
JOHANN ADAM SCHALL VON BELL – *JINCHENG SHU XIANG*, DIALOGUE AND SPIRITUALITY

汤若望——《进呈书像》，
对话与灵修

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In early modern times, the Jesuits tried to perform their mission of Evangelization in China from the top down, because their hope was to lead the Chinese emperor to Christianity. He should be followed by his people and finally by the whole Far East, as they hoped, because China was culturally the leading nation (Standaert, 2001, 310). This was part of the method of accommodation that included an indirect mission through science, an apostolate of the press and other things. Important, however, were also images and pictures.

Images and pictures played an important role in Europe in Catholicism as a religion of the senses. In the *Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola*, Biblical texts were used for meditation with visualization. During the meditation a mental space was created, which generated an imaginative journey into Biblical narrative, which offered the chance of a spiritual encounter with Biblical persons, scenes and events (Criveller, s.a, 1; Standaert, 2001, 623f). In China, images, xiang 像 or tu 圖 (Criveller, s.a., 3), could help to prepare Non-Christians for Christianity, they could introduce the religion to illiterate people, whereas the new subjects were also attractive for more learned people. Also in China, images served

Christians as a catechetical tool, they helped for devotion and meditation. Sometimes, they were even said to have the power to produce miracles (Menegon, 2007, 389f, 399). Pictures were kept more easily in mind than “dry” texts.

Johann Adam Schall von Bell (1592–1666), who was born into a house of patrician nobility in Cologne, belonged to those Jesuits who were recruited by Nicolas Trigault (1577–1628)... Schall was chosen as an expert on astronomy, in the hope he should contribute to the reform of the Chinese calendar together with other Jesuits.

For the Jesuits images had four functions: the didactic function, because knowledge is also transferred by images. This was especially true for illiterates. The second function was the remembering function; the third function the empathic function, when not the intellect but emotions became important. The fourth function was the veneration of Jesus Christ and the saints by the images (Standaert, 2007, 39). Gianni Criveller stresses the argument that for the Jesuits the image was not the illustration of a written text, but the text was in the service of the image. The image touched the heart and the will, and in this respect image books had a spiritual function and were means of meditation (Criveller, s.a., 1).

The most famous European book in this respect is Jerónimo Nadal's (1507–1580) *Evangelicae historiae imagines* ... with 153 contemplative texts in large folio with scenes from the gospel harmony (*Diatessaron*), published

in 1593. The pictures were mostly made by the famous Wierix brothers and others (Standaert, 2007, 12f). Three books with images are known to have been printed and used in China, which partly followed Nadal's model adapted to the Chinese taste: *Song nianzhu guicheng* 誦念珠規程 (*Rules for Reciting the Rosary*, 1619) with 15 woodcuts translated by the Portuguese Jesuit João de Rocha (1583–1623), which were to accompany the reciting of the rosary especially for meditation (Qu Yi, 2012). Another series of circa 56 woodcut engravings was made under the direction of Giulio Aleni (1582–1649) entitled *Tianzhu jiangsheng chuxiang jingjie* 天主降生出像經解 (*Explanation of the Images of the Lord of Heaven's Incarnation, or Illustrated Life of Jesus*), 1637. Also, their model was Nadal's book. These pictures were not a translation of the four Gospels but presented the most important situations of the life of Jesus Christ in Chinese language. This helped to overcome the difficulties involved in accepting the dogma of his passion and crucifixion. It presents the picture with the necessary text, sometimes with scenes included belonging to the same history (Standaert, 2001, 623).

The main topic for consideration here is a third booklet with pictures about the life of Jesus Christ, namely Johann Adam Schall von Bell's *Jincheng shuxiang* 進呈書像 (1640). Johann Adam Schall von Bell (1592–1666), who was born into a house of patrician nobility in Cologne, belonged to those Jesuits who were recruited by Nicolas Trigault (1577–1628) during his famous tour through Europe (1616–end 1617). Schall was chosen as an expert on astronomy, in the hope he should contribute to the reform of the Chinese calendar together with other Jesuits. On his tour Trigault not only “collected” Jesuits for the China mission but also money, donations, books and presents (Väth, 1991, 31–34).

