's belief in cultural exchange as the best way to carry out his mission to convert China was at odds with the conservative, dogmatic, military-oriented approaches taken by other missionaries.

But it was in line with the perspective of Alessandro Valignano, director of the Jesuit mission in Asia at that time, who provided Ricci with robust support. Ricci didn't manage to convert China as a whole. But he did succeed in becoming the most important cultural messenger from the West in Chinese history. To this day, Ricci is held in high esteem throughout China.

Michele Ruggieri (1543–1607)

Erudite and elegant, Michele Ruggieri was the first Jesuit in history to enter China. Born in Italy, he graduated from the University of Naples with a doctorate in law. He joined the Jesuits in 1572 and went to the Roman College the following year. Ruggieri and Ricci traveled to Goa together in 1578, but Ruggieri then continued eastwards, arriving in Macao in 1579. He devoted himself to learning Chinese and established St Martin's Academy to teach Catholicism to young people in Macao. Whenever possible, he also entered China to seek permission for the Jesuits to live there permanently. He visited Guangzhou and Zhaoqing, establishing connections with the local elite. Dressing as a "Western monk" in Buddhist robes and with a shaved head, he eventually succeeded, being allowed to build a Jesuit church in Zhaoqing with other missionaries. In 1584, Ruggieri published *Catechism*, summarizing the basic teachings of Catholicism, aimed at a popular audience, and the first such book in Chinese. Later, he was sent back to Rome to petition the Vatican for a diplomatic envoy to go to Beijing to meet the Chinese emperor and advance the missionary cause. However, he found the Vatican in turmoil and was unable to fulfil this task. By the time the situation stabilized, he was in ill-health. In contrast to events in this script, Ruggieri died in Italy in 1607.

Alessandro Valignano (1539–1606)

Born in Naples, Italy, Alessandro Valignano was a talented, dynamic character who played a key role in the Ricci story. By the age of 19, Valignano had already received a doctorate in law from the

University of Padua. As a young man, he also spent more than a year in a Venetian prison after a duel. In 1566, Valignano joined the Jesuits and enrolled at the Roman College, where he was taught by the brilliant scholar, Christopher Clavius, and in turn became an outstanding tutor at the College. In 1573, he was appointed Visitor, or Commander, of all missions in India and eastward, in charge of sending Jesuits to China and Japan. He left Europe in 1574, and three years later would walk the breadth of India barefoot to carry out his missionary work.

Valignano first arrived in Macao in 1578 on his way to Japan, staying for around 10 months in the Portuguese settlement. During this time, he observed significant differences between China and Europe, in particular China's long history of civilization and that people never carried weapons in daily life. His respect for the Chinese led to his epoch-defining call for the Jesuits to adopt a completely different strategy to the "fire and sword" method employed to convert other countries. Diverging from conventional "Eurocentric" perspectives, Valignano argued that the way forward in China was through cultural exchange and that Catholicism should be prepared to adapt to the local culture, a theological approach later known as "inculturation." He was also a strong supporter of Ricci's ideas of accommodation, via inculturation, as a way to convert China. Many of the Jesuit missionaries disagreed with such approaches. But Valignano's close relationship with the Pope and high-ranking Vatican figures helped protect him from his critics as he challenged established views and changed the course of history as a result. He died in Macao in 1606.

Xu Guangqi (1562–1633)

Hailing from Shanghai, scholar-official Xu Guangqi repeatedly failed the imperial examinations as a young man. He first came into contact with the Jesuits in 1596 when passing through Shaozhou in Guangdong Province. Four years later, after he finally succeeded in becoming a provincial graduate, he met Ricci in Nanjing. There,

Xu deepened his understanding of Catholic doctrine, Western science, and European technology, becoming one of the first people in Chinese history to gain both a Chinese and a Western education. Eventually, he converted to Catholicism and was baptized under the name of Paul. By 1604, the 42-year-old Xu had become a metropolitan graduate, similar in level to a doctoral degree. Among his later posts, he became Grand Guardian of the Heir Apparent, Minister of the Board of Rites, and Grand Secretary of a section of the Imperial Library. He demonstrated sterling integrity as an official, was an effective administrator, and a prolific writer throughout his life. For Xu, Catholicism was a way to improve Confucianism and change Buddhism, motivating his efforts to facilitate communication between China and Europe. In 1607, he worked with Ricci on a translation of the first six volumes of Euclid's *Elements*, the earliest and most important translation of Western philosophy and natural science in the Ming and Qing dynasties. In his later years, one of Xu's most important tasks was to revise the calendar system. In 1634, a year after his death, the entire collection of almanacs – 22 versions in 61 volumes – was published as the *Chongzhen Almanac*, systematically introducing Western astronomy into China. Most had been finalized, revised, or reviewed by Xu, the result of a lifetime's work and an enduring symbol of collaborative research between Chinese and Western scholars. The Holy See still regards Xu among the highest exemplars of a Catholic.

