

# IDEAS FOR COEXISTENCE: WANG ZHENG'S INTEGRATION OF CATHOLICISM AND CONFUCIANISM

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## Abstract

Wang Zheng of Shaanxi Jingyang was an important figure in the history of Chinese and Western cultural exchange in the late Ming Dynasty. He chose to be baptized into the Catholic faith by missionaries, and he actively introduced and translated Western scientific works and wrote many of his own religious works. These works integrated Confucianism and Catholicism. He also funded the construction of churches, and founded the Ren Association. There is a deep significance in Wang Zheng's attempt at religious integration, particularly for contemporary China Catholics. This paper examines the work of Zheng and shows how his approach to cultural exchange and mutual learning are important for the promotion of peaceful coexistence.

## บทคัดย่อ

Wang Zheng of Shaanxi Jingyang เป็นบุคคลสำคัญคนหนึ่งในประวัติศาสตร์จีนและการแลกเปลี่ยนทางวัฒนธรรมในสมัยราชวงศ์หมิงตอนปลาย เขาเลือกที่จะเป็นคาทอลิกโดยได้รับการรับศีลล้างบาปจากบรรดามิชชันนารี เขาระดมทรัพย์สินที่จะแนะนำและแปลงานทางด้านวิทยาศาสตร์ตะวันตก และได้เขียนงานทางด้านศาสนาไว้มากมาย งานเหล่านี้ได้บูรณาการลัทธิขงจื้อและคาทอลิกเข้าไว้ด้วยกัน เขาบริจาคเงินสร้างโบสถ์หลายแห่ง และเป็นผู้ก่อตั้งองค์กรแห่งความรัก ความพยายามของ Wang Zheng มีความสำคัญอย่างยิ่ง ต่อบูรณาการทางด้านศาสนา โดยเฉพาะอย่างยิ่งคาทอลิกจีนร่วมสมัย บทความนี้ตรวจสอบผลงานของ Zheng และแสดงให้เห็นถึงแนวทางของเขาในการเข้าไปแลกเปลี่ยนทางวัฒนธรรมและการเรียนรู้ร่วมกันซึ่งสำคัญยิ่งสำหรับการส่งเสริมการอยู่ร่วมกันอย่างสันติ

Increasingly, China is recognizing the contributions of Catholicism to its historical development, and recognizing the present role of Catholics in supporting national unity and economic development. This paper wishes to introduce an important Catholic thinker who is an important part of the history of China, a pioneer in the introduction and translation of Western scientific works, and an important part of the history of the cultural exchange between Confucianism and Catholicism.

## **Introduction to Wang Zheng**

Wang Zheng, was born on April 19, in the fifth year of Long Qing Ming Mu Zong (AD 1571), in Shaanxi Jingyang Luqiao Wang jiabu. He was named variously Liang Fu, Kui Xin, Liao Yi Dao Ren, and Zhi Li Sou, He later took the Catholic name Philippe, and after his death, the people of his hometown called him Duan Jie Xian Shen. In the twenty-second year of Wanli Shenzong (AD 1594), he passed his provincial examination and received the Ju Ren. He took nearly three decades to pass the national examination, which he finally earned in the second year of Tianqi Xizong (AD 1622). Wang Zheng was familiar with many classic works of literature and became very learned and famous. As the Tuiguan of guangping Zhi Li, he helped overturn the unjust charges against the Bai Lian religion, he was active in dredging and engineering the Qing river, and served as a soldier. As the Tuiguan of Yangzhou Zhili, Wang Zheng bravely condemned the expense of the King's boats, built water conservation projects, reduced the salt tax, eliminated private interests, resisted the Wei party, and was named "Bold Man" along with Laifu Sanyuan. Wang Zheng was an official for more than two years. In the third anniversary of his father's death, he was promoted to the position of Shandong Qianxian jian Liaohai army by Sun Yuanhua with whom he was friends. Wang Zheng was at this time developed reclamation projects for rivers and mountains, and was involved in the strengthening of military affairs. Due to an internal mutiny, he was punished by being ordered to guard a nearby town, but he was eventually absolved and returned home. After Wang Zheng returned to the countryside, he began to practice the Catholic faith, and built a church in Luqiao Zhen. He and foreign mission-

aries actively translated and introduced Western scientific works. Meanwhile he edited and published the works of his own, and founded the Ren Association in the countryside, served the poor and people struggling with disasters, composed Zhong Tong which was an army association to keep the peace which was renowned far and wide. Wang Zheng came into contact with the Catholic works of Western missionaries, and was baptized a Catholic at the age of 46. Li Zicheng captured the city of Xi'an in the sixteenth year of Chongzhen (AD 1643), and sent a mission to invite Wang Zheng into his camp. Wang Zheng refused to participate, and prepared himself to die for the Ming country. The following year, when he learned that the rebel army had occupied Beijing, he stopped eating and after seven days died at the age of 74.

