

Just a Poem: The Story of “Xian Hua Si” in Cultural Encounter

Xiamen University

ZHANG Xianqing

Professor Stephen Owen with the Department of East Asian Language and Civilization, Harvard University, is a well-known sinologist in the study of Chinese classical poetry and literature. In recent years, some of his works have been successively translated into Chinese for publication, and he has accumulated quite a few domestic supporters. In *Borrowed Stone*, an optional anthology by Prof. Owen, there is a short essay, an excerpt, in which the author discussed the poetic art of the Song Poetry and the meaning of its hidden expression by way of a poem written by Huang Tingjian. Ms. Tian Xiaofei, the translator, gave it the title: “Just a Poem”,^① though a few words only, yet hardly can it conceal its clever thoughts, enticing strong aspirations from readers. Here, I’d also like to borrow this title to discuss a poem of the Ming Dynasty that I have recently come across by chance, a theme involving the Chinese and the western cultural exchange during the Ming and Qing dynasties. It’s read as follows:

Met with the Reverend monk Mr. Jian at Xian Hua Si (Xianhua Temple)^②
It has been several years since you came from the south across the sea,
May I ask you master, why you are still alone.
No word or expression can fathom the absolute truth of Dharma-paryaya,
Could it be that there is still heaven beyond the Western Paradise?

The composer of this poem was named Ou Daren (1516-1595). Daren, styled himself Zhenbo, alias Lunshan, was a native of Shunde County, Guangdong Province of the Ming Dynasty. He was bright and eager to learn even when he was a child. He read his family’s book collection many times. At 14 years of age, he succeeded as a supplementary county school student, then became a disciple of Huang Zuo, a famous Confucian scholar, and was skilled at ancient prose and poems. Often, he would get together with scholars, such as Liang Youyu, Li Minbiao, Li Shixing, and Wu Dan to recite poems, and they were collectively branded as “Nan Yuan Hou Wu Zi (The Latter Five Poets of the Southern Garden)”. Although Ou Daren was profoundly learned and talented, he could not succeed in government examination even after he had tried many times: “he entered the examination hall for eight times and yet couldn’t pass the examination”, ridiculed Ou Biyuan, his great-grandson of his clan. During the 42nd year reign of Emperor Jiajing (1563), Daren, already 47 years old, eventually succeed in entering the final imperial examination with a senior licentiate degree the government examination. The chief examiner at that time was Qu Jingchun, father of Qu Taisu, a famous Roman Catholic of the Ming Dynasty. He read over the examination paper and couldn’t help exclaiming: “certainly a talent of the generation”, and specially recommended him to be the No. 1 Scholar (title conferred on the one who came first in the highest imperial examination). Since then, Daren became famous both at home and abroad.^③ However, apparently, achievements in poem and prose did not open for him a bright prospect for career development. From the 4th year reign of Emperor Long Qing, Daren subsequently assumed a number of relatively low positions in the Imperial hierarchical ranking, such as *Xundao* or instructor of Jiangdu (a post equivalent to vice bureau director for education), *Xuezheng* of Guangzhou or Guang Prefecture (a senior 8th ranking position for education), *Jiaoshou* of Shaowu Prefecture (the highest academic official in a prefecture, equivalent to the head of provincial education department), *Zhujiao* or assistant (a Junior 7th ranking position in the feudal court ranking system of China) of Guozijian, the Imperial College, and *Pingshi* or judicial clerk in the Central Judicial Court etc. It wasn’t until the 10th year reign of Emperor Wan Li (1582) that he was promoted *Langzhong* or Director of the Bureau of Weights and Measures (Yuhengsi) of the Ministry of Works, an officer in the Ministry of Works Affairs in Nanjing, a middle ranking bureaucrat of the Imperial Court when he was already 66 years of age. Two years later, Ou Daren, who was tired of his official career, resigned for retirement and returned to his hometown in southern China, living in seclusion for over a decade, and eventually died at the age of 80 during the 23rd year reign of Emperor Wan Li (1595). His main works were compiled by his family members and disciples into a book entitled “*Ou Yu Bu Ji (Collected Works of Ou*

^① Stephen Owen (USA), translated by Tian Xiaofei, *Borrowed Stone: Optional Anthology of Stephen Owen*, Nanjing: Jiangsu People’s Press, 2003, pp. 252-269.

^② Ou Daren (Ming Dynasty), Vol. I of “*Qu Yuan Ji*” of “*Ou Yu Bu Ji (Collected Works of Ou Yubu)*”, p. 3., *Si Ku Jin Hui Shu Cong Kan (A Series of Prohibited and Destroyed Books of the Imperial Collection of Four in Qing Dynasty)*, Ji or volume collection, Vol. 48

^③ Compiled by Chou Juchuan, checked and annotated by Chen Xianyou, *Yang Cheng Gu Chao (ancient banknote of Guangzhou)*, Guangzhou: Guangdong People’s Press, 1993, p. 496.

