

Matteo Ricci: the Mandarin from the West

The word ‘mandarin’ has travelled far, from the original Hindi or Sanskrit word *mantri* for a “counsellor”, to the Malay *menteri*, and thence to Portuguese *mandarim*. From the Portuguese it has come to the English language as *mandarin*. It is used in English to describe the officials of the Chinese Empire, or officials of any bureaucracy (such as ‘the mandarins in Whitehall’). I have no hesitation in using this global word to describe Matteo Ricci, who originally trained to be an official for the Papal States. After joining the Jesuits, Ricci then travelled to the Orient, first in the Portuguese city of Goa, then (via the Malay port of Malacca) to the outpost of Macau at the gates of the Chinese Empire. He then began a famous odyssey from the south of China to the capital in Beijing, once again establishing the Catholic faith at the heart of the Chinese Empire. A key decision along the way (1594) was the choice of entering China as scholars, in the mandarin class, and a willingness to serve as scholar-officials.

The word *mandarin* is not used in Chinese. The Chinese usually use the word 官 (*guan*) for an official. The late Archbishop 羅光 Lo Kuang, in his biography of Matteo Ricci in the Chinese language, uses this word to describe European officials.¹ Thus the archbishop reverses the process in which *mandarin* has entered the English language and found a new meaning there.

Matteo Ricci Timeline

This timeline is simplified from the detailed chronology prepared by Professor Filippo Mignini for the Matteo Ricci Institute for the Relations with the East, at the University of Macerata.²

1552: Born 6 October at Macerata

1561-1568: Studied at Jesuit Boarding School in Macerata.

1568 – 1571: Studied law at the University of Rome (*Sapienza*)

1571: Ceased his law studies, and began his novitiate in the Society of Jesus (*Jesuits*).

1577: Assigned to the Eastern missions, and set out for Lisbon. While waiting for the annual voyage, studied theology in Coimbra College.

1578: 24 March, left Lisbon, and arrived in Goa on 13 September. Studied theology and taught humanities (that is Greek and Latin) in Goa and Cochin (Kochi). Ordained priest in Cochin (25 July 1580).

This posting ended when he was ordered to Macau to assist Fr Michele Ruggieri in the China mission.

1582: 7 August arrived in Macau.

1583: With Michele Ruggieri, sets up the first residence in Zhaoqing.

1585: Michele Ruggieri is sent to Rome, and never returns to China.

1589: Sets up the second residence in Shaozhou.

1594: Ricci abandons the dress and status of a Buddhist monk (a bonze) and adopts the dress of a mandarin.

1595: Sets up his third residence in Nanchang.

1599: Sets up his fourth residence in Nanjing.

1601: Receives permission to enter Beijing, and stays there until his death.

1610: On 11 May dies in Beijing. His tomb may still be visited.

The Study of Law

In sixteenth century Europe, the study of law was a common preparation for an official career.³ Major universities had schools for the teaching of law. Macerata, the home town of Matteo Ricci, had its own university. However, at the time Ricci was old enough to study at university, it was in decay, and

¹ 羅光：《利瑪竇傳》，第三版（台北：輔仁大學，1982），頁 225, p. 6.

² http://www.istitutomatteoricci.com/en/cro_ess.asp (visited 5 February 2010).

³ Paul Grendler: *The Universities of the Italian Renaissance*, Baltimore and London, John Hopkins University Press, 2002.

his apothecary father sent him to Rome to study. Biographers emphasise that his father was preparing young Matteo for a career as an official.

Matteo was not exceptional in studying law, although he did not complete his degree. His predecessor and colleague Fr Michele Ruggieri had studied law in Naples, graduated with his doctoral degree in civil and canon law, and had served at the court of Philip II in Naples.⁴ Ruggieri then came to Macau in 1579, and led the mission into the mainland of China. It was Ruggieri who specifically asked for Ricci to join him.⁵

The study of law in sixteenth century Europe meant Roman law, which was the source for both civil law (governing secular affairs) and canon law (governing the affairs of the Catholic Church). Four key texts were used. These had been compiled in the sixth century under the Emperor Justinian, and were re-discovered in the west of Europe in the mediaeval period:

The Constitutions (*Codex Constitutionum*),

The Digests (or Pandects),

The Institutes,

The Novels (new constitutions issued after the publication of the Codex).