Li Zhi (1527–1602)

Controversial writer and philosopher Li Zhi was born in Fujian, becoming a provincial graduate at 26. He taught in an academy and held various government posts until his mid-fifties when he retreated to a Buddhist monastery. Over the next 20 years, he wrote his famous works: *A Book to Burn*, *Another Book to Burn*, and *A Book to Keep Hidden*. These books shook the intellectual world at that time. Li slammed the then-dominant Neo-Confucian school of thought that demanded self-restraint and asceticism, arguing instead that the ideal

state would allow “each and every person to satisfy their desires.” He vigorously advocated for governance focused on improving the lives of citizens rather than asking them to make sacrifices. Li was a leading proponent of equality and liberal thinking. Many prominent figures of the time, including artists such as playwright Tang Xianzu, ministers, members of the court, and senior military officials respected Li and regarded him as their teacher. However, his wild and uncompromising spirit also prevented him from finding contentment in his time. Historically, Li and Ricci only met three times, and their meetings were never as long or deep as those in the script. However, as the Chinese idiom states, it appears they were like “old friends at first sight,” with both men recording their interactions in their works. In 1602, Li was arrested and accused of “daring to instigate chaos with subversive lies and misleading the people.” He died in prison, his unwillingness to be humiliated driving him to suicide. Throughout the late Ming and Qing Dynasty, Li’s books were banned, and he was erased as a historical figure. He was reinstated in the 20th century by Mao Zedong during his anti-Confucianism campaign.

Mei Danran (no dates available)

The relationship between Mei Danran and Ricci in this script is pure artistic license. While fictional, it was partly inspired by the factual complex relationship between Mei and Li Zhi. In reality, Mei was not born into an ordinary family, as set out in the script, but was the daughter of a high official. Mei was reputed to be a talented individual of great beauty. After her fiancé died, she moved to the family priory to practice Buddhism along with other members of her family. Later, she became a follower of Li, who was soon impressed by her erudition and capacity for learning. The two kept up a correspondence and became close friends. However, the patriarchal nature of Ming society and sheltered existence foisted on most “respectable” Chinese women means it is hard to ascertain Mei’s story, save for certain chapters in Li Zhi’s *A Book to Burn* and a few scattered notes from the late Ming period. In the script, Mei is

Part I

Leaving Home

1. EXT: GOA – CLIFF PATH – NIGHT

SUPERIMPOSE: GOA, INDIA 1582

In the moonlight a Jesuit priest, MATTEO RICCI (29), comes running up a narrow path above the ocean. He turns as he runs and looks at the other Jesuit priest just behind him.

RICCI

Hurry up, Nicolas.

NICOLAS LONGOBARDI (27), breathing hard, catches up with Ricci.

They reach a rock wall.

LONGOBARDI

Wait, Matteo!

Ricci leads Longobardi through an opening.

2. CLIFF LEDGE

The moment Ricci and Longobardi step onto the cliff ledge they are awed by the sight before them.

Below them they see the entire landscape of rolling hills and structures lit by candles and torches and filled with PEOPLE.

On one side sits a cross-section of Goanese society: slaves, Portuguese, Muslims, Hindus, Christians, dignitaries, Chinese and Malay sailors. On the other is a huge regiment of Mogul soldiers in ceremonial uniform. All sit silently in anticipation of the events unfolding upon a LARGE, RAISED STAGE.

On the stage sit two opposing groups: AGED JESUIT PRIESTS and AGED MULLAHS. An INDIAN CHRISTIAN CHOIR is singing softly, filling the air with reverence.

Suddenly, a murmuring rumbles through the crowd. The choir stops singing.

RICCI

Here they come.

Silence fills the landscape.

3. STAGE

A tall, stately Mogul in royal robes, SAID ABDULLAH KHAN, and a distinguished Portuguese gentleman in ceremonial uniform, PAPAL AMBASSADOR VICEROY DON LOUIS DE ZUIDA, march toward the center of the stage.

They both bow, first to each other, then to the aged men on stage, then to the audience.

Said Abdullah steps forward and addresses the audience in Farsi.

4. CLIFF LEDGE

Ricci and Longobardi are leaning out as far as they dare, to hear what is being said.

LONGOBARDI

What is he saying, Matteo? I never could learn their language.

RICCI

Shh... He is saying he is Said Abdullah Khan, the ambassador of the Muslim Emperor Akbar, of Mogul India. As God's representative on earth, the Emperor desires to resolve the conflict between the religions within his empire by sanctioning this series of debates. And all conflicts in his Empire should be resolved by words, not by bloodshed. Look - now the Papal Ambassador is going to speak.

LONGOBARDI

I hope he speaks in Latin and not Portuguese.

5. STAGE

The Viceroy steps forward and speaks in Portuguese.

6. CLIFF LEDGE

A frustrated Longobardi kicks at the rock.

RICCI

He says that before the debate begins he has a personal gift from the Pope to present to Said to give to Emperor Akbar.

