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RESEÑA DE "DICIONÁRIO PORTUGUÊS-CHINÊS" DE JOHN W. WITEK (ED.)
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REVIEW ESSAY

John W. Witek, SJ (ed.),

Dicionário Português-Chinês (attributed in this edition to) Michele Ruggiero and Matteo Ricci, S. Local, Biblioteca Nacional de Lisboa, IPOR, Ricci Institute, University of San Francisco, 2001.

The first Chinese dictionary in a Western language has recently been published. It is a facsimile version of the 16th century manuscript *Vocabulário Português-Chinês* (Portuguese-Chinese Vocabulary) that is kept in Rome, in the *Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, Japonica et Sinica* I Collection, 198, pp. 32 to 169.

In total, counting the words and expressions, there are about 6000 entries in Portuguese and 5461 corresponding entries in Chinese. There is also a middle column, which, as a rule, contains the Romanisation or the phonetic transcription of the Chinese characters. The entries go from “*aba da vestidura /chiu zi*”, on p. 32, to “*zinir a orelha*”, on p. 156. Pages 157 to 169 list entries that are still at the preparation stage and have not yet been phonetically transcribed. All these pages, with the exception of p. 157, which only contains the Portuguese terms, display the terms in Portuguese alongside the respective Chinese characters.

The reproduction of this important manuscript is accompanied by a study by Paul Fu-Mieng Yang that was published in English by the Chinese Academy of Taipei in 1989 and is now republished in both Portuguese and Chinese.

This study, entitled “Portuguese-Chinese Dictionary of Michele Ruggiero and Matteo Ricci: historical-linguistic introduction” is a valuable reference with regard to the Chinese linguistics of the Dictionary in question. It is the only study of Chinese appearing in Western languages and has been quoted and used, in terms of the different aspects of Chinese linguistics, by other people who have studied the Dictionary (such as L. F. Barreto, in 1997 and 2000, and Joseph Abraham Levi, in 1998).

However, Paul Fu-Meing Yang commits serious errors whenever he departs from the Chinese material. The most serious of these errors is, perhaps, the dating and consequent geographical origin of the manuscript.

The Portuguese-Chinese Vocabulary has no explicit authorship, date or place of origin. This is perfectly logical and natural because this is not a finished work by a single author, but rather a tool of collective use that was always being added to. The work was taken out of use in 1588 when M. Ruggieri took it from Macao to Rome.

Paul Fu-Mieng Yang, based on other elements of the old manuscript, dates the Portuguese-Chinese Vocabulary to approximately 1583-1588. But the suggestion that it was created in 1583 has nothing to do with the Dictionary itself, nor is it based on any similar text nor any documents in Portuguese.

In the same manuscript, before the Vocabulary pages, there are texts in Chinese, probably written by Chinese teachers of the Jesuits in Zhaoqing, in 1585 and 1586, which deal with aspects of Christian religion. In the pages following the vocabulary section, also in Chinese, we find a copy of a 1557 verdict. Without any explanation or proof, Paul Fu-Mieng Yang makes the claim “.... therefore, it was compiled between 1583 and 1588 ...” (p. 42).

Any novice History student knows, you cannot date a document using date indications from other documents that happen to be found together with it. Instead, it is in the Vocabulary, on pp. 32 to 169, the documentation that deals with the connections between Portugal and China and the History of the Company of Jesus in Eastern Asia up to 1588, that we can find such hypothetical grounds for the dating the Portuguese -Chinese Vocabulary.

This serious error on the part of Paul Fu-Mieng Yang, formulated as a hypothesis, is repeated in John W. Witek’s introduction. Again, there is no reason or basis and the statement is made with a tone of certainty.

John W. Witek’s introduction summarises what is already known and published on the vocabulary, mainly repeating, for better or worse, Paul Fu-Mieng Yang’s 1989 study.

One of the major unresolved issues concerning this Portuguese-Chinese Dictionary is that of the authorship, dating and place or places of origin. Without any proof or basis, John W. Witek categorically states that the authors were M. Ruggieri and M. Ricci and that the dates and place of origin were, respectively, 1583-1588 and Zhaoqing.

In the studies that I published in 1997 and 2000, I proposed, as a hypothesis based on the semantics of the Vocabulary, that it was written by several Chinese and Portuguese, being coordinated by both M. Ruggieri and M. Ricci. I established that the majority of the Vocabulary was written between 1580 and 1588, and that the manuscript was written in Macao and Zhaoqing.

