

Portrait and Construction of a Cultural Reality China and Diego de Pantoja

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The image that Europe had of China in the 16th century was very similar to that constructed in the Middle Ages at the time of the Yuan dynasty (1280-1368), so the information that generally reached the West was limited to re-workings of Marco Polo's work and also a mythical idea or perspective of the Orient as "other".¹

Forty-one works were published in Portuguese and Spanish between 1502 and 1598 on the subject of China, a country that had been the dream of Christopher Columbus a few years previously. The books tackled the subject from various angles since the authors and their perspectives were all different, and they too seemed to be entranced by it, given the extraordinary utopian and hyperbolic nuances that underlie most of their descriptions.

Nevertheless, this way of viewing alterity undergoes a radical change with the arrival of the Jesuits in China in August 1582.² Thus, we shall insert a dividing line between a singular, limited way of

viewing and a new unprecedented form that we can define as anthropological in the sense of achieving understanding through co-existence. In other words, we refer to the difference between the construction of an alterity through incomplete and fragmented variables (the limitations of time and space with the resulting institutional and cultural limitations) that make the anthropological definition of the "other" more difficult, and, on the other hand, continuous co-existence with immediate and total observation specifically marked (though this is not its end purpose) with the desire to be compassionate and comprehend.

It is through this second perspective that the work of a Spanish Jesuit, Diego de Pantoja, reflects the image of an exceptional and particular China, but also possesses plurality and universality. The play between the two fields of history and anthropology will be our convergence tool.

Diego de Pantoja was born in Valdemoro and baptized on 24 April 1571. He was the son of Diego Sánchez and Mariana Pantoja, members of long-established Christian families, well known in the district, that had produced a doctor in theology and professor at Universidad de Alcalá, various members of different religious orders, both men and women, members of Holy Office tribunals and even an inquisitor of the same tribunal.

On 6 April 1589 he entered the Society of Jesus and only one year later was a novice at Villarejo de Fuentes College, in Cuenca province. In 1593 he lived at Plasencia College and at the age of 22 received

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not only religious instruction but also artistic and philosophical instruction (specialising in logic). He was soon transferred to Alcalá College, given his potential. There he studied theology in greater depth.

At that time, the Society of Jesus was extending its reach throughout the Orient and consolidating its position of strength in regard to other religious orders. Father Gil de la Mata, Superior of the Province of Japan, travelled to Toledo to recruit new preachers of the gospel. Young Diego, along with many others, felt that this was his mission, and after managing to persuade his family and superiors, who were against the idea, he travelled to Lisbon on the first leg of the journey to Japan.

He left the Portuguese capital on 10 April 1596 for Goa, arriving on 25 October. Six months later, on 23 April 1597, he joined up with the priests Alessandro Valignano, Niccolo Longobardi and Manuel Dias to leave Goa for the Portuguese enclave of Macao, arriving full of hope on 20 July, when he was only twenty-six years old. In October 1599 he secretly entered China together with Lázaro Cattaneo, taking advantage of a fair in Guangzhou. On 1 November, disguised as Chinese and hidden in a boat, they headed north, crossing Nanxiong, Nan'an, Ganzhou and Nanchang, navigating along the the Yangtze River, via Anqing and Wuhu, to Nanjing. Five months later, in March 1600, Diego de Pantoja met Matteo Ricci, and just two months after that, on 20 May, both priests, along with two Jesuit brothers of Chinese origin, Sebastian Fernandes (Zhong Mingren 钟鸣仁) and Manuel Pereira (You Wenhui 游文辉), commenced their journey to Peking, arriving there on 24 January 1601.

From that date onwards, Pantoja would dedicate all his efforts and in fact his entire life to China and its evangelization, given that he would not leave China until forced to do so by the Chinese authorities after the Nanking uprising, returning to Canton, where he died on 9 July 1618, aged 47 years.

The fact that some Catholic priests were able to reach the Forbidden City not only marked a milestone in the evangelization of China but was also the start of the peak of the special policy devised by Alessandro Valignano and put into practice by the Jesuits. This experience was essential for Pantoja, given that it allowed him to get to know Chinese culture first hand and to analyse in greater depth those more philosophical

aspects on which the discussions of Confucians were focused. These interactions also allowed him to set down in a number of works his personal contribution to the Chinese world as well as establish a bridge of communication between both cultures. Though we shall comment on some aspects in this vein further on, I believe that his pioneering work in his youth sets out the characteristics of his personal view of the “other” China, better than any other. This is, as we shall see, an ethnographically inclined work that constitutes a real treasure in the classical bibliography of the East-West encounter.

