

Reshaping the Boundaries

*The Christian Intersection of China
and the West in the Modern Era*

Edited by Song Gang

Contents

Boundary-Crossing Words, Beliefs, and Experiences: Late Imperial China's Encounter with the Modern West <i>Song Gang</i>	1
1. "Sinarum gentes . . . omnium sollertissimae": Encounters between the Middle Kingdom and the Low Countries, 1602–92 <i>Thijs Weststeijn</i>	9
2. Russian-Chinese Cultural Exchanges in the Early Modern Period: Missionaries, Sinologists, and Artists <i>Nikolay Samoylov</i>	35
3. The Wind <i>Qin</i> : Hearing and Reading Chinese Reactions to the Pipe Organ <i>David Francis Urrous</i>	48
4. "Supreme Nation": The British Image in Karl Gützlaff's Novels <i>Shifei liuelun and Dayingguo tongzhi</i> <i>John T. P. Lai</i>	59
5. "Sacred Heart" and the Appropriation of Catholic Faith in Nineteenth-Century China <i>Ji Li</i>	76
6. Local Magistrates and Foreign Mendicants: Chinese Views of Shanxi's Franciscan Mission during the Late Qing <i>Anthony E. Clark</i>	91
7. A Religious Rhetoric of Competing Modernities: Christian Print Culture in Late Qing China <i>Melissa Wei-Tsing Inouye</i>	106
List of Contributors	123
Index	125

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the Low Countries.¹²⁶ As Duyvendak concludes, scholars "failed to take advantage of the enormous lead given to the Dutch by the excellent exchange of information in the seventeenth century."¹²⁷

For reasons that merit additional research, "Holland had lost its interest in China."¹²⁸ As a final note, we may again point out a Chinese parallel. In the Middle Kingdom, the initial interest in European learning waned outside the emperor's close circles. Hsia speaks of the Confucian literati's "disenchantment" with the West in the late seventeenth century.¹²⁹ In 1692 the Kangxi Emperor, under Verbiest's guidance, had issued an edict of toleration of Christianity. Yet when Charles-Thomas Maillard Tournon (1668–1710) brought forth the papal order to denounce the Jesuits' Sinophile stance in 1707, he annulled the edict and took steps to restrict and finally ban the Christian missions in his empire. A century of mutual exchange drew to a close.

2 Russian-Chinese Cultural Exchanges in the Early Modern Period

Missionaries, Sinologists, and Artists

Nikolay Samoylov

Introduction

Russian cultural interaction can be safely characterized as having a long-standing tradition. Today, numerous studies on Sino-Russian relations exist. However, it should be noted that the majority of books and articles on this subject concentrate on the history of political relations. They particularly address the signing of major treaties and agreements, as well as the establishment of borders between the two neighboring states. Russian-Chinese economic relations, and specifically cultural connections, have been analyzed to a much lesser degree. They frequently engage in sweeping generalizations and do not utilize new methodological approaches. Taking the field of research into account, it appears imperative to conduct a full-scale survey on the process of intercultural interaction between Russia and China from a historical approach. This type of analysis should highlight the importance of interaction between the two inherently different societies and cultures.

Russian cultural interactions are more complex than a simple bilateral pattern of cultural contacts. In this case, historians face dynamic and constantly flowing social, ethnological, and cultural exchanges between China and Russia. The encounter of a variety of different concepts, ideas, and behaviors gave rise to diversified modes in the interaction process, which was closely tied with the social-cultural developments of Chinese and Russian communities.

Cultural interaction represents a process of concrete parameters, ramifications and requirements of cultural, social, and historical components, as well as mutual influences by way of global trends. Putting together these interrelated factors, we can structure a general four-stage development for the historical encounters between cultures.

In the first stage of sociocultural interaction, each society tends to show little interest in its counterpart. The mutual indifference may last for a long time till social conditions create favorable conditions for a breakthrough toward

126. Louis XIV sent six Jesuits to Beijing as correspondents for the Académie Royale des Sciences (while the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres studied the Chinese language); the Royal Society proposed to include the Jesuits in China among their correspondents in 1667; the Imperial Academy of Sciences in Saint Petersburg maintained links with the French missionaries. See Standaert, *Handbook*, 892–93. In 1733, Naples saw the foundation of a specialized Collegio dei Cinesi.