John W. Witek, in the absence of any proof on which to base his “certainties”, uses the final part of the introduction, “The Dictionary as a Historical Document”, p. 20 to 23, to make several assertions concerning part of the

study that I published in 1997, seeking to refute the hypotheses presented therein and developed further in 2000, in L.F. Barreto, "Macao, an Intercultural Border in the Ming Period" in *Ming Qing Yanjiu*, ed. P. Santangelo, Naples, *Istituto Universitario Orientali*, pp. 17 to 42 (a study not quoted by John W. Witek).

John W. Witek states on p. 22 "... Barreto rejects this linguistic analysis stating that the phonetisation is based on Cantonese and the Hokkien dialect of Fujian, and not on either the Beijing or Nanjing dialects...". This is an assertion made without transcribing the relevant passage from my study. He cannot transcribe it because it is absolutely untrue that I made such a statement.

In fact, I assert exactly the opposite: "... in some places the phonetisation of the vocabulary is done in Mandarin (either in the Beijing dialect or in the variety from the South of Nankin) and in others in Cantonese and Hokkien (Fujian dialect)..."¹

John W. Witek states, wrongly and without showing the quotation, that I said the opposite of what I actually did. The transcription of the quotation shows the inaccuracy of John W. Witek's affirmation.

On p. 21, John W. Witek says "... Barreto ... continues, stating that the two Italians did not know Portuguese let alone Chinese ...". On p. 52 of my 1997 study I state: "... I draw the reader's attention to the fact that neither Ricci nor Ruggieri were sufficiently fluent in the Portuguese language, and much less in Chinese, in the eighties to..."

As can be seen, once more, without giving proof or any quotation, he is quoting me as having said the absolute opposite of what I wrote. It is generally agreed that in the eighties, Ruggieri and Ricci were just starting their studies of the Chinese language in Macao and Zahoqing and did not sufficiently have the level of mastery of Chinese vocabulary and writing present in the Dictionary.

With regard to Portuguese, the absence of known material produced in this language by the Jesuits in question, gives us an understanding of their limitations. Such limitations were natural because M. Ruggieri left Rome in November 1577 and embarked from Lisbon for Goa on 24 March 1578. M. Ricci arrived in Coimbra in June-July 1577 to study Theology in Latin and in March 1578 he went to India.

In the eighties, both Ruggieri and Ricci – perhaps the latter more than the former – had, at most, the limited self-taught rudiments of Portuguese,

¹ L. F. Barreto, "A fronteira cultural" *MacaU*, 2nd serie, no. 58, 1997, p. 55. There is an English version of this article, published in *MacaU*, Special, 1997.

which did not even allow them to write a letter in Portuguese, much less a dictionary.

The problem is even more complex since the rudiments of Portuguese that they may have acquired did not give them access to the specific technical nautical vocabulary, with regional variations, such as Portuguese from Madeira, the trade terms and the war-related vocabulary that is present in the Portuguese-Chinese Dictionary. And it certainly would not be Jesuits – of Italian or other nationalities – who would write in street Portuguese swear words like “*cabrão*” (consenting cuckold) and “*cona*” (cunt) that appear on pp. 55 and 63, respectively.

The handwritten and unfinished Portuguese-Chinese Vocabulary was written by several different people using different types of writing, both on the Western side, in terms of the Portuguese and the phonetisation, and on the side of the Chinese characters. It is therefore undisputable that the work was written collectively and that Ruggieri and Ricci never actually claimed to be the authors. Both of them, particularly the former, was constantly referring, in letters sent throughout the eighties, to writings and translations that he had authored. If he had been the author of this vocabulary he would surely have stated so.

The attribution of individual authorship to Ruggieri-Ricci, put forward as a hypothesis by Paul Fu-Mieng Yang, and repeated as a certainty by John W. Witek, really shows a misunderstanding of the nature and function of the Portuguese-Chinese Vocabulary. It was an instrument – a means of learning the Chinese and Portuguese languages used by M. Ruggieri, M. Ricci, the other Portuguese Jesuits, the young Chinese catechists and the Chinese scholar possibly called Kiu-Ni-Ko (was he the Chinese Christian interpreter Filipe Mendes?). This is a teaching tool for a large and varied group of students and cannot possibly be an individual or private work, which would undoubtedly be written in Italian or Latin and Chinese and never in Portuguese and with these types of words.

This is a collective work put together by many people taking several different approaches. First and foremost, it is a way of gathering oral and written expressions in Macao and therefore it is naturally in Portuguese and Chinese. The words and expressions were gathered from the Portuguese merchants and their Chinese interpreters, the pilots, the Senate, and the Chinese maritime and trading communities – hence the coexistence of the Cantonese and Hokkinese phonetisations with those in Mandarin from the south and north. It was a project designed to gather terms, as can be seen on pp. 157 to 169. The terms collated would later be subject to phonetisation and alphabetically ordered according to the Portuguese/Phonetic/Chinese alphabet.

