

《中國晚明與歐洲文學：明末耶穌會古典型証道故事考詮 (*Late Ming China and European Literature: A Philological study on the Late Ming Jesuit Appropriation of the Classical Exemplum*). By Li Sher-Shiueh (Taipei: Taipei Lianjing, 2005). 437 pp. Hardback, ISBN 957-08-2828-5.

THIS BOOK rediscovers a crucial yet often unnoticed role of Jesuit missionaries as the earliest introducers of Western classical literature to China. The author begins his prologue by referring to the magnum opus *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages* of Robert Curtius. Such deliberate intertextuality of the two titles signifies the author's respect for the scholarship and inspiring works of Curtius. The author points out that his book is distinctive from the other in terms of research object and methodology. Li's monograph shares the same objective of his doctoral thesis to "offer a re-examination of the late Ming Jesuit Chinese writing in a literary perspective". The leading research question of Li's work is: "Was literature included in the Western knowledge introduced by Jesuits to late Ming China?" His following questions are: What is the content of such "literature"? Does it constitute a sort of evangelical poetics or translatology? (p.i) As Li's metaphorical use of "the storyteller" from Benjamin's article title (pp. 344-350) indicates, this book presents Li's well-documented and comprehensive investigation on three related questions: What kind of stories was told by the Jesuits? How did they tell these stories? Why did they tell them in this way?

The stories appropriated by the Jesuits are the classical exemplum, which is defined by French scholar Jacques le Goff - "a brief narrative given to persuade an audience by a salutary lesson" ("un récit bref donné comme convaincre un auditoire par une leçon salutaire") (p.4). In terms of their context and origin, Li further divides exemplum into two categories: the classical exemplum and the Catholic exemplum. The former category includes Greco-Roman stories that served secular rather than religious ends. An influential example of the latter is *Vitae patrum*, stories of the Northern African desert fathers in the 3rd century BCE. Its abridged version *Legenda aurea* edited by Jacobus de Voragine became even more widely circulated in Europe. Both versions were appropriated by the Jesuits in late Ming China. Li gives three reasons to explain why he is so intrigued by the translated exemplum: firstly, such appropriation marked the initial exchange between Chinese and Western classical literature; secondly, the Jesuits' attempts to pen Chinese written language in the form of *Apostolat der Presse* (apostolate of the press) were unprecedented despite the earlier Catholic appropriation of this pagan literature in the 2nd or 3rd century (pp. 330-344); thirdly, the Jesuits' application of chreia, a sub-genre under anecdotes, is exceptionally widely seen in the history of Catholic proselytization. Based on these points, Li firmly argues that the significance of the Jesuit appropriation of the classical exemplum in late Ming China should not be overlooked by anyone engaged in literary and cultural exchange between China and the West (pp. 5-6).

In the four following chapters, Li discusses respectively four categories of exemplum –fabula, chreia, mythos and legend. In Chapter 2, Li describes fabula as what Isidore of Seville calls "*loquendae fictae*", or "fictional speech" (p.46). Due to

