ALSO BY JOHN E. WILLS, JR.

Mountain of Fame: Portraits in Chinese History
Embassies and Illusions: Dutch and Portuguese Envoys to K'ang-hsi, 1666–1687
(coedited with Jonathan D. Spence)
From Ming to Ch'ing: Conquest, Region, and Continuity in Seventeenth-Century China
Pepper, Guns, and Parleys: The Dutch East India Company and China, 1662–1681

1688
A Global History

John E. Wills, Jr.

W. W. Norton & Company New York London
in memory of

Robert H. Irmann (1916–1998),
scholar of 1688,
teller of tales,
fine
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sometimes tried to see what he could do in someone else's style and once confessed that he had not been able even to approach the effects of the austere landscapist Ni Zan. But more often his paintings were like no one else's and were so different from one another that they seem to be the work of a dozen different painters. This extraordinary variety in style is a central principle in Shitao's famous *Record of Remarks on Painting* (*Hua Yu Lu*). Styles of painting all have their origin, he said, in a primordial, undivided One Stroke. The individual can grasp this One Stroke for himself, and once he has done so, his refusal to be limited to any one style will give rise to many styles, each fully realized in itself, without any special effort. Each painting will represent the external structure and also seize the internal powers and movements of mountains, rivers, people, birds, animals, grass, trees, and buildings. Shitao's essay drew on over five hundred years of sophisticated critical writing about landscape painting but carried it to a new level of intellectual ambition, echoing basic ideas of Confucianism, Chan Buddhism, and especially Daoism, so that the One Stroke began to sound very much like the undivided primitive Way out of which all particular beings arise.

The One Stroke produced the many styles, and the many styles, always individual and coherent and right, begin to form in the mind of the viewer not One Style but a world of constant surprise and irredicible diversity. Shitao no doubt was aware of the Indian origins of the Buddhist teachings he studied for many years but otherwise left no evidence of any interest in a world outside the world that was China. But in his artistic genius and in his ideas he came as close as anyone to the kind of art needed to encompass the world of 1688. The historian seeking to sketch a world tries not to be confined by any style, any set of questions but to follow hunches, to let one thing lead to another. Like Shitao letting the One Stroke appear in many forms, he hopes to avoid system and to put before his reader many pictures of a world, reflecting the unconfineable variety, splendor, and strangeness of the human condition.

In 1688 the empire of the Great Qing was at peace. People in the know heard about the continuing uncertainties of relations with the Russians, the rise of Galdan of the Dzungars, and the flight of the Khalkhas toward the Great Wall, but all that seemed far away. At the Wuhan cities in the middle Yangtze Valley there was a mutiny of troops threatened with demobilization, but it was quickly put down.

Older people remembered very different times. Fifty years before, the northern China plain had been ravaged by huge bands of mounted rebels, pursued by Ming imperial troops who were almost as much out of control. A bloodthirsty rebel had paused briefly in his rise to power over the riches of the Sichuan basin. In the rich rice lands of the lower Yangtze Valley, a general loss of control and incursions by the northern rebels had set off violent uprisings by tenants and bondservants. The south coast was in the hands of sea lords who supported the dynasty largely on their own terms. And on the northeast frontier of the empire a people who had long been tributaries to the Ming court, the Jurchen, had reorganized themselves and given themselves a new name, Manchu, and were taking and holding Chinese cities.

In 1644 the northern rebels had taken Beijing, only to be expelled ten weeks later by the Manchus, who proclaimed that they had come to restore order, to avenge the martyred last emperor of the Ming, and to establish their own Great Qing Dynasty. The violence of the Qing con-
quest was immense but brief; the Qing was in control of most of the empire by 1650. In the 1670s a rebellion of some of the senior Chinese generals allied to the Qing threw several provinces into turmoil but ultimately failed. The last opponents of Qing rule, descendants of the late Ming sea lords holding out on Taiwan, surrendered in 1683.

Confucians, with a few exceptions like Wang Fuzhi, thought of the moral teachings of their master as something that anyone could learn, even if he was not Chinese. They knew that a number of surrounding smaller states—Korea, Vietnam, and the Ryukyu Islands—were deeply influenced by Confucian culture. They knew that Japan had been so influenced in the past, and although they knew little of Japan at the end of the 1680s, they would not have been at all surprised by the spectacle of the reigning shogun earnestly studying the Yi Jing and trying to impress a less violent code of conduct on his warrior ruling class. The Manchus drew on a Central Asian heritage of statecraft not altogether different from that of the Mughals and the Ottomans, but from before 1644, they also had sought to present themselves as heirs, though not uncritical ones, of the Chinese political tradition.

In 1688 the ruling Qing emperor was in the twenty-seventh year of his Kangxi reign period; although this is actually a "year period" used to count the years in a reign, even contemporaries sometimes used it to refer to the emperor himself, and so do we. Manchu was Kangxi's first language but he had a good Chinese education and took his Chinese learning seriously. We have extant records of his daily deliberations with his ministers, and it is no surprise at all to find in them such hoary Confucian clichés as "Governing is a matter of men, not of laws." Thus we find the emperor and his ministers taking a great deal of time to consider various candidates for appointments and their relative strengths and trying to find the appropriate way of disciplining an errant bureaucrat without destroying his future usefulness.

The imperial examinations, key to the channeling of elite energy and ambition into the service of the imperial center since about 1000 C.E., also received a good deal of attention. In April 1688, hundreds of scholars gathered from all over the empire for the metropolitan examinations in the capital. They already had passed through the narrowest gates in the system. Examined by local education officials, they had been awarded a local designation of "official student," which gave them social standing and some tax exemptions but no qualification for office and was not permanent; they had to keep studying and were periodically reexamined. The next step was the most difficult, as many hundreds of scholars gathered every three years in each provincial capital to be locked in long rows of examination cubicles and to write for several days on topics of classical learning and contemporary statecraft. The gathering of the candidates in a provincial capital was a time of great excitement. The candidates exchanged views on scholarship and politics. The common people watched for the lists of successful graduates and bet on which names would be on it. The ratio passing this examination at any sitting might be as low as two or three in a hundred. Those who passed were qualified for low-level office and for the metropolitan examination. Not all of them were from wealthy families; often someone would contribute to the travel expenses to Beijing of a poor graduate, esteeming his scholarship and hoping to be remembered if he became a high official.

The metropolitan examination was held at the imperial Confucian temple, east of the palace compound. Again the scholars were locked in cubicles for a series of essay assignments. After a certain number had been selected to receive the degree of jin shi, "presented scholar," there was a final step called the palace examination, for which the emperor approved the questions and participated in the evaluation. It determined the ranking of the successful candidates. Those who received the top ranks would be instantly famous, eligible for immediate appointment to high academic posts in the capital, and were expected to have brilliant careers ahead of them.

On April 28, 1688, the examiners presented the Kangxi emperor with a list of the 176 men who had passed the metropolitan examination and ten of the papers they ranked highest. The emperor was well prepared. He asked about the character of each of the leading candidates, sometimes directing the question to a councillor who was from the same area. He recognized the paper of one Zha Sihan even before the seals were broken to reveal the name; he said he had seen samples of Zha's calligraphy. Zha was a member of an eminent family from Zhejiang, in the southeast, a family with some taints of Ming Loyalism but a great deal of prestige. After the emperor had examined several of the papers and discussed their merits with his councillors, he raised Zha from fourth place to second. But that left the first three places all going to men from Zhejiang, and he thought that not suitable, so he juggled the rankings a bit more. The next day the new jin shi were ushered into the huge court before the Hall of Supreme
Harmony, and performed their ketous (old spelling kowtow; three kneelings and nine prostrations) before the emperor, almost invisible on his throne in the shadows of the hall.

But despite the Confucian clichéd there was more to governing than judging men and encouraging their scholarship and natural goodness. People lived on the land and drew their livings from it. Their rulers had to draw enough revenue from them to be able to keep order, defend them against bandits and invaders, teach the teachable, build up reserve stocks of grain for famine years, and maintain transport canals, irrigation works, and flood control systems. They also had to keep the burdens of tax and labor service light and equitable. When Chinese statesmen discussed these problems, they found it altogether natural to refer to the strengths and weaknesses of the various systems Chinese rulers had tried out since the founding of the Han around 200 B.C.E.

