

MACAU RICCI INSTITUTE –  
INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM 2024  
Cultural Exchange between the East and the West.  
Remembering Marco Polo at the 700th  
Anniversary of His Death

Abstracts

## **East Meets West: Dialogue on Art, Culture and Religion**

Joseph Tham (Professor, Regina Apostolorum Pontifical university, Rome, Italy)

Over the centuries, constant encounters have occurred between the Far East and Europe. One of these significant moments occurred with Marco Polo's travel from Venice to China, bringing new developments to the Orient and bringing back new ideas to the Occident. While globalization and technological advancements have created new crossroads in the contemporary era, they can stay somewhat popular and exterior. Deeper cultural interchanges would be beneficial in fostering cooperation and understanding, thus avoiding polarization. A project of Art for God: Harmony of Humanity, Nature, and the Heavens seeks to engage Western Christian thoughts with Chinese philosophical and literary traditions. This presentation will illustrate some examples of how the art of traditional Chinese paintings, calligraphy, and seal carving can be used to express theological concepts and categories. This modern-day project hopes to embellish the bridge-building initiative that Marco Polo began centuries ago.

*Prof.Dr. Francesco Vossilla:*

*Giovanni da Montecorvino and Giovanni Marignolli: two Franciscans in the long century of Marco Polo, Dante, and Boccaccio.*

In the annals of Catholic history, amidst the windswept currents of diplomacy that carried the ambitions of Dominican and Franciscan friars across distant shores, one cannot overlook the venerable figures of Blessed Giovanni da Montecorvino (ca.1247-1328) and his successor in Beijing, Giovanni Marignolli (ca. 1290-1359).

Their odyssey sought communion with the distant potentates of Eurasia, including the legendary Cathay/China. Let us focus upon Friar Giovanni Marignolli, whose book, titled *Chronicon Bohemorum* (circa 1355), narrate his adventures across Asia.

Hailing from the cloisters of Santa Croce in Florence, Marignolli emerges as the quintessential envoy of the Papal court, tasked with the duty of engaging the enigmatic Yuan dynasty. Indeed, the Franciscans Montecorvino and Marignolli symbolize the genesis and culmination of the apostolic and diplomatic endeavours of the Catholic Church within the realms of pre-modern China.

Significantly, Giovanni da Montecorvino and Marco Polo stride through the corridors of time as contemporaries, their accounts and missives resonating with tales of Cathay, for instance concerning the conversion to Catholicism of the Ongut Prince George, kin to the Grand Khan.

The empire of the “Tartars”, its people, and its bountiful treasures echo through Italian literature in the epoch of Marco Polo and Kublai Khan, reverberating within the verses of Dante and the pages of Giovanni Boccaccio. This factor moves us to linger upon the chronicles of Marignolli, and to glean insights into his world, beginning amidst the vibrant tapestry of Florence and the Italy of his illustrious contemporaries, Dante and Boccaccio.

## Monotheism in Beijing under the Mongols

Leopold Leeb, Chinese: Lei Libo 雷立柏

### Abstract

The Mongol conquest of large areas in central and western Asia since the early thirteenth century brought many groups of Muslims to the capital of the Mongols, which was relocated to the area of modern Beijing around the year 1270. Not only Muslims, but also Nestorian Christians and European Catholic missionaries found their way to Beijing. This article tries to compare the situation of different representatives of a monotheistic faith in Mongol China, especially in Beijing, around the year 1300. The description centers around the Syrian Isa, most probably a Nestorian Christian, who served in high offices in Beijing after 1270, Shams al-Din (died in 1279), the famous Muslim general and administrator from Bukhara, and the Italian missionary Giovanni Montecorvino (1246-1328), who lived in Beijing for three decades in the early fourteenth century. For the three monotheist communities the rule of the Mongols in Northern China brought great opportunities, and the period around 1300 became a time of the establishment of Nestorian, Catholic, and Muslim communities in Beijing. However, whereas the Muslims could continue their tradition, as is testified by the old mosque at the Niujie in Beijing, practically no traces of Mongol Nestorianism and Catholicism have come down to us, except the few ruins of the Shizisi in Fangshan, some 40 km south of Beijing. The present study tries to describe and compare the approaches and contexts of three representatives of the three traditions and elucidates the factors which were decisive for the relative success or the failure of the religious traditions in Beijing. One of these factors was the magnitude of local religious communities, another was the relative independence of the tradition of clergymen, since the ordination of Catholic priests needed a bishop, and this bishop needed approval by Roman authorities. Perhaps the most decisive factor was the usefulness of Muslim soldiers and generals in the armies of the rising Ming rulers, which ensured that the small Muslim enclaves in Beijing were protected and could continue their religious life. The present study relies on the available sources, which are limited, especially in the case of possible Jewish communities in northern China during the Mongol dynasty. The general picture is that of discontinuity of Christian groups after the takeover of the Ming Dynasty and the manifest continuation of Islam, testified by old buildings and stone inscriptions. Muslims continued to serve at court as administrators, astronomers, or military advisors, and so the Muslim communities both in Nanjing and Beijing could continue, although they underwent the Sinification process which the rulers of the Han-Chinese Ming Dynasty demanded. In this way the Muslims became a minority group which was gradually seen as an integrated though different community in an otherwise rather homogeneous Han-Chinese society. The Muslims and their monotheist faith were accepted, whereas the Christian communities were discontinued after the establishment of the Ming.