Yubu)”, consisting of 15 categories in 72 volumes, such as “*Bai Yue Xian Xian Zhi (Biographies of Virtuous Ancestors of Bai Yue)*”, “*Wen Ji (collected works)*”, “*Lu Yan Ji*”, “*Fu Huai Ji*”, “*Yao Zhong Gao*”, “*Guang Ling Shi Xian Sheng Zhuan (biographies of ten gentlemen from Guangling)*”, “*You Liang Ji*”, “*Nan Zhu Ji*”, “*Bei Yuan Cao*”, “*Yong Guan Ji*”, “*Xi Shu Ji*”, “*Leng Ling Ji*”, “*Zhao Gui Ji*”, “*Qu Yuan Ji*”, and “*Du Xia Zeng Yan*” etc., with 1 appendix category in 4 volumes. The poem quoted in this article is from Vol. 1 of “*Qu Yuan Ji*”.

Why is this poem by Ou Daren worth of our attention, a talented scholar of the Ming Dynasty from the Southern China? Let’s read the title of the poem again: met with the Reverend monk Mr. Jian at Xianhua Temple. The wording “Xianhua Temple” will, I think, make anyone surprise who is familiar with the history of China and the western cultural exchange of the 16th century. Indeed, Xianhua Temple, mentioned in this poem, is not an ordinary Buddhist temple in southern China of the Ming Dynasty, as it was the earliest Roman Catholic Church built in the Chinese mainland by the Jesuits who entered China at the end of the Ming Dynasty. As for the “Buddhist monk Mr. Jian”, mentioned in the poem, is no other than Michele Ruggieri, a Jesuit who led Matteo Ricci to have propagated the Catholic faith and opened churches in Zhao Qing after hardworking and painstaking efforts.

During the 8th year reign of Emperor Wan Li of the Ming Dynasty when Matteo Ricci was just ordained to the priesthood in Cochin India, there were already Jesuit pioneers who came to China to knock its door. On his way to Japan for evangelization from Goa India, Alessandro Valignano, the Apostle of the East, resided in Macau for a time, following the strategy of St. Francis Xavier that: to convert Japan, you must first convert China. For several times, he attempted to open the door of the Chinese empire, but eventually he failed and had to leave with regret. It is said that he once stood against the window of the Jesuit College in Macau, looking far into the Chinese land and couldn’t help giving a heavy sign of disappointment, thus leaving a famous remark in the history of the Roman Catholic Church: When will this rock be open for the Lord? In his capacity as Visitor of Missions of the Jesuit Society in the Far East, he issued an order that all subsequent comers must learn the Chinese language before they were allowed to enter the Chinese empire for evangelization. Just as Valignano was leaving for Japan with a heavy heart, Michele Ruggieri, his Italian compatriot, received an order to come to Macau in July 1597. With the instruction of Valignano in his hands, Ruggieri was nevertheless still determined to fulfil his vow and obey his superior he promised when entering the Society of Jesus to start to learn the abstruse Chinese language and characters with resolute determination and perseverance although, at heart, he felt terribly horrified, thus opening a new page for the Chinese church.

Born in 1543, Michele Ruggieri was 36 years old when he arrived in Macau. Apparently, he had already missed his prime time to learn a foreign language and, for a middle-aged European, who had never had contact with the Chinese language before, one could imagine the difficulties to learn again an abstruse oriental language. The slow progress in language training in the very beginning and his inner feeling of urgency, hoping to quickly master the Mandarin to facilitate his missionary endeavour, are just like two invisible forces of pressure squeezing his breadth. The dejection and exhaustion he encountered in initial learning of the Chinese language were often discernable in his correspondent left, so much so that even in 1583 when he had already gotten a firm foothold in Zhao Qing, still he mentioned the difficulties in learning Mandarin: “I stayed in Macau for several years, while the Portuguese businessmen engaged in trading activities, I learned what they called “Mandarin” - the Chinese language. The local Chinese government officials and court ministers all use this kind of language. As there are almost unlimited and numerous vocabularies, it is very hard to master, and one needs to spend many years, even for the local Chinese.^①” Moreover, as Michele Ruggieri had to devote wholeheartedly to learn the language, barely had he the time to participate in other activities of the Macau missionaries, which aroused discontentment among other Jesuits, and he had to cope with the reproach or blame of his colleagues: “This friar can serve other Jesuit activities, and yet he is doing this kind of thing, what’s the use of it? He studies the Chinese language, devoting himself to a kind of hopeless task, a sheer waste of time.”^② Before Michele Ruggieri’s arrival in Macau, there were more than twenty Jesuits travelling to and from Macau at that time, and yet none of them studied Chinese. Luckily, when majority of the Jesuits were doubting about the learning of the Chinese language and reproaching Michele Ruggieri, he received solid support all the while from Valignano, who, as Visitor of Missions of the Jesuit Society in the Far East, wrote a letter immediately to the Superior of the Jesuit in Macau, asking them not to thwart Ruggieri’s effort in learning the Chinese language. History also proved the vision of Valignano. Ruggieri, together with Matteo Ricci, who later joined him, two pioneers of the Roman Catholicism who entered China in the end of the Ming Dynasty, eventually didn’t let him down, for they gradually mastered the Chinese language, with which they

^① English translation by Howard Leenstra and Chinese translation by Wan Ming (USA), “8 Letters by Jesuits in China from 1583-1584”, edited by Ren Jiyu: *International Sinology*, Zhengzhou: Elephant (Daxiang) Press, 1998, Vol. 2, pp. 254-255.