That work is actually a letter addressed to Father Luis de Guzmán, his protector, who was Provincial of the Society of Jesus in Toledo, and which was added to the so-called *Relación de la entrada de algunos Padres de la Cópia de Jesús en la China* [Report of the Entry of some Priests of the Society of Jesus into China], which was compiled and published in the city of Seville in 1605.

The letter is composed of 131 leaves (front and back), or 262 pages in other words, and in five places it is dated and signed. It is written in learned Spanish that is difficult to read nowadays due to the replacements of the letter ‘u’ for ‘v’, ‘f’ for ‘s’, and the omission of the letters ‘n’ and ‘m’, in addition to the era’s specific orthography and punctuation.³

We find three important points in the text: firstly a detailed register of his personal and missionary experiences and encounters, the latter being similar to those of Matteo Ricci,⁴ given that most of them occurred together; secondly a clear and lucid explanation of the policy of adaptation they implemented; and lastly one of their first reports, in which they describe ethnographical data on China and especially the imperial court in great detail and in a direct and personal manner. This work thus provides a first-hand report of the Jesuit experience in China and, in turn, a living portrait of people, their traditions and customs that had been unknown until then. It is not surprising that, even though it had only just been written and sent, the letter was published in Valladolid (1604), Seville (1605) and Palencia (1606). One year later, in 1607, it was translated into French and published in Arras, Rennes and Lyon. In 1608 a German translation was published in Munich, and a Latin version appeared in the same year. It was published in English in 1625, precisely when another Spanish Jesuit, Adriano de las Cortes, commenced his mission in China, which would generate another wonderful manuscript.⁵

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These dates and publications tell us to what extent Europe was interested in discovering more about Chinese culture. On the other hand, it is not surprising that we find in these Jesuit writers an internal structure that forms part of a general model of China and which, furthermore, sets the trend—a model that even Pantoja broadly follows when reporting in his letter: “some (things) concerning the grandiosity of this kingdom, its customs, government, and policies,” and likewise when stating some clear reasons to write in such a manner: “by seeing (the country China) so famous in our Europe, and with reason, I do not doubt that this will be thanks to V.R. and those that may read about it” (p. 6).⁶

In more modern language one could say that China was in fashion in Europe, and all that which was different from the West was deemed attractive. The larger the paradox, the greater was the attraction. China was not a “savage country” like America; its people did not go about naked, its rituals were not bloody, and it had social habits and even etiquette more refined and elaborate than in Europe. The American, Philippine and Indian experiences tinged all others, but China alone met all expectations in terms of land, riches and people as well as knowledge-based traditions that came close to and even surpassed the Europeans.

As the priest wrote: “The Chinese are much given to the letters and to studying because that is the source of all their honour and wealth” (p. 90). He even states: “The Chinese esteem the art of writing well more than we do, and thus, many know how to write and a great number of books are published each year” (p. 96 reverse side). Nonetheless he also highlights the following: “They do not have nor do they study science, mathematics nor anything similar, just rhetoric, because the entire basis of their knowledge and the fame of the learned does not comprise more than knowing how to elegantly discourse and discuss a subject, just like the orators of ancient times in our Europe” (p. 90 reverse side).

Superficially, it would seem that Pantoja was playing both sides of the coin, or even that this ambiguity was due to his ignorance, but this is far from the truth. Pantoja, like any good Jesuit, actively knew about Riccian policies and had to insist (and he did so throughout the entire text) on these differences. In other words, the Chinese are sharp, studious, learned and grand orators, but they are neither philosophers nor scientists—a role that is filled in the imperial court

in Peking by the Jesuits. This is the point of view that must be ever present in order to understand the value of Pantoja’s work.

