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# ART, CULTURE, AND RESONANCE IN THE JESUIT MISSION IN CHINA

## 在华耶稣会的艺术、文化与共鸣

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### ABSTRACT

The beginning of the Modern era (ca. 1400) was marked by two great shifts: the start of the global age of empire building, and of large-scale population movements around the world. As more people travelled for longer distances, art and culture increasingly moved with them. This began an accelerated process of inter- and intracultural exchange. European art and culture, which formerly had been a part of territories and landscapes exclusive to Europe, now 'territorialized' parts of non-European lands from the sixteenth century onward. The Jesuit missions in Asia not only brought Western architecture, music, poetry, and painting (and the integral aesthetic that went along with these modes) but also established an enduring resonance of these things.

This paper explores resonance as an example of how East and West have always found meeting points in the arts, even when other media and discourses proved not to be compatible.

**T**his paper presents some thoughts on history and our construction of it as pertains to the Jesuit mission in China, and specifically to the arts in that history and the 'resonance' that these activities and objects continue to have for us today. The first part of the paper reviews the concepts of cultural baggage and cultural resonance. I explore these not only to

explain the terms, but also to establish baselines for what these ideas constitute. The second part explores three historical experiences of the Jesuits in China, in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and nineteenth centuries, which have resonance for us in the present. The final part discusses resonance today, and to what extent resonance may still (for better or worse) be crafted in the context of extensions of the Roman Catholic encounter and mission experience.

The term, ‘cultural baggage’, is often used ironically, or in a negative sense. Whereas baggage in the simple sense consists of mere objects, *cultural baggage* is a loaded, metaphorical term, uttered with a sense of superior moral rectitude and denoting an ethical failure. It is a favourite term of the politically correct. It has become so common to dismiss disliked attitudes and opinions with the phrase ‘cultural baggage’, that one hardly notices anymore the sense of bigotry that lies behind the phrase and its use. I wish to consider the arts as both baggage and cultural baggage, and for the moment leave aside any ethical evaluation.

global movement, perhaps best exemplified in China through the voyages of Admiral Zheng He (鄭和) between 1405 and 1433. Political change, technological innovation (especially in shipbuilding), and population growth all drove this trend worldwide. And travelling by ship meant the shipment not only of people but also of cargo; and cargo means baggage.

## 2.

To partially redeem cultural baggage, I want to consider an actual piece of an actual Jesuit’s baggage. This is a hymnal, printed in Graz in 1729 and taken to China in 1736 by Augustin von Hallerstein (劉松齡, Liu Songling), the Jesuit astronomer who held important positions in Beijing until his death in 1774. This is a remarkable object because material culture of this kind survives in only very few examples. The hymnal must have had a great deal of meaning for Hallerstein. It was salient link with home, with his origins, and it is printed not in German but in his native Slovenian, meaning that it could not have been meant for general use in the Beijing mission

The cultural resonance of Hallerstein’s hymnal, then, arises from the interrelations between the object (hymnal), the traditions it represents (Christianity, and the Jesuit Asian mission in particular), and the audience to which it speaks (that is, us today).

The beginning of the Modern Era – that is, from about 1400 onwards – was marked by two great shifts. One was the start of modern empire building; and the second was a consequence of this, the acceleration of large-scale population movements around the world. As more people travelled for longer distances, art and culture increasingly moved with them. This had the effect of speeding up processes of inter- and intra-cultural exchange, of ideas, beliefs, value systems, biology, and material culture. Although these exchanges had been going on for several millennia, the fifteenth century marks their intensification on a *global* scale. While most of this has been viewed through a West-to-East paradigm, it is important to remember that it was indeed a

but was rather a personal, devotional object. Its small size meant that indeed it was part of Hallerstein’s ‘baggage.’ Its meaning is amplified for us today because we consider it not only for what it is (a hymnal) but also as a symbol disclosing aspects of the China mission up to the suppression of the Jesuit order (1773). We look at this hymnal and involuntarily we begin to think about its use and its history. We imagine Hallerstein holding it and remembering his early years in Austria, his family, his formation, his ministry. We construct a selective frame around this object which gives it both salience and resonance, an eloquence now attributable to the object which it would not have had fully in Hallerstein’s day. This hymnal came to China as a piece of that past brought by

someone who knew he would probably never see home again. In this small and ephemeral piece of material culture we understand how the baggage of culture is key in creating cultural resonance.

