

CIS 160: Introduction to East Asian Studies
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Prof. Eriberto P. Lozada Jr.
Office: Carnegie 01
Telephone: 704-894-2035

Office Hours: M, W, F 10:30 – 11:30 am
T, Th 10:00 – 11:15 am or by appointment
Email: erlozada@davidson.edu
Web: <http://www.davidson.edu/personal/erlozada>

Lecture Notes, 15 September 2003

Sources of Identity Crisis in China: Contact with the West

- In China's history, the Mongol empire was the most complete (and first) challenge to the Chinese worldview of the "middle kingdom" and the superiority of Chinese culture; more complete domination by a non-Han group than previous non-Han dynasties, less "sinification" than other dynasties, and wide extent of Mongol empire (touching Europe)
- Ming dynasty (1368-1661) – last of the Han imperial dynasties, but in many ways not-typically Han Chinese in outlook (i.e., "legalist" despotism vs. Confucian paternalism); founder of Ming dynasty initially had power base from soteriological cult, Red Turbans (remember the issue of suspicion of religious organizations mentioned earlier)
- Unlike previous dynasties where cultural/economic exchange achieved by the periphery coming to the center, Ming expanded outwards – constant obsession with Western borders (traditional Inner Asian issue – continued threat of Mongols, Jurchen (the earlier mentioned Jin dynasty), but now also the Russians), but sending out of naval fleet (eunuch-admiral Zheng He) – very unusual in Chinese history
- Ming dynasty also a time of rapid development – economic conditions prosperous, population explosion, cultural developments: in Smith article, note increased importance of regional trade (rise of merchant class), urban development in the south, and increased geographic mobility
- Also contact with the West: Matteo Ricci and the Jesuits (see Jonathan Spence's *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci*); we will return to this later

The Last Dynasty: The Manchu Qing dynasty

- Same pattern of non-Han group from northeast Asia, one-time mercenaries/allies of Ming, become strong enough to conquer the dynasty
- Manchu gradually "sincized," using Chinese bureaucracy to rule; but maintain mix of Manchu and Han Chinese practices in court; example, policies written in both Chinese and Manchu script
- Europeans – Portuguese, Dutch, English – , with superior technology, engaged China with maritime trade; after a series of conflicts, Russians and Chinese establish a border with 1689 Treaty of Nerchinsk; note Cohen's point that "The treaty was unusual, in that the Qing, eager to be rid of a distraction in order to focus on the Zunghars, treated the Russians as equals. It was also enormously important, as it established a border between China and Russia that has endured with little modification ever since." (pg. 218)

Case Study: Christianity in China

- Nestorian presence in Tang court; later followed by John de Montecorvino came overland during the Mongol Yuan dynasty, but had little impact in China
- Before Matteo Ricci, there was Francis Xavier – the Jesuits traveled with the expanding maritime activities of Portugal (and later France) – overseas missionary activity associated with trade and technology of the West; (we will talk about FX later, who first went to Japan, and then went to China and died there)
- Jesuit strategy – indigenization of Christianity; initially went in form similar to Buddhist monk, but found that as a result they had limited access and little respect;
- With the arrival of Matteo Ricci during the Ming, they switch to the guise of intellectuals (Confucian-like); they also become fluent in the Classics and Chinese intellectual thought; as a result, they become more engaged with the literati-elite, and work their way into court, where they achieve success as mapmakers, astronomers, and other technical/scientific specialties
- In the late Ming, Jesuits help the dynasty by providing plans for cannons and other military hardware; they also provide explanations (apologetics, to use religious terminology) using Chinese intellectual terminology and issues (see for example *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, by Matteo Ricci), increasing their status among the Han Chinese intellectuals who make up the bureaucracy (at one point, the “prime minister” of China became a Catholic, and the goal of converting the emperor seemed attainable); their prestige in court continues in Qing
- Other Catholic missionary orders (Dominicans, Franciscans) were left out of the Jesuit success in China; European politics also pitted Jesuits in different nations against other orders and European courts; domestic politics in Europe play out in something called the “Rites Controversy”
- The Jesuits interpreted Confucian-style ancestor worship as “civil ritual,” something that was performed as part of being within a Chinese polity, and not as a religious event; otherwise, Chinese Catholics could not participate in political office; this was accused as heresy by other Catholic missionary orders; the Qing Kangxi emperor intervened on behalf of the Jesuits, and wrote a letter to the Pope about the validity of the Jesuit interpretation; as a result, the Pope intervened and interpreted the accommodation as heresy;
- As a result, the Jesuits are disbanded worldwide in 1773, (although, obviously, they were allowed to re-form as an order later); Cohen describes the outcome this way: “Jesuit hopes for bringing Christianity to China foundered on the arrogance of Rome.” (pg. 219)
- By the 20th century, the Catholic Church would later recognize that ancestor worship was indeed a civil ritual