its strong allegorical characteristics, fables had been widely employed in ancient times for public speeches until the late medieval and Renaissance rhetoricians challenged their ambiguous functions for biblical instruction and superficial entertainment (p.48). Li investigates how the Jesuits co-opted the Aesop's fables from three sources, i.e. *Phaedri Avgvsti Liberti Fabvlarvm Aesoptarvm* by Phaedrus (1st century), *Aesopic Fable of Bavrius in Iambic Verse*, and the Augustana collection in Greek prose. He finds two approaches of the Jesuit co-option: one retains the original intention of the story and the other creates new meaning by changing the plot or revising the implied moral values. In Henderson's words, the latter approach shows "the making of meaning" in Jesuit Chinese writing with allegoresis or spiritual interpretation (p.54). Li makes three discoveries in this part: firstly, the fables that were given new meanings by the Jesuits remain in the same pattern of the classical fables (p.55); secondly, the new meanings often come from the re-configuration of the story structure (p.55); and thirdly, these new meanings stem from three recurrent themes in the medieval European pulpits, i.e. *memoria mortis*, separating fact from fiction, and the last judgment (p.58). The first theme is addressed in Ricci's translation of the peacock fable in his *Jirenshepian* 畸人十篇 (Ten pieces of the disabled man). In his Chinese collection *Kuangyi* 况义 (To give meaning), Trigault illustrated the second theme in the fable of the dog, the meat and the reflection. It is noticeable that both missionaries had used the "Three Friends" fable to demonstrate the last judgment of God. Ricci's version in *Jirenshepian* (1608 AD) gives a concise definition of the three friends as *caihuo* 財貨 (wealth), *qingqi* 親戚 (kinsman) and *dexing* 德行 (moral behaviour), while Trigault's translation (1625 AD) elaborates on the definition with a special term *degong* 德功, which is the reversion of an influential Buddhist term *gongde* 功德 (merits and virtues). Disregarding the linguistic differences, Li observes that both versions present the transformed meaning from general ethics to the ultimate concern in the secular world (pp.70-78). The appropriated fables all served a common purpose to deliver the sometimes far-fetched religious lessons while "re-aiming" (Harold Bloom) at the audience in a Chinese context (p.122).

Chapter 3 introduces *chreia* as a sub-category under anecdotes, which embodies the tension between history and fiction. To use Li's words in his article on the Jesuit use of *chreia* in late-Ming China, this type of moral anecdote "stands out as the most unrelenting challenge against historical truth". Li cites the definition of *chreia* by Ronald F. Hock and parallels this subgenre with "shishuo" 世說 from *Shishuo Xinyu* 世說新語, a collection of stories and discourses of literati written during the Jin period (265-420 AD) by Liu Yiqing. An apt example of the Jesuit translation of *chreia* is found in *Dadaojiyan* 达道纪言 (1636 AD), a collaborative translation by the Italian Jesuit missionary Alfonso Vagnoni (1566-1640) and Han Yun 韓雲 (approximately 1596-1649), a provincial official in Shanxi. This book is a collection of the Western political and ethnical apothegms from ancient Greek and Latin literature. The 356 pieces of dictum were categorized into the Confucian cardinal five relations - that between the ruler and the ruled (158 pieces); that between parents and

children (21 pieces); that between siblings (31 pieces); that between husband and wife (23 pieces); and that between friends (122 pieces). To find out why a large number of chreiai (approximately 750 pieces in total) had been translated by the Jesuits, Li investigates its historicity, fictionality and textuality, and attributes its wide use to the exemplum principle of *decorum*, or usefulness (p.180). Li concludes this chapter by identifying how historicity suffered a twofold loss in chreia – it is lost in the figures of speech of this genre as well as in the preaching role that chreia plays. Li finds it more paradoxical that the readers' perception of truth is strengthened at the loss of historicity. This finding indicates the usefulness of a distorted "history" to convey the universal truth (pp.186-187).

Chapter 4 discusses myths, a category that shares the fictional feature with fable (p.189). Despite the relatively minimized number (less than 20 pieces) compared to the large proportion of chreia and fable, the mythos played a distinctive role in the writings of three missionaries, namely Ricci, Vagnoni, and Portuguese Jesuit Emmanuel Diaz. In Ricci's *Jirenshepian* 畸人十篇 (Ten pieces of the disabled man), Li finds the first Western classical myth in Chinese writings - the story of King Midas. It is about how the hidden secret of Midas' donkey ears was advocated by a magic bamboo flute. This piece of bamboo grew from a hole in which the king's barber made a whisper out of such burning truth. Ricci omitted the genealogical background of Midas and his enmity with Apollo, and changed a seemingly trivial detail. In the original story and its European variations, the flute was made of reed, but in Ricci's version it is a produce of the celebrated Chinese botanical species bamboo. For Li, this seemingly minor alteration not only demonstrates Ricci's domestication strategy but also emphasizes the allegorical meaning of natural phenomena (pp.195-199). Further discussions are conducted on the three myths in Vagnoni's Chinese writings (p.236) and Portuguese Jesuit Emmanuel Diaz's *Shengjingzhijie* 聖經直解 (A faithful interpretation of the Bible) (1636), in which ten pieces of Greek myths were appropriated (pp.200-205). Three findings were drawn from these discussions. 1) Homer and other Greco-Roman myths were "rigidly rejected" despite the inevitable presence of mythical tradition in the late Ming Jesuits' writings (p.237). 2) the efforts to appropriate Greek myths demonstrate the religious syncretism in late Ming China (p.242). Thirdly, Diaz's view of mythos resembles the modern sense of myths, which, as Barthes defines, is a type of speech that serves our needs by changing its form, content and usage (p.243).