These four texts are collectively known as the *Corpus Juris Civilis* or the *Corpus Juris* of Justinian. Roman law became the common bond linking professional administrators in the many states which had emerged in Europe, even in those states which had never been part of the Roman Empire. The studies of these texts can be likened to the Confucian studies, which were the common bond linking China's mandarins, even though the country may have been divided by revolt or invasion, as dynasty succeeded dynasty.

The study of law in the sixteenth century was not narrowly "black letter" law, but was designed for the preparation of clerics and officials in a variety of states and principalities. Although Roman law had been taught since the mediaeval period, most famously at Bologna, it was a developing science, not a static one. The best legal education was at the heart of the *Renaissance*, the renewal of culture which drew on the ancient sources. It was not simply a technical training for future judges or counsel.

The Law Course at the Sapienza: The *Rotuli*

Although the information relating to Ricci's law studies might be sparse, there are important sources available.⁶ Professor Emanuele Conte of Rome 3 University has collected the rolls (*rotuli*) and other sources from Sapienza for the years 1514 to 1787.⁷ The rolls provide a list of the courses taught in a particular semester, with the name of the professor with some details of his experience, and sometimes a brief summary of the content.

1568-1569

Canon Law

Fr Hieronymus Parisettus

Ordinary Civil [Law]

Fr Lelius Iordanus

⁴ Michele Ruggieri and Matteo Ricci: *Dicionário português-chinês* = 葡漢辭典 = Portuguese-chinese dictionary / Michele Ruggieri & Matteo Ricci ; Editor John W. Witek, Macau : Instituto Português do Oriente, 2001, p.153.

⁵ There are other examples of significant clergy who trained or served as officials. For example, twenty years later than Ricci, Francis de Sales' noble parents had prepared him for a career as an official by sending him to Padua to study law (1588-1591). He graduated with his doctorate, but chose to become a diocesan priest, and ultimately became a bishop.

⁶ I am very grateful to Professor Ugo Baldini of the University of Padua who has directed me to this source, and kindly provided me with copies.

⁷ Emanuele Conte: *I Maestri della Sapienza de Roma Dal 1514 al 1787: I Rotuli e Altre Fonti*, Rome, Istituto Storico Italiano, 1991, pp.61-79.

- Fr Marcus Antonius Bizonus
- The Institutes: of wills
 - Fr Hieronymus Pandonus
- Canon Law: of wills
 - Fr Antonius Velius
- Pandects
 - Fr Marcus Antonis Murettus
- Ordinary Civil [Law]: of
 - Fr Cinus Campanus
 - Fr Ioannes Franciscus Confalonarius

1569-1570

- The Institutes: of obligations
 - Fr Hieronymus Agapettus
 - Fr Thomas Fuscus
- Canon Law: of constitutions
 - Fr Hieronymus Parisettus
- Ordinary Civil [Law]
 - Fr Lelius Iordanus
 - Fr Marcus Antonius Bizons
- The Institutes: of trusts
 - Fr Hieronymus Pandonus.
 - Fr Iacobus Butrius
- Canon Law
 - Fr Antonius Vellius
 - Fr Benedict Bonus on usury
- Pandects: of agreements
 - Fr Marcus Antoninus Murettus
- Ordinary Civil [Law] including verbal obligations
 - Fr Camillus Plautius
 - Fr Cinus Campanus