Wang Zheng wrote many works during his life. According to records of Wang Jie – Wang Zheng's seven-generation descendant in Jiaqing Qing Dynasty – there were dozens of works and millions of words. For various reasons, many of his writings were lost. But many writings were saved and edited by professor Li Zhiqin, a contemporary scholar. Another work to preserve his writings was the Chronicle of Jingyang Master Wang Zheng, which was edited by professor Song Boyin. There were 87 articles and 42 works in Wang Zheng's writings. In a speech on the three hundredth anniversary of Wang Zheng's death, Mr. Shao Lizi said that he – along with Xu Guangqi and Ma Xiangbo – loved his country, loved the truth, his heart was as pure as snow and as warm as fire. Shao regarded Wang Zheng with high esteem. Wang Zheng and Xu Guangqi are alike in that they were both from South Xu North Wang, and they made valuable contributions which deserve to be learned, their research continued, and their spirit preserved.

Wang Zheng was also known as the first Catholic in Shaanxi, and some scholars believe he was the first Catholic in the Northwest of China.

### **Wang Zheng's Scientific Contributions**

The greatest impact works of Wang Zheng and the Jesuit missionaries translated and published, were *Xi Ru Er Mu Zi*, *Yuan Xi Qi Qi Tu Shuo Lu Zui* and *Xin Zhi Qi Tu Shuo*. Wang Zheng helped P. Nicolaus

Trigault to finish *Xi Ru Er Mu Zi* and wrote the preface in 1626. At the same time, P. Nicolaus Trigault taught Wang Zheng the Latin language. Wang Zheng studied Latin from the missionary and helped the missionary to finish *Xi Ru Er Mu Zi*. In fact, as a scholar, Wang Zheng started the road of the Chinese people to learn Western languages, to better facilitate the exchange between Chinese and Western cultures.

*Xi Ru Er Mu Zi* was the work with which European phonology entered into China. Mr. Du Songshou stressed that it was not merely a reference book for Westerners to learn Chinese characters, but it was an integral contribution to Chinese language study. It was, in other ways, a comparative study of Chinese and Western languages, and was a collaborative work involving both Chinese and Western scholars.<sup>1</sup>

On January 10<sup>th</sup> 1958, Premier Zhou Enlai had a report entitled “The task of the Current Language Reform on the National Political Consultative Conference”. It covered the use of Latin as medium of Chinese phonetics, which has a 350 year history. In 1605, Italian missionary Matteo Ricci first used the Latin alphabet to transliterate the Chinese characters. In 1625, another French missionary P. Nicolaus Trigault also used the Latin alphabet to transliterate the Chinese characters and wrote the work named *Xi Ru Er Mu Zi* in order to serve the needs of foreigners learning Chinese language.

In 1626, *Yuan Xi Qi Qi Tu Shuo Lu Zui* (generally referred to as *Qi Qi Tu Shuo*) was dictated by P. Johannes Terrenz, and translated by Wang Zheng. In 1627, Wang Zheng wrote the preface. The work was finally published in Yangzhou in 1628. This book was one of the more than seven thousand books which were brought into China by Trigault, and according to Wang Zheng’s preface, *Qi Qi Tu Shuo* was one of the early works brought by Western missionaries.

The book introduced various mechanical devices from the West, and allowed for the possibility of integration and development between Chinese and Western science and technology. It introduced the water gun and water pump (shui chong), described in *Qi Qi Tu Shuo*, which was useful in fire fighting. Its introduction created conditions for the continued exchange and intergration of Western and Chinese technology.

In 1626, according missionary reports, Wang Zheng independently wrote *Xin Zhi Qi Qi Tu Shuo* (generally referred to it as *Zhu Qi Tu Shuo*). In

1628, the work and *Qi Qi Tu Shuo* were published in Yangzhou together. Wang Zheng also learned mechanical engineering by Trigault. In his caption to the illustration of windmill he clearly states that it was introduced by Mr. Trigault. In addition, Wang Zheng at the behest of his uncle Zhang Jian and town friend Ma Liaotan, designed some installations by himself, such as siphon (hong xi), crane drink (he yin), round pots (lun hu), farming (dai geng), spinning mill (zi zhuan mo) and bicycle (zi xing che), and so on. When he worked in guang ping, his practical inventions won much praise.