This was how the terms in use in the Portuguese and Chinese communities in Macao were gathered, in the ledger books of the Portuguese merchants in Macao, in the circles of official political administration, from the “...*Regiments of ships and officers ... (in) Chinese characters ...*” (Brother José de Jesus Maria), from the port and the streets of the city, making up the core of the vocabulary present in the Dictionary.

It is for this reason that the Portuguese-Chinese Dictionary has a vocabulary that is essentially secular and practical, even containing street vernacular terms such as “*cona*” (cunt), “*cu*” (arse), p. 63, “*puta*” (whore) and “*putaria*” (pertaining to prostitutes), p. 133, or “*cabrão*” (consenting cuckold), p. 55. This also explains why the Portuguese-Chinese Vocabulary is a grouping of varied and multiple technical terminologies that are very specific to certain activities such as trading, arts and crafts and sailing/piloting.

The Vocabulary contains diverse and different terminologies that are specific to the maritime and mercantile areas of Macao.

Without doubt, it could not have been any different. What else was there in the Macao when Ruggieri arrived at the end of 1579 and where, from 1580 he would have learned Chinese, particularly written Chinese? He would have attempted to learn Mandarin/court Chinese, in particular through the community of Chinese catechists in the Jesuits’ residence and later, after 1581, through the Chinese scholar who was undergoing the process of Christianisation, Kiu-Ni-Ko/Filipe Mendes.

To give an idea of the specific technical maritime Portuguese that is present in the Portuguese-Chinese Dictionary, which is not taught in any school and can only be learnt in ships and ports, I will give just a few of the dozens of examples that could be given.

Page 45 “*arriba*” (that in sailing language means steep land next to the sea shore) and “*arribar*” (that means to slew leewards). Page 50 “*baixa-mar*” (the low tide water level) and “*baldear*” (to wash or scrub the ship). Page 50 reverse “*barcada*” (that means the load carried by a ship) and “*barqueta*” (meaning a small boat). Page 53 “*bora*” (the cold dry wind from the North East) and “*botar fora*” (meaning, in technical maritime terms, to leave the bar). Page 55 “*cabrestante*” (the machine used to raise the anchor) and “*cabresto*” (meaning the cables or chains that hold the bowsprit to the bow wheel). Page 56 “*calefetar*” (that means to put tow in the joints and cover them with pitch to stop water coming in). Page 58 “*carre da Índia*” (that is, an on-board hammock). Page 88 reverse “*encabeçar*” (that in maritime terms means to substitute parts of the sail); p. 97 “*esporão da não*” (that is, the prow or part of the ship that protrudes in front of the bow wheel); p. 105 reverse “*gavea da nau*” (meaning the second sails counting from the bottom).

In the studies published in 1997 and 2000 I gave many other examples of the nautical and sailing terminology present in the Portuguese-Chinese Vocabulary as well as examples of the mercantile, political and military vocabulary. Overall these terms form the core of the Dictionary and prove that they were gathered and set down in Macao.

The few examples that I give here are only to prove that there was a specific technical sailing language in the 16th century that was only known to and used by boatswains, pilots and shipwrights. These technical sailing words would not be known to people who were fluent in Portuguese and much less to those with only rudimentary knowledge of the language.

To obtain these terms of vocabulary that are unique to sailing it would have been necessary to consult several sea-faring men, gather these references and find the Chinese equivalents in a nautical-port environment.

The technical sailing language present in the Dictionary proves not just that the terms were compiled in this fashion, but also shows that Macao would have been the only place where it would have been possible to have access to these technical terms in Portuguese and their Chinese translations.

The Portuguese-Chinese Dictionary is centred on nautical matters and geography, mercantile activity and political-diplomatic relations. It is a group of terms in Portuguese and Chinese with few erudite, theoretical or religious words.

It is a work that collated and arranged the vocabulary in the vicinity of Macao that reflected the maritime and mercantile essence of the port city ("*nau de carga*" (cargo ship) e "*nao d'armada*" (battle ship) p. 122, "*carta de marear*" (sea chart) p. 57 reverse and "*pagar tributo*" (to pay tribute) p. 126, "*canela, cânfora*" (cinnamon, camphor) p. 56 reverse and "*cravo*" (clove) p. 63 reverse and "*sandalo*" (sandalwood) p. 142 reverse, "*prata*" (silver) p. 133 reverse and "*seda*" (silk) p. 143 and "*administrador da fazenda real*" (royal tax administrator) p. 35 reverse).