127. Duyvendak, "China in de Nederlandse letterkunde," 13. Over time, this even resulted in the Amsterdam-born philosopher Cornelis de Pauw (1739–99) refuting all previous positive images of China in *Recherches philosophiques sur les Egyptiens et les Chinois*, 2 vols. (Berlin, Amsterdam, and Leiden: Vlam and Murray, 1773).

128. Duyvendak, "China in de Nederlandse letterkunde," 13. This was obviously related to the decline of the Dutch East India Company. See Lach and van Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe*, Vol. III, 506. After 1678, the Dutch concentrated their direct trade on Java and relied for contacts with China on Chinese and Portuguese intermediaries, whereas European commercial interest in East Asia became increasingly focused on the large-scale production of certain products for export; see Wills, *Pepper, Guns, and Parleys*, 261–61.

129. Ronnie Po-chia Hsia, "The Catholic Mission and Translations in China, 1583–1700," in *Cultural Translations in Early Modern Europe*, ed. P. Burke and R. P. Hsia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 39–51. According to Wills, *Pepper, Guns, and Parleys*, 261, by 1700 "[b]oth sides in the Sino-Western trade

ethnic, political, ideological, or personal—are present. This first stage can be characterized as a stage of *indifferent interaction*. Sporadic contacts between the representatives of different societies and cultures may take place, but as a whole these types of contacts do not affect the general character of the initial interactions.

In the next stage, a process of recognition of the *other* culture takes place. Close political, diplomatic, and economic relations lead to an increasing need for a better understanding of the differences and similarities between one's own culture and the *other* culture. It occurs spontaneously without prior schemes and often leads to certain unorganized accumulation of information and unguarded infiltration of elements from one culture into another. Gradually, the *other* culture with which a society chooses to interact is identified and conceptualized by means of collective representations, often expressed in certain stereotyped narratives and images. This stage of sociocultural interaction may be called the *identification* stage.

After the *identification* stage, there comes the period of increased interests in the *other* culture. The accumulation of data and knowledge shifts from a casual, incidental style to a purposeful and, under certain conditions, institutionalized project. Some cultural elements are adopted by both parties, a definite consequence of deliberation and development of stable and active trade relations. Sociocultural interactions begin to cover wider spheres of culture and various aspects of daily life. In this stage, cultural adoption may certainly be localized in a geographical sense, or within a specific social class. This adoption and expansion may be characterized as the *activation* stage.

When sociocultural interactions in a historical continuum become entrenched more deeply into the new spheres of a society, it may lead to active adoption of achievements from the *other* culture. This does not necessarily happen to all interactions between societies and cultures. When it does occur, it is referred to as the *adaptive* stage. Ultimately, in active adoption of cultural achievements from each other, there often appears a process of *cultural synthesis* between the encountering societies.

The stage of *indifferent interaction* in the history of Russian-Chinese relations should be traced to a period before the seventeenth century. During that time, contacts between Russians and Chinese were sporadic, and few stable communication channels existed. There were unofficial, inconsistent, and mostly trade-focused stimuli for communication.

The *identification* stage can be traced to the seventeenth century. The first Russian embassy/envoy sent to China was Ivan Petlin's mission of 1618, and from that moment, the cultural distinctions between the two countries became present.¹ Though subsequent missions in the next few decades failed due to Sino-Russian confrontations

territorial control, the Russian envoys did serve as intermediaries in transmitting substantial messages between two essentially different sociocultural systems.²

The foundation of cultural intercourse and scientific research of China was laid during the reign of Peter the Great (1672–1725). On June 18, 1700, he issued an edict considered to be the first decree on Russian studies of Asian languages. In 1716, the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission, established according to Peter the Great's edict, arrived at Beijing. The missionaries stayed and worked through the next three centuries. Apart from their political and religious activities, members of the mission's staff figured prominently in advocating Sino-Russian cultural exchanges in various aspects. More remarkably, it is largely owing to the Ecclesiastical Mission in Beijing that Russian Sinology began to take shape. The mission is considered to have served as a major channel for communication and transmission of cultural concepts and ideas between Russia and the Qing Empire.

