

Part 3

THE QING DYNASTY TO CIRCA 1800

Overview

Ming rule over China ended in 1644 when Beijing fell to an invading Manchu army. The Manchus descended from the Jin or Jurchen (*Nüzhen*), whose empire (1115–1235) in what is now north-east China had been destroyed by the Mongols. Towards the end of the sixteenth century the Jurchen tribes were united into a formidable fighting force by Nurhaci (1559–1626), who from 1618, operating from the Jurchen heartland in Manchuria, began to take on the Ming in a series of military campaigns. These campaigns were continued and intensified by his son Huang Taiji (1592–1643; entry 17), who in 1635 changed the name of his people to Manchu and soon afterwards adopted the name of Qing for the dynasty of which he declared himself emperor. Qing control over all of China was consolidated in the years following 1644 as residual Ming resistance and subsequent rebellions were crushed. In later decades the Qing empire expanded westwards into Central Asia until it covered a territory three times the size of the Ming empire (Jami 2008:43).

Even before the capture of Beijing the Qing bureaucracy had routinely employed Manchu, Mongolian and Chinese side by side. After 1644 Manchu became the official state language; it remained the language of the Imperial Court to the end of the dynasty in 1911 (Crossley and Rawski 1993:68, 74). However, the Manchus made up only a tiny minority of perhaps two per cent of the Qing Empire's vast population (Grimm 1988:77) and they brought with them a primarily oral tradition (a written language was not created until Nurhaci's time). That made it inevitable that they would be gradually sinicized. Translation from Chinese into Manchu became a major concern in this process. The tension at its heart pitted the Qing authorities' desire to preserve a distinct Manchu identity against their high regard for Han Chinese culture with its venerable written tradition and sheer force of numbers.

The translation of Chinese historical and other works into Manchu had begun under Nurhaci, but after 1644 the number of translations, now including the Ruist classics, rapidly increased (Durrant 1979:654, 656). By the end of the eighteenth century all the major Chinese classics had been rendered into Manchu (Zacharoff 1891:153; entry 27). Whereas the early translations appeared mostly in monolingual editions, later versions, often intended for use as commentaries on the Chinese originals and as aids to studying Chinese, were routinely published in bilingual form (Grimm 1988:78).

In their efforts to promote the Manchu language the Qing authorities rewarded translation into Manchu, but in the longer term they were fighting a losing battle. As Ivan Zakharov

put it, originally in Russian in 1875: “Translation led to high rank, wealth and honours, and translators occupied half of the official posts, but the great number and the advanced state of culture of the Chinese people set the designs of the government at defiance” (Zacharoff 1875/1891:154). In the end the translations facilitated the absorption of the Manchu minority into Chinese culture.

The other main language of the Qing empire, Mongolian, benefited from the westward push into Central Asia when the Kangxi Emperor (1654–1722) had the Tibetan Buddhist canon translated into Mongolian; the commentaries on it would be translated under one of Kangxi’s successors, the Qianlong Emperor (1711–1799) (Crossley and Rawski 1993:98).

As the Qing armies took control of China in the 1640s, the Jesuit missionaries had no choice but to embrace the new regime. In Beijing they did so with singular success. While in his day Matteo Ricci had managed to gain access to the Forbidden City, he never actually set eyes on the elusive Wanli Emperor (1563–1620). In subsequent decades the Jesuit reliance on the patronage of literati and influential court officials shifted to more direct imperial patronage. From the 1640s onwards Jesuits also occupied leading positions in the Directorate of Astronomy (also referred to as the Astronomical Bureau) (Standaert 2008:170). Under the Qing, Jesuits acted as personal tutors and interpreters to the emperor himself, and they learned Manchu so as to be able to converse with him in his native language (Crossley and Rawski 1993:88). The missionaries were formally licensed to study Manchu in 1689 (teaching the language to foreigners would be banned in 1805, as part of a series of anti-Christian measures; Crossley and Rawski 1993:87, 89). First Adam Schall (Johann Adam Schall von Bell, 1592–1666), then Ferdinand Verbiest and after him Antoine Thomas (1644–1709), followed eventually by the French missionaries Jean-François Gerbillon (1654–1707) and Joachim Bouvet (1656–1730), taught the Kangxi Emperor Western mathematics, sometimes meeting him on an almost daily basis. This meant the teaching materials for their lessons needed to be translated into Manchu. To this end, and at the emperor’s behest, Verbiest prepared a Manchu version of 幾何原本 (*Jihe Yuanben*) *Elements of Mathematics*, the first six books of Euclid in Clavius’s edition as translated into Chinese by Ricci and Xu Guangqi back in 1607 (Jami and Han 2003:92). In July 1675 the emperor even visited the Jesuit residence in person (Brockey 2007:137).