## **Transmission and Reception of *Le divisament dou monde* in Europe:**

### **Some Early Dominican Contributions**

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What is relatively well known is the rather limited role that two Dominican friars played in the travels of Marco Polo; Niccolò of Vicenza and William of Tripoli were assigned to accompany the Polo family (Niccolò, Maffeo and Marco) on their journey to China in 1271. What is less well known are the very important roles that several Italian Dominicans played in *The Travels of Marco Polo*. This paper presents how they contributed to the transmission and reception of Marco Polo's text.

Polo's close relationship with the Dominicans at Venice is well established. There is ample evidence that he had links with the Convent of Saints John and Paul. Polo is named as a witness in an official record that the community accepted a gift on 13 March 1323. He even included the Convent in his will of 9 January 1324.

### **Transmission**

Francesco Pipino of Bologna is probably the first person who translated Marco Polo's text from Franco-Italian to Latin, which was completed by 1322. The oldest title of the book is recorded as *Le divisament dou monde* (The Description of the World). The title that Pipino gives to the book is perhaps less concise but more accurate: *De conditionibus et consuetudinibus orientalium regionibus* (On the Conditions and Customs of the Eastern Regions).

Pipino's translation of Marco Polo's text is the version that is most widely disseminated throughout Europe, including England, France, Italy, the Iberian Peninsula, as well as Northern, Central and Eastern Europe. The dissemination of Pipino's version was greatly facilitated by the printing of the text at Gouda, South Holland in 1484.

Pipino's translation is also the version that is most famous and widely used in Europe. Pipino's version was subsequently re-translated from Latin to other European languages, including Czech, French, Gaelic, Portuguese and even Venetian.

## Reception

When Polo's text became available in Latin, some friars focussed on using it for the sake of advancing geographical knowledge:

- Francesco Pipino subsequently used his version of the text to compose the *Chronicon*, which was completed by 1322.
- Jacopo d'Acqui also used Polo's text to compose the *Cronica ymaginis mundi*, which was completed by 1334.

Other friars were interested in Polo's text for the sake of developing resources for preaching:

- Pietro Calo da Chioggia included a quotation from Polo's text in his work *Legendarium*, which was completed by 1340.
- Nicoluccio d'Ascoli included a quotation from Polo's text in a sermon, which was composed by 1340.
- Filippino of Ferrara included several quotations from Polo's text in his work *De introductione loquendi*, which was completed by 1347.

The reception of Marco Polo extended beyond the Dominicans in Italy to the friars in England; Thomas Waleys included several quotations from Polo's text in his work *Moralitates super Vetum Testamentum*, which was completed by 1327.

This paper concludes that the early work by the Italian Dominicans during the fourteenth century contributed significantly to the transmission and reception of Polo's text in Europe for the following reasons:

1. The translation work of Francesco Pipino was clearly instrumental for the transmission of the text from Bologna to other parts of Italy and then to other regions of Europe.
2. Francesco Pipino and Jacopo recognised the intellectual value of the text and used it as a primary source for studying geography.
3. Pietro Calo, Nicoluccio and Filippino saw the authoritative nature of the text and used it as an aid for composing sermons by quoting from it.

## **Study of the Manuscripts of "The Travels of Marco Polo" in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana**

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The Biblioteca Ambrosiana in Milan, established in 1607, is one of the oldest libraries in Europe and holds seven significant manuscripts of the "Travels of Marco Polo." As essential resources for the study of the "Travels of Marco Polo," these manuscripts provide abundant materials for understanding and analyzing the transmission history and textual evolution of the work. This study centers on the seven manuscripts housed in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana. Through annotation and comparative analysis, it explores their origins, linguistic styles, illustrations, bindings, emblems, signatures, and other characteristics, with a particular focus on comparing them to the traditionally regarded most complete version by the Société de Géographie.