We can see that even though the report was aligned with a theoretically neutral standard, the purpose and, therefore, the design and content of the letter is not neutral. The Jesuit priest highlights in each line and in regard to each subject, not only in the detailing of Chinese culture without preferring the same in comparison to European culture, but, above all, the positions taken up by key men of the Society of Jesus. He writes: “They have asked us many things these days which we have sought to answer, prioritising things in relation to Our Lord as much as we can, and also those about our Europe... (and) they have said many things to the king (the emperor of China), who seems to really want to see us” (pp. 36 and 36 reverse side). In other words, the Jesuit priest advises that European science and culture would be the keys to opening the door for their religion, and Pantoja proudly knows that this is precisely their achievement:

“There is here, it is said, a resident of this city, a Turk, who more than forty years ago brought one or two lions to his father from this king, who partly for not knowing either letters or sciences and partly for not being familiar with Chinese habits, customs and ways, found no one to deal with, or anyone to take him to the door: and in relation to us, thanks be to God, all of the high mandarins, seeing that we are accustomed to his dress, ways and courtesies, come to visit our house and are honoured to show us as friends in public, which has not even been done with their own (in their capacity and neutral status)... it seemed impossible a few years ago to achieve the status, reputation and fame of goodness and learning the Fathers now have, which provides us with confidence to take on yet more difficulties with the aid of our Lord, so that with the comfort of our Europe and our Fathers (who have worked so much in this land) we are greatly esteemed and much sought after in this our holy work, with the honour and glory of his divine Majesty and expansion of our Holy Mother the Church of Rome” (pp. 113 to 114).

This specifically raises three points that are central in demonstrating the meaning and objective of Pantoja’s letter and which are present in each one

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of his accounts despite the fact that they cannot be extensively dealt with here. One of them is the reason for entering China—in other words, the evangelization of a learned though infidel people. Another, related to this first one, is to put into motion some of the behavior, actions and motivations that are the backbone of Ricci's known adaptation policy. Both of these form part of a joint initiative that for reasons of pure pragmatism is broken down into specific moments (I refer to the difference in the roles of Pantoja and Ricci from those who would later comment on such aspects). Lastly, and as the excerpt highlights, it should not be forgotten that Europe, and with it political and religious power (and included here are the hierarchical maxims of the Church as much as their different ranking), is dependent on the successes in China and the results of the adaptation policy. The Jesuit position in the Chinese Rites controversy was already being prepared so that these successes would not be in vain.

Thus, Diego de Pantoja's text should be tackled from this background. His letter is initially informative and explanatory (according to that indicated above), though it is also historical and ethnographical. In this sense, the letter not only relates the actual experiences and specific successes of a man, but it is also a cultural account.

As such, it follows the specific scheme of a text wishing to inform others of different lands and customs. Thus, after relating his journey and his position in the imperial court (which takes up forty-six pages), he dives into what he himself calls "some tidings of Christianity," which consists of a clarification of the religious situation of the Chinese and a considerable attack on Buddhism—something that was very common amongst the Riccians and which would carry serious consequences for what we can call "the export image to the West".⁷

Thus, it is almost halfway through the letter before the focus is on Chinese society and customs. Nevertheless, this report is not an isolated product without any precedent but is modeled after previous sources, and Diego de Pantoja knows perfectly well the items that he has to cover. If truth be told, the Spaniards were true masters in that sense. For example, the *Normativa para descubrimientos y ordenanzas del bosque de Segovia* [Rules for the discovery and regulation of Segovia wood] of 1573) added to which the fifty items drawn up by Juan López de Velasco entitled *Instrucción*

y memoria de las relaciones que se han de hacer para la descripción de las Indias [Instructions and description of the reports that have to be produced to describe the Indies] or the instructions drafted by Martín Enríquez in 1572 for China, or those used by Francisco de Sande for the Philippines, specify a specific way of observing that Jesuits all over the world follow and have improved upon. In addition, the Annual Letters and the reports and accounts that were the trend at that time, such as the report of Gaspar da Cruz (1569), incorporated into the Spanish of Bernardino de Escalante or the best seller of Mendoza (*Historia de las cosas mas notables, ritos y costumbres del gran Reyno de la China*) in 1585, or the works of Valignano or Ricci, form an ethnographical body on China that would have doubtlessly influenced Pantoja.

If we place ourselves in a specific historical and social context with other specific texts (co-texts) as a backdrop, a small summary of this part of Pantoja's letter will help us to understand it as a whole.