One set of policy challenges had an even longer lineage. Before 2000 B.C.E. the great statesman Yu was supposed to have rescued the world from a great flood by digging channels so that the water could run off into the ocean. Then he had been chosen as the best man to succeed as ruler and had regularized the kinds of goods each region should present as tribute. When a grand secretary mentioned the classical text Tribute of Yu in a debate in 1688, the emperor remarked that such an allusion to ancient times was what you would expect from someone who didn’t really know anything about the subject at hand. But in fact Yu’s wisdom in digging channels so that the waters could drain away, his assembling masses of workers, and his own doggedness in the struggle against the waters still were relevant to those who were trying to deal with the problems of the Yellow River and the Grand Canal.

The Yellow River flows down out of plateaus covered with fine loess soil. Untamed, it changes course frequently as it deposits its huge burden of silt on the North China plain. Since before Confucius’s time China’s rulers have sought first to drain parts of that plain for cultivation, then to channel the Yellow River. The result has been that its silt is deposited mostly between the dikes, and its bed eventually has risen above the surrounding plain. In Ming and Qing times the situation was compounded by the importance of the Grand Canal, which brought the rich rice surplus of the lower Yangtze to the capital, interacting in complicated ways with the Yellow River, the Huai River a bit farther south, and a series of shallow lakes on the floodplain. The whole system requires constant monitoring and centralized management. These were less and less available in the last decades of Ming. The mouths by which the Huai emptied into the ocean silted up. Lower channels were not kept dredged, so that river and lake beds built up and floods became more frequent. A major effort to get the system under control was inaugurated in 1677 with the appointment of Jin Fu as director general of the Yellow River. Jin superintended a major effort to dredge channels and build new dikes. But still there were floods, and some of his policies aroused controversy.

Thus it was that on April 8 and 9, 1688, determined to get to the bottom of the whole situation, the Kangxi emperor assembled in his presence all the major officials involved in Yellow River policy. Yu Chenglong, governor of the metropolitan province, was the most vigorous critic of Jin Fu. He accused Jin of failing to dredge the key river mouths, allowing floodwaters to ravage rich areas between the Huai and the Yangtze. Levies of labor had been excessive. Jin had converted land that was in private hands but not properly listed on the tax rolls into garrison fields, normally used to finance military establishments but here to support the water projects. The common people wanted to kill and eat Jin Fu, Yu said. Jin replied that all he had done was to crack down on abuses of power by the local landed elites. The emperor was very much in control of the debate, asking detailed questions, exposing his ministers’ ignorance, reminding them that he had walked on some of the key dikes on his southern tour. He drove home over and over the need for a comprehensive view, for not just going along with the local people, who didn’t mind releasing water that would flood fields in the next county. When he caught an official in a major error or contradiction, the official fell onto his face in a ketou. Finally it was clear that Jin Fu would have to take the blame for his adoption of the unpopular garrison field system and for his failure to clear the key river mouths and would be dismissed. But the emperor suspended the further punishments that had been proposed for him; we shall wait six or seven years, he said, to see if anyone else can do a better job.

On his second tour of the south in 1689 the emperor reexamined the river system, saw how much Jin Fu had accomplished and how enormous the challenge was, and restored Jin to his office, which he held until his death in 1692. Jin had been vulnerable in 1688 because he was associated with the grand secretary Mingju, who had just fallen from power. The
emperor knew when he had to let the political winds blow, but he also valued competence and hard facts, especially in dealing with the great intractable river.

All early modern rulers understood the importance of ceremony in communicating favor and disfavor and projecting their own majesty; in this, Kangxi was very much the contemporary of Aurangzeb and Louis XIV. But in China the centrality of ceremony in Confucian thought added extra layers of care and self-consciousness. Kangxi, steeped from childhood in Chinese values as well as in those of his Manchu ancestors, presented himself as the gracious rewarder of a good minister and a filial grandson.

On August 9, 1688, the Kangxi emperor received in audience the sea-pacifying count, sea-pacifying general, commandant of water forces of Fujian Province Shi Lang. In 1683 Shi Lang had led the forces that conquered Taiwan, extinguishing the last organized center of organized resistance to Qing rule throughout China and incorporating Taiwan into the Chinese Empire for the first time. At the audience the emperor removed his own collar, lined with the special imperial dragon satin, and had it placed around Shi’s neck. On August 10 the emperor received Shi again, at the Qianqing Gate, a great verandalike structure, often used for informal and working audiences, behind the formal audience halls of the Beijing palaces, and gave him some dishes to eat from his own dinner.

These already were gestures of very special favor, carefully recorded. The emperor never missed a chance to show his ministers how well he treated those who served him well and to remind them how often his judgment of men and political situations had been better than theirs. The emphasis on the ruler’s evaluation and employment of ministers was one of the fundamentals of Confucian statecraft, but the touches of personal recollection and self-congratulation were highly individual and characteristic of Kangxi’s style as a ruler. So was his way of reminding an official that he knew that man’s weaknesses and remembered his mistakes but was allowing him to continue in office nonetheless. A loose imperial rein, a proper sense of gratitude on the part of the official, and a keen sense of being always on probation, always watched were the lot of the bureaucrat or general under Kangxi. After the second audience the emperor bestowed on his aged general the signal honor of a summons into the private areas of the residential Qianqing Palace, usually off limits to all except the emperor, his ladies, and the court eunuchs. The following conversation was recorded:

Emperor: Do you have anything to memorialize?
Shi: Your minister has served as commander of water forces for Fujian. It was only by means of the Awesome Majesty and Immense Blessings of Your Imperial Majesty that the maritime frontier was pacified. I have nothing with which to trouble Your Majesty.

Emperor: Previously you served as an Inner Court High Minister for thirteen years. At that time, because you are a Fujian man, there were those who belittled you; it was only We who knew you and treated you generously. Thereafter the Three Feudatories rebelled and oppressed our people, but one by one they were pacified, and only the sea bandits remained like wandering spirits, sneaking away to take Taiwan and to afflict Fujian. If We wanted to do away with these bandits, no one but you would do. Thus We made a decision, based on Our own convictions, to give you a special promotion and appointment. As it turned out, you were able to exert your strength and exhaust your mind, determined not to fail in your duties, zealous and unmindful of yourself, so that bandits who had been impossible to put down for sixty years were wiped out without any remaining resistance; this really is your accomplishment. More recently, there have been those who said you were presuming on your merit and becoming proud, and We heard something of this. Now you have come to the capital, and there have been people who have said We should keep you here and not allow you to go back. But We have considered that when the bandit disorders were at their height We used you and did not mistrust you; now that All Under Heaven is at peace, should We mistrust you and not allow you to go back? Now you are commanded to return to your post; henceforth you must be more careful, in order to preserve your meritorious name. In the past, when officials of high merit sometimes have not been able to continue without blemish to the ends of their careers, it has been because they were not careful; you must exert yourself in this way. You also must maintain harmony between soldiers and people, and keep your region at peace, in order to fulfill Our intention to love the soldiers and give solace to the people, and in order to preserve the ideal image of a meritorious minister.

Shi: The pacification of the sea bandits relied entirely on Your
Majesty's uncanny strategy and penetrating calculations. It was the plans that were transmitted to your minister; that made success possible; how could your minister have had the strength? Your Imperial Majesty has set up troops to protect that people; how would your minister dare not to imitate the Sage Compassion and keep harmony between troops and people? Moreover, since Fujian is my native place, your minister will be sure to devote himself to pacifying it. Your minister has received the Heavenly Grace of the Emperor in great abundance, being named an Inner Court High Minister, then granted the rank of Count with right of inheritance. All Under Heaven will be ruled by the Imperial Dynasty for ten thousand, one hundred thousand years, and your minister's descendants will enjoy good fortune without end. Also I have received the favor of Your Imperial Majesty removing an item of Your Majesty's clothing and putting it on your minister, giving Your Majesty's own food to your minister to eat; these are special favors without precedent since ancient times. But your minister is just a solitary individual, simple of mind and hasty of speech, so that I offend many people; for completing my career safely I depend entirely on Your Imperial Majesty. Your minister is old and his strength is spent. The affairs of the border region are weighty; I fear that my spiritual energy will not be sufficient to manage them.