**2024 International Symposium**

**Cultural Exchange Between China and the West:  
Remembering Marco Polo**

The Macau Ricci Institute and The University of Macau  
18-19, October 2024

**Abstract**

**Bridging The East with The West. Benedictus Polonus and the Franciscan Expedition to the Mongol Empire**

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Benedictus Polonus or Benedict of Poland (c. 1200 – c. 1280), was a Franciscan friar, traveler, explorer, diplomat, missionary, and interpreter, who embarked on a significant diplomatic mission to Asia during the late 13th century. His journey was a remarkable feat of international diplomacy and religious outreach, as he sought to establish connections between the European powers and the powerful Mongol Empire over twenty years before the famous trip of Marco Polo to Asia. The Franciscans' mission was part of a larger effort by the Catholic Church to expand its influence and spread the Christian faith to distant lands of Asia. At that time, the Mongol Empire was one of the most powerful and expansive empires in history, encompassing vast territories across Asia and beyond. Benedictus Polonus had a function of the secretary and translator to the papal legate Giovanni da Pian del Carpine, accompanying him in his journey as delegate of Pope Innocent IV to the Great Khan Güyük of the Mongol Empire in 1245–1247. This



expedition was designed by Pope Innocent IV for the sake of gathering substantial knowledge about the Mongols and the new empire, whose power started to be felt at the gates of Europe, becoming a real threat for Christianity.

This paper aims to present a brief outline of this historic journey, with a special focus on Benedictus Polonus' participation and his role in the papal mission. Thanks to this diplomatic expedition, the Franciscan emissaries learned about the culture, religion, and traditions of the Mongol Empire. They made some geographical discoveries, correcting and expanding European knowledge about vast territories of Asia. They both completed a successful return journey to Europe and gave important accounts of their travels. Giovanni da Pian del Carpine authored the text *Historia Mongalorum*, while Benedictus Polonus was the author of the brief chronicle *De itinere Fratrum Minorum ad Tartaros*. We will try to portray the significance of the existing historical accounts and documents of the journey as an already critical testimony of medieval stages of globalization by bridging the East with the West. Despite the challenges they faced, Franciscan envoys to Mongolia left a lasting impact on the history of international diplomacy as well as religious and cultural exchanges, contributing to breaking mental barriers and broadening geographical and cultural horizons. One of the results of their expedition was the launching by the Papacy of other missions and installing new dioceses in the Mongol Empire. Those efforts helped to foster greater understanding between different civilizations and laid the groundwork for future interactions between Europe and Asia.

## Abstract

*Marco Polo and citrus fruits. The varietal wealth and the therapeutic uses of the 'Chenpi', from Giovanni de' Marignolli to Cosimo III de' Medici*

by Gabriele Capecchi

The *Milione* describes some places - such as 'Camandu' (Qamādīn, near Jiroft in the current Iran), or the 'Kingdom of Lac' (Indian Gujarat) – characterized by the production of citrus fruits, at that time unknown to Europe and still difficult to find, as well as the final journey into the 'Mangi' territory (ethnomic for southern China ["South Barbarians"]). The coastline between the ports of 'Fugiù' (福州市, Fuzhōu) and 'Zayton' (泉州, Quanzhōu), now Fujian Province, had a varietal richness mostly used in the manufacture of 'Chenpi' (陳皮, *Citri reticulatae pericarpium*), active principle in use at the TCM already in *Canon of the Central Treasury Classic of Master Hua [Tua]* during the 'Six Dynasties period' (220/222–589). The Venetian traveller had dwelt on the high efficiency of Yuan hospital complexes, where the element was vital in ten medical treatises least, although this "herbal medicine" obtained therapeutic dignity only through Lorenzo Magalotti (*Relazione della China*, 1672), as a result of talks with the Austrian Johann Grüber, a Jesuit missionary in Beijing from 1656.