M. Ruggieri arrived in Macao on 20 July 1579 having been called there and instructed by the visitor A. Valignano to dedicate himself exclusively to learning the written Chinese language. He began immediately, being helped, from 1580 onwards, by a group of young Chinese catechists (see, for example, the letter from Lourenço Mexia dated 1 September 1580 in *Jap. Sin.* 8, II, p. 258 reverse).

Ruggieri's letters from Macao dated 8 November 1580 and 12 November 1581 (published by T. Venturi) describe the difficulties and progress being made in learning Chinese and tell of how, in 1581, he was already able to read Chinese books. Pêro Gomes, in a letter from Macao, dated 25 October 1581, wrote that Ruggieri had told him that he already had a command of about 12,000 Chinese characters (*Jap. Sin.* 9 I, p. 51 reverse).

Although there may have been some exaggeration with regard to his command of Chinese, it is true that in 1580-81, M. Ruggieri translated the *Ten Commandments* into Chinese and translated, from Chinese, *San Zi Jing / Three character classic*, a manual of Confucian morality for children to be recited in ternary rhythm by students..

This progress with the Chinese language, working alongside the Chinese catechists and the Chinese scholar, implied that he learned the Chinese language in Macao and collated, based on his experiences in the territory, this Dictionary of terms that at least served the group in question.

The Portuguese-Chinese Dictionary is not unconnected to these other texts that were fundamental tools of the Company of Jesus for crossing the mercantile and maritime Europe-China frontier that was Macao, in order to get to the Chinese interior and the seat of provincial power in Zhaoqing, en route to the main objective of reaching Beijing, the heart of the Chinese empire.

The start of the 1580's was marked by the development of these tools that were considered fundamental for the success of the mission in the provincial Chinese authorities.

In the area of language, the maximum vocabulary possible was considered to be that in the Portuguese-Chinese Dictionary, the only Chinese that was then available to Europeans. But it was not only this, since at the end of 1581 or start of 1582, the first catechism in Chinese, the *Tien Zhu Shi Lu*, was written in manuscript form in Macao. The 1581 letters from the Jesuits Francisco Pires, Pêro Gomes and M. Ruggieri prove the existence of this manuscript in the Chinese language. It was continually improved and touched up and in 1583 it was taken to Zhaoqing in manuscript form, being printed there in 1584.

Again, this was a collective work by at least two Jesuits, M. Ruggieri and Pêro Gomes and a Chinese scholar who was being converted to Christianity (Kiu-Ni-Ko?).

A Chinese vocabulary and a catechism in Chinese were fundamental instruments for guiding people through the official Chinese interior, having been created in the informal coastal area of China that is Macao, being extended, developed and improved in Zhaoqing

However, these years 1580-1581-1582, during which very careful preparations were made for the entry of the Company of Jesus into official continental China, were not concerned just with the aspects of the Chinese language and translating Christian doctrine into Chinese.

The time was also used to gather updated information on Chinese geography and politics as well as on some elements of Chinese culture. It was as comprehensive and accurate a status report on the situation as was possible.

The information was gathered in Macao and on journeys from Macao to Canton and resulted in the first library of Chinese books bought by the Company, namely "... Chinese geography and history treatises and a dictionary of plants ..." (A. Valignano). In 1582, M. Ruggieri, translated some passages from these books for A. Valignano, unquestionably with the help of a group of Chinese Christians.

This up-to-date and accurate status report on China, collated and organised by the Company, appeared at the beginning of 1583 in works by Alonso Sanchez, SJ and A. Valignano, SJ.

Based on M. Ruggieri's accounts in 1582 from Canton and Macao, Alonso Sanches S.J. wrote, between March and June 1583, the *Relacion breve de la jornada* (*Short report on the journey*) where he outlines the difficulties and barriers to understanding the Chinese language and writing.

A. Valignano left Macao in 31 December 1582, taking with him this information on China that, in Cochim, in June 1583, he would incorporate in *Historia del Principio Y Progreso de la Compania de Jesus en las Indias Orientales* (*History of the Beginnings and Progress of the Company of Jesus in the East Indies*) in chapters 26 to 28.

In very simplified terms, this is the context from which the Portuguese-Chinese Dictionary emerged, in Macao between 1580-1582. There is no doubt that the development and deepening that was done on the catechism and the more general information about China from the residence in Zhaoqing was also done to the Dictionary.