This section starts with a description of China from a geographical standpoint, "it is in an excellent position and location," and corrects errors previously found on European maps. Thus, Pantoja comments on how China was represented as being one-third larger than it really is and how the maps had Peking incorrectly located (it was not at 50° he said but rather at 40°),⁸ a fact that resulted in the erroneous mapping of the famous wall. The Jesuit also states that the kingdom of Cathay does not exist as such, just as the city of Cambalu does not exist, given that the former is really China itself, and the city is its capital, Peking.

After noting such corrections and informing that the Chinese believe that "all kings of the world recognize their own," Pantoja moves into economics, the world of imports and exports. Through his text we know that the Turks and Moors introduced jasper, which fascinated the Chinese and the king in particular, musk and rhubarb. Territorial divisions were also referred to, as usual, as well as an indication that China had thirteen provinces and two imperial courts, each one with its capital and each city with its corresponding districts and towns. He ably refers to the fact that in the Chinese books that he read houses, families, land and taxes are recorded—something that he was not able to personally confirm. On the other hand, he relates at first-hand how he is amazed by the houses, bridges and palaces, and by everything when

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referring to Peking and Nanking. He wrote of these: “It seems to all of us that have been there that this or that Peking holds as many people or more than four of the most known and populous cities of our Europe, such as Rome, Lisbon and other large cities.... and people arrive every day” (p. 63).

This grandiosity, which at first provides a means of comparison with the most well-known European capitals, is also used to give the dimensions other Chinese cities, roads and palaces. Nevertheless, despite such splendour, he describes in disgust: “The Chinese are so alike in all natural and artificial things and so uniform that those viewing a main city are unable to find anything new compared to the others” (p. 63). It is curious that this complaint of the lack of variety or similarity of appearances is constant amongst Jesuits.

However, as a man from a dry zone, he deeply admires the rivers and water topography which is common even nowadays in inland Chinese landscapes. He is agreeably surprised by the use given to water as a trade route and as a source of food (he is delighted by the fishing cormorants), the profusion of vessels and the aesthetics of a landscape punctuated by flocks of small sails raised in the wind. His artist’s eye captures the mandarins’ boats in great detail, and he writes, “There is not much in our Europe at their level because it seems that there is nothing that reaches their level of beauty” (p. 66 reverse side). Pantoja draws a graphic-aesthetic chart page by page and line by line, with the excuse that the boats serve to outline the social classes, both in relation to the people as well as the merchandise and the cities.

Another interesting point in regard to his explanations that peaked my interest because I found it a long time ago in a manuscript by another Jesuit, Adriano de las Cortes, is what I personally call their “Cartesian character”. I refer through this name to behaviour similar to the empirical, to the detailed verification of the test and the object to be tested. Pantoja, like the other priest, measures, counts, calculates and experiments. Thanks to this emphasis on detail, we not only know that the Chinese transported silk, gold, iron, mercury, wood and sails by boat, but we are also told that a pound of sugar was worth eighteen maravedis, and also that if we buy it in bulk instead (“all together” as he calls it), then we can acquire 100 pounds for nine or ten reales, though if we purchase it in Peking it will be twenty or twenty-four maravedis

because, as he warns, “Everything is more expensive here.” We rarely find more irrefutable proof than “I was there.”

Pantoja gives detailed information on the price of sails, honey and needles, all of which was aimed at those who could come to these lands. As he explains, “It is necessary to be very careful in this regard...because the Chinese don’t miss an opportunity to raise the prices (of goods) when they can” (p. 71). He even makes an effort to relate daily life by reviewing the most typical food products. We know by how much the price of trout (three maravedis per pound) or eggs or fruit was cheaper than in Spain. Nevertheless, Pantoja is Spanish through and through, since he starts to talk about Chinese wines and states: “In actual fact, they do not compare at all with those of our land” (p. 73).

Thus, Father Pantoja takes us on a detailed tour from agricultural production to livestock, the way to eat and etiquette. He says that the Chinese eat little, slowly, without tablecloths or napkins, though they do use chopsticks—a hygienic and comfortable custom which he feels very much at home with. “I must confess, in fact, that they seem to be greatly ahead of us” (p. 73). Drinks are always taken hot, oils are very fragrant, and the fruit is very diverse.

Leaving food behind, Diego de Pantoja then focuses on dress (its forms, colours and materials) and on hairstyles, which allows him to speak of their physique and tell a nice anecdote: The Chinese believed that Pantoja could discover treasures since his eyes were a very light blue.