From the 1650s onwards various embassies from European countries and from Russia had begun arriving at the Qing court, and on each occasion Jesuits acted as interpreters for the emperor. Among the first European nations to despatch an embassy to Beijing were the Dutch, who, as Protestants, were dismayed to see the Jesuit Adam Schall interpreting for them. The Jesuits’ service as linguists did not prevent them from acting in their own interests. Ferdinand Verbiest portrayed the Dutch and the Russians to the emperor as schismatics and heretics in revolt against their rightful overlord the Pope; the emperor sent the envoys away empty-handed. Later Verbiest negotiated privately with a Russian ambassador to try to secure an overland route from Europe to China for the missionaries (Nicolaïdis 2003: 44–45). When in 1706 the papal emissary Carlo Maillard de Tournon (1668–1710) came to the Qing court to discuss the so-called “Rites Controversy” (about which more below), he was understandably wary of the Jesuit interpreters the court assigned to him, since his visit concerned precisely the Church’s strictures about the Jesuit style of missionising in China (Brockey 2007:187–188).

The trustworthiness of interpreters remained an issue in all manner of contexts. For instance, in 1743, when the British commodore George Anson (1697–1762) and his ship the *Centurion* proceeded from Macau to Canton (Guangdong) with a captured Spanish galleon

in tow, he felt let down by a succession of Chinese interpreters, whom he described as unreliable and dishonest. Having made it to Canton he at last came across an interpreter he reckoned he could trust, the Englishman James Flint (1720–?), who spoke Chinese on account of having been left behind in Canton as a teenage boy to learn the language, the merchant ship's captain who left him there being persuaded "of the great advantages which the East India Company might one day receive from an English interpreter" (Anson 1748:532). Flint went on to become the Company's first official Chinese interpreter.

For the missionaries, being close to the nerve centre of Qing power brought risks as well. In 1664, rivalries among Muslim, Chinese and Western astronomers at the Directorate of Astronomy led to Adam Schall and Ferdinand Verbiest being imprisoned under harsh conditions and facing a possible death sentence; they were not reinstated until 1669 (Jami and Han 2003:90). Neither could the missionaries avoid being drafted into decidedly secular enterprises. The emperor's wish was their command. During the pro-Ming rebellion against Manchu rule known as the Revolt of the Three Feudatories (1673–1681), Verbiest designed artillery pieces for the Manchu army and supervised a cannon foundry. Towards the end of the Kangxi Emperor's reign, French Jesuit cartographers helped to survey in detail the full extent of the Qing Empire, basing their methods on the map of France that had been published in Paris in 1693 (Jami 2008:65); supplementary maps were produced in 1769 to reflect the Qianlong Emperor's conquests in Central Asia. Accurate maps served obvious bureaucratic and military ends (Waley-Cohen 1993:1529).

When Matteo Ricci had sent letters or reports back to Europe, he had used either the Portuguese or the Spanish route, and sometimes both simultaneously in view of the hazards of long-distance travel. The Portuguese route went south-westwards via Macau, Goa, Mozambique and Angola, the Spanish route eastwards via Manila and Mexico. The two routes reflected the way Spain and Portugal had divided their global spheres of influence at the end of the fifteenth century. During the sixteenth and most of the seventeenth century the Catholic missionaries setting out for Asia depended on the Portuguese Assistency (or *Padroado*). However, in the course of the seventeenth century Portuguese sea power waned and was increasingly contested by other countries, first Holland and Britain, then also France, which became a dominant force in Europe under Louis XIV (1638–1715). All three countries also happened to be at the forefront of scientific advances, with London and Paris leading the way. The Royal Society was set up in London in 1660, the *Académie royale des sciences* in Paris in 1666. The combination of French political assertiveness and scientific interest led to a new chapter in the Jesuit involvement in China, as France broke the Portuguese monopoly on patronizing the China mission. The shift had consequences both for translation and for the representation of China in Europe.