But this continuation and development cannot erase that its genesis and initial formation and formulation in Macao and the Macao-Canton axis between 1580 and 1582.

In terms of historical truth and documental proof, the establishment of the first residence of the Company in interior, official China in 1583 is extremely dependent on and connected with the establishment of the first Jesuit residence in China, in 1563-1565, which was, without doubt, a coastal and informal China, a China with a European border, in other words, Macao.

It was precisely this maritime and mercantile China, located on the European-China frontier, that provided the first insight into Chinese language, culture and society. This in turn led to the first translation exercises from Chinese to Latin and from Latin to Chinese, the first Chinese vocabulary in a Western language, the Portuguese-Chinese Dictionary, the first Chinese Christians, and the first Chinese Jesuits, as well as the establishment of Macao as a base for economic support of the Company of Jesus in Japan and China in the 16th and 17th centuries.

In the case of the so-called Portuguese-Chinese Dictionary, the edition of this facsimile manuscript could justifiably bear a title along the lines of *Vocab-*

ulary of the Language of China with the equivalent in Portuguese, done by some priests and catechists from the Company of Jesus as well as by other scholarly and working Chinese and Portuguese.

The collective authorship of the work involved, without doubt, M. Ruggieri, and to a lesser extent, M. Ricci, but also the Chinese Christian scholar possibly called Kiu-Ni-Ko, the Chinese Christian interpreter Filipe Mendes, if they were not the same person, young Chinese catechists, who were probably mainly Zhong Mingren/Sebastião Fernandes (c. 1562 – c. 1621) and Huang Mingshao /Francisco Morais (c. 1569 – 1606) who were to become the first Chinese Jesuits and in the 1590's were respected teachers of Chinese to other Western Jesuits.

The work also involved Jesuit and non-Jesuit Portuguese, possibly Cristóvão da Costa and very probably Duarte de Sande, as well as many other anonymous members of the "*Nação portuguesa*" (Portuguese nation) p. 122 (the only Western nationality mentioned in the Dictionary), both "*cristão velho*" (old Christians) p. 64 and "*cristão novo*" (new Christians) p. 64.

Above all the work involves Macao and its Portuguese, Chinese, maritime, merchant and religious communities. This explains the presence of terms such as "*Aitão*" and "*Ançam*" p. 58, "*gurabaça*" p. 165 and "*maquao*" p. 169, not to mention "*pão d'ouro*" p. 126 reverse, "*ouvidor*" p. 125 reverse, and "*corregedor*" p. 62, words full of meanings for people who know the history of Macao.

The Portuguese-Chinese Vocabulary poses fascinating but difficult challenges for specialists in Portuguese culture, language and history of the 1500's, and above all to specialists in the area of Macao. No less difficult and fascinating problems are faced by specialists in Chinese Ming period language, culture and history.

We are therefore confronted with a facsimile edition of the manuscript and not, unfortunately, with an analytical edition that brings together specialists in both languages, histories and cultures, which is what should and must be done.

To give an idea of the difficulties and fascinating challenges that are posed by the study of the Portuguese vocabulary, let me give two short and simple examples. The only Western locality given in the Portuguese-Chinese Vocabulary is "*Bragua*" p. 160. "*Braga*" (a city in northern Portugal) may only mean that the author who was responsible for that entry wanted to say or try to find out the name of his native city in Chinese. This could have been any Portuguese from Braga who was in Macao but if he was a Jesuit then it was very probably Duarte de Sande. He was born near Braga in 1547, had been in Macao since 1585, would reside in Zhaoqing between 1585 and 1587 and was in charge of the China mission between 1585 and 1597.

It is possible that in this vocabulary some Portuguese terms that come from Chinese or Annamese appear for the first time, or one of the first times. This is possibly the case with “*canga*” p. 161, meaning “torture rack”. In Portuguese, the term had only been used before by Fernão Lopes de Castanheda, in 1551, in a sense that may or may not denote torture rack.

An understanding of the Portuguese-Chinese Vocabulary requires specialised research, well founded hypotheses and the future work of a Portuguese-Chinese team in the realms of the history and culture of Macao and Macao-Canton-Zhaoqing. We can do without the certainties and falsehoods that result from deep ignorance and which are contained in John W. Witek’s lamentable introduction .

Contrary to what John W. Witek states, the Portuguese-Chinese Dictionary originated in Macao, as I have just proved through some examples. It emerged against the background of M. Ruggieri’s studies of the Chinese language, which dates it in the 1580’s. It was a collective tool used by a group of Jesuits and non-Jesuits, Chinese, Portuguese and Italians who began writing down the Chinese and Portuguese languages in Macao.

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