

Modern Macao — the Jesuit Gate Into China

Macao (Aomen), conquered in 1557 by the Portuguese, was the oldest European trade and missionary centre in China (Mote, Twitchett, 1988, 334). The circumstances which led to the occupation of the harbour by traders are not known very well. One version says that the European ship had had crushed near the island's coast during a storm and that the sailors were permitted to stay in Macao and repair their sails. But there is still another story about the sailors who helped the government of Guangdong to combat Japanese pirates and who obtained permission to lease out the harbour (Kajdański, 2005, 143). The contacts between the Chinese administration and the Portuguese were quite successful. In 1585 the minister of treasury — Chang Chü-cheng launched fiscal reforms, which soon revived the central government and also the economical situation in Macao (Mote, Twitchett, 1988, 346). In the same year the city, thanks to its large and steady population, was honoured by the creation of the city council. Macao had proper contacts with Kwangtung, however there occurred conflicts between the Fukien's bureaucracy and merchants from Manila as well as between the Dutch and Chinese merchants which lowered the level of trade in the Portuguese harbour. Therefore, Macao fell into dependence on the Chinese officials who were responsible for the city's food supply (Ibid., 346-347). In the early seventeenth century (after the Dutch had attacked the island) the Portuguese gained from the Chinese authorities a permission to fortify their city. This act significantly strengthened their position on the island (Kajdański, 2005, 144).

In Macao the Jesuit missionaries set up their missionary centre from which they could supervise their activity in South-East and East Asia (Ibid., 144). In 1562 they organized the first outpost (Grzebień, 1999, 40), and one year later there were eight Jesuits on the island (Dunne, 1962, 15). In the year 1576 there was founded the bishopric on the island, which held the patronage over Jesuits' districts in China, Japan and its islands (Kajdański, 2005, 144). In 1582 Jesuit Alfonso Sanches came from Manila to Macao and informed other friars that the Spanish king — Philip II — had received the Portuguese crown. The Portuguese from the island were disappointed with this news, but it did not cause disorder there. The Portuguese from Macao used their own law which was contrary to the Chinese businesses. The Chinese governor Ch'en-Jui would often summon the agents of the Portuguese city to remind them

about the Chinese law and customs to be obeyed. The European merchants, who wanted to make their contacts with the Chinese administration more plausible, often gave gifts and bribes to the Chinese officials (Mote, Twitchett, 1988, 346). Probably it was the reason why Macao's governor was treated by Kwangtung's government as a foreigners' ally and patron.

Since the sixteenth century there has been the treatment between the Holy See and the Portuguese king which left whole Asian trade in the hands of the Portuguese. In return, the Portuguese king had to protect the developing Christian activity in the area. Thereupon this treatment the Jesuits constructed new churches in Macao, missionary residences and Jesuit colleges in which friars were studying Chinese culture, customs and language (Kajdański, 2005, 144-145). The highest religious power was in Jesuit hands. They had great merits in diplomatic contacts with Chinese. Moreover, thanks to their wealth, they became the important investor in the island's foreign trade (Mote, Twitchett, 1988, 347). European women were not allowed to live on the island. Also non-catholic settlement was prohibited and only Portuguese ships were allowed to sail into the local harbour (Kajdański, 2005, 144-145).

Owing to a fortunate economic situation the city was growing quickly and in the seventeenth century there were many buildings erected in a Portuguese colonial fashion, which changed an architectural view of the city. In the centre of the city there were situated dozen of strongholds whose task was to defend the city against the Dutch raids, as well as catholic churches, administration buildings and a representative edifice of the senate (Ibid., 140). Outside the centre there were numerous Portuguese houses — from luxurious residences with gardens to tenement houses. Traditional Chinese houses were left in small number only in suburbs. The evidently Chinese elements, which survived in Macao, were Buddhist temples (Ibid., 140).

For the Chinese, the city appeared to be European. Without fail such a feeling was induced by strange (colonial, Renaissance) architecture, religious processions, sounds produced by church bells and the exotic appearance of the European people. For natives such changes meant that they were no longer in China (Mote, Twitchett, 1988, 347).