1570-1571

- The Institutes: of wills
 - Fr Hieronymus Agapetus
 - Fr Thomas Fuschus
- Canon Law: of
 - Fr Hieronymus Parisettus
- Ordinary Civil [Law]: of
 - Fr Franciscus Confalonarius
- The Institutes: of actions
 - Fr Hieronymus Pandonus
- Canon Law: of gifts *inter vivos*, and of engagement and marriage
 - Fr Antonius Vellius
 - Fr Cesar Valentinus
- Pandects: of
 - Fr Marcus Anonius Muretus
- Ordinary Civil [Law] including soluto? of marriage
 - Fr Camilus Plautius
 - Fr Rinaldus Tholomeus

We do not know whether young Matteo found time to attend other courses at the Sapienza. (Perhaps there is a comparison with Francis de Sales, who managed to please his father by keeping up his law studies to the morning, and who pleased himself by studying theology in the afternoon.) Not only was

theology taught at the Sapienza, but also mathematics. One of the options was a course on Euclid, whom Ricci and his friend Xu Guangqi translated and published in 1607.

Missionary and Mandarin

There is no doubt that Ricci's primary aim in coming to China was religious. He came as a missionary, sent to bring the knowledge of Christ to the people of China. But his missionary method, established by Alessandro Valignano, involved a deep insertion into the language, culture, and life of the Chinese people. For Ricci, who had been schooled for a career as an official in the West, the adaptation to the life of the scholar-officials in China was not easy, but was the best route to meet his religious aims.

Ricci's studies in law at a very important time of his formation need further attention from contemporary scholars. Gianni Criveller does not refer to it in his otherwise excellent study of how Ricci was formed intellectually and scientifically.⁸ Ruggieri, the former official at the court of Naples, and Ricci began their preparation for missionary work by the study of the Chinese language and culture. They understood the importance of China's administrative system, and how administrative permission to reside in China would be crucial to the advance of their work. For that reason, they aimed to seek the consent of the local officials to reside in China, and when that proved to be unstable, to seek permission of the Emperor in Beijing. It was nearly twenty years after his arrival in Macau that Ricci received that permission.

Ricci, the mandarin from the West, moved quickly and easily among the Chinese mandarins. He learned the scholarly Classics which underpinned the mandarin patterns of thought. He reached out to them in ways appropriate to the class: he wrote on the topics which interested them. This is what lies behind his earliest work *On Friendship*.⁹ He adopted the polite fiction of setting this work in the context of his relationship with a very senior official, the Prince of the Jian'an Commandery. Ricci, who had a trained memory, shared his training with officials (including a provincial governor) and their families, so that their sons would have a better chance to pass the examinations which were the surest route to fame and fortune in the imperial Chinese state.¹⁰ Ricci, like Ruggieri before him, was both tested and supported by China's culture of giving gifts. He provided gifts such as clocks to please the scholar officials, and was in turn given valuable gifts such as internal transportation. Ricci, and in turn other Jesuits, provided the scholarship which China's scholars and officials requested.¹¹ Scholars, including the famous philosopher Li Zhi, provided Ricci with introductions to scholar-officials in Beijing.

In 2010, the four hundredth anniversary of his death, many admirers of Matteo Ricci are recalling his gifted and committed missionary work in China, in all its dimensions. This short contribution only aims to add a small detail to the already rich portrait, by recalling Ricci as the "Mandarin from the West".

⁸ Gianni Criveller: "The Background of Matteo Ricci, the Shaping of his Intellectual and Scientific Endowment", *Chinese Cross Currents*, 2009, Vol. 6, No. 4, p. 76.

⁹ Matteo Ricci: *On Friendship: One Hundred Maxims for a Chinese Prince*, Timothy Billings (transl.), New York, Columbia University Press, 2009.

¹⁰ Jonathan Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci*, London, Faber and Faber, 1988.

¹¹ Yves Camus: "Jesuits' Journeys in Chinese Studies", World Conference on Sinology, Beijing 2007, <http://www.ricciimac.org/doc/JesuitsJourneys.pdf> (visited 7 February 2010).