The most precious gifts came from the dukes of Bavaria from the house of Wittelsbach, the reigning duke Maximilian I (1573–1651, duke of Bavaria since 1597 and elector since 1623), married to Elisabeth (1574–1635), and Wilhelm V, called the Pious (1548–1626, duke from 1579–1597), who had abdicated. Wilhelm gave relics for the mission, 2 beautiful monstrances, a silver crucifix and other pictures, whereas Maximilian gave a very rare and beautiful present, a so-called Pommern cabinet, made of ebony with 6 layers, each one divided into compartments with silk, which contained small beautiful things of daily life in silver (Väth, 1991, 34–36; Standaert, 2007, 20–24). It had been made in the city of Augsburg. In the fourth layer of the cabinet was a little booklet on the life of Jesus Christ, made for the China mission. Its 50 images were painted on parchment, the text was written with golden letters, the silver cover showed the four Evangelists with their symbols. Duchess Elisabeth following her husband's example and contributed a comparable booklet on the life of the Virgin Mary for the Chinese empress. Both booklets seem to have been lost (Standaert, 2007, 31). An additional gift was a group consisting of figures of the 3 Magi or Kings bringing gifts while adoring Jesus. These figures were made of wax (Standaert, 2007, 27–29). All presents were sent to China via Lisbon in 1618 (Standaert, 2007, 41).

We have no idea what happened to the presents during the next years. Evidently, at least some of them were brought to Beijing, but they could not be given to the emperor(s) because in this case, they would be considered as tribute from the dukes of Bavaria. Our story resumes in 1640 with the Chongzhen 崇禎 (1628–1644) emperor. The calendar reform was finished in 1635, with Schall staying in Beijing and working for the

Calendar office. The emperor lived far removed from the world in his palace surrounded by his family, by the ladies who waited on him, and by the Eunuchs (Väth, 1991, 122f). In the harem of the royal palace fifty of the serving ladies were baptized by the Eunuch Joseph, with the Jesuits giving indirect pastoral counseling. The ladies were quite fervent in their faith and received writings and books. They gave precise accounts “with full candor of soul” that the Fathers found it quite easy to direct them spiritually. When in 1640 Father Provincial Francisco Furtado SJ (1587–1653) visited the capital, he designated one of them as their superior; the other ladies obeyed scrupulously (Chan, 1981–83, 79f).

In principle the Chongzhen emperor was favorable towards Christianity and the Jesuit fathers. When a clavichord was found among the treasures of the palace that had been presented by Fr Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) to the Wanli emperor 萬曆 (1572–1620), the Chongzhen emperor wanted to have the melody of the psalm mentioned on it “*Cantate Domino canticum novum*” translated into Chinese. The instrument was repaired and Schall wrote a melody for explanation. The occasion to show the instrument was used to surrender two other precious gifts, namely a parchment booklet with the life of Jesus Christ together with the group of the Three Kings (Standaert, 2007, 44–46). For this purpose Schall decided to write a Chinese explanation of the images, which, as he hoped, would prepare Chongzhen for Christianity. The booklet with the explaining woodcuts and text was finished within 4 months as was the clavichord. The clavichord and the presents were brought to the palace on September 8, 1640. The impression must have been overwhelming.

When the emperor saw the gifts, he washed his hands in veneration. Especially the picture of the Three Kings impressed him: “He knelt down on the floor and adored the holy child who had called the Kings from such a long distance, and who now in this picture came to look for the king of China from even a longer distance.” All the others including the empress did the same. Then the emperor said: “This child is greater than Fo (Buddha), Yü (禹) and Huang (皇) and [greater] than all spirits.”(Bernard, 1942, 49) The booklet and the figures of the Three Kings were exhibited in another hall, and the whole court approached and venerated them. The most noble of the Christian court ladies are said to have understood the truth of these mysteries (Bernard, 1942, 48f). Some of the reports describe Chongzhen pointing to one of the Three Kings adding: “This one is more holy than our Yao (堯),” a king in Chinese antiquity. The emperor then for a long time looked to the engravings of the book with great reverence for each one (Chan, 1981-83, 81).