In October 1577 an Italian Jesuit — visitor of East India, Japan and China — Alessandro Valignano, came to Macao (Dunne, 1962, 17). The Jesuit thought about changing the relations with Chinese living in the city. He wrote about them that they were “great and worthy people” and “the only possible way to penetration will be utterly different from that which has been adopted up to now” (Ibid., 17). During his first visit A. Valignano quickly noticed that the local Jesuits gave up the idea of Christianization and conveniently settled in

Macao as chaplains of the Portuguese society (Ross, 1994, 118). The Jesuit realized that in order to instil Christian faith in China, friars would have to forget about the idea of europocentrism and change it into the idea of cultural adaptation (Dunne, 1962, 18). His conceptions met with a cold reception in Macao. Local friars firmly emphasized the way of Christianization, which was rejected by A. Valignano. The Chinese who were converted to Christianity received new Portuguese names and were forced to wear European clothes and obey Portuguese customs (Ibid., 19).

In such a situation A. Valignano decided to bring to the harbour new Jesuits who would be ready to complete his plans. Michael Ruggieri was the first Jesuit who turned his new theory into practice. He arrived in Macao in 1580 with a task to learn the Chinese language — both in speaking and writing (Ibid., 18). When M. Ruggieri found the teacher and started the Chinese study, he was disturbed by other friars from the city. They often told him that he should fulfill his priestly duties in the way that was practiced in Macao and treated his Chinese education as useless. They did not believe that he would manage to reach central China (e.g. Peking). Despite the depressing atmosphere and low language abilities, M. Ruggieri continued his Chinese study (Ross, 1994, 119). The Jesuit could also skillfully use Portuguese merchants whose regular visits in Canton gave him opportunity to make some new contacts with Chinese administration. He went to Canton (from Macao) twice — in 1580 and in 1581. Both times M. Ruggieri took special care on every customary formalities during his contacts with Chinese officials (Ibid., 120). During his last visit he was praised by the Canton's officials (contrary to other Europeans) for a conduct proper to Chinese etiquette. He won recognition particularly for using *kou tou* (Ibid., 119). (*Kou tou* was a kind of a bow, which should be performed before the emperor or high-rank officials. The subject was to hit the floor three times using his forehead at the moment when the emperor or an official was entering the audience hall). In the sixteenth century most of the Europeans thought that such behaviour was below their dignity (Ibid., 120).

In Macao the friars frowned on M. Ruggieri's acts. The local Jesuits tried at all costs to make him resign from his efforts to make closer contacts with the Chinese officials. They explained to him that it was a waste of time and as it had given no effect, they tempted him with a possibility of taking the ministerial office in Jesuit Order. However, M. Ruggieri had realized that his agreement to such proposition would mean that he would have to stay in Macao and would not be able to travel through China anymore, therefore he rejected the offer, despite the friars' insinuations. When pressure to reduce his activity was growing, M. Ruggieri

asked for help A. Valignano. Unfortunately, even his interventions did not have any positive result (Dunne, 1962, 18).

The relations between Macao and the Canton's officials were temporarily cooled when in 1582 a group of Spanish Jesuits, led by Alonso Sanches, came to the island. The Chinese could only accept Europeans from Macao, but on no conditions from any other place. A. Sanches and his friars, due to their uncompromising europocentric attitude, made a very bad impression on the viceroy of Kiangxi and Kwangtung — Ch'en Jui (Ibid., 20). After their visit the viceroy sent a letter to a Macao bishop — Leonard de Sec, summoning him to appear before him to talk about prevention against such uninvited visits. The message from Canton troubled Jesuits. In order to appease situation, they decided to send to Canton M. Ruggieri and captain major from Macao — Aires Gonzales de Mendosa, who were popular among Chinese administrators. Their task was to efface disadvantageous impression, which A. Sanches and his friars had left after themselves, and to try to gain more autonomy for Macao (Ibid., 20). Once again, thanks to his diplomatic abilities, M. Ruggieri managed to conciliate the viceroy. Ch'en Jui promised him also that he would consider the plea for Macao's autonomy. The impression which was made by M. Ruggieri in Canton was so good that he unexpectedly received a proposition from high-rank officials, who offered him a place in the quarter reserved for foreigner outposts, to build there a chapel. It was a great success because it was the first time ever when anyone had gained permission to build a Christian edifice outside Macao (Ross, 1994, 121). The newly built chapel became the Christian centre in Canton. In fact — officials-literati (shenshi) were not visiting this place to preach there, but M. Ruggieri was able to use their presence in the chapel to get them interested in Christian faith and the people from the West (Ibid., 121).