Wang Zheng studied both practical and theoretical knowledge. He devoted himself to learning for the benefit of the people. He possessed the vision to learn the most advanced mechanical knowledge from the missionaries.

Wang Zheng was a representative intellectual of the late Ming Dynasty who accepted Western scientific knowledge in a pragmatic way. As a Confucian, he integrated Confucianism and Catholicism, then accepted to be baptized into the church. These connections allowed him to continuously adapt Western scientific knowledge for Chinese use. *Xi Ru Er Mu Zi* was a handy tool for learning Chinese, this was practical. The appliances he introduced in *Qi Qi Tu Shuo* and *Zhu Qi Tu Shuo* were beneficial to economic production and military defense and other practical activities.

Xu Guangqi, Li Zhizao, Wang Zheng were the representatives of progressive ancient intellectuals, they reconsidered China's past academic weaknesses, pursued modern science, astronomy, geography, mechanics, mathematics, and approached learning with a realistic attitude and vision.

### **The Theology of *The Awe of Heaven and the Care of Human Beings***

*The Ultimate Discussion of the Awe of Heaven and the Care of Human Beings* was the major work of Wang Zheng's theological writings. The work enriched the dialogue between Confucianism, and its propositions concerning heaven and human beings, and Catholicism, with its beliefs concerning love. He cleverly joins Confucianism with Catholicism by appealing to the Confucian idea of benevolence. Yi (a classic Confu-

cian work) says, yuan is the greatness of goodness. Gentlemen experience benevolence, enough to grow. The benevolence is mirrored in Christianity through two propositions: to love God (and since God loves mankind) to love others as himself. These two propositions are really one. That is, to love one (God) and love what he loves. This is the source of benevolence and respect that is central to Confucianism.

Benevolence, the great respect for Heaven. When one is in awe of God and when one loves ones neighbor as oneself, this is the same as the Confucian virtue of benevolence. Wang Zheng further states that one must move from being in “awe” of God to “loving” God. The consequence of loving God, was loving people. All the instances of love, for example, giving food to the hungry, giving water to the thirsty, giving houses to the homeless, demonstrate the Confucian fourteen virtues of body and spirit.

Wang Zheng in *The Awe of Heaven and the Care of Human Beings*, believed people who are in awe of heaven and love ones neighbor will go to heaven after their deaths. He also believed that the ancient sages had tried to express these same principles, and that he was merely saying what the sages wanted to say could not.

Wang Zheng made great efforts to integrate Confucianism and Catholicism in the form of questions and answers in *The Utimate Discussion of the Awe of Heaven and the Care of Human Beings*. He connected these principles with benevolent love. While he attributes these ideas to the ancient Chinese sages he believed that all people could put these ideas into practice.

## **Wang Zheng and Chong Yitang**

In 1625 (the fifth year of Tianqi), Wang Zheng invited Trigault to open Catholic church in Shaanxi. Wang Che, who was the younger brother of Wang Zheng, donated his mansion in Luqiao as a place for prayer, which they named Chongyi Tang. It can be said that Chongyi Tang was the first church in Shaanxi. Later, Trigault and Johann acquired some money through Wang Zheng, and they purchased land to build a church also named Chongyi Tang in north of Sanyuan County. Also in 1625-1626, Trigault was helped by Wang Zheng and purchased land to build a

church in Tang Fang street north of Xi'an. When Trigault was in Xi'an, he had seen the unearthed monument of Nestorianism of Da Qin popular in China. In 1627, Trigault was removed from Shaanxi, then Johann got to Xi'an and took over and completed the construction of the church, named Chongyi Tang. The church building no longer exists today, but we can infer that the architectural style was an integration of Chinese and Western styles, this integration of Confucianism and Catholicism can be even seen in the name Chongyi Tang. During his visit Johann discussed issues with Wang Zheng in Xi'an. Wang Zheng recorded the conversations and finished the diary essays of Chong Yitang. Later, they also founded the Jing Feng Museum, published other works of literature including Wang Zheng's writings and the translated works of Western missionaries.

### **Wang Zheng and The Benevolence Association**

On September 8<sup>th</sup> 1609 (the thirty-seventh year of Wanli), Matteo Ricci founded Mother of God Association in Beijing, it was the first charity, or Benevolence Association, for China Catholics.<sup>2</sup> Later Yang Tingyun established the Benevolence Association in Hangzhou.