In 1683 Philippe Couplet, on his promotional tour of Europe, had relayed to Louis XIV a request from Ferdinand Verbiest for more missionaries with sound scientific training to be sent to Beijing. The French King seized the opportunity to forge not just missionary but also diplomatic, commercial and scientific ties with Beijing. In 1685 five French missionaries, all skilled scientists and members of the Academy, set sail not from Lisbon but from the French port of Brest. Led by Jean-François Gerbillon (1654–1707), they took with them a collection of scientific instruments donated by the king, as well as letters patent declaring them to be the king's mathematicians (and hence independent of the Portuguese crown; Jami 2008:52). Stopping over in the Dutch settlements of Cape Town and Batavia (thus avoiding Portuguese possessions), they landed in Ningbo (not Macau) and reached Beijing in 1688. Another twelve French missionaries arrived in 1697. In that year one of the first cohort of

five, Joachim Bouvet (1656–1730), was sent back to France as the emperor's envoy; he returned with ten more recruits in 1702.

The French missionaries' scientific credentials soon enabled them to get close to the Qing court, as close as Schall and Verbiest had been. Jean-François Gerbillon was involved almost immediately in the negotiations with Russia that led in 1689 to the Treaty of Nerchinsk, the text of which was established in Manchu, Russian and Latin. From the 1690s on, the French missionaries tutored the Kangxi Emperor in mathematics, but, unlike Schall and Verbiest before them, they began to import textbooks originally written in French rather than Latin. The imports included works such as Ignace-Gaston Pardies's *Eléments de géométrie* (1671), which they translated first into Manchu and then into Chinese (Jami 2008:61). This brought to an end the monopoly of Latin as a source language for missionary translation into Chinese. Bouvet and Gerbillon also wrote a mathematical treatise in Manchu, which the emperor had translated into Chinese. In 1723 the totality of the Jesuits' mathematical knowledge was gathered up and incorporated into a large-scale compendium of Chinese mathematics commissioned by the emperor (Standaert 2008:180).

The Manchu language first became known in the West thanks to the French missionaries. Gerbillon produced a Manchu grammar, written in Latin, as early as 1696. Almost a hundred years later, in 1789–1790, Jean-Jacques Marie Amyot (or Amiot, 1718–1794), who became very proficient in the language, published a Manchu–French dictionary (Crossley and Rawski 1993:87, 89).

The painter and priest Louis Antoine de Poirot (1735–1813; entry 28) was a late exponent of the French missionary endeavour in China. The translation for which he is known, a New Testament in Chinese, is also slightly unusual because it concerns the Bible. He used the Latin Vulgate as his source text, and he rendered it into colloquial rather than classical Chinese (Hsia 2007:41). He also appears to have translated the Old Testament into Manchu, a version that has remained unpublished to this day. That it took so long for a translation of the Bible to be produced in China is not surprising. On the whole, Catholic missions, unlike their Protestant counterparts, did not prioritize Bible translation but favoured liturgical and devotional texts instead. Matteo Ricci, for instance, had a copy of the Antwerp Polyglot Bible sent to him in Beijing as early as 1604, but no translation ensued (Standaert 2003:387). Bible translation into Chinese had to wait for the Protestant missionaries, who began to arrive in the nineteenth century.

Despite the arrival of the French, the decline of the Jesuit mission in China set in soon after 1700. The so-called Chinese Rites Controversy left the Jesuit missionaries in disarray, and they never fully gained the trust of Kangxi's successors, the Yongzheng (1678–1735) and the Qianlong (1711–1799) emperors. The last heave came in 1773 when the entire Jesuit order ceased to exist (it would be re-established in 1814).

The Rites Controversy (Mungello 1994; Zürcher 1994) was as much about translation as it was about religion and rites. Almost all non-Jesuit Catholic missionaries within and outside China, and even some Jesuits, strongly disapproved of the use Matteo Ricci and his followers made of indigenous Chinese words – rather than transcribed Latin terms – to represent specifically Christian concepts like God, soul and angel. They argued that these pre-existing Chinese terms came with their own non-Christian cultural baggage, which subverted the Christian meaning the terms were supposed to carry. As regards ritual practices, the Jesuits' opponents condemned the toleration by missionaries of such things as the veneration of the ancestors, rejecting as spurious the Jesuit argument that these ceremonies were not religious but purely secular in nature.