^② Translated by Howard Leenstra and Wan Ming (USA), “Correspondence of Jesuits in China from 1583-1584’ Preface”, *International Sinology*, Vol. 2, p. 252.

knocked and opened the door to enter the hinterland of China.

After all, Michele Ruggieri was an erudite western scholar with extraordinary language talent, for when he was assigned to the Indian Monsooning Malabar region for mission activities in November 1578, he tried hard to learn the local language, and was able to listen and understand confession of the locals in the Tamil dialect just half year later.^① This kind of sensitivity to language was obviously demonstrated in his learning of the Chinese language. Moreover, Ruggieri had also found his first teacher by this time, a very good one. According to records of historical materials of the Catholic Church, this first teacher, who had been a great help to Ruggieri, was a Chinese painter and calligrapher. When he was teaching, he would write the Chinese character first on a piece of paper and then explain gradually one by one its pronunciation and meaning.^② However, to our regret, we could no longer know the name of this teacher who taught the Chinese language to foreigners in this early period. Upon request of Michele Ruggieri, Matteo Ricci also arrived at Macau on August 7th 1582. Maybe the arrival of a companion had increased the benefits of learning from each other by exchanging views, Ruggieri and his companion advanced very fast in their learning of the Chinese language and, in a letter written in 1582, Valignano already commended their great progress.

Perhaps it was during this time that Ruggieri and his companion Matteo Ricci had started to compile dictionary to facilitate their learning of the Chinese language, and this should be the beginning of the “Portuguese-Chinese Dictionary”. An interesting question is: when was exactly Michele Ruggieri able to converse alone with the Chinese in Mandarin and read Chinese ancient books and records? In his correspondence, Ruggieri did not mention this issue expressly as he spoke only of his general contact with the Chinese, nor did he mention whether there was Chinese translator. In the autumn of 1582 when officials from Canton (Guangzhou) invited Ruggieri for a visit, at first, Valignano was not very much willing to let Ruggieri accept this invitation. Because he believed that “none of these two priests are able to speak Chinese, and the written language ability of Fr. Ruggieri has not yet reached the level to engage in important negotiations”.^③ Here, it seems to imply that Ruggieri was still not yet able to speak Chinese by this time. In a letter written by Fr. Francesco Cabrale, Rector of Macau Monastery, dated November 20th 1583, he mentioned that when invited to Zhao Qing that year by Wang Pan, its Magistrate, Ruggieri and Ricci brought along with them a skilled translator to pay a visit to Wang Pan. In a letter sent from Macau by Ruggieri dated January 25th 1584, he also mentioned that several “translators who had helped them” stayed together in their newly built house in Zhao Qing.^④ It is clear therefore that, during their communication with the Chinese, Ruggieri and Ricci still couldn't do without a translator until the beginning of 1584. However, in October 1585, Ricci wrote that he could already talk with any Chinese without a translator, and also able to write in Chinese and read fairly satisfactorily.^⑤ In a letter to his friend written relatively later that year, Ricci said that he could already speak fluent Chinese and started to preach in the Church.^⑥ It is understood that given his extremely strong memory and being nearly ten years younger than Ruggieri, Ricci had achieved rapid progress in his Chinese learning. However, considering that Ruggieri studied Chinese three years earlier than Ricci and had already compiled and published a book entitled “*Xin Bian Xi Zhu Guo Tian Zhu Shi Lu* (a newly compiled [Indian] *Veritable Records of Catholic Saints*)” by the end of 1584 with the help of a Chinese scholar, the first Chinese book by the Jesuits who entered China in the end of the Ming Dynasty, it could be inferred that, by his Chinese standard, Ruggieri should have been able to cope with his daily conversions in Chinese and also have possessed certain abilities to read Chinese ancient books and records by the end of 1584 at the latest. This could be proven by the existing manuscripts of some Chinese poems written by Ruggieri. In the Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, ARS, or the Roman Archives of the Society of Jesus, there is a Chinese poem manuscript, including 34 poems. The late Jesuit priest Fr. Albert Chan, who is skilled at textual research, convincingly concluded that Ruggieri was the author of these poem manuscripts, thus making these manuscripts come out in the wash that had remained silent in the Archives for several centuries and were, for a time, even misconstrued as Buddhist poems. At the same time, we are also able to infer through these manuscripts the Chinese standard of Ruggieri, thereby delving into his painstaking efforts in an attempt to infiltrate into the circle of the Chinese literati.^⑦ In all fairness, all these works pertain to imitations and are at just about the level of a Chinese pupil in the Ming Dynasty who had just started learning poem compositions. However, it also reflects from a side view that, by

^① Translated by John Wei and Wu Xiaoxin (USA), *Preface*, please refer to the *Portuguese-Chinese Dictionary*, edited by John Wei, Biblioteca Nacional (Portuguese National Library), Instituto Portugues Oriente (Oriental Portuguese Institute), and Ricci Institute for Chinese-Western Cultural History, University of San Francisco (USF), 2001, p. 85.

^② Translated by John Wei and Wu Xiaoxin (USA), *Preface*, p. 85.