Emperor: In generals, wisdom is to be esteemed, not strength. We employ you for your wisdom; how could it be a question of strength of hands and feet? You must exert yourself in your charge.

Shi Lang lived until 1696. In 1688 his influence still counted for something in coastal Fujian and even supported new ventures like the envoys to Madras that same year whom we shall meet later in this book, but he was spending more of his time in retirement at his country estate and had to share power in the ports with representatives of the new system of maritime customs collectors and other branches of Kangxi's bureaucracy.

At the end of their interview, according to the imperial diarists, the emperor took note of Shi Lang's age and gave a special order to an imperial guardman to take his arm and support him as he departed.

A far longer and more serious drama of ceremony and politics already had begun at the beginning of 1688, with the illness of the grand dowager empress. At dawn on January 3, 1688, the Kangxi emperor led an immense procession of princes, dukes, lesser nobles, and high military and civil officials from the inner residential palace through all the gates and courtyards of the Forbidden City of Beijing, then more than a mile south through the streets of the city to the immense park of the Altars of Heaven. All went on foot, including, in a rare gesture of humility, the emperor himself.

The Round Hill Altar of the Altars of Heaven is an elevated marble terrace, devoid of structure or ornament except for the marble railing that encircles it; it is surrounded in turn by two more railings on lower terraces. Only fourteen days before, the emperor had come there in person at dawn to perform the great winter solstice sacrifice to High Heaven, which was the most awesome moment in the annual ceremonial round of the imperial system. Since about 1000 B.C.E. Chinese rulers had called themselves Sons of Heaven and had claimed to rule by the Mandate of Heaven. Heaven's mandate, its favor to a particular ruling house, was not immutable; it would be lost, and the dynasty would fall, if its rulers failed to provide effective government and to set good moral examples in their own conduct. It was such a "change of mandate," in Chinese eyes, that had led to the fall of the Ming and placed Kangxi's father on the throne in the Beijing palaces in 1644. The emperor thus appeared at the Round Hill Altar beneath the cold dawn sky as a dependent, almost a supplicant, not in control, acknowledging the ultimate moral precariousness of his position. Perhaps as old, though not as clearly visible to us in the early stages of its history, was a sense that when the Son of Heaven paid homage to Heaven, he became the sole and essential pivot among the realms of Heaven, Earth, and Man. The proper succession of the seasons, timely rain for the crops, timely planting by the farmers all depended on the maintenance by imperial officials of a correct calendar and on the proper performance by the emperor or his delegates of a regular round of ceremonies marking turning points in the cycle of the year. I doubt that many of Kangxi's subjects were seriously worried that the days would not get longer if the winter solstice ceremony were not properly performed, but here too there were echoes of hazard, of responsibility, of things that could go wrong.

Both in the winter solstice ceremony and in the special ceremony on January 3, details of rank—the insignia, badges, and sashes of rank, the proper places to stand, and the proper sequences of motion—surrounded a simple basic act. The emperor was alone on the top terrace of the altar, all others well behind him or on lower levels. He performed a full ketou—
three kneelings, each followed by three prostrations to the pavement—
before a tablet bearing in gold letters, Chinese and Manchu, on a deep blue
ground, the words "Sovereign Heaven, Lord on High." A ceremonial usher
read out the text of the imperial prayer, and the emperor performed
another ketou.

But the purposes of the two ceremonies were quite different. On
December 25, 1687, the emperor’s beloved grandmother the grand dowager
empress Xiaozhuang had fallen seriously ill. Immediately the emperor
began to spend almost all his time in her sickroom, never undressing, sleep-
ing near her bed, preparing her medicines himself. On December 31 he
sought to remove baleful influences and propitiate the cosmic powers by
ordering a reduction of the sentences of most criminals in the empire. Now
he had come, on foot, to plead with Sovereign Heaven to grant additional
life to his grandmother. This was the prayer that was read out:

Ah! In the twenty-sixth year of Kangxi, the cyclical year ding mao, the
first day of the twelfth month, the cyclical date yi si, I, your Minister, the
successor Son of Heaven, dare to proclaim to Sovereign Heaven, the
Lord on High, saying: Your Minister has received the assistance of
Heaven, and has served his Grandmother, the Grand Dowager Empress,
received her protection for long years. and relying on her was able to
find peace and tranquility. But now suddenly she has fallen gravely ill,
and within the space of ten days it has been seen that it is very grave, and
that might become critical at any time. Your Minister took no rest day
and night, putting aside thoughts of bed or of food, mixing her medi-
cines myself, seeking doctors and prescriptions everywhere, but nothing
had any effect. In the Palaces all were sorely afflicted, and no one knew
what to do. This humble one considered that the Heart of Heaven is
compassionate and loving, that there is no place not covered by its
canopy. All the more should your Minister, this insignificant person,
devote himself to her. Moreover, your Minister, this insignificant person,
in the past was blessed with her kindly care. I recall that at any early age
I lost my parents, and took refuge at the knee of my grandmother. For
more than thirty years she has nurtured me, taught and admonished me,
so that I have come to maturity. If it were not for my grandmother, the
Grand Dowager Empress, your Minister certainly never would have
been able to become what he is today. Such has been her boundless
mercy to me, that in my whole life it would be hard to repay it. Now
that matters have come to this dangerous point, I have dared to cleanse
myself and choose a day, and respectfully lead all my ministers, calling
out and imploring to the Vast Arch of Heaven, humbly beseeching it to
consider with pity and sincerity, to look down in calm reflection, so that
this grievous illness may quickly pass away and she may live to a ripe old
age. If perhaps her Great Portion is exhausted, this Minister wishes that
his years may be reduced, some of his years transferred to add to the
long line of the Grand Dowager Empress. For this I prostrate myself
here below on the Altar, imploring your Vast Assistance, overcome with
prayerful beseeching.

The echoes of this ceremony were as long and as deep as those of the
winter solstice rite. All traditional cultures respected family hierarchy, but
nowhere was filial piety so central a social value as in China. Every classi-
cally educated Chinese would have recognized the echo of the story of the
great duke of Zhou, about 1000 B.C.E., when his nephew the king was mor-
tally ill, imploring Heaven to take him instead.

But the Kangxi emperor was Manchu, not Chinese. Although by 1688
he had acquired a quite respectable Chinese classical education, presented
himself as a patron of the Chinese tradition, and shown a genuine personal
interest in parts of the classical heritage, the first language of his court was
Manchu, and the text of his prayer was prepared in both Chinese and
Manchu. Also, the grand dowager empress was Mongol, a member of the
imperial Borjigit clan, descendants of the world-conquering Genghis Khan
and his brothers. She and her aunt had been married to Hung Taiji, the pre-
conquest second emperor of the Manchu ruling house, who had played a
key role in building its power and finding places in it for powerful Chinese
and Mongol allies before the beginning of the conquest of China. In those
distant days visits to the Manchu court had been occasions for vast gather-
ings at the imperial yellow tents set up far out on the grasslands, with much
feasting, hunting, and horse racing.

Even if the emperor had wanted to abandon his Manchu heritage and
become a purely Chinese emperor—and clearly he did not—he could not
have done so without alienating the Manchu grandees of his court and its
Mongol vassals. At the beginning of 1688 important Mongol princes were
on the brink of rebellion against Manchu suzerainty, and the prospect that
they might ally with the Russians was especially frightening to the Qing.
But filial piety was not just a Chinese ideal. As the emperor remarked to
his officials a few weeks later, “Who does not have family ties?” Manchus, Mongols, and Chinese might have somewhat different ideas of blood ties, but demonstrative love of an elder would appeal to all of them. In this particular case the Chinese could see the emperor setting a good example of a key traditional virtue, the Manchus would note his special reverence for a symbol of the glorious continuity of the Great Qing from preconquest days on, and the Mongols would appreciate that it was one of their own whom he was attending so anxiously.