The controversy had been rumbling on since almost the very beginning of the missionary project. As early as 1616 João Rodrigues (c. 1561–1633), a veteran of the Japanese mission then stationed in Macau, had shown himself highly critical of his fellow Jesuits' use of indigenous Chinese words for Christian concepts, a mode of translation he regarded as erroneous and dangerous (Cooper 1974:282–287; Brockey 2007:85–86). The fiercest critic of the Jesuit policy was the Spanish Dominican friar Domingo de Navarrete (1618–1689), who had spent ten years as a missionary in Manila and another fifteen in Fujian province, and who in the 1670s, following his return to Europe, took his objections to the Jesuit accommodation policy to the Propaganda Fide office in Rome and went on to compose a huge tome tearing every single aspect of the Jesuit style of missionising to shreds. Polemics between the Jesuits and their adversaries in other orders continued throughout the century.

The matter was resolved in 1704, when the Pope found definitively against the Jesuits, forbidding the use of existing Chinese terms for the Christian God and prohibiting Chinese Christians from participating in rites for Confucius or ancestors. For the Kangxi Emperor, the Pope's attempt to dictate to Chinese subjects constituted unacceptable interference. The papal emissary who had been sent to explain the ban to the Qing court, Maillard de Tournon, was promptly banished, and soon afterwards the emperor proscribed all Christian missions. Kangxi's successors the Yongzheng and the Qianlong emperors, who in any case were much less favourably disposed towards the missionaries than their father and grandfather had been, reinforced the ban several times in the course of the eighteenth century. The Yongzheng Emperor had all Jesuit possessions confiscated in 1724.

Shortly after the mid-century, and for a variety of reasons, the Jesuit order came under severe pressure in other parts of the world, too. In the course of the 1760s the Jesuits had already been expelled from some European countries and their colonies. In 1773 the Pope abolished the Society of Jesus altogether, although the news did not reach China until two years later. In the preface to his 1810 translation into English of the Qing penal code, the English diplomat and traveller George Staunton ascribed the decline of Catholicism in China to the suppression of the Jesuits but also noted that the anti-clerical spirit of the French Revolution of 1789 "has subsequently had the effect of considerably reducing both the amount of the funds which support, and the number of the labourers who cultivate the Christian vineyard in China" (Staunton 1828:20).

Staunton went on to acknowledge, however, that Europe owed virtually everything it knew about China at the time to "the literary labours of the Missionaries, consisting of original descriptions and of translations" (1828:21). Indeed, throughout the period of Qing rule until the time Staunton was writing, the Jesuits had been churning out descriptions and translations, initially still in Latin but during the eighteenth century increasingly in French. The most important translation they produced was undoubtedly *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* ("The Chinese philosopher Confucius"), which appeared in Paris in 1687, translated and compiled by a team of four Jesuits led by Philippe Couplet, who also signed the dedication to Louis XIV. The book contained three of the four classic books attributed to Confucius, in a translation meant to be as accurate as possible (Couplet 1687:1); in their introduction Couplet and his fellow translators followed Ricci in discerning proto-Christian elements in the ancient texts while rejecting later Neo-Ruist interpretations (Lundbæk 1983:26).

The descriptions of China that appeared in ever larger numbers in Europe in the eighteenth century derived mostly from the regular reports sent back by French Jesuits and published as *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses* in thirty-four volumes between 1703 and 1776. The French Jesuit historian Jean-Baptiste du Halde (1674–1743), who never set foot outside Paris, used

the *Lettres* for his influential four-volume description of China (*Description de l'Empire de Chine*) in 1735. The knowledge thus amassed culminated towards the end of the century in the sixteen volumes of *Mémoires concernant l'histoire, les sciences, les arts, les mœurs, les usages etc. des Chinois* (“Treatises on Chinese history, sciences, arts, traditions, customs etc.”), which appeared in Paris in 1776–1791.

By the early nineteenth century Europe had gone through what has become known as the scientific revolution and was entering the industrial revolution, giving the continent a sizeable advantage over the rest of the world in economic and military terms. While Europe’s knowledge of China had greatly increased during the preceding century, relatively few new European works on science and technology had been translated into Chinese in that time. The knowledge gap proved disastrous for China. By the mid-century the country had lost the Opium Wars. Beyond them lay the destruction of Beijing’s Summer Palace and a string of Unequal Treaties. For the Qing, the nineteenth century would bring nothing but humiliation.

(Overview by Theo Hermans)