^③ Translated by John Wei and Wu Xiaoxin (USA), *Preface*, p. 85.

^④ English translation by Howard Leenstra and Chinese translation by Wan Ming (USA), “8 *Letters by Jesuits in China from 1583-1584*”, pp. 260-261.

^⑤ Translated by Luo Yu, *Ricci's Missive Collection* (Vol. I), Taipei: Guangqi Press, Furen University Press, 1986, p. 69

^⑥ Translated by Luo Yu, *Ricci's Missive Collection* (Vol. I), p. 77

^⑦ Albert Chan, S.J., “Michele Ruggieri, S.J. (1543-1607) and His Chinese Poems”, in *Monumenta Serica* 41(1993), pp.129-176.

this time, Ruggieri had already mastered preliminarily the Chinese language, with also certain level of cultivation of the Chinese literature. Of course, he was not satisfied with his oral standard of the Chinese language. In a poem entitled “*tan tang hua wei zheng* (signing over my own non-standard Chinese language)”, he once complained that his “Tang (Chinese) language” was not that authentic, so much so that it had affected the results of his missionary works: “I have been engaging in missionary activities for several years now and still hard to succeed, the reason is that Chinese and foreigners have different languages. I can peach with leisure then only when I can understand and master completely the Chinese language.”^① Obviously, it is precisely because Ruggieri had mastered the preliminary Chinese language and characters and could recite and compose poems that he was able to socialize and make acquaintance with the erudite Chinese literati, and then there came the much-told story of an encounter at Xianhua Temple with Ou Daren, the talented scholar from Southern China, and also the composition of a poem by the latter to record the encounter.

In Ou Daren’s poem, Ruggieri was an eminent monk from the Buddhist country India. In December 1582, when Ruggieri came to Zhao Qing together with his companion Francesco Pasio, attempting to reside in this city for missionary activities, Chen Rui, then Viceroy of the two Kwong provinces, told them that, as missionaries who were neither married nor government officials engaging in spreading religion, the precondition was that they should undo their foreign costumes and put on the Buddhist gown. Perhaps in Chen Rui’s view, foreigners attempting to reside in China would be contrary to the Law of the Ming Dynasty. However, it would be another story if they were monks coming to the east to spread Buddhism. One the other hand, as far as Ruggieri was concerned, the primary objective that he was earnestly longing for was to stay in the Chinese hinterland, and it seemed insignificant as to what kind of dress or garb they wear. Probably, beginning this year, Ruggieri and his companion who entered China also early, started to cut hair as monks, putting on the Buddhist gown granted to them by Chen Rui, and lived in the Tianning Temple, calling themselves monks from India. In Ruggieri’s view, there was nothing wrong to claim that they came from India, because whether Francesco Pasio, Ruggieri, or Matteo Ricci, they all once lived in India and preached there. At all events, Ruggieri accepted the role of an Indian monk peacefully and naturally. For instance, in the end of 1584 when Ruggieri carved and printed “*Xin Bian Xi Zhu Guo Tian Zhu Shi Lu* (A New Compilation of the Veritable Records of Catholic Saints)” in the southland, the first Chinese book by the Jesuit, he called himself a monk many times in the preface: “Although I was born in another country, we are equally human beings. As such, how could I not be as good as beast as not to repay a debt of gratitude! Now, to placate foreigners like me from far way, the government had even granted me a piece of land for residence, this is certainly an extreme kindness like parents! Even though I intend to repay this kindness with treasures and faithful services, as a monk, I’m poor, and China is not lacking treasures and valuables either. Then, with what shall I repay this debt of gratitude? The only thing would be Tian Zhu Xing Shi (Veritable Records of Catholic Saints), which originates from India and spreads to all corners of the earth.... I reflected (and found out) that there is no way to make the repayment, for the time being, I just have to narrate the true records and write down in Tang (Chinese) characters, so as to slightly repay the debt of gratitude for placating me in a bare possibility!” As to the end of the prologue, Ruggieri directly signed his name as monk from India.^② “Furthermore, in some of the poems written by Ruggieri, there was also disclosure that he called himself a monk. For instance, when he lodged at the local Tianzhu Temple during his first visit to Hangzhou in the spring of 1586, he once inscribed a poem and presented to a certain scholar from Southern China as a gift: “from a western country, I came to Sindhu (India), and without fear, I travelled around for thirty years painstakingly. During this period, I spent a lot of time and read all the sacred scholars’ books, and also spread Catholicism to all moral beings to release their souls from suffering.”^③ In a similar case, aside from Ou Daren’s poem, the image of Ruggieri as a Buddhist monk also appeared in the writings of Xu Wei, then a talented scholar from Southern China. Xu once composed two poems with “Buddhist monk” as the theme to record and narrate the deep impression that Ruggieri had had upon him during the latter’s Southern China tour.^④ It could be said therefore that, for quite a long period of time, Ruggieri and all his Jesuit companions who came to China in the early period had appeared in public as monks. It wasn’t until 1595 when Ruggieri had already returned to Europe for many years that Matteo Ricci, who had already thought it over for a long time, finally decided to change to Confucian costumes with suggestions from Qu Taisu. Obviously, in Wang Pan’s view, Magistrate of Zhao Qing Prefecture, as Ruggieri was a monk, it would certainly be justified that his abode and venue for religious teaching should also be some kind of Buddhist palace or treasure temple, and that was also the reason why

^① Albert Chan, S.J., “Michele Ruggieri, S.J. (1543-1607) and His Chinese Poems”, p.153.