7. STAGE

On stage the Viceroy motions off to the side. A MILITARY OFFICER steps forward and hands him a large book. It is a beautiful PLANTIN BIBLE. The Viceroy turns and presents the Bible to Said Abdullah. Said takes the Bible, turns to the audience, and starts speaking in Farsi again.

Postscript

Ricci's legacy in opening the door to East-West cultural exchange was wide-ranging and far-reaching, not only in China but also the West.

In the early 1690s, composer Andreas Werckmeister proposed the "equal temperament" system, dividing an octave into equal steps and pushing Western instrumental music to new levels of freedom. Fellow composer Johann Sebastian Bach then went on to publish the *Well-Tempered Clavier* (1722 and 1742), his collection of preludes and fugues in all 24 major and minor keys, later hailed as the "Old Testament of music." What is less well-known is that 100 years before Bach, "equal temperament" had already been developed in China and published in a monograph at a time when Matteo Ricci and fellow Jesuit Diego de Pantoja were in Beijing.

According to research by sinologist Joseph Needham, it was Pantoja, who greatly enjoyed Chinese music, who was responsible for bringing equal temperament to Europe. Indeed, the Jesuits' many reports on China instigated a fascination with "Chinoiserie" in the West in the 18th century. Chinese furniture, lacquerware, porcelain, wallpaper, and silks all became fashionable imports as well as widely imitated.



RICCI'S TOMBSTONE IN PEKING.

In addition, flagbearers of the Enlightenment, such as Gottfried Leibniz and Voltaire, heralded Chinese moral philosophy. Reformists found much that resonated. Suddenly, it seemed that the West had long lacked a formal system for civil administration, the selection and evaluation of officials, internal security, and universal education, both public and private. Guided by Enlightenment ideas of reason and rationalism rather than religion, Western societies began to change. They established professionalized administrative systems, examination and selection mechanisms, supervisory structures at all levels of society, and independent public education and universities. In short, they started to take on the shape more familiar today. Meanwhile, Chinese society under the Qing Dynasty ironically went on to become more closed-minded during this period.

This set the scene for an entirely different set of East-West encounters in the 19th and 20th centuries.

Illustrations

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|-------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| ii | <i>Church in China</i>
Photographer unknown
Print from book in private collection | 165 | <i>Along the River During the
Ch'ing-ming Festival</i>
Qing dynasty, by court painters
Print from private collection
National Palace Museum, Taipei |
| 15 | <i>China and Birmah</i>
c. 1850, by John Tallis
Print from private collection
John Tallis and Company | 172-173 | <i>Elegant Gathering at
the Orchid Pavilion</i>
Ming dynasty by Wen Zheng ming,
Liaoning Provincial Museum, China |
| 17 | <i>Portrait of a Young Man</i>
c. 1530 by Lorenzo Lotto
Print from book in private collection
Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice | 180 | Photographer unknown
China Tourism magazine |
| 29 | <i>Akbar Presiding over Religious
Discussions in the Ibadat-Khana</i>
from the History of Akbar
(Akbarnama), by Abu'l-Fazl.
CBL In 03.263. CC BY – 4.0
Chester Beatty, Dublin. | 203 | <i>Drawing of Astronomical
Water Clock Tower in K'ai-feng</i>
A.D. 1090
Print from book in private collection |
| 53 | <i>View of the Porto Interior</i>
c. 1840, by Anonymous
Print from book in private collection
Luis de Camoes Museum, Macao | 208 | Figure paintings
Print from book in private collection
lady by Ding Guanpeng,
Palace Museum Beijing.
Literati by Zeng Jing,
Zhejiang Provincial Museum
Literati, unknown artist |
| 62-63 | <i>View of Canton</i>
c. 1800, by Anonymous
Print from book in private collection | 219 | <i>Galileo</i>
c. 1920, by Jean Léon Huens
Print from book in private collection
Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice |
| 65 | Photograph unknown
China Tourism magazine | 237 | <i>Anting Gate, in the city
wall of Beijing</i>
1860, by Felice Beato
Print from book in private collection |
| 68-69 | Photographer unknown
China Tourism magazine | 240 | Sacred way at the Ming
Ancestors Mausoleum, China
China Tourism magazine |
| 83 | <i>Typus Orbis Terarum</i>
1592, by Abraham Ortelius
Print from book in private collection | 274-275 | <i>Departure Herald</i>
Ming dynasty, by Court artists
Print from book in private collection
National Palace Museum, Taipei |
| 151 | Leone Nani, Italian missionary
and photographer
Late Qing dynasty
Print from book in private collection
China | 299 | <i>Departure Herald</i>
Ming dynasty, by Court artist
Print from book in private collection
National Palace Museum, Taipei |
| 154 | <i>The City of Nanking</i>
by Thomas Allom
Print from book in private collection
National Maritime Museum, Greenwich | 303 | Recent photograph of
Ricci's tomb by author |

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