There also was a more immediate political agenda. Since about 1679 the court had been dominated by officials allied with the Manchu grand secretary Mingju. In these years many officials seemed blatantly interested in making fortunes for themselves, there were frequent stories of bribery in connection with appointments, and the emperor sometimes found his selection of officials constrained by the choices Mingju and the others put before him. One possible counterweight to the power of Mingju was an increasing reliance on the Chinese scholar-officials who already were submitting memorials criticizing the corruption and mismanagement of Mingju’s associates; but their protests were rooted in a purely Chinese tradition with no place in it for Manchus and Mongols, and their criticisms frequently were idealistic and impractical, uncomfortably close to targeting the emperor himself. Moreover, the emperor did not like the scholars’ intricate politics of cultural attainment and personal connection. Another possible counterweight to Mingju was the power of Songgotu, Manchu chamberlain of the imperial bodyguard, uncle of the empress, an extremely capable man who had been an early supporter of the emperor in the 1660s but had been deprived of most of his power in 1679. Still, Songgotu’s relation to the empress gave him an especially close relation to the emperor’s thirteen-year-old heir apparent. It would not be wise to allow the court to be completely dominated by a grandee whose power reached so close to the throne, especially if the boy already was showing signs of the willfulness and instability that eventually led to his deposition and imprisonment. The emperor’s extraordinary demonstrations of anxiety over his grandmother’s illness would raise his own prestige in the eyes of all important elements in his court, increasing his own power rather than shift his dependence from one group to another. It would also give the heir apparent and anyone who might be tempted to support him against his father a lesson in filial piety.

This is not to say that the emperor’s anxiety and grief were playacting.

His father had died when he was seven, and his mother when he was nine, and his grandmother had taught him, nurtured him, and supported him when at the age of fifteen he decided to take power for himself and dismiss his regents. He loved her, and I think he really believed that he never could have become the capable and powerful ruler he was without her.

On January 12 and 14 the high ministers knelt outside the gate of the grand dowager empress’s palace and urged the emperor to take a little more rest. He refused. Court business had almost come to a halt; the emperor held only one work audience with his ministers in these weeks. The grand dowager empress died at about midnight, January 26–27. The emperor “beat his breast, stamped his feet, and wailed, calling out to Heaven and challenging Earth, crying ceaselessly, eating and drinking nothing.” By midmorning the grandees and ministers had assembled and urged him to moderate his grief; the classics counseled that mourning should not be carried to such excess as to harm the health of the mourner, and this was all the more important for the Son of Heaven, on whose person the minister and people depended for so much. The emperor replied by noting that ruling emperors had almost never observed the canonical twenty-seven months of mourning but had “converted months into days,” remaining in full mourning for only twenty-seven days. In his reading of history the emperor had found only one exception, in the late fifth century B.C. But because his father and mother had died when he was young, he could not even remember them clearly, and he never had had a chance fully to demonstrate his filial piety. He intended to stay in mourning for the full twenty-seven months.

The ministers immediately protested that this was impossible. There does not seem to have been any insuperable barrier to the emperor’s carrying out his political functions, answering memorials, making appointments, approving sentences, and so on, while he was in mourning, as long as he moderated his demonstrations of grief and preserved his health. The real difficulty was with his *ceremonial* responsibilities. Among the ceremonies the emperor normally performed in person were many “of good omen,” including the winter solstice ceremony and the regular rites of homage in the Imperial Ancestral Temple, which the emperor could not perform in mourning dress, which was of ill omen. If these ceremonies were not properly carried out, said the ministers, “then certainly the spirit of the grand dowager empress will not be at peace in Heaven.” The emperor continued his weeping and wailing night and day; his ministers saw that he was weak,
his face drawn. Moreover, they were expected to attend and assist him in
his ceaseless mourning. February 2 was the first day of the Chinese Lunar
New Year, ordinarily the year’s most festive day. But now there were no fes-
tivities, and the emperor only grudgingly gave himself and his officials a
day of rest from mourning before the coffin. Then the mourning began
again, and the argument about “converting months into days” continued.
“How can I eat my words?” asked the emperor at one point, but finally on
February 6 he had to give in and abandon his plans for twenty-seven
months of mourning.

On February 12 a huge procession accompanied the coffin of the grand
dowager empress out of the Forbidden City to a temporary resting place
in the northeast part of Beijing. In the deep cold the emperor followed the
coffin on foot, mourning bitterly, and in the crowds of officials who knelt
and mourned as the procession passed by, many feared that he was endan-
gering his health. He wanted to find temporary quarters near his grand-
mother’s coffin. His ministers persuaded him that dynastic precedent
required that he return to the Forbidden City; he agreed but decided to
spend his nights not in his usual comfortable quarters but in a tent set up
by one of the inner gates, perhaps a bit out of the north winds of the steppes
but still very cold.

The emperor normally had a working audience with his high ministers
almost every day, but since his long walk to the Round Hill Altar on January
3 he had had only one in a month and a half. On February 24 he went
back to work, turning at once to the intractable problems of flood control
along the lower Yellow River. Then on March 9 he pronounced a long di-
atribe against self-serving officials who formed cliques and lower officials
who kept quiet and did not speak out against faction and corruption. He
ended by dismissing Mingju and his closest associates from their offices.
The change was so sudden and came so soon after the emperor had
resumed political activity that it may reflect a realignment of political
forces at court. It seems likely that some important part of Mingju’s power
must have been based on a relation with the grand dowager empress or her
household, so that her death left him vulnerable. The emperor continued
to sort out the new political situation, dismissing some Mingju allies and
pardon ing others and placing Songgotu in charge of extremely important
negotiations with the Russians. The appointment conferred considerable
power on Songgotu and kept him thoroughly occupied and often far from

Beijing for the next year and a half, while the emperor continued to
strengthen his own position.

In May the emperor accompanied the coffin of the grand dowager
empress to the Eastern Tombs, about sixty miles east of Beijing; his minis-
ters called this an unprecedented demonstration of filial devotion. He was
away from the palace for twenty days. In June he went again, his ministers
protesting that he should not exert himself in the summer heat. In
November he went yet again, to accompany the tablets bearing all the
titles of the grand dowager empress. The Chinese monarchy was sustained
by a rhetoric of conscientious and paternal care for the welfare of the com-
mon people but was in fact so isolated from them that it comes as a bit of
a shock when a direct encounter with them is recorded in the Diaries of
Imperial Activities. As he left Beijing in November, the emperor observed
that there were corpses lying in the ditches. It is not stated whether they
were evidence of violence, disease, or famine. The great horror, to common
people thoroughly imbued with the patterns of filial conduct the emperor
was so ostentatiously following, was that the corpses lay without proper
burial. The emperor ordered that five ounces of silver from his private trea-
sury be given to the local headmen for the purchase of coffins and the
proper burial of the corpses. The headmen gave thanks: “The Sage Ruler
loves the common people, and his mercy extends even to corpses by the
roadside; truly this is a benevolent government not equalled even in
ancient times.” The people crowded to the road, calling out, chanting,
weeping as the emperor passed by.
CHAPTER II

THE JESUITS AND CHINA

On March 11, 1688, the people of the northwest quarter of Beijing lined the streets to watch a funeral procession that was far more modest than that which had carried the coffin of the grand dowager empress from the Forbidden City a month before but that had its own points of interest and singularity. It included a delegation of high officials of the imperial court headed by Tong Guowei, whose family members were said to "fill up half the court." Kangxi's mother had been a Tong. Now a daughter of Tong Guowei was one of the most important of the imperial consorts. A family of bicultural origins, the Tongs had made the most of their ability to function effectively both in Manchu and in Chinese society. They had gained power as agents of the court in the provinces during campaigns against the rebellious Three Feudatories in the 1670s.

While the officials watched, the great varnished coffin of the deceased was brought out into the street and placed under a silk canopy of white, the color of mourning. Sobbing mourners prostrated themselves before the coffin as the procession formed. First came a band of musicians, followed by a group carrying a great tablet bearing in gold characters the name and titles of the deceased: Nan Huaiyen, president of the Imperial Board of Astronomy. Then there were many flags and banners and a large cross, carried between two rows of solemn Chinese Christians, each holding a lighted candle and a handkerchief to wipe away tears. There followed a large picture of the Virgin Mary and the Infant Jesus holding the world in His hand. A portrait of the deceased accompanied an elegy composed by the emperor and written on a banner of yellow satin, both surrounded by a crowd of Chinese Christians and Jesuit missionaries, all in mourning dress. The coffin swayed along, borne by sixty men, accompanied by the eminent delegates of the court and a host of courtiers and officials on horseback. Fifty cavalymen, impressive in their silent good order, brought up the rear.