In 1634 (the seventh year of Chongzhen), Wang Zheng founded or Benevolence Association in Luqiao Jingyang, called Benevolence Association. Its constitution is considered an important document in the history of Catholic charities in China and was created by Wang Zheng.

In this Constitution, Wang Zheng speaks of loving others, the importance of doing one's best, saving, comfort, dying quietly, the power of love, and other topics. In fact, the Benevolence Association was the realization of Wang Zheng's *The Awe of Heaven and the Care of Human Beings*. He further said, if the principles of this Association can be carried into practice, poverty can be alleviated. From the small town to the large city, people would truly love one other. Society as a result would be more peaceful and harmonious. We still believe this today; if everyone contributed a little love, the world would become better. Meanwhile, we should continue to learn from Wang Zheng's spirit and practice.

## **The Significance of the Integration of Confucianism and Catholicism**

The society would be changed in the late Ming Dynasty. It was the third time that Catholicism entered into China for the soil to take root in the late Ming Dynasty. Matteo Ricci took on the garb of Confucianism in order to proselytize. The integration of Confucianism and Catholicism begun to take effect gradually through a number of Confucian scholar-officials and missionaries. Wang Zheng was a Confucian scholar who accepted the Catholic doctrine, but his faith was stability of the country and peace of the world. Meanwhile, as a Confucian scholar who accepted the Catholic, Wang Zheng's actions would be worth studying, but more importantly, when we study and communicate between different cultures, misunderstandings and conflicts are avoided. Currently, the Chinese Catholic integrate the local cultural elements, and these features are increasingly evident. But it still seems to many people, that the Catholic Church is very strange. So misunderstandings caused by unfamiliarity is still a risk. Therefore, the understanding and study of the Chinese Catholic Church is an important undertaking.

In October 2006, the sixth central committee plenary meeting of the Sixteenth Congress of CPC passed the resolution of CPC Central Committee on a number of major issues of building a socialist harmonious society, which clearly emphasized the positive role of religion in promoting social harmony. The report of the seventeenth congress of the Party also saw a positive role for religious figures and religious believers in promoting economic and social development. In December 2007, Comrade Hu Jintao in the second study group of the 17<sup>th</sup> Central Committee Political Bureau outlined the fundamental requirements of religion for this new historical period. He encouraged religions to play a role in patriotism, progress, serving the community, making contributions to national unity, economic development, and social harmony. He encouraged interpretations of religious doctrine which were in line with social progress and the requirements based on the profound changes in society. Religion should promote ethics, health and civility, and it should strengthen the ideological foundations of socialist society. It should also participate in social service, charity to the poor, assisting victims of a disaster, helping

the disabled, providing for the aged, supporting education and providing medical services.

The history of China's Catholic Church should not be overlooked. In contemporary China, the Catholic Church should play an active role in building a harmonious society. It is important to understand how the Catholic Church contributes to socialist construction. For example, to a large extent religious charity is a powerful complement to the social services of government. Such groups as the Hebei Jinde Foundation, Catholic Social Service Center of Xi'an Diocese and other Catholic charity organizations in China, carry out extensive charity activities in rural areas. This is the expression of the functional significance of religion for current social conditions. Of course, how to improve this system needs further thinking.

For the Catholic Church, the question of how to enhance the concept of national identity is extremely important. Some scholars have pointed out that China always interprets religion relative to government management. Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism are to assist managing country? Chinese, Fuzhuwanghua?. When national identity is strong, the church-state relation is more harmonious. For example, it is very significant that the churches cooperate to promote unity and prosperity for the country during major holidays such as National Day. They also encourage all believers to love motherland and observe the laws. As a believer who was baptized 300 years ago, Wang Zheng actively made the effort study Western science and culture and demonstrated the spirit of pursuing truth. Nowadays, as the openness of the country is increasing, more and more believers, many of whom are priests, are sent to study abroad. These religious people are young and multi-lingual. Therefore, they can make use of their knowledge to teach foreign languages, translate and introduce advanced foreign ideas. As a result, the exchange and understanding between Chinese and Western cultures will continue to strengthen. This is the road, started by the spirit Wang Zheng, which leads to a peaceful world.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Song Boyin, *The Chronicle of Wang Zheng*, Shaanxi Normal University Press, 2004, p281.

<sup>2</sup>Gu Weimin, *Chinese Catholic Chronicle*, Shanghai Bookstore Publishing House, 2003, p106.