^② Edited by Zhong Mingdan and Du Dingke, Catholic Literature of the Jesuit’s Archive in Roman During the Ming and the Qing Dynasties, Taipei: Ricci Institute, 2002, Vol. I, pp. 3-5

^③ Albert Chan, S.J., “Michele Ruggieri, S.J. (1543-1607) and His Chinese Poems”, p.141.

^④ Albert Chan, S.J., “Two Chinese Poems Written by Hsü Wei (1521-1593) on Michele Ruggieri, S. J. (1543-1607), in *Monumenta Serica* 44(1996), pp.317-337.

Wang Pan subsequently inscribed for him the name “Xian Hua Si (Xianhua Temple)” for his residential hall, which was quite similar to a Buddhist temple.

Then, “Xian Hua Si” – the first Catholic Church in the Chinese mainland during the Ming Dynasty that arouses our inexhaustible imagination, how was it built? In his letters, Ruggieri once mentioned the simple process of building Xianhua Temple. For instance, in a letter sent from Macau dated January 25th 1584, he wrote:

From some other letters of mine, you (Superior General of the Society of Jesus in Rome) already knew that the will of God had already opened for us once again the door of China, and enabled us to enter this great kingdom, and this was realized precisely by sending me to call on the officer of Zhao Qing Prefecture. He learned that we came from Rome and sent by the Pope, and he also knew that the reason we hope to learn their language and characters is that we can exchange views and share with them all we have. He therefore gave us a warm welcome. He let me choose a lot, a place in the downtown area with relatively a favourable location, to build for me and my companion a house and a small chapel to say mass. Besides, he also gave me special permission so that I can teach (our Catholic faith to) the local Chinese here. Some Chinese lent me 100 pieces of coins for need of constructing our house. This is a big amount of money here, and it is also quite amount even in Europe. With this money and the help of others, we built a small house for Ricci and me, and also several translators who were helping us.^①

In 1583, Ruggieri, who were travelling between Macao and Guangdong for several times, finally had an opportunity to settle down in Zhao Qing Prefecture. In September the same year, under invitation of Guo Yingpin, Viceroy of the two Kwong Provinces, Ruggieri arrived at Zhao Qing, bringing along with him also Matteo Ricci, where they were welcomed by Wang Pan, Magistrate of Zhao Qing Prefecture. Wang appropriated to them a lot near the Chongxi Tower in Xiaoshiding area in the east of the city, so that the Jesuit missionaries could build a house for residence, and Wang reported the same to Guo Yingpin, Viceroy of the two Kwong Provinces for approval. However, a good gain takes long pain. As Ruggieri and Ricci were preparing to start building their house, they were opposed by the locals, and they had to temporarily suspend the housing construction. Subsequently, for exchange, the officers in charge of construction supervision appropriated to them a piece of land for construction near the road and, at the same time, with efforts of Ruggieri and Ricci, the worries of the locals were gradually dissipated. Thus, Ruggieri started constructing the church in Zhao Qing, the first in the Chinese mainland, that he was earnestly longing for. It is clear from introduction of the abovementioned letter that, after acquisition of the land from Wang Pan, the initial plan of Ruggieri seemed to be constructing an integral building consisting of two structures: one for housing, and one for church. In a letter by Francesco Cabral, Rector of the Macau Residence, dated November 20th 1583, it also mentioned that piece of land could “be used to construct a house and a church”.^② However, because the Macau Church had temporary financial problems and could not provide more financial support, Ruggieri had to change his plan and built a house with relatively smaller area, serving both as a church and a house for living. In January 1584, the construction of Xianhua Temple was not completed because, in a letter sent from Macau, Ruggieri still mentioned that he would be travelling to Macau that month, hoping to raise some fund from the Portuguese “to build our small chapel”. Four months later, in a letter sent from Zhao Qing dated May 30th 1584, Ruggieri mentioned that Wang Pan, Prefecture of Zhao Qing, inscribed a “Xianhua Temple” stele and composed a poem for them as gifts: “The Chinese officials liked us very much, and they were happy that we lived there. One of the most learned officials composed some poems for us, and also sent us two inscribed steles.”^③ These two steles were entitled “Xian Hua Si (Xianhua Temple)” and “Xi Lai Jing Tu (Pure Land from the West)”. When Wang Pan was presenting his stele, it should be that the Xianhua Temple had been completed only the first stage of its engineering construction, i.e., the principal structure of the base layer. It wasn’t until the end of 1584 when the Xianhua Temple had finally been completed, because, in the letter sent from Guangzhou by Mateo Ricci dated November 30th of the same year, it mentioned that: “our house in Zhao Qing is about to finish. Though it’s very small, all local nobilities have come to visit and they came one after another, so much so that we even have no time to rest.”^④ It is clear therefore that, from the start to completion, construction of the entire Xiahua Temple project should have lasted more than a year. Then what was the exact