From the first missionaries down to our own day, any foreigner who wants to fit into Chinese society takes a Chinese-style name. It should reflect in some way the sound of his European name as well as something of the values and commitments he brings to China. Nan Huaiyen was Ferdi- nand Verbiest, a Flemish Jesuit. Nan reflected a syllable in his personal name. Huaiyen, "Cherish Benevolence," proclaimed his allegiance to the highest and most demanding of the Confucian virtues, requiring complete selflessness, compassion for others, and constant moral self-examination, surely a Confucian virtue that a Jesuit would have no qualms about espousing for himself and his Chinese converts.

Verbiest had been a most worthy successor to his Jesuit confreres Matteo Ricci and Johann Adam Schall von Bell. All three were expert in the very delicate art of using science, technology, and secular learning in the service of the Chinese imperial court to negotiate a space of tacit tolerance for Christian missionary activity in the empire. Ricci had made a profound impression on some eminent late Ming literati, and his renown, his learning, and the European clocks he presented had won him enough of a foothold at the late Ming court that on his death in 1610 the emperor had granted a plot of land for his burial, where several other Jesuits later were buried. It was toward that cemetery in Zhalia, outside the northwest gate of the city, that Verbiest's coffin was being carried. Schall had skillfully navigated the crosscurrents of the last years of the Ming, peasant rebellion, and Qing conquest, then had won the affection and favor of the young Shunzhi emperor, father of Kangxi and the first Qing ruler in Beijing, only to be imprisoned and almost executed in the last years of his life, after Shunzhi's death. Under Ming and Qing he had demonstrated the superiority of European computational and observational astronomy and had been placed in charge of the important work of preparing the imperial calendar for each New Year. He too was buried at Zhalia.

Born in 1623 in a village near Kortrijk in western Flanders, Verbiest had been educated by Jesuits except for one uncomfortable year in the Jansenist-dominated University at Leuven. After his Jesuit novitiate and
ordination he had made some efforts to go as a missionary to South America but then had made his decision for China in 1657. By 1660 he was in Beijing, never to leave it again except when he accompanied the Kangxi emperor on two expeditions beyond the Great Wall. Schall's death had been followed by several anxious years when three Jesuits in Beijing languished in house arrest while all other missionaries were confined in Canton. Then, on Christmas Day 1668, court eunuchs had abruptly summoned the Beijing Jesuits to answer the young emperor's questions about astronomy and the calendar. Stunned by the lively intelligence and curiosity and the political mastery of the sixteen-year-old Kangxi emperor, the Jesuits had demonstrated the superiority of their astronomy in repeated tests, so that their rivals and critics were dismissed and they were restored to favor and to responsibility at the Board of Astronomy.

The emperor's interest in the Jesuits, and in their learning and technical skills, was authentic and personal. Over the next twenty years the Jesuits often had ridden off at dawn to a suburban palace to give the emperor a lesson in astronomy, physics, or mathematics. The emperor had learned a bit of Western music and delighted in several elaborate fountains and mechanical toys the Jesuits made. They had supervised the casting of some small cannons for use against the rebellious feudatories in the south. They had made a few converts in the bicultural court society, endured the embarrassments of visits to their church by cynical courtiers and palace ladies, and done their best to answer the emperor's rather sharp questions about what seemed to him to be the contradictions of their teaching of the Holy Trinity. They had served as interpreters for Portuguese and Dutch embassies and now were involved in the negotiations with the Russians. The Jesuits found much of this secular activity distasteful and at odds with their missionary vocations, but their successes after 1668 had led to permission for other missionaries to reside in the provinces. Their good standing at the court did much to ensure that provincial officials would treat the missionaries well, and by 1688 a fitful discussion had begun that was to lead in 1692 to a formal imperial declaration that Roman Catholicism was not in conflict with good order and cultural orthodoxy and that Qing subjects might legally convert to it.

At the cemetery the missionaries read the prayers and performed the graveside ceremonies of the Church of Rome and then knelt while Tong Guowei read the imperial edict praising Verbiest's services to the Qing and expressing the emperor's sadness at his death. Father Thomas Pereira replied, expressing the Jesuits' grief and also their immense gratitude for the favor the emperor had shown them by sending the edict and such eminent delegates. The Jesuits later learned that the emperor had been pleased by these expressions of gratitude and had bestowed new honorary titles on Verbiest and a gift of silver toward the construction of a monument over his tomb and the engraving of his edict on a marble tablet.

Five of the Jesuits who knelt at Verbiest's tomb that March day in 1688 were newcomers, having reached Beijing just too late to receive Father Verbiest's blessing before he died on January 28, 1688. (The most probable reason for the six weeks' delay of Verbiest's funeral was that no such public event could take place while the emperor was in mourning for the grand dowager empress.) The five newcomers all were French, and their arrival just after the death of the last of the pathbreaking court Jesuits makes these first months of 1688 a transitional point; up to this time the Jesuit mission in China had drawn its priests from all Catholic Europe but had been under the control of the Portuguese crown, which claimed patronage over all Catholic missions in Asia under the post-Columbus treaties dividing the world between Spain and Portugal. The French priests, although a welcome infusion of talent and manpower, represented a direct challenge to that Portuguese monopoly. Their learning and literary abilities also were to give some new turns to old arguments about the appropriate Catholic attitudes toward the heritage and values of Chinese civilization.

The story of the Jesuit encounter with Chinese civilization from Ricci on illuminates some of the global intersections in the early modern world. The expanding net of European sea voyages led to encounters with previously unknown peoples, many of whom the Europeans fitted into well-established human types. They considered the peoples of the Americas and sub-Saharan Africa to be as savages, occasionally noble, but more often cannibals or otherwise subhuman. The Muslims of the Indian Ocean were nothing new, simply 'Moors,' followers of the epileptic impostor Muhammad, enemies of the Christian God. Hindus and Buddhists were worshipping of idols, often of the devil, and believers in a doctrine of transmigration of souls they probably had learned from the Pythagoreans. But the experience of China did not fit into categories derived from the European and Mediterranean past. China's bureaucracy of learned men, who claimed to draw their moral guidance not from God or gods but from
a hallowed past of sage rulers and teachers, and the good order, populousness, and wealth of the country had no precedent in earlier European experiences of alien peoples. Ricci, deeply impressed by the learning and moral seriousness of his intellectual Chinese friends, as they were with his, became convinced that large elements of the Chinese elite tradition were compatible with Christian belief or could be made so without fundamental change. Confucianism, in particular, could be treated as a secular or civil tradition in a synthesis analogous to Saint Paul’s linking of early Christianity with Hellenic culture or to the Renaissance mixes of Catholic fervor with adulation and study of the Greek and Roman heritage in which Ricci and his confreres were steeped.

Ricci’s accommodations to Chinese ceremony and terminology never were without opponents even within the Society of Jesus, but they were debated among the missionaries in a nuanced and fairly open-ended manner until Manila-based Dominicans and Franciscans entered the China missions in the 1630s and soon took their condemnations of the Ricci accommodations straight to the Roman Curia. The baffled Curia, with no independent sources of knowledge of China, agreed with whichever side had last presented its explanation of Chinese realities and issued contradictory directives that settled nothing. Conferences among the missionaries confined in Canton in the late 1660s had led only to tenuous new understandings, and even these were challenged when the gifted Dominican polemicist Domingo Fernández Navarrete slipped away from Canton, made his way to Europe, and mounted a skillful campaign against the Ricci accommodations in books and in lobbying at the Holy See. Verbiest sought to rebut Navarrete’s views. Nothing was settled in 1688, and the next fifteen years saw an eruption of “Rites Controversy” polemics in Europe. A papal legation sent to Beijing to reassert papal control over the practices of missionaries and converts in China outraged Kangxi and shattered the fragile goodwill that Verbiest and his confreres had built up.

In the 1680s, however, despite the jurisdictional confusion and the simmering quarrels over the Ricci accommodations, China seemed to hold much promise for the growth of Catholic missions. Promoters of a French role in the missions soon made plans to send a party of French Jesuits to China. These missionaries were to be completely independent. To improve their welcome in Beijing, they were to be chosen for their ability in mathematics, astronomy, and related fields. Moreover, in a wonderfully baroque use of the passion of the age for facts and maps, their refusal to submit to other church authorities was to be explained on the grounds that they were going not as missionaries but as scientific observers, collecting geographical and astronomical data for the Academy of Sciences.