The occupations and the rank and wealth of each one, burials and mourning, soldiers and their hierarchy, scholars and the learned, all form an important part of his report. There are evidently some aspects that shock him more than others, and there are even some that disgust him, such as the buying and selling of children, which he points out “is the cheapest thing in China,” or polygamous marriage, which he describes in detail so that the reader can fully understand what it means, and which he sees as “one of the biggest (if not the biggest) hindrances to upper-class people and mandarins from becoming Christians” (p. 81). Finally, we draw attention to what we commented on before. Firstly, the evangelical purpose is always present. Secondly, the fact that he lived amongst the Chinese is decisive in his co-existence with them. He has to have a holistic view more like that of an anthropologist than

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a missionary, even though implicitly, to understand the relations that exist (and China is a good example) between social class, status, prestige and type of matrimonial institution.⁹

I understand that it is very difficult, even with the above text and without providing evidence from other accounts, to see the reader as in Pantoja's letter appreciating the sense of experimentation, of having lived, the famous Malinowskian I-testimony that is so dear to a large part of our field. Each line of the letter encapsulates life and feeling, observation and thorough recording of data, experimentation and precise comparative measures that highlight each ethnographical detail that the Jesuit slowly uncovers. If a burial is spoken of, the reader sees it—the language providing insight into mourning colours, the significance of time according to rank in the lineage, the relationship between social class and burial space (the more important the position the longer the body is kept in the house before final burial) the different rites and ceremonies, the sound of songs and music, and the quality of the coffins. Likewise, we smile with him when, with acute irony, he likens the soldiers to schoolboys that “have not an iota of honour,” or when he explains that “to argue is to throw a few punches, go wild and let down one's hair and then make up in two words. They don't give much importance to beatings or the like because of things for which our people would kill” (p. 89 verso).

In this all-encompassing manner, with no lack of reference to letters and books, to learned Confucians and all types of mandarins, to the different political, ministerial and bureaucratic structures, Father Pantoja arrives at a point that seems to characterize his report even more than everything else, taking into account his position of *in situ* observer. The Jesuit comments in some of the last pages on what the imperial court is like. He describes the three most characteristic types of people: the women, the eunuchs and the royal family (particularly the king and queen).

Before moving into this subject, I think that evidence should be provided of the fact, in my opinion, that the Jesuits collided head on with the female world just as it was and as it was being built in Ming China. In reality, none of them were prepared for the absolute segregation of upper class women, perhaps because it was quite normal in Spain and Italy for women to use a separate religious space for

more profane acts. Thus, when the Jesuits preached equality of the sexes for certain religious practices and even the mixing of men and women in ritual acts, the wall that had been raised between them was, quite plainly, insurmountable. Similar separation was found in relation to the polygamous matrimonial system, and even in this regard, though for a different reason, we can note the astonishment of the Chinese that the Jesuits practiced celibacy. That is, the Jesuits not only did not marry, but they did not even want to have children—something that was truly inconceivable in Chinese culture at the time.

Perhaps Father Pantoja, for all those reasons, showed great sensitivity to women and states that he even baptized some, despite the inconveniences. Not forgetting his missionary zeal, and for the sake of what he believed was the women's well being, he criticized the practice of polygamy, indicating that it “is the cause of much rebellion and disagreement in their homes between the wives and the children of different mothers.” This and the knowledge that in Spain each man is only allowed to take one legitimate wife is for them, “great incentive to be ruled by our law and persuade their husbands to abide by it” (p. 117). Curiously, the Jesuit interprets polygamy as is commonly done in the West, and the somewhat erroneous interpretation has survived through the ages.

Nevertheless Pantoja, who is a priest when all is said and done, tackles the subject of women in an oblique fashion, saying: “In relation to their wants, customs and other things we know nothing, nor can we since they spend their life at home... and since nobody takes care of them but themselves (since they are always at home) I cannot say anything about their ways” (p. 117 verso).

Nevertheless, since the priest has eyes and ears, he sometimes saw them in places he visited, which was enough for him to be able to detail their clothing and, of course, their small feet. He used the empress (as a standard or benchmark) to finish off this section, highlighting again her imprisonment (“there isn't a nun that compares,” he said), the number of concubines (evidently fruit of the matrimonial system) and also the lack of power, representation and royalty.