^① English translation by Howard Leenstra and Chinese translation by Wan Ming (USA), “8 Letters by Jesuits in China from 1583-1584”, p. 261

^② English translation by Howard Leenstra and Chinese translation by Wan Ming (USA), “8 Letters by Jesuits in China from 1583-1584”, p. 260

^③ English translation by Howard Leenstra and Chinese translation by Wan Ming (USA), “8 Letters by Jesuits in China from 1583-1584”, p. 263

^④ English translation by Howard Leenstra and Chinese translation by Wan Ming (USA), “8 Letters by Jesuits in China from 1583-1584”, p. 265

architectural style of the Xianhua Temple that had finally been built after expending Ruggieri so much energy?

In the design of Ruggieri and Ricci, they would “build a small and yet charming two-stored structure according to the European style, one that is quite different from the traditional Chinese one-stored bungalow.”^① However, after start, progress of construction of the housing was relatively slow, and had even accumulated quite amount of debt because of financial difficulties and objection from the Abbot of the Macau Monastery who believed that a two-stored building might cause misunderstanding among the locals that the missionaries were constructing fortifications. After selling their triangular prism for 20 ingots of gold, Ruggieri and Ricci were barely able to build the first floor: with two rooms at both ends, one big hall in the middle arranged as a chapel by the missionaries, and an altar in the centre, hanging with the image of Madonna. Afterwards, with return of the Portuguese trading vessels from Japan to Macau, the lucrative Portuguese businessmen gave a handsome donation to Ruggieri, with also the help of Zhao Qing officials and “money and various kinds of gifts given to the Church by other good souls, it was enough to pay off the debts, complete the construction, and supplement adequate pieces of furniture.”^② Apparently, after obtaining the long expected financial support, Ruggieri finally completed its housing construction according to the original design. Therefore, the Xianhua Temple that Ou Daren had seen was not a Chinese style bungalow as misconceived by some scholars in the past, rather a European style two-storied building. In those years of settlement in Zhao Qing, Matteo Ricci mentioned for many times in his letters the European Style of Xianhua Temple. For instance, in the letter to **Fr. Napoli Maceli (拿波里 马塞利)** dated November 10th 1585, Matteo Ricci gave a relatively detailed description of the Xianhua Temple and the sensation it aroused among the locals at that time as he wrote:

As regards our house, though a bit small, it is very beautiful: there are four rooms in the second floor, the living room is in the middle, a balcony in the front, with one cloister each at the left and the right sides; in the first floor, aside from rooms, there is also a small chapel. Since there are many people coming here for a visit, I told you this already last year. This is very helpful for us, because with it, we can get acquainted with scholar-bureaucrats, and make friends with government officials. Soon, this western-style building has become well-known far and near. Other people also come here for a visit, and as we are different from them, we have become also the targets for their visit. Some people come here to see our house, because it is different from the Chinese building, and they have never seen this before. There are also some who come here to see our western European-style Madonna, or have a look at our western books, and still there are also some who ask what it means by “being saved”..... In the end, we let them see all what we have. If we sell tickets, we can certainly clean up a small fortune! Especially the triangular prism, they called it “priceless treasure”. I told you this already last year in my letter, and, compared with clock, velvet and other western items, the triangular prism can attract more of their curiosity.^③

In a letter to **Fr. Fricati (富利卡提)** dated the 24th of the same month, Ricci also mentioned that as Xianhua Temple “is a European-style architecture, it becomes one of the local scenic spots, and has attracted many people for frequent visits.”^④ Likewise, in *The Journals of Matteo Ricci*, it also described the European-style appearance of the Xianhua Temple: “Though the house itself is quite small, it is very appealing. The moment the Chinese caught a sight of it, they are immediately pleased. This is a European-style structure, different from their own, because it has one more story with brick decorations, and its beautiful contour is adorned with orderly window arrangement.”^⑤ Inside this two-storied European-style architecture, the hall at the first floor serves as chapel; and of the wing-rooms, two serve as reception room and library, and the other two as astronomical instruments display room and studio for production of striking clock and world map. The four rooms on the entire second floor serve as living room and guestrooms. When Wang Pan organized a parade procession, blowing horns and beating drums according to the Chinese tradition, and presented his personally inscribed two golden plaques entitled “Xian Hua Si (Xianhua Temple)” and “Xi Lai Jing Tu (Pure Land from the West)” to the new residence of Ruggeri at the first floor that had just been completed, following the suggestions of Wang Pan, Ruggieri hung “Xian Hua Si (Xianhua Temple)” on top of the door of the hall at the first floor and “Xi Lai Jing Tu (Pure Land from the West)” in the reception room.^⑥ As the golden plaque

^① Authored by Matteo Ricci (Italy) and Nicolas Trigault (Belgium) and translated by He Gaoji et al, *The Journals of Matteo Ricci*, Guilin: Guangxi Normal University Press, 2001, p. 115.

^② Authored by Matteo Ricci (Italy) and Nicolas Trigault (Belgium) and translated by He Gaoji et al, *The Journals of Matteo Ricci*, p. 126.