Six Jesuits sailed from Brest early in 1685 on the ships that carried the Siamese ambassadors, the sieur de Chaumont, and the abbot of Choisy to Ayuthaya. In 1687 five of them went on to China on a Chinese junk, arriving at Ningbo in July. Kangxi, delighted to learn of the arrival of Jesuits who knew mathematics and astronomy and brought scientific books and instruments, summoned them to the capital. Thus it was that the five French newcomers to Beijing were among the prominent mourners at Verbiest’s funeral. For one of them, Jean-François Gerbillon, his mission to collect geographical information was about to expand beyond his wildest imaginings. A high-ranking delegation, led by the redoubtable Songgotu and by the emperor’s uncle Tong Guogang, was about to set out to attempt to meet the Russian envoys who had spent the previous winter at Scelsingk. The Russians now were overcoming the linguistic barriers that had inhibited earlier communications with the Qing court by regularly bringing with their envoys a Polish secretary or two who would translate each communication into Latin, to be translated into Chinese and Manchu by the Jesuits in Beijing. Thus it was thought necessary that two Jesuits should accompany the Qing envoys. One would be Thomas Pereira, who had been in Beijing for fifteen years and had won special favor by teaching the emperor Western music. Gerbillon would be the other.

Early on the morning of May 30, 1688, Gerbillon, who had been in China for less than a year and in Beijing for four months, joined in an imposing procession of seventy or eighty officers and about a thousand cavalymen that set out from the capital to the north, seen off by the emperor’s “eldest son.” This probably was the thirteen-year-old heir apparent, whose instabilities of character and morality may already have contributed to the emperor’s emotional displays of filial piety before and after the death of the grand dowager empress.

For every day of his four-month journey through the steppes, Gerbillon, scientific investigator dispatched by the Academy of Sciences, as much devoted to the augmentation of knowledge through the careful observation of particulars as were Rumphius and others whom we shall meet later in this book—Hans Sloane, Claude Perrault, Locke, Leibniz—notes down the distance and direction of the day’s progress, the nature of the country, its animals, plants, and people. In the first days he described the great
fortresses that guarded the valleys to the north of Beijing and the immense wall that linked them, which "descends to the precipices, and climbs to the top of inaccessible rocks." Impressed by the feats of construction, he thought the results added little to the security provided by the mountains themselves and found many points on it meagerly garrisoned.

On June 2 the expedition reached the city of Baotou. "This city has two walls, entirely of brick. The land around it is the best and most fruitful we saw in all this valley, the grains and other crops are very fine, although the land is a little dry. The Chinese have discovered the secret of watering their fields by making the water of springs in the vicinity run through canals which they have dug; they draw the water from these canals manually." At the next town a rich merchant gave a banquet for Tong Guogang, and Gerbillon was told that even Uzbek and Persian merchants came there. This zone was thoroughly controlled by the Qing. Local officers came to pay their respects to Tong Guogang and Songgotu. By imperial command local people regularly brought cattle and sheep to feed the expedition.

On June 7 Gerbillon saw his first Mongol camp and wrote down a full description of the construction of a yurt and a more cursory description of the apparent poverty and uncouthness of the people. He predictably had no use for the lamas—senior monks in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, often believed to be reincarnations of a godlike figure or holy teacher—toward whom "the Mongols display a veneration beyond all expression." He was convinced that the Qing court's cordial treatment of them was solely for the sake of Mongol politics and asserted that in Beijing they quickly became accustomed to wearing fine clothes and bought the prettiest women slaves "on the pretext of marrying them to their slaves." From June 15 to 17 the party camped near Huhhot, then already a major Mongol center and today the capital of China's Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region. Gerbillon accompanied Tong Guogang and Songgotu to the principal Lamaist temple, and was appalled by their reverence toward the young man who was venerated as a reincarnated Bodhisattva. They prostrated themselves before "the pretended god," who placed his hands on the head of each and had each touch his prayer beads. The "Living Buddha" wore a long robe of fine yellow satin with a multicolored border, not unlike the vestments of a Catholic priest, which completely covered his body; when he reached out for a cup of tea, Gerbillon could see that underneath the robe his arms were bare and he had only a plain red and yellow monastic robe thrown over his shoulders. The meal that followed included some

decent rice and soup, but also some disgusting dried fruits, oily cakes, and half-cooked chunks of meat. They toured the temple, parts of which seemed clean and well decorated, and saw a child also venerated as a Living Buddha.

Gerbillon was regularly measuring the height of the sun and calculating his altitude. He commented frequently on how cold it was at night and how hot in the middle of the day. Leaving Huhhot, the party struck nearly straight north, hoping to make contact with the khan of the Khalkhas. The scattered trees and cultivated fields that had been seen from time to time on the road to Huhhot disappeared. There were many rabbits, antelope, wild goats, pheasants, and wild geese, and the soldiers hunted every day. Gerbillon was delighted to be served a delicate pheasant egg omelet. The party split up to follow three separate routes. Now they saw a few Khalkha camps, which seemed even more impoverished than those of the Mongols farther south. Finding enough water for the expedition's hundreds of horses and camels was a daily worry.

On July 8 the party came across a miserable camp of twenty-five to thirty Khalkha yurts. Some of the people had come from farther north, fleeing the invading forces of Galdan of the Dzungars. Even the senior lama, brother of the Khalkha khan, was said to be fleeing to the south. The next day the column turned back south to rejoin the other two so that the commanders could consult about this new situation. By July 22 they had rejoined Songgotu and his column and had received orders from the emperor that they were to turn back to Beijing and write to the Russian ambassador at Selenginsk to make new arrangements for a meeting. This was a great relief; the weather was very hot, the horses were growing tired and thin, and the unsettled conditions to the north added immensely to the risks of an attempt to reach Selenginsk that summer.

As the party made its way back toward Beijing, they learned that orders had gone out to all the Mongol vassals of the Qing to mobilize their forces against the Dzungars. Some of them also were to join the annual imperial hunt, north of the Gubei Pass, which this year would have even more than usual the air of a military exercise. On August 12 Gerbillon witnessed one of the more low-key days of the hunt, in which a double circle of soldiers and servants gradually closed in while frantic hares tried to find a way out, even trying to run between the men's legs; 157 hares were killed in less than three hours. On August 29 he was able to examine and describe a wolf and some antelope that had been killed on the hunt. The route now led
through much better country, then a difficult gorge, and there were apricots and sour wild cherries to be picked along the way. On September 27 they caught up with the imperial hunting camp. Gerbillon was deeply impressed by its orderly layout, with the guards and high-ranking officers’ tents nearest that of the emperor, which did not seem a great deal larger or more splendid than the others but had a gold ornament on its highest point. The high officials and the Jesuits went out to wait beside the road and greet the emperor as he returned from the hunt after dark; His Majesty greeted them courteously, remarking that they must be very tired.

The party now continued on its way toward the capital. The mountain scenery was pleasant and less daunting than farther north, and there were even some wild grapes and wild pears near the road. The road was much more commodious because this was a route the emperor often took on his hunts. The party returned to Beijing on October 8; the emperor arrived on the eleventh. On December 9 the Jesuits gathered at the tombs of Ricci, Schall, and Verbiest for a further ceremony ordered by the emperor, at which his mourning edict was read aloud in Manchu.

The adventure was wonderful, the glimpses of the splendor of the imperial court fascinating, the information collected would delight the Academy of Sciences, but Pereira and Gerbillon had had only one or two occasions when they managed a bit of discussion of religion with the great men in charge of the expedition and had had to grit their teeth as they saw them groveling before a Living Buddha. The Jesuits’ purpose in leaving behind their families and the comforts of their native lands and making such long and dangerous voyages was to save souls. The favor of the imperial court was essential to the safety and continuity of the mission enterprise, but the fruits seemed to come so slowly. Beijing court society had produced a few distinguished converts, including some Manchus of the imperial clan and some Tong relatives. It was said that there were some eight thousand converts in the Shanghai area, which had been the home of Ricci’s first significant convert. Other centers of Catholic growth were much smaller but could be extremely robust; the area around Fuan in Fujian Province, ministered to by Dominicans from Manila, had many zealous converts, and they and their descendants were to remain steadfast through many troubles in the eighteenth century. But there were never enough missionaries, and they were too conspicuously foreign, too vulnerable to suspicion of foreign influence even when official policy was benign, too likely to die before their language learning and acculturation reached a level where they could interact with people effectively. Missionaries shook their heads at their converts’ difficulties in learning Latin, and many of them were convinced that the Chinese character simply was not suited to the rigors of priestly life, but slowly the missionaries came around to the idea of a native priesthood.