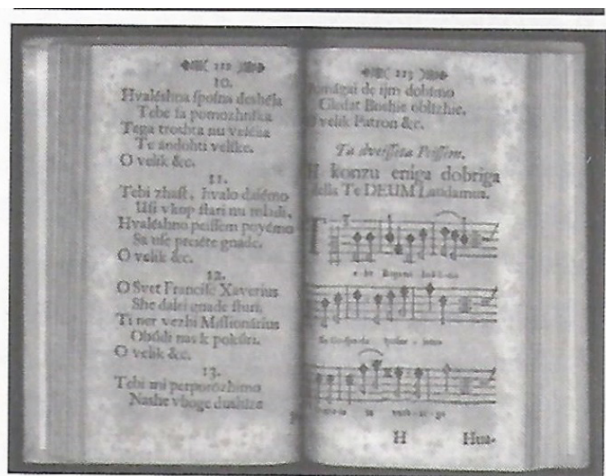


Fig. 1. Hallerstein's hymnal (Graz, 1729)

### 3.

*Salience* and *cultural resonance* are terms largely defined today by journalists, psychologists, and social scientists. James Ettema defines salience in journalism as “an effect of selectivity in fact-gathering and emphasis in news-writing” (Ettema, 2005). Salience, according to Ettema, can lead to the culturally resonant “when accomplished with eloquence.” Michael Schudson has pointed out that cultural resonance is symbolic and an aspect of cultural power. Although he limits the term more narrowly than I do, he concludes that cultural resonance “is not a private relation between cultural object and individual, not even a social relation between cultural object and audience, but a public and cultural relation between object, tradition, and audience” (Schudson, 1989). The cultural resonance of Hallerstein's hymnal, then, arises from the interrelations between the object (hymnal), the traditions it represents (Christianity, and the Jesuit Asian mission in particular), and the audience to which it speaks (that is, us today.) An object may nonetheless have resonance on an individual level, and in my view this too is *cultural*, because in private we do not, cannot separate ourselves fully from our culture; neither must it always be ‘crafted’, because time sometimes does that for us. Meaning thus changes over time and in some cases is amplified.

Hallerstein could never have guessed that nearly 300 years after its publication his Slovenian hymnal would become an object of interest and cultural meaning.

### 4.

The first of the three examples I present here of the confluence of art, culture, and resonance in the Jesuit Asian mission is the house built at Zhaoqing (肇慶) by Matteo Ricci (利瑪竇, Li Madou) in 1583. Francesco Maglioccola has reconstructed a possible model for the house, and published his findings in a 2010 article, ‘The first Western house in China’ (Maglioccola, 2010, pp. 46-49). According to Prof. Maglioccola, the house was built of brick, with two rooms on each side of a central hallway. Explaining his ‘virtual reconstruction’ of the house, he has remarked that “I set out in search of this house as both a physical object and a mental object... so that we could enter into the house anew. The essence of the house participates in a very real way in a manner that exceeds materiality. Indeed, its mere construction takes second place to the legacy it represents which gives it its value” (Maglioccola, 2006).<sup>1</sup>

This legacy-granting value is very close to what I have identified as resonance. Even in this early outpost of the China mission, the arts of Western European culture provided a talking point between Ricci, his colleagues, and the Confucian scholars of his audience. One day they brought out for show some European “musical instruments, which they [the Chinese] had never seen before” (D’Elia, ed., 1942, p. 259, n. 310). In this act the essential ingredients for resonance were present: the objects, the meanings, and the audience. But this is amplified for us today by the visual reconstruction of the house: if journalists are correct in asserting that cultural resonance is something to be ‘crafted’ by selecting from among salient themes, then the image of the house today places emphasis on the ways in which visual culture can be central to resonance.

<sup>1</sup> I have edited the original English of Maglioccola's paper, “Matteo Ricci and Chinese desire”, for clarity.

## 5.

My second example concerns Tomás Pereira (徐日昇, Xu Risheng), the seventeenth century Portuguese Jesuit so well-known through the work of the Macau Ricci Institute. In keeping with my focus on resonance in physical, material objects, the aspect of Pereira's work I would like to focus on is the pipe organ which he built for the Nantang (南堂) church in Beijing in 1679-80. As an example of how we craft resonance today, I have given Pereira's 4-stop organ (PEK1680)<sup>2</sup> the same treatment that Maglioccola gave to Ricci's house in Zhaoqing. Maglioccola and Wang Lianming (王廉明) applied CAD software to the question of the Nantang, in particular trying to understand and to date the famous drawings now in Lisbon (Maglioccola and Wang, 2011). Working with my colleague Cealwyn Tagle, we used the same process to reconstruct the organ of 1680. The likelihood is that the Nantang tower was where the whole of the soundboard, chest, and bellows were located, and the organ console itself was probably built on a platform on the side of the wall.



Fig. 2 Reconstruction of PEK1680 (Tomás Pereira) by Tagle and Urrows

Creating these images, or perhaps teasing them out of the confusing records and accounts of the instruments, was an exhilarating experience. Like the virtual reconstructions of Ricci's Zhaoqing house and the Nantang, these allowed me not only to step into the Nantang itself, but also into a resonant space, and to climb up to the organ gallery and imagine myself sitting

<sup>2</sup> "PEK1680" is the census identifier for this organ in The Pipe Organ in China Project database.

there and playing the organ.