This topic of the women of the palace gives him cause to move into the ambiguous world of the eunuchs, a powerful class that is rejected, feared and hated, holding a cross-class and cross-sex position. This liminality, which

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is so interesting to us, caused the priest to adopt an attitude of rejection without him knowing it, which can be seen by reading between the lines.¹⁰ He commences by noting their low social level, which seems to him to cause them to “be of no delicacy” and to “be little learned.” In reality they are mere servants of the palace, and all that is asked of them is to “be of fair face and fair tongue.” He then explains how he noticed in his first year in Peking that more than three thousand boys were chosen from amongst the more than twenty thousand who presented themselves for selection. Once chosen, they are distributed into different occupations, and some of the older, more experienced ones are musicians or mathematicians to the king, a fact that Pantoja simply comments on by saying, “So as not to be held up here, I shall simply say that they do not know anything.” In reality, the biography, the proven and suffering-laden success drives the Jesuit’s pen onwards. His interaction with Buddhists and eunuchs was never good. That is why he calls them low, covetous, haughty and rude, though he finally concedes that some are “good and prudent.”

Life in the royal court was luxurious and the Emperor “very miserly,” something that is not surprising given that, as his protector comments, what else could one have expected if they are only raised with eunuchs and women. In other words, the feminisation of the royal enclave is, according to him, counter-indicated and a hindrance to a good royal education. The palaces are splendid, however, and the Jesuit describes in detail the forms, materials, colours and, of course, the drawings, windows and other artwork with real enthusiasm. It is very interesting to see how he has meticulously ordered the different walls of the palace to indicate how the different members of the imperial family live—something that he again takes advantage of in order to attack the system of polygamy and the established separation of the children of secondary wives and concubines.

Pantoja terminates his letter with this information and then includes maps of China (which do not appear in the text) and a promise to Father Luis de Guzmán that he will send a more detailed description of the same. He further adds “a number of other manuscripts... so that you can see what Chinese letters are like and what characters we have been putting into our heads.” The letter is signed in Peking on 9 March 1602.

As stated at the beginning, this report by Pantoja is a text that should be assessed in the general context

of the Riccian adaptation policy, in other words, a strategy on several levels that combines religious and profane elements, and defines different pathways of rapprochement with the very different Chinese. In order to understand Pantoja and his works, the report must be viewed with reference to other ideas including, amongst those indicated herein, the arts and sciences.¹¹

Diego de Pantoja had great artistic talent that he used to draw up maps that caused a sensation in the Court of Peking, due to both their line details and their colouring. Besides these maps, the Spaniard’s most valuable contributions were in the musical and linguistic fields. The Jesuits brought some musical instruments with them when they first travelled to Peking, including the so-called “monochord” (clavichord), which Pantoja taught a number of people to play. However, on understanding that the Chinese syllables possess different tones that constitute distinct semantic fields, he created a vocabulary for writing music where each accent corresponded to musical notes and could be graphically written. Five notes were allotted to each Chinese sound vocal or monosyllable so that they would represent five distinct tones or accents, arbitrarily choosing the notes that indicated the three accents (circumflex, grave and acute) and the short and long syllables. In other words: “do with the circumflex accent, re with the long syllable sign, mi with the grave accent, fa with the acute accent, and sol with the short syllable sign.”¹² Even though this system has its limitations, it advanced the work of other Jesuits and can even be considered to be the pioneering precursor for the Wade-Giles phonetic system.

From a clearly scientific viewpoint, the work of Pantoja stands out, and it seems unnecessary to reaffirm that the policy of rapprochement could only have been carried out by enlightened and prepared minds. His topographical and technical know-how and mathematical and astronomical knowledge were important weapons in the evangelization of China. Thus, in the summer of 1611, he reviewed Euclid’s *Elements of Geometry*, together with Sabatino de Ursis. One year later he translated the Western calendar into Chinese, and at around the same time he wrote the *Rigui Tufa* 日晷图法 [Illustrated Book on the Sundial] with Sun Yuanhua 孙元化, and he created an exhibition on world geography that would serve as the basis for Jules Aleni’s famous work *Zhifang Waiji* 职方外纪 [The World Outside of China] (1623). Finally, in 1614 he

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published in Chinese his greatest ethical-moral work, entitled *Qike* 七克 [Treatise on the Seven Sins and Virtues]. This work contains a study of human nature, the main sins and the means of combating them by building a bridge, à la Ricci, between Christianity and Confucianism. Six editions of this work were published up to 1910, followed by further editions in 1922 and 1962, when it was published in Shanghai and Taiwan.