The booklet about Jesus Christ and the figures of the Three Magi were exhibited during the next days, and they were adored with great reverence. Then they were moved to a secret room to be safe. Chongzhen often read the booklet. But “the poor king was so blind, he felt that he was not able to understand it as he would like.” He burst out saying “The law of *Tienchu* (天主 the Lord of Heaven) seems to be true, but I cannot understand it.” Father Provincial and Schall saw an opportunity to reach the mind of the emperor, and Schall wrote additionally a kind of catechism with a more detailed explanation of the sacred doctrine. But he found no occasion to give it to the emperor (Chan, 1981-83, 81). Only a short time later, parts of China were conquered by rebels, then the “Tartars” (Manchus) attacked and conquered it. Chongzhen and his closest

family members committed suicide when the rebel Li Zicheng 李自成 (1606–1644) conquered Beijing, with China coming under Manchu rule in 1644 (Chan 1981-83, 81-83). Schall regretted that Chongzhen with his noble character failed to convert to Christianity despite the fact that he praised and fostered Christianity, and that he suffered such an unworthy death (Bernard 1942, 109).

With his booklet *Jincheng shu xiang* Schall tried to convince the last Ming emperor Chongzhen and his court of the mysteries and spiritual benefits of the Christian faith. There was, however, not time enough to convert him, and also the Yongli emperor in the South of China did not make the last step to embrace the faith. Both suffered a sad fate.

This story was reported in several European contemporary accounts about the status of Christianity in China written by Jesuits (*Suma del estado del imperio de la China*, in Martino Martini, Johann Adam Schall von Bell, Daniello Bartoli, Ignatius Dunyn-Szpot, Philippe Couplet). They wanted to give hope to Europe that the conversion of China was not far if the Jesuits would continue with the apostolic work. Some of these reports about Chongzhen and the life of Jesus combined his fate and his failed conversion with the fate of the Southern Ming under the Yongli emperor 永曆 (1646–1663). Some members of Yongli’s family converted to Christianity, among others the empress dowager Helena, the

emperor's mother, the emperor's wife, and the heir apparent, who was baptized Constantin, and thus the conversion of the Yongli seemed possible (Chan, 1981-83, 98). Especially the two Jesuit procurators, the Tridentine Martino Martini (1614-1661) and the Polish Jesuit Michał Boym (1612-1659), brought the stories about the failed conversion of the Chongzhen and about the fate of the last Ming emperor to Europe. Martini, sent by the Jesuits from Northern China, published the stories in a booklet (Martini 1655), whereas Boym was sent by the court of the Southern Ming, and his account was only published partly. We can assume that there was at least one witness at both courts namely the Eunuch Achilles Pang Tianshou 龐天壽 (1588-1657). At first he served at the court in Beijing and later with two emperors of the Southern Ming, where he even became a kind of chancellor. It was Achilles who baptized several members of the Imperial family (Chan, 1981-83, 94f).

But Schall's booklet also had bad results. The notorious Confucian scholar Yang Guangxian 楊光先 (+ 1669) used three of the pictures of Schall's *Jincheng shu xiang* as part of his accusation against Schall, namely that he and the Christians venerated a man who attempted a revolt against the Roman emperor and therefore had been sentenced to death and crucified. The images of the Crucifixion of a naked man were scandalous for the Chinese (Väth, 1991, 304-326; Menegon, 1998, 315f).

Conclusion

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and also the Yongli emperor in the South of China did not make the last step to embrace the faith. Both suffered a sad fate. Chongzhen even played a role in four dramas on the Jesuit stage in Southern Germany, illustrating a bad example for the students of Jesuit schools.

1. *Zunchinus Tragoedia Zunchin Dess Keyzers in China kläglicher Undergang*. Luzern 1703 (Chongzhen, Tragedy, the Sad Drowning of the Emperor of China).
2. *Xunghinius Tragoedia Xunghinius Der Sinische Kayser In einem Traur-Spill vorgestellet*. Burghausen 1719 (Chongzhen, Tragedy of Chongzhen, the Chinese Emperor, introduced in a tragedy).
3. *Revolutio Imperij Sinici Sinische Reichs-Abwechslung*. Hall 1723 (Revolution of the Chinese Empire).
4. *Cum-chimus potentissimus (Chinarum) Imperator sive Potentiae humanae fragilitas ac fortunae ludibrium. Tragoedia*. Hildesheim 1733 (Chongzhen, Mighty Emperor of the Chinese, or the Fragility of Human Power and Fortune. Tragedy) (Collani, 2011, 397f).



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