

Mitje SAJE (ed.), A. Hallerstein—Liu Songling—劉松齡: *The Multicultural Legacy of Jesuit Wisdom and Piety at the Qing Dynasty Court*. Maribor: Association for Culture and Education, 2009. 381 pp

Edmund Ryden

Produced on beautiful paper with lavish illustrations and a clear readable font this hardcover book of nearly 400 pages is a testimony to the generosity of the European Union towards one of its newer member-states, Slovenia, and a witness to the enthusiasm of the editor and his team. From the scientific point of view the book is interesting for what it has to say about astronomical studies and observations dealing with what we now call electricity in eighteenth century China, showing how Jesuit work in China was part of a global scientific community that involved the Royal Society in London and researchers in St Petersburg among others.

Although parts of the book benefitted from the help of a native English translator, most of it did not and the result is lamentably obvious. Even if the English were to be improved, the book would still need considerable editing to make it more uniform in style. As it is it is a collection of articles of very varied quality.

The average expert on Jesuits in Qing dynasty China may well know the name of Augustin Hallerstein SJ (1703~1774) but one may be forgiven for not knowing that he came from the Austrian Province of Carniolia, which is now the independent country, Slovenia. In many ways this book is a patriotic work to reclaim the Slovenian identity of Hallerstein and goes along with an exhibition on him held at his place of birth, Mengeš.

A series of introductory articles sets out the rediscovery of Hallerstein by Slovenia and the background to the project to study his life and work. There then follow four, unnumbered, chapters. The first presents a biography of Hallerstein (by Zmago Šmitek 70 pp). The next two deal with his work on electricity (by Stanislav Južnič 40 pp), and on astronomy (by Ju Deyuan 50 pp). There is then an introduction to his letters by Aleš Maver (30 pp). These chapters are followed by a translation of his letters (140 pp). From the archival point of view the *Letters* are perhaps the most interesting documents, but there being no table of contents of this section, consultation is frustrating. The book ends without an index and it also lacks a table of illustrations.

Šmitek's chapter presents Hallerstein's life through his letters, but the notes nowhere refer to the translation of the *Letters* provided in the book. Clearly the author originally wrote for an audience that had no access to the *Letters*. As with many missionary accounts, the voyage to China receives a disproportionate emphasis.

Južnič's chapter on electricity is interesting for the way the author brings out the interconnectedness of early modern science, jumping from Beijing to Paris, London and St Petersburg. However, this chapter does not only require English corrections; the translation of Chinese is also faulty. In explaining the initial proposal to translate "vacuum barometer" into Chinese as *yan-qi-tong*, the author notes that the Emperor proposed *hou-qi-tong* (p. 145). The first he translates as 'the tube for the air research' and the second as 'tube for air observation'. I should note that while he does provide a *pinyin* transliteration for the first, alongside two other forms, he fails to do so for the second. Anyhow, the rather convoluted explanation provided makes it clear that the terms *yan* and *hou* are not to be translated as 'research' and 'observation'. '*Houqi*' is 'climate' and '*yanqi*' is 'steam'.

Ju's chapter opens with a detective story of how he discovered that Hallerstein and Liu Songling are indeed one and the same person. Given that this was never a secret, the story is rather otiose. It is also unfair to conclude that scholars were wrong to identify Hallerstein as German or Austrian rather than Slovenian (p. 166). His nationality at the time was certainly Austrian and he was correctly listed in the Society of Jesus as German. I wonder if Ju would support modern Tibetans or Uyghurs in denying their Chinese nationality.

Aleš Maver's introduction to the letters brings out Hallerstein's patriotic loyalty to the Habsburgs and provides an overview of the letters as such. However, I find Maver's habit of referring to Hallerstein as "the Mengeš native" particularly irritating. Given that the definite article in English is often the equivalent of "the one and only" this usage suggests that Hallerstein was the only person ever born in Mengeš. I would also take issue with the description of Christian missionary efforts in China as "a story of failure in all their stages" (p. 223). Moreover, Maver's singling out of Christianity (unfortunately he still adheres to the label 'Nestorian') under the Tang, as the most successful Christian mission to date is strange. His text reads: "Nestorians were actually the most successful, which is hardly worthwhile as today the Nestorian Church hardly exceeds a hundred thousand believers. Rather less than more." (p. 223) Translation, alas, leaves much to be desired. The letters themselves had the benefit of a native English-speaker to help with the translation and hence are much more readable.

Conclusion

The editor and his colleagues are clearly enthusiastic about their subject and have obviously done a lot of specialised work, for which they deserve to be congratulated. They were also lucky to receiving such abundant financing and to produce a book of excellent material quality. It is precisely for these reasons that one regrets the failure

to improve the English and, even more importantly, to properly edit the book, providing indices, cross-references and ensuring consistency. Articles that quote the *Letters* should refer to the text of the *Letters* included in the appendix. I have the impression that the editor applied for funding and that the grant was given for a particular financial year and so the book had to be published before it was ready. As it stands at present the book can still serve as a source-book but one for which the reader will have to do the editing and indexing.

Edmund Ryden SJ, of the Jesuit Mission Office of the Fu Jen Catholic University, New Taipei City, is Associate Professor in the Law Department, and in the Human Rights Programme of Soochow University, Taipei. He has run four conferences on human rights and supervised the publication of the Conference papers.