We have, though somewhat rapidly, outlined one of the works that actively assisted in creating a particular image of China. Likewise, every text involves a number of codes that are used to draft each one of the characteristics that define the unknown. Thus, texts like this one involve messages produced by particular emissaries and are produced, therefore, for singular reasons and with little concrete explanation, and are, in turn, interpreted by recipients who likewise will have specific reasons and motives for interpretation.

Restrictions of time and space do not allow for the analysis that such a subject requires here. Therefore, we should take into consideration the fact that the descriptive and significant messages sent by the emissary are a subsequent reworking of his experiences and interests as well as products of his capacity to interpret. There is also the doubt that this sensibility is in turn influenced by the emissary's personal and specific history as much as by his sensory perceptions and feelings. Father Pantoja, in other words, sees and observes not only with his eyes but also with his understanding, his experiences, his beliefs and desires.

With this in mind we can propose that the singularities of each specific story be left to one side and focus on a more comprehensive view of the subject. In other words, if we are able to place ourselves in a macro position, in the sense of the full historical context, and relate this to the perception of the actors, i.e. in a micro-historical context, then we can discover how the overlapping of the facts indicates to us many details that only have real meaning if they are dependent on one another. Thus, the China of Father Pantoja, the Spanish Jesuit missionary and follower of Ricci, is an image, though a fractured, partial and at the same time full, image of Chinese culture.¹³

In his interpreted ethnographical description, both detailed and singular, we find the entire model, range and comparison. His view is the objective view of one seeing without passion, without zeal, only with the desire to observe in order to know, report

and understand. Thus it is quite significant that he only touches on certain aspects of the Chinese religious world, and yet he dedicates fifty pages to his own missionary experience. To reiterate, Pantoja the ethnographer observes to understand and explain, though Pantoja the missionary must transform in the act of observation. His senses of perception, selection and interpretation of “both” and the “other” unite, without separation.

Maybe because of this we see Diego de Pantoja and his manuscript as forming a bridge between cultures. He is, in fact, an “importer”, a mediator between the different worlds. The Jesuit himself (just as Ricci's adaptation policy envisaged),¹⁴ transferred Western knowledge, techniques and skills to the imperial court of Peking, while by pure creativity (his writings, drawings, music, etc.) he focused on himself and his observations, and via self-instrumentalisation he brought part of China to the body of Western knowledge.

This final aspect is a relevant and interesting phenomenon that deserves more detailed study. I am certain that the awareness of that which is different, the increasingly convergent elaboration of “others”, and even the construction of a paradigm in regard to the relative is a clearly Western product that can even sometimes restrict our capacity for critical reflection and thought. This process created a strange development that, in the case of China, produced a real intellectual crisis in Europe—a movement of self-blame and criticism as strange as the stereotype of the wise old Chinese man and his beautiful wife with tiny feet wrapped in silk—bringing the great crisis of rites and the beginning of the end for the Jesuits.¹⁵

It is important, therefore, to see the mediation forms produced by this text, both between cultures and in the priest himself, and it is evident, though not covered here, that this controversial process produces strong liberalisation in both individual and collective terms on different planes and through different criteria. However, I propose that mediation, like a fence, is selectively permeable in all that is built in a cultural sense, with categories like gaps in the fence that permit (or don't) communication between individuals and cultures.

Father Pantoja's text is paradigmatic in what it states. His use of the first person, and his descriptions, create reality in what he sees, and, in doing so, everything acquires the status of objectivity and truth. Words such as “I would say, that I doubted, saw, observed, asked,

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was showed, felt,” and other such verbs in this style are words indicating that they were lived and experienced, which prove to the reader the reality of the text. The priest’s words also have force when used in the plural, and he involves a specific group of people who back up what is seen and related. Pantoja continuously constructs sentences in the plural: “it seemed to all of us that were there,” “we also found along this path,” “we arrived at a very large city,” and “we tried it a few times,” all of which are assertive phrases that convert the individual view into a collective one, the subjective observation that is somewhat questionable into one that is objective and indisputable. Like Durkheim, Pantoja knows that the group is something more than the sum of the parts, and he selects and interprets, as an individual as well as part of a group, a collective that supports and reinforces what he says.