In Chapter 5, Li adapts Propp's folklorist definition of legend and analyzes the Jesuit appropriation of three widely-spread Greco-Roman legends: "Aesop and the Tongue", "Damon and Pintias" and "The Sword of Damocles". For Li, the appropriated translation of Matteo Ricci and Martino Martini not only indicate their sermon approach but also demonstrate the ethnical encounters of Chinese tradition and Western ideologies (pp.246-248). He finds the last legend a typical case of Jesuit appropriation of Western classical legends due to its wide currency in Western civilization and the sophisticated symbolic meaning of the sword in Ricci's version. As Li finds, the sword was given a threefold religious sense including the divine justice, the metaphorical Death and the secular sins of the King (pp.293-294). For the

Jesuit storyteller, this story depicts the unequal bipolar relationship between God and humans: the suspended sword demonstrates the wrath of God and human beings shall consequently owe and fear God (pp.291-302). Despite the Jesuits' endeavour to preach in a Confucian way, this theme contradicts the core Confucian ideas of *ren* 仁 [compassion] and *tianrenheyi* 天人合一 [the harmony between heaven and humans]. Ricci's rewriting efforts did not meet his objective. For the Chinese listener, a non-believer scholar Gong Daoli 龚道立, the most impressive message in this story is the "good and evil judgment in one's afterlife" (p.306). To sum up, Li finds that the Jesuits often began their preaching with anecdotes from Western history and illustrated their points with fictional Greco-Roman legends. For Li, legend situates on the spectrum between history and myth or between fact and fiction, but its narrative purpose could be described according to Propp's opinion that "[h]istorical significance is an ideological phenomenon" (pp.308-309).

From the four categories of exemplum, Li summarizes and accentuates the exceptional "Medievalism" (p.6) that characterizes the Jesuit appropriation of ancient Greco-Roman stories. If we take into consideration the spatiotemporal remoteness (China vs. Europe and Medieval times vs. Renaissance era), we find the fact that the Jesuits from Renaissance Europe preached in classical Chinese with medieval exemplum in late Ming China even more stimulating. It is in this sense that Li defines such "Medievalism" with Stephen Owen's term of "language system", which surpasses linguistic, cultural and tempo-spatial boundaries, and demonstrates a unique communication between Chinese and Western literature (pp.39-40). Li's book demonstrates the twofold motive of such "Medievalism". One is the cultural context of late Ming China with remarkable linguistic heterogeneity (pp.7-23) and the flourishing allegorical literature written by Ming literati (pp.83-85). The other is the deep influence of Western rhetoric tradition on the Jesuit preaching method, which is one key issue of Li's inquiry on the transformation from language to morphology (p.39).