Thus it was that on August 1, 1688, three Chinese—Liu Wende, Wan Qiyuan, and Wu Li—kneeled before Bishop Gregorio Luo Wenzao in a church in Macao and were ordained priests in the Society of Jesus. Luo himself was a singular figure, educated and ordained by the Manila Dominicans, going along somewhat hesitantly with their opposition to the Riccian accommodations to Chinese tradition. Wan had been received into the society at Hangzhou, where there had been a solid Christian community since late Ming times. Liu had come into the orbit of the missionaries as an official in the Board of Astronomy in Beijing and used the Western name Blaise Verbiest. Wu Li was the kind of convert the Jesuits dreamed about, a poet and painter admired in the best circles of creativity and connoisseurship, a participant in the moral and intellectual ferment of the early Qing who had found in Christianity, as the Jesuits had argued since Ricci’s time, the supplement to and completion of his Confucian quest.

Born in 1632, Wu Li was too young to have taken an examination degree under the Ming before 1644, so he was not bound by any formal ties of obligation to the old dynasty. But opportunities for advancement through the examinations were limited in the early Qing, and in any case his real interests were in painting and poetry, for which by the 1650s he was associating with some of the most famous masters in the empire. In the 1670s Wu Li joined in intellectual and literary circles that were especially interested in Song Dynasty poetry, with its vivid observations of mundane realities, and in poems and plays with historical themes, which had special resonances to men who had lived through the dramas of the Ming-Qing transition. Wu also associated with men who sought to give concrete expression to Confucian values through local meetings for moral exhortation and the study of classical texts. But for some the gap between utopian dreams of social and cosmic harmony and the present dusty realities was too wide, the conventional stories of the rise and fall of dynasties too full of delusion and chicanery. Such men needed a “single lord” to follow and worship, a new way of understanding the origins and nature of the world.
Most participants in these quests turned from Confucianism to Buddhism, or vice versa, or tried to revive some strand of Chinese popular religion and hero worship. Wu Li became, in 1679, one of the handful who made the astonishing leap to commitment to an obviously foreign faith. He at first planned to accompany Philippe Couplet, S.J., to Europe but then remained in Macao, becoming a novice in the Society of Jesus in 1682. A series of his poems from these years are vivid evidence for his skills as an observer and describer: the little white houses of the slave quarters, the Chinese fishermen coming in at night, the slaves singing and dancing to a guitar at a church festival, Wu and his European confreres struggling to converse with each other and sometimes having to write things out in their different scripts. He also expressed his growing understanding of his Christian faith in poetry. One poem begins as a conventional Chinese expression of sympathy for the hard life of a fisherman, then notes that lately Catholicism has come to his city, and some friends of the fisherman’s have changed their job: “They now are fishers of men.” It ends with a wry naturalistic touch, worthy of the best Song poets, as the fisherman realizes that converts keeping the fasts of the church will be better customers for his fish.

The Jesuits had made some risky accommodations with Chinese culture, and some of their critics were convinced that Chinese Christians under Jesuit tutelage were crypto-Christians at best, with no sense of the terrifying drama of the death and resurrection of the Son of God and the salvation He offered to each sinner. Such accusations cannot survive a brief acquaintance with Wu Li’s Christian poems:

By nature I have always felt quite close to the Way;
When done with chanting my new poems, I always concentrate my spirit.
Prior to death, who believes in the joy of the land of Heaven?
After the end, then comes amazement at the truth of the fires of hell!
The achievements and fame of this ephemeral world: footprints of gooses on snow;
This body, this shell in a lifetime of toil: dust beneath horses’ hoofs.
And what is more, the flowing of time presses men so fast:
Let us plan carefully about the ford that leads to the true source.

And perhaps it was in connection with his ordination on August 1, 1688, and his own first mass that he wrote:

Again he washes his hands, and then turns around.
He prays that he and all assembled sinners may be washed clean with not an iota left;
only then may they not betray Jesus’ compassion.
Why does he make the sign of the Cross over and over again?
The holy death took place nailed thereon.

The Jesuits risked all to change China. Many Chinese were respectful, and some converted. Chinese specialists in computational astronomy recognized and adopted the Jesuits’ superior techniques. Many Chinese painters, although not the most ambitious and culturally pretentious ones, tried to learn something of Western techniques of shading and perspective. But the religious and cultural impact of the missionaries’ message remained limited and local; Wu Li’s conversion was not the beginning of a great trend. Ricci had stumbled on a time of exceptional cultural openness and deep questioning of received modes of thought, but by 1688 most Chinese intellectuals had resolved their tensions in ways that had nothing to do with a foreign religion. China’s culture was changing, self-critical, but it had no unquenchable thirst for novelty, no principled quarrel of ancients and moderns, before about 1900. A thirst for new facts and new places was not absent, but it was not as widespread and obsessive as in the culture of seventeenth-century Europe. Whereas China’s vast publishing industry rarely put out anything that offered a connected picture of the distant lands from which the traders and missionaries came, in 1688 Europe, and especially France, there was a wave of publishing about China that crested about 1700 and continued far into the eighteenth century. The anti-Christian polemics of Voltaire and other masters of the Enlightenment ironically owed much to the accounts of Chinese ways in the writings of the Jesuits.

In the middle of 1687 the learned world of Europe gained new access to the heart of the Confucian tradition with the publication in Paris of Confluentes Sinarum Philosophus, a splendid folio volume of more than five hundred pages. In 1688 a long synopsis in the Journal des Scavans and reviews in the Bibliothèque Universelle et Historique and in the Acta Eruditorum and a French synopsis by Jean de la Brune, La Morale de Confucius, Philosophe de la Chine, spread knowledge of this great work in the European intellec-
tual world. This magnificent book contained full translations of three of the "Four Books," the texts at the heart of Neo-Confucian intellectual life that claimed to present the teachings of the Master himself and his immediate disciples. It also contained a brief life of Confucius. A chronological summary of more than three thousand years of the Chinese monarchy took up more than one hundred pages. The dedication of Confucius Sinarum Philosophus to Louis XIV was followed by a Preliminary Declaration of more than one hundred pages, which claimed that this work was intended not "for the amusement and curiosity of those who live in Europe" but for the use of missionaries. This was a bit disingenuous; the splendid book was meant to publicize and glorify the Jesuit mission enterprise in the courts and elite circles of Europe and to justify its approach to China. But it was true that the translations the book contained were the product of about eighty years of collective effort, as one generation of missionaries struggled to understand the texts that were so central to the lives and convictions of the educated Chinese whom they were seeking to attract to Christianity and then used the results of their efforts to teach newly arrived missionaries, who later might try their hands at improving the translations.

The Preliminary Declaration was an important statement of the approach to the Confucian heritage the Jesuits had been developing ever since Ricci's time. It argued that there were passages in the classical texts in which Heaven seemed to have consciousness, to care for mankind, and to infuse in man a moral conscience. There was a smaller number of references to the Lord on High, which seemed even more like intimations of the One God. But the Song Dynasty Neo-Confucian commentators, systematizing an organic naturalism that also was powerful in Chinese culture since early times, had insisted that the Lord on High was simply a synonym for Heaven, and Heaven was just a way of referring to the patterned order of a cosmos that ran itself and did not need a transcendent deity as Established order or object of worship. Ricci, encouraged by critics of Song thought in late Ming times, had emphasized the passages with glimmerings of an ancient knowledge of God. He also argued that the Song commentators had systematically suppressed evidence that the ancient Chinese, down to somewhat after the time of Confucius, had known and worshiped the True God. The greatest cause of the loss of that ancient knowledge, he said, was the coming of Buddhism in the first century CE. The teaching he brought would remove that Buddhist taint, already widely criticized among Confucian intellectuals, and would supplement Confucian earnestness in self-cultivation and moral action with knowledge and worship of the True God.