## 6.

For a third example of the crafting of resonance we travel forward in time nearly two centuries, to a point where the Jesuit mission had been restored as the post-1814 'New Company' and China and the West had entered the complex and stressful Treaty Port era, and to Shanghai in particular. The sources of this example of resonance are not so well-known as Ricci and Pereira: they were the French Jesuits François Ravary and Hippolyte Basuiau. Ravary came to China in 1856, and Basuiau joined him nine years later. During those nine years, Ravary kept up a detailed correspondence with Basuiau, which has survived in part at the French Jesuit Archives in Vanves.

From Ravary's letters, and other histories of the Jiangnan mission, I put together an account of the richness and originality of Ravary's vision for music as a meeting point of cultures. In his first year in Shanghai Ravary formed a liturgical boys' choir, which he accompanied with an intercultural ensemble of harmonium, two *dizi* (笛子), and two *sheng* (笙). Chinese language liturgy, some of it going back to Jean-Joseph Marie Amiot's time in mid-eighteenth-century Beijing was mixed with Latin. Basuiau, still in Europe at the Jesuit seminary in Belgium at Brugelette, was tasked with finding surplus instruments for Ravary, who in 1857 established the first brass band in China at Zikawei.<sup>3</sup>

Beyond the question of chronological primacy, Ravary's band demonstrates to us something unexpected. It shows one of the ways in which the Jesuit mission territorialized a space for Western music in China. Yet it also shows one of the ways in which Western music 'became Chinese': it became so in part because the Jesuit mission avoided presenting the Christian message in an exclusively Western cultural format, and in part because the Mission also avoided presenting Western culture in an exclusively religious mode. Music, and by extension the arts in general,

<sup>3</sup> A photograph of Ravary's band exists in an album, "*Album Chinois*," made in Shanghai in the winter of 1857/58. It is available online at the Getty Research Institute's website (Getty Research Institute, 2012, p. 83).



became in turn a meeting point for cultures where this was more difficult to achieve on other bases. In its small way the band is an important example of the simultaneous interaction on both local and global levels that has been called *histoire croisée* or, “entangled history” (Kaufman and North, 2010, p. 3). This hybrid East-West band shows that the crafting of resonance was not (and is not) a uni-directional activity: it could (and can) refer at the same time to two separate and differentiated cultural systems, or ‘audiences.’

7.

While journalists speak of object, tradition, and audience as the ingredients for resonance, they also believe that resonance is crafted. This is to say that in an ontological view of resonance it is a *quality* of things, and not a property. Things acquire resonance in relationship to an audience and to their perception; they do not possess it from the start. This leads to questions of how to evaluate resonance. Is it, for example, possible to craft new resonances today in the context of the Jesuit mission in Asia? Such resonances may occur when the mission is the object, and the traditions and the audience are us, whether we are Roman Catholics or not. We all admire the Jesuit mission for what Gauvin Bailey noted was “their commitment to education and flexibility”, which “got them more deeply involved with secular society and humanism than any order which came before them; the Jesuits on the missions felt the passion of high culture – European and non-European – and wanted to communicate this enthusiasm to their audiences. This is why, even though the Jesuits were well aware of their pastoral limitations, they were content to prolong the dialogue at any cost, even if only on the cultural plane” (Bailey, G.A., 1999). And this cultural plane has remained a salient feature of the mission in the present day.

The arts may indeed start as a form of cultural baggage, but as I have been at some pains to point out this baggage is not entirely without merit, meaning, or positive qualities. We live still in an age of huge migrations: refugees have flooded Europe in the past several years, creating a challenging new reality for everyone. China’s

countryside has been depopulated in the last several decades, and more people than ever now live in the coastal cities. Shenzhen holds the record for the fastest ascent ever recorded to the status of a ‘megacity’ (a city with a population of over 10 million.) The number of tourist arrivals in Hong Kong in 2015 was 59.3 million, in a city with about 8 million residents. Only 13.5 million of these nearly 60 million were not from Mainland China.

For over 600 years our planet has been living in a dynamic state of global movement. Sometimes this movement is welcomed, but more often not. Sometimes this movement is voluntary, more often it is not. Mediating the strains that accompany this has never been easy. But culture, and the arts in particular, were one strategy used by the Jesuit mission which today has resonance for us, the audience of history, as we try to figure out what to do in a world where intercultural confrontation has taken on bewildering new dimensions. While we cannot realistically compare the situation of China in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries with Europe or North America of the twenty-first, we can try to stand back and see what worked and what didn’t. Then there are the journeys that take place inside of us: the mental, emotional, and spiritual journeys. These are also susceptible to resonance. My goal is to encourage us to think a little more broadly about culture, tradition, art, and what salient aspects of these three things have resonance for us personally. So when those things that you see or hear “strike a responsive chord” in you, thank cultural resonance for that, and try to be part of the process by which this resonance is prolonged, carrying on in the great tradition of those generations of giants who found meeting points between peoples through the arts when everything else seemed to have failed.

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