^③ Trans. Luo Yu, *Complete Works of Fr. Matteo Ricci, S. J. Letters*, Vol. I, p. 76

^④ Trans. Luo Yu, *Complete Works of Fr. Matteo Ricci, S. J. Letters*, Vol. I, p. 84

^⑤ Authored by Matteo Ricci, S.J. (Italy) and Nicolas Trigault, S.J. (Belgium) and translated by He Gaoji et al, *The Journals of Matteo Ricci*, p. 126.

^⑥ English translation by Howard Leenstra and Chinese translation by Wan Ming (USA), “8 Letters by Jesuits in China from

“Xian Hua Si” was hanging strikingly on the door of the church, this “Buddhist Temple”, with its peculiar architectural style, had apparently left deep impressions on the mind of the constantly streaming visitors. In the word-of-mouth process, the reputation of Xianhua Temple had also been carried far and wide in public in the south of China of the Ming Dynasty, so much so that the name of **Basilica di Santa Maria (圣母堂)** that was originally given to the structure by the missionaries had instead become unknown to the public.

What was the exact time when Ou Daren met Ruggieri? From Ou Daren’s curriculum vitae, it is clear that Ou resigned from office in 1584 and returned to his hometown in Guangdong from the south of China. And from November 1588 when Ruggieri had already received the order of Valignano to embark to Rome from Macau via sea route for preparation of matters of the visit of the delegation of the Roman Curia to China till his death in 1607, Ruggieri had all the while been staying in Europe and never had the time to return to China.^① It is clear therefore that it should be between the four years from 1584-1588 that Ruggieri and Ou Daren met each other in Xianhua Temple. From October 1585 to the spring of 1586, under invitation of Zheng Yilin, succeeding Magistrate of Zhao Qing Prefecture, Ruggieri and Antonio de Almeida travelled far to Shaoxing of Zhejiang Province. An episode occurred before this travel of the south of the Yangtze River provides a clue for us to infer the time for the meeting between Ou Daren and Ruggieri. In *The Journals of Matteo Ricci*, it has the following records concerning preparations before departure of Ruggieri for his travel in the south of the Yangtze River:

Of the various kinds of arrangements that the Fathers must make before departure, one thing is worth of special mention, because this is the first time to adopt this method, and in the future it will be used as a universal method. In the first volume of this book, we have already mentioned that the Chinese have several names, but they would never use their real name or original name unless they are called by their seniors or they call themselves, or signing signature. In fact, breaking this rule would hurt the people called. Therefore, every Chinese would choose an additional and more honourable name for himself and people would call him by this name. However, even to this time, the Fathers have always used their own original names, and their servants and families also call them by their real names. To be moderate, the Chinese believe that this is not polite. Therefore, in order to facilitate their dealings with all kinds of peoples and convert souls to Christ, they adopted the custom of choosing a so-called honourable name. ^②

The passage quoted above disclosed an important information, that is, from the beginning of Ruggieri’s travel in the South of the Yangtze River in the Autumn of 1585, Jesuit missionaries in China had started to adopt the method of choosing an alias, or another name from the meaning of one’s original name as the Chinese would do. The significance of this act is actually not inferior to the subsequent adoption of the Confucian cap and dress. From this time, Ruggieri chose for himself the name “Fu Chu”. And we have taken note that in the poem, Ou Daren called Ruggieri (Chinese name: Luo Ming Jian) directly “the Buddhist Monk Mr. Jian”, and no alias or other name of Ruggieri was mentioned. Therefore, when Ou Daren met Ruggieri in Xianhua Temple, Ruggieri had not chosen for himself an alias yet, and in dealing with others, he always used his original name. That means, the time of their encounter should be after the spring of 1584 when Wang Pan presented him the “Xian Hua Si (Xianhua Temple)” golden plaque and before the travel of Ruggieri in the South of the Yangtze River in October 1585. Thanks to the protection and introduction of Wang Pan, this period had been the quietest days of the Zhao Qing Church, and also the busiest and the most bustling time of the Xianhua Temple. In the letters of Ruggieri and Ricci, both mentioned the grand occasions of that time when people from all walks of life came to visit the church one after another. For instance, in the letter sent from Macau dated October 21st 1584, Ruggieri wrote: “Chinese from all walks of life here (Zhao Qing) came to visit our Church openly, they look at our sacred paintings with reverence, and asked about the teachings of Christianity and issues concerning forgiveness (washing away, this is how they describe Baptism) of sins through Baptism”. ^③ In a letter sent from Zhao Qing dated October 20th 1585, Ricci also described to his Jesuit Superior General at that time that many “scholars and nobilities came to our Residence for visit” every day.^④

Apparently, just like many literati of the Ming Dynasty, Ou Daren also liked to travel to temples, and in

1583-1584”, p. 263

① Authored by Joseph Dehergne, S.J. (France) and Translated by Geng Sheng, *Zai Hua Yesuishi liezhuan ji shumu bubian [Répertoire des jésuites de Chine de 1552 à 1800. Chinese]*, Beijing: Zhong Hua Books Co., 1995, Vol. II, p. 584

② Authored by Matteo Ricci (Italy) and Nicolas Trigault (Belgium) and translated by He Gaoji et al, *The Journals of Matteo Ricci*, pp. 133-134.