Therefore, he concludes as a certainty that there is not a better culture, but there are aspects of the culture that come out more positive or negative. The text does not seem to pass judgment, just compare, harmonise and later on, on a case-by-case basis, select. The preference even changes sides on occasion, to tend to

the other side, and then comparing again, highlighting the different cultural values. Really, throughout the text, through the superlative adjectives and adverbs, the hyperbole and disjunction, but primarily through the meaning and force of the indicative and reflexive verbs, we can see the force and creative power that words have. The words are real and seem to leave the paper and transform into voice by the hand of Pantoja, by the centrality of his person, his group and his direct experience.

Certainly, being a missionary, between cultures, and living on the edge, Pantoja can, from there and with creative experience, direct his gaze at different Chinas, providing a fractured view that is interpreted as complete. Anthropologists know that by looking at and admiring a culture we basically reinvent it, as we know that our inventions and constructions, our interpretations and realities are as complex, ambiguous and paradoxical as we ourselves are, though we also know that this is precisely our wealth. **RC**

Translation by PHILOS - Comunicação Global, Lda.

NOTES

- 1 For example, *Marco Paulo*, by Valentim Fernandes, published in 1502, and *Cosmographia breve introductoria en el libro de Marco Paulo*, by Rodrigo de Santaella, published in 1503. In regard to the myths, the legend of Prester John and his marvellous treasures should be recalled.
- 2 The date on which Matteo Ricci disembarked at Macao and on which, at least officially, the adventure of the policy of adaptation starts.
- 3 I am preparing a monograph on Pantoja which will include a copy of his letter and a preliminary study of his life and work.
- 4 It can be seen in the classic works of Nicolas Trigault, Pasquale D’Elia or Tacchi Venturi.
- 5 Entitled *Viaje de la China*, of which I am the editor, and which was published by Alianza Editorial, Madrid, in 1991. The *Revista de Cultura* no. 31 (April/June 1997) published my article, “The Jesuit Adriano de las Cortes and Chinese Culture”.
- 6 In order to avoid excessive notes, all literary excerpts and references will be included in the main text from now on, bearing the page number and ‘verso’ if relevant.
- 7 See *L’Europe chinoise*, vol. 1, by René Etiemble, Paris, Éditions Gallimard, 1988.
- 8 It refers to the latitude, which is really 39.55° North, while the longitude is 116.25 East.
- 9 I wrote on the subject in “Mujeres chinas y hombres españoles (alteridad y género)”. In Paloma de Villota (ed.), *Globalización a qué*

precio: el impacto de la[s] mujeres del norte y del sur, Barcelona, Ed. Icaria, 2001, pp. 301-318.

- 10 His perception was undoubtedly influenced by the multiple encounters that he and Ricci had with the eunuchs, especially one called Mathan. See the first part of Pantoja’s letter. This dislike of eunuchs is also quite common in other reports, such as that of Adriano de las Cortes. I indicate here the anthropological interest of such liminary persons and the low social status that trans-sexual persons have.
- 11 Writing on the subject of cultural mediation and ideological frontiers. In Rui M. Loureiro and S. Gruzinski (eds.), *Passar as Fronteiras. Actas do II Colóquio Internacional sobre Mediadores Culturais. Séculos XV a XVIII*. Lagos, Centro de Estudos Gil Eanes, 1999, pp. 339-354.
- 12 The excerpt is as follows: the (sound) with circumflex is dental; the long accent, silent; the grave, excellent; the acute, reduced; and the short, slow. The corresponding sounds are ut=dental, re=silent, mi=excellent; fa=reduced, sol=slow. (Cronohistoria de la Compañía de Jesús, p. 449).
- 13 See my article “Entre la imagen y la realidad: Los viajes a China de Miguel de Loarca y Adriano de las Cortes,” in *Revista Española del Pacífico*, no. 8, 1998, pp. 569-584.
- 14 This topic is covered in more detail in “Misioneros en China: Matteo Ricci como mediador cultural,” in *Entre dos mundos. Fronteras culturales y agentes mediadores*. Sevilla, 1997, pp. 329-348.
- 15 See *Les Jésuites en Chine. La querelle des rites (1552-177)* by René Etiemble, Julliard, 1966.