In the 'Mangi' territory was therefore 'Zayton', an important lap along the 'Silk Road' and which, despite being Marco Polo's last Chinese port, draws in the circumstance as a diocese and Minorite bishopric since 1308, where the religious could dispose of large conventual buildings – given by an Armenian benefactress – with a warehouse. Also likely for apostolic purposes is the presence of a clinic, largely conforming to local therapeutic doctrines: setting sail from here Giovanni de' Marignolli in 1346, the confreres in tow would have brought medical oils and seeds useful for reproducing the 'Chenpi' in their homeland. Landed in Naples in 1353 (then going to Florence), while the Archbishop went to the Avignon see of Innocent VI, some other Franciscan Friars settled in Pisa. Here, in the convent of Santa Maria in Fossabanda, the grand-ducal botanist Paolo Boccone found specimens of the so-called 'aranzo a foglia di salice', identifiable in the *Citrus sinensis* 'Liucheng' (柳橙, Liu Cheng Willow Orange), published in 1674 and merged into the Medici citrus collections.

***Building Bridges in Time and Space: „Early Modernity“ and Its Implications for  
Understanding Present Times***

Cultural Exchange between the East and the West.

Remembering Marco Polo at the 700<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of His Death

Conference the 18/19<sup>th</sup> October 2024, Macau Matteo Ricci Institute.

Culture is a result of the human spirit, whereby no culture is an island but part of the universal human family. Therefore, cultural exchange has always been a central feature of human lives. Relationships between East and West has been marred by conflicts, but have also brought forward fruitful exchanges and led to mutual influences, when the technical means for travel and communication were available. The first period of this, the age of Marco Polo, were the so called (Late) Middle Ages. During this period important cultural developments took place in the West. The renowned French Catholic Theologian Marie-Dominique Chenu specialized in this field has spoken of an Early Modernity. A closer look shows indeed that most innovations which accompany us to this day were made in this period. In my contribution I will take up three of them: a new relationship of the material world (natural sciences/technics; economics, trade) and human thinking and faith, which made eastward trade; a new view of the individual, his/her capabilities coupling liberty with responsibility (the early civic movement in Italian and European towns) and - thirdly - a sense of humanist and fraternal universalism calling for bridges between cultures and religions as Pope Francis stresses in his encyclical *Fratelli tutti* 2020. The inventions made in this far away age merit intercultural reflections and exchange also in our time.

Ingeborg Gabriel, Prof. em. Vienna.

## SYMPOSIUM 2024

CULTURAL EXCHANGE BETWEEN CHINA AND THE WEST:

### *REMEMBERING MARCO POLO*

*Mystical dimensions of the cultural exchange shaped by: "You have to see it to believe it."*

### *GREATNESS AND CHARACTER OF A FIRM GENERATED OUT OF PAIN AND SUFFERING Remembering 800 years since St. Francis Assisi received the Stigmata at Mount Alverna*

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#### **Abstract**

The era of Marco Polo was marked by a new curiosity encapsulated in the battle cry: "You have to see it to believe it." For the first time the call from the experiences of Marco Polo was not so much the urge to make profits through trade of the business people or the zeal to save souls of the missionaries but the fascination with the amazing world of new insights to be gained by extensive travels through unknown regions of the world. However, no matter how amazing new insights may appear for those who face them on the spot there was the risk of remaining purely on the surface of things and most importantly to remain a stranger among strangers. In the worst excess of today's mass tourism, you may wonder what discoveries are still ahead if travelling means invasions of people without any sense of respect for culture and desire for any genuine encounter with local people.

Therefore, this extraordinary memory of an encounter of St. Francis Assisi with the Crucified Lord happened 800 years ago on 14 September 1224. The "Poverello", the "poor fool of the Lord" as we may translate was retiring in a favoured hidden corner on mount Alverna and prayed. However, this time his union of the Crucified and Risen Lord was so intense that St. Francis in full compassion with the Lord nailed on a cross felt the wounds of the Crucified Lord in his own hands.

The matter seems so truly unbelievable as the reference to a scene in the Bible seems straightforward (John 20, 24-29): while 11 apostles claim after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ that they have "seen" him one counters with the following argument: "If I do not see the scar from the nails at his hands and if I do not put my finger in the scar of his nails and do not put my hand within his side I will not believe." (John 20, 25). The argument seems entirely plausible: why believe in such an unbelievable without having any proof of evidence.

However, the buck does not stop there for Thomas.

indicates another drive to sincerely respond to the appeal of "the real thing", i.e., the genuine encounter with whole new worlds so to speak resonates in the spiritual renewal in the church namely through Franciscan and Dominican friars which was enriched with a significant missionary outreach to far away countries including Asia during the relatively open era of the Mongolian Interlude of the Yuan Dynasty. However, this amazing outreach cutting across so many cultures and right into the heart of China seems to be grounded and empowered by the encounter characterized by a maximum of pain and suffering. Here lies also the great resource for resilience as a requirement to forge ahead despite of apparently unsurmountable

difficulties and failures.