This book demonstrates that the classical exempla were not faithfully recounted but purposefully rewritten in a unique style by the Ming Jesuit storytellers. Li incorporates the Ming Jesuits such as Ricci, de Pantoja and Vagnoni into "a particular missionary group of authors" due to their continuation of the classical tradition by "creating" chriic exempla of various kinds in Chinese to illustrate Christian philosophy. Why did this group choose to "trans-write" rather than translate? That is the key issue discussed in the concluding part of Li's monograph (Chapter 6), where Li scrutinizes the Jesuit self-perception of their co-option of Western classical exemplum (p.315). From Ricci's Chinese writings, Li observes that the Jesuits held a Platonic attitude toward literature. For example, the epics of Homer were absent in the appropriated Greco-Roman stories despite the intertwined relation between Homer and Catholicism. Ricci undervalues Homer and other poets because their poetry blurred the distinction between the Olympus Gods and "god-like" mortal heroes (p.323). Li uses a celebrated event to prove that Jesuit appropriation embodies their Platonic evaluation of art in human society. During his second visit to Nanjing in 1599, Ricci had a debate with the famous scholar monk Sanhuai 三淮 (1545-1608) on

the topic of appearance and essence. The latter insisted that substantial objects could be recreated in the speech about them. And Ricci gave his frequently cited answer: “If I can see the reflection of the sun or the moon in a mirror, ... can I simply say that the sun or the moon is made by this mirror?” For Li, Ricci’s retort apparently directs to the Platonic idea of mimesis (p.327).

Lastly but importantly, Li’s monograph tackles Ming Jesuit narrative identity, which is extremely difficult to be nailed down regarding their somewhat chameleonic behaviour. They are generally portrayed in Chinese cultural history as the first introducers of material culture and Catholic missionaries engaged in rhetoric and hermeneutical activities. However, their mission to convert Chinese people was far from successful since statistics show that the converted Chinese account for only 100,000, which is rather a small percentage on the scale of the late Ming Chinese population of 175,000,000 (p.351). They carefully distinguished themselves as *wenren xueshi* 文人學士 (the Chinese man of letters and scholar) and *xishi* (Western scholars) or *xiru* 西儒 (Western Confucianists) (p.315). Such hybrid identity between China and the West was sustained also by their efforts to imitate the appearance and attire of monks upon their arrival and adapting to the mainstream Confucian scholar lifestyle later on (p.353). Li’s book suggests a unique perspective to portray these Jesuits – they are above all “storytellers on the medieval altar” (p.352). By telling and appropriating the Western classical exemplum, the Jesuit creation of “exemplum literature” contributes to both Chinese civilization and Western tradition by enhancing the genre resources for Chinese literature and negotiating the “ancient enmity” between poets and philosophers described in the *Republic* (p.352).

Apart from its extensive scope and penetrating thoughts, Li’s book is also noteworthy as the fruit of the author’s perseverant search crossing both linguistic and disciplinary boundaries. The idea of this book was initiated in Li Shixue’s high school years when he challenged the traditional view in the textbook of Chinese cultural history—the Jesuit missionary advocated mainly Western religious beliefs and material culture when they preached in late Ming China. Li started his first investigation during his postgraduate studies at Fu Ren University, Taiwan. He happened to find a series of *Tian Xue Chu Han* 天學初涵 [The Preliminary Ideas of Heavenly Studies] edited by Li Zhizao 李之藻 (1571-1630 AD) in the library of the faculty of humanities. Out of “a mysterious impulse” as Li described, he got hold of the book and began reading it. To his delight, he found rich literary values rather than scientific evidence in this compilation of many Aesop’s fables and some other familiar stories translated into Chinese. After reading the whole series, Li composed his first article on the relationship between Greek allegories and late Ming Catholic preaching in China in a journal *Chinese and Foreign Literature*. Much encouraged by his supervisor Prof. Anthony C. Yu at Chicago University, Li decided to develop this idea in his PhD thesis. He spent thirteen and a half years in total on this research project – nine years on the extensive learning in Chinese literature and history, theology, medieval studies, and classical languages such as Latin and Greek; and then four and a half years on the composition of his thesis.

The next step of Li's incessant Odyssey is to explore the relation between the Jesuit translation and Chinese literature. I am confident that Li's reappraisal will break the perpetual principle of cultural essentialism in nationalistic literary theories that he aims to deconstruct.

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