In May 1582 M. Ruggieri was allowed to talk to Kou Ying-p'ing — the viceroy of two districts — Guandong and Yuangxi. During this visit he won the Chinese official's support and gained permission to set up a Jesuit residence in Zhaoqing. In the winter of 1582 M. Ruggieri with another Jesuit — Francesco Pasio — came to Zhaoqing, where with the aid of local officials, he constructed a Jesuit residence (Dunne, 1962, 21). In order to function in the Chinese society the Jesuits had to identify with one of the social groups, therefore they chose the social group which was connected with religion — the Buddhist monks. As a symbol of a new life and identification with the chosen group, the missionaries began from changing their clothes — they were to wear Buddhist robes, shave their hairs and beards. Most of the Chinese treated the transformed Jesuits as a fraction of Buddhists (Ross, 1994, 121).

The incident caused by a group of five Franciscans, who illegally came from Manila to Fukien, determined the government of Kwangtung to expel M. Ruggieri and F. Pasio from Zhaoqing and send them back to Macao (Dunne, 1962, 20). After six months the situation calmed down and M. Ruggieri, thanks to his friends from Zhaoqing, was able to return to the city. This time, due to F. Pasio's departure to Japan, he was accompanied by young and capable Jesuit Matteo Ricci. M. Ricci had come to Macao on A. Valignano's order, to learn Chinese language and to see Chinese customs. The young Jesuit, during his stay in Zhaoqing, had to prepare an exhaustive report about China. He had to describe people, customs, institutions and government (Ross, 1994, 122).

Earlier, in his letter from 13th February 1583 which was addressed to his Roman rhetoric teacher — Martin Ferrari — M. Ricci wrote about his observations concerning the Chinese language: "I have recently given myself to the study of the Chinese language and I promise you that it is something quite different from either Greek or German (...) there are many words that can signify more than a thousand things, and at times the only difference between one word and another is the way you pitch them high or low in four different tones. (...) for all the written letters are different from each other (...). They have as many letters, as there are words and things, so that there are more than seventy thousand of them, every one quite different and complex (...). Each word is one syllable, and the fastest way to write them is to paint them, so they use the brush (...). The greatest advantage of this is all the countries that use these letters can understand each other's correspondence and books, even though the languages are different" (Ronan, 1988, 11)

M. Ricci, with the aid of the translators, wrote the report which based on the Chinese authorities. His report, containing either positive or negative information about the natives, their customs and culture, became for the people from the West a priceless source of knowledge about China. Thanks to his report Europeans could confirm that Marco Polo's Cathay meant China, and Khanbalic was identical to Peking (Ross, 1994, 122). In Zhaoqing M. Ricci spent also long hours on learning the literary Chinese language, studying Chinese classics and Confucian writings. It was a much easier task, because he derived from M. Ruggieri's experience, who, despite he was not as talented as M. Ricci, worked hard and learnt the Chinese language well enough to be favoured among other Europeans, who were treated by Chinese as "barbarians". In spite of many difficulties, M. Ricci decided to continue M. Ruggieri's work and bring China closer to Europe. He also planned to convert the Chinese in quite another way than the Jesuits from Macao did it (Ibid., 122-123). In his ambitious

plans the Jesuit went even further: he dreamt about reaching Peking (Beijing) and organizing there a new Jesuit residence (Ricci, Trigault, 1978, s. 227-228).

This thesis, due to vastness of its subject, draws attention only to a few aspects connected with the existence of Macao and the activity of the two Jesuit missionaries — M. Ruggieri and M. Ricci. Owing to the fact that the subject of modern China still remains largely unexamined, I only tried to outline here the beginning of the Jesuits' mission in Macao which was the encounter between two different cultures — the culture of the East and of the West.

Studying the Chinese language and wearing Buddhist robes, the Jesuit missionaries came to better and more maturely understand the Chinese culture. They became a part of Chinese society, engaged in a dialogue with the Chinese, which was a difficult task, due to the differences between both cultures. M. Ruggieri and M. Ricci set off to China planning to persuade its people the superiority of Christian faith and European culture. They did not predict that they would be “absorbed by this exotic country”, instead of realizing their own plans. M. Ricci realized that he had to “(...) become the Chinese to conquer China for Christ (...)” (Ibid., 252). These two Jesuits managed to conciliate two ideas - the Confucian philosophy (and the Chinese world within which they had to act) and catholic theology which was the most important part of their lives.

The reports of M. Ricci have been the first (and for this reason very important) attempt to present and understand Chinese culture by a European. They were a significant source which enhanced the recognition of the mentality and culture of the Chinese, long before the contemporary sinology was even conceived.

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