An archetypal source of cultural exchange between Europe and other cultures within this spiritual movements of the 13. century in Europa is found in the intense encounter with Jesus Christ in his human existence from his birth to the cross. In particular St. Francis Assisi at the origin of the Franciscan movement of friars shaped a whole

new spirituality of encounter with the Crucified Lord which culminated in his personal journey when he received the so called "Stigmata" which marked the two last years of his life. In fact, he received the wounds of the Crucified Lord when he was praying on the mountain of Alverna on 14 September 1224. A painting by Giotto conveys an impressive memory of this encounter.

This holistic embrace with the Crucified and Risen Lord has its iconic place in generations of missionaries who inspired by the ideal of radically following the naked Lord have embarked in myriads encounters informed by a way of cultural exchange which does not shy away from risking and giving one's one life for the others. The Franciscan tradition found one of its Chinese roots in the context of the Shanxi province. Contrary to other spiritual traditions the Franciscan tradition of sharing faith does not so much focus on dogmatic embracing of particular articles of faith and thorough knowledge of Holy Scriptures but insists much on the living example of a live totally devoted to the other in the same way like St. Francis was so to speak passionate in love with the Crucified and Risen Lord. This passionate love certainly strongly resonated in these first encounters of Franciscans finding themselves within a totally "new" world.

29 July 2024

## **“The West” and the Formation of Hong Kong Protestant Christian Leaders in 1980s and 1990s**

Kwok Wai Luen (Professor Hong Kong Baptist University, HK)

From 1842 to 1997, Hong Kong was under the British colonial rule. As a member of the British Empire, for a long period of time Hong Kong has served as a springboard of Chinese young talents to receive the Western education and as a bridge of Sino-Western interchange. In this paper, I will analyse how their experience and encounter of the Western culture and society shaped the worldview and faith of Hong Kong Protestant Christian leaders in the transitional period of 1980s and 1990s through oral history accounts. In his study of transnational religious life of Chinese migrants, Chee-Beng Tan points out that the interaction between migrants and their religious faith can be transformative and creative. The subjects of research of the paper are not migrants but Christians with overseas experience. Their transnational experience is not from migration but education and work. It does not limit to that of overseas but includes the encounter of the Western cultural and religious thought in Hong Kong. For the pattern of their transnationalism is different from the Chinese migrants overseas, the adaptation and transformation generated is also different. The experience of our research subjects offered space to widen their horizon intellectually, theologically and socially. They applied the new knowledge and perspectives that they have learnt in their home city. In some cases, their influence reflexes back to the West. Moreover, the experience peculiarly awakened the Chinese identity consciousness of these future leaders. But, their awareness of the national identity is not that of patriotism. For many of them, the overseas experience brings the non-Chinese perspective of understanding and loving China into their thought and vision. There are subtle differences and similarities of the identity construction between these Christian leaders and the pro-China activists in 1980s and 1990s. In this paper, I will use the oral history of Tso Man King (曹敏敬), Raymond Fung Wai Man (馮煒文), and Yung Wai Yip (翁偉業) for my analysis. I organize the narratives by the age of the interviewees.

利瑪竇與吳歷——從《野墅平林圖》的作者是誰說起

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利瑪竇（1552-1610）與吳歷（1632-1718）都是著名的耶穌會傳教士。儘管二人相隔近一個世紀，生平從未有過交集，但在後世，卻以他們與藝術的緣分發生了某種聯繫。正在澳門大學藝術博物館展出的《野墅平林圖》（複製品）向來被說成是利瑪竇的作品，但種種跡象表明，它更有可能出自吳歷之手。本文是對於吳歷與澳門和西畫關係的重新檢討，期望為澳門研究提供來自藝術史的新論證。

Matteo Ricci and Wu Li - starting with who is the author of the "*Picture of the Wild Villa in a Distance Forest*"

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*Matteo Ricci* (1552-1610) and *Wu Li* (1632-1718) were both famous Jesuit missionaries. Although the two were separated by nearly a century and never crossed paths in their lives, but in later generations, they had a certain connection by means of their relationship with art. The replica of the *Picture of the Wild Villa in a Distance Forest*, which is currently on display at the University of Macau Art Museum, has long been said to be the work of *Matteo Ricci*, but there are indications that it is more likely to be attributed as the work of *Wu Li*. This paper is a re-argument of the relationship between *Wu Li*, *Macau* and Western painting, hoping to provide new evidence from art history for the *Macau Studies*.