This risky formula, which cast foreigners as explainers to a sophisticated elite of the real meaning of its classical texts, offended some Chinese intellectuals, intrigued some and led small numbers to the great leap of conversion. In the Preliminary Declaration it was reflected in descriptions of the "pure simplicity of the golden age," in which the sage emperors worshiped the Lord on High or an active, beneficent Heaven, and in demonstrations of gratuitous distortions of these passages by the "Modern Interpreters"—that is, the Song commentators. The translations themselves occasionally may be seen giving a twist toward anticipation of Christian ideas. For example, the phrase "bright virtue" appears several times, referring to a deep potential for virtuous action that can be "brightened" or developed. But in one passage the Jesuits translate it as "rational nature," and in another they build on assertions that this virtue is received from Heaven to find in it intimations of the Christian concept of the immortal soul. The result is an obscuring of the uniquely Chinese sense of the moral potential of man rooted in his organic relations to the world around him. In its place there is a concept of "rational nature" so narrowly based in abstract discussions of the soul and the rational nature of man that it could be easily cut away from its moorings in the Christian drama of sacrifice and redemption and used to support Enlightenment rejections of Christian orthodoxy.

In early reports on China around 1600 European readers had gotten glimpses of Chinese wisdom and a strong impression of the prosperity, populousness, and good government of the empire, but not a concrete sense of people and events. That changed abruptly after the collapse of the Ming, as accounts of the "Tatar Conquest" by missionary eyewitnesses began appearing. First impressions of a collapse of a civilization comparable to the fall of the Roman Empire soon yielded to an understanding that despite the many brutalities of the conquerors and the tragedies of heroic but vain Ming resistance, a new and effective order was rapidly emerging. Most of this writing took the form of narratives that focused on rulers and other individual actors. Speeches and actions might be melodramatic, but they were not exotic; these were actors in a kind of drama all too familiar in seventeenth-century Europe. Some of the reports depicted the Manchus as brave warriors imposing order where the "effete Chinese" could not, a vision that owed as much to European views of leadership and virtue in
their own society as to the realities of early Qing China or Chinese ideals of scholar-official rule. The History of the Two Tartar Conquerors of China by Pierre Joseph d’Oriëns, S.J., published in French in 1688, was an excellent representative of this genre, particularly rich in its portrayal of the Qing court as seen by the Jesuits. It included notes drawn from two imperial expeditions beyond the wall when Ferdinand Verbiest had followed the emperor, who showed the foreign priest much favor and studied the constellations with him.

A much more distinctive contribution to European knowledge of China was made by the New History of China by Gabriel de Magalhaens, published in 1688 in both French and English translations; the Portuguese original text has never been found. Magalhaens probably finished his book about 1675, when he was in his sixties and had been in China for thirty-five years. He had taught in the Jesuit establishments at Goa and at Macao before his arrival in 1640 at the lovely and cultured city of Hangzhou beside its famous West Lake. But soon he was sent off to aid Luigi Buglio in Sichuan, making the long and daunting trip up the Yangtze just in time to join Buglio in harrowing adventures as captives first of a monstrous rebel and then of the suspicious Manchu conquerors. Once settled in Beijing in 1648, Magalhaens stayed there until his death in 1677 except for one trip to Macao. He kept his distance from the court favor seeking of Schall and Verbiest.

Magalhaens’s book contains good examples of the expositions of Chinese history and philosophy found in most Jesuit books, but it is particularly noteworthy for its sense of movement through the vast empire and its capital and its engagement with their ambiguities. The author gives an excellent description, probably drawing on his observations on his trip to Macao and back, of the Grand Canal and its sluice gates, where great grain barges were winched up to a higher level of the canal by hundreds of men straining at huge capstans. His section on the capital is especially notable for its account of the imperial palaces. He takes his reader with him on a walk, starting well to the south of the gate we now call Tiananmen, describing what is seen as one emerges from each grand gate into each new courtyard. People told him it had been much more splendid under the late Ming, “yet there is that in it still which serves to fill the imagination, and display the grandeur of the empire.” He describes fully the “ordinary audience” ceremony, at which capital officials gathered to prostrate themselves in the greatest of the palace courts before the emperor, far away in the shadows of his throne hall. If we count the courtyards he and his reader traverse on their imaginary walk up the central axis of the palaces, he has reached fifteen by the time he emerges from the north gate of the palace compound, crosses a wide avenue, and passes through another triple gate into a vast open area that is left unpaved. It adjoins stables for some of the emperor’s horses and is watered to keep the dust down when the emperor is about to go riding. Beyond the next gate is a fine park with five artificial hills built up out of the earth removed to make the lakes to the west of the palaces; this park and these hills still are to be seen in Beijing. They “are covered with trees to the very top, planted with an exactness of symmetry, every one with a round or square pedestal, wherein several holes are cut for the rabbits to burrow and hares to sit in, of which those little hills are very full. The park also has many deer, goats, and birds, and the emperor often comes there to relax and watch them.” Louis XIV, lord of Versailles, was not much for reading, but I should like to think that somehow he read or heard a bit of these descriptions and was envious.

The lord of Versailles also would have understood the most startling aspect of Magalhaens’s description of the Chinese politics of his time.

To be a viceroy, or governor of a province, before a man can have his commission sealed, will cost him twenty, thirty, forty, and sometimes three-score, sometimes seventy thousand crowns [ounces of silver]. And yet so far is the king [emperor] from receiving a farthing of this money that he knows nothing of the abuse. Only the grand ministers of the empire, the colons or counsellors of state, and the six supreme tribunals of the court are they that privately sell all offices and employments to the viceroys and great mandarins of the provinces. On the other side, they to satisfy their avarice and reimburse themselves of the money laid out for their preferments, extort presents from the presidents of territories and cities, who repay themselves upon the governors of towns and boroughs, and they, or rather all together, make themselves whole again, and replenish their purses at the expense of the miserable people. So that it is a common proverb in China that the king unwittingly lets loose so many hangmen, murderers, hungry dogs and wolves to ruin and devour the poor people, when he creates new mandarins to govern them. In short there is not an viceroy, visitor of a province, or any such
like office, who at the end of three years of his being employed, does not return with six or seven hundred thousand and sometimes a million of crowns.

The Kangxi emperor certainly was very much aware that men sought office in order to get rich. He must have known a good deal about the ways those seeking appointments sought favor in the capital. Magalhaens’s picture of a constant and systematic sale of offices gets only scattered support from Chinese sources from the time, but he spent a great deal of time listening to people of all conditions in the capital. His own experiences of China, perhaps his own misgivings about his confreres’ enthusiastic pursuit of court favor, may have led him to believe the worst about the society around him. If Wu Li proves that some Jesuit converts were real Christians, Magalhaens proves that the fathers themselves could be respectful of Chinese culture and awed by the majesty of the court without becoming starry-eyed Sinophiles. Neither side of this great encounter feared ambiguity or complexity. That is why we continue to learn so much from it about the early modern world.

In the first days of the eleventh month of the first year of Genroku—late November 1688—people walking in the clean and orderly streets of the Japanese city of Kanazawa occasionally were accosted by beggars dressed as lepers. Noticing that the beggars did not in fact have the missing fingers, ears, and noses of lepers and remembering what time of year it was, the stroller might give the beggar some money and receive in return a charm that would ward off the fearful disease.

The Japanese cycle of the year offered up great events for everyone: New Year, the Girls’ Festival, the Boys’ Festival, the summer Star Festival, and the Festival in Honor of Ancestors. In a society carefully and thoroughly divided into occupational and status groups, it was fitting that many of these groups also had their own separate festivals. The smiths had theirs on the eighth of the tenth month, and the merchants held theirs twelve days later, decorating their shops, offering discounts, giving small presents to regular customers. Beggars were another status group, with their own headmen recognized by the government; in 1688 they were upset by the number of people begging who were not part of their recognized groups. In fact, there were two separate groups of recognized beggars, and the sham lepers of the beggars’ festival were not from the main group but from a smaller, separate group, tenaciously independent, with their own living area behind the Shinmei shrine, called the monayoshi, “beggars who bring good fortune.” In addition to begging they produced sandals and