③ English translation by Howard Leenstra and Chinese translation by Wan Ming (USA), “8 Letters by Jesuits in China from 1583-1584”, p. 264

④ Trans. Luo Yu, *Complete Works of Fr. Matteo Ricci, S. J. Letters*, Vol. I, p. 66

his corpus collection, we found many poetic compositions of his visit to temples and monks. Once, he even visited the Tianning Temple where Ruggieri and Francesco Pasio stayed during their second visit to Zhao Qing in December 1582, and inscribed a poem entitled “Passing by the Tianning Temple in Autumn Together with Wei Jing and Dao Xiang for a Visit to the Real Sage (Buddhist Monk) But Failed”: “a close minister of the Monarch has just granted me a vacation, and I like to climb up in leisure. Thus, together we marched towards a temple built in the previous dynasty as we planned to pay a visit to the senior Buddhist monk. On a small temple, there hangs only alms bowl, (but) where does the lonely vine come from. Among my companions, there was one literati who asked how many lamps were there in front of the gate of the Buddhist monastery.”^① Perhaps, as far as Ou Daren is concerned who is in his old years, life might just like Alnaschar’s dream, and his lifetime frustrations for all his talents and his immersed melancholy and solitude could be slightly consoled probably only through conversion to religion. When hearing that a peculiar style “Buddhist temple” was newly built in Zhao Qing, the Capital Prefecture, its abbot was a very capable and talented person from a strange land, with many queer books and weird instruments, and Wang Pan, the former Magistrate of Zhao Qing Prefecture, now Head of Lingxi (a provincial department, ranked between the provincial governor and magistrate of prefecture) even inscribed a plaque and presented a poem as gifts, lavishing them highly, as leader of the poetic circle in South China, Ou Daren would certainly not let this opportunity go by without paying a visit.

Now, let’s close our eyes, try to indulge our thoughts, transcend time and space and return to that historical site of more than four hundred years ago, and imagine this scenario occurred in the 16th century in Zhao Qing Prefecture in Southern China: just like before, an old man appeared in front of the “Xian Hua Si” – a newly built Buddhist temple – for a visit. When he knocked open the gate, he found out that, to his surprise, the abbot, who opened the gate for him, with a high nose bridge and deep eyes, bowing with hands clasped, was a “Buddhist monk” who called himself Luo Mingjian (Ruggieri). Guided by this hospital host, he had a taste of the peculiar architectural style of this building, one that he had never seen before, and fully enjoyed the various kinds of books and apparatuses in display, including prism etc. In the process, he couldn’t control his own curiosity as he frequently asked Ruggieri’s background and teachings of this religion. When hearing Ruggieri’s own explanations, he seemed to have understood that, though coming from India, the religion Ruggieri was propagating was not the same as that of the local Buddhism. Before leaving, just like majority of the visitors, he might also took with him a copy of “*Tian Zhu Shi Lu* (Veritable Records of Catholic Saints)” from the bookshelf of Ruggieri, so that he could study carefully in his leisure. ^②

Though, from his arrival at Macau in July 1579 to his departure in November 1588, Ruggieri stayed in China for just a short period of less than ten years, and yet his contribution in the history of missionary activities of Catholicism to China could never be underestimated: He was the first Jesuit settled in the hinterland of China in the end of the Ming Dynasty, the builder of the first Catholic Church in the mainland in the end of the Ming Dynasty and, at the same time, the first advocator and executor of the Catholic strategy of adaptation. However, right until today, in the history of Sino-western cultural exchange, Ruggieri still has not yet received adequate appraisal from the academic circle, as history seems to have showered all halos upon Matteo Ricci. The poem on Xian Hua Si (Xianhua Temple) by Ou Daren, poet from the Southern China at the end of the Ming Dynasty, has been the first Chinese poem that we have discovered thus far with Xian Hua Si (Xianhua Temple) as its title, recording and narrating directly the friendly contacts between Chinese Confucian scholars and western Catholic missionaries,^③ and the meeting between Ou Daren and Ruggieri in Xianhua Temple that it describes has left with us a story of cultural encounter. And yet, just like the contribution of Ruggieri, this poem has also been buried long in the dust of history. Today, as we read this poem, do we ever experience what the poem reflects is, though a little history between two literati with different cultural background, and yet a prelude of the big history of encounter between the Chinese and the western culture?

^① Ou Daren (Ming Dynasty), Vol. II of “*Lu Yan Ji*” of “*Ou Yu Bu Ji* (Collected Works of Ou Yubu)”, p. 9-10

^② Trans. Luo Yu, *Complete Works of Fr. Matteo Ricci, S. J. Letters*, Vol. I, p. 64

^③ When inscribing the “Xianhua Temple” Stele, Wang Pan had presented a poem to Ruggieri. Unfortunately, the original poem had lost. Currently, we can only conjecture the contents of the poem of Wang Pan from the Italian translation of Ruggieri. Please refer to English translation by Howard Leenstra and Chinese translation by Wan Ming (USA), “8 *Letters by Jesuits in China from 1583-1584*”, pp. 263-264.