The influential 1727 Treaty of Kyakhta brought the *identification* stage to an end. The significance of the treaty is now readily admitted by Russian, Chinese, and many Western historians due to its emphasis on Russian-Chinese trade as a major communication channel for sociocultural interaction. Precisely, trade promoted mutual distribution of elements of Chinese and Russian material culture. Kyakhta should be recognized as the focal point of the initial sociocultural interaction.

Members of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Beijing brought substantial contributions to the spread of knowledge about the Qing Empire and the formation of an idealized image of China in Russia. Sino-Russian interactions by this point entered the *activation* stage, and the role of Russian missionaries in this process was very important.

The Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Beijing

The Russian Ecclesiastical Mission operated in China for about three centuries. The staff slowly established a small Orthodox Christian community in Beijing. They endeavored to translate liturgical books into Chinese and Manchu, as well as translate Chinese books about the Qing Empire into Russian. More noticeably, members of the mission carried out various diplomatic assignments, and since 1917 they began to focus on the spiritual care and moral support of a large group of Russian exiles due to the October Revolution and the Civil War in Russia.

Nowadays there is still the need to further explore the history of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in developing sociocultural ties between Russian and Chinese peoples. Some key issues deserve more serious study and analysis: (1) the place of Russian Orthodox Christianity in the religious exchanges between Russia and China, (2) the importance of Russian and Chinese works written by Russian missionaries in

1. Vladimir S. Miasnikov, *The Ch'ing Empire and the Russian State in the 17th Century* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1985), 64–70.

the interaction process, and (3) the role of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in the formation and transformation of multilayered cultural images in Russia and China. Based on in-depth analysis of these issues, we will get a comprehensive understanding of the crucial role of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in the Russian-Chinese cultural dialogues in the modern era.

The Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Beijing had a clear goal to disseminate knowledge between Russia and China. Eight groups of missionaries were dispatched in turn during the mid-Qing period, i.e., the eighteenth century, and their activities clearly suggested a remarkable three-in-one role: (1) fulfilling diplomatic assignments from the Russian imperial government, (2) studying Chinese language, history, and culture for practical and intellectual purposes, and (3) preaching Orthodox Christianity. Due to the diplomatic twist, the Orthodox missionaries often fell short of evangelical enthusiasm. Their religious function was largely confined to serving Christian members of the Albazin community in Beijing during the first hundred years of their missions. However, the direct contacts between these missionaries and the Chinese people provided a nice opportunity for the latter to know more about Russia and Russian culture. It is interesting to note that the term *Luocha* (羅刹) a category for demons in popular in mid-Qing Chinese sources. Ironically, the Russian missionaries themselves played a role in this conscious appropriation and misidentification because they did not bother to use the term *Fo* (佛 Buddha) to refer to the Christian God and another term, *Lama* (喇嘛 a guru in Tibetan Buddhism), to refer to their Christian identity.³

The Russian Ecclesiastical Mission also made contributions to the cause of teaching the Russian language in China. On March 24, 1708, during the reign of the Kangxi Emperor (1661–1722), the first school of Russian language was founded in Beijing. This was approved by the imperial court. At that time, there were “68 people who have the intention to study the Russian language.”⁴ However, the first classes in this school were conducted very irregularly. At the beginning the Russian language teachers were merchants, who arrived in Beijing with trade caravans. When the merchants left with caravans, the classes stopped. In a few years, students from the school were taught by some representatives from the Albazin community. A new stage in Russian language teaching came with the start of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission. After the Yongzheng Emperor’s (1723–35) ascension to the throne, there was a reorganization of the school, which in 1716 was renamed the School of Russian Language at the Imperial Chancellery. After the emperor’s edict, two priests from the Orthodox Mission were invited to teach Russian in the school. From then on, priests from

the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission were actively engaged in teaching. They not only instructed students to the basics of Russian but also acquainted young Chinese and Manchurian people with important and useful aspects of Russian culture and daily life. Moreover, the Orthodox missionaries managed to maintain a vital component for cultural dialogues with the Chinese people.

Plavitskiy suggested that the first teachers from the mission’s staff were cleric Ivan Yakovlev, who died in Beijing in 1736, and Ierodiakon Philemon. A student of the mission, Luka Voyeikov brought to Beijing *The Russian Grammar* by Meletij Smolenskiy (1578–1633), which was well-known in Russia. Later, it was translated into Chinese by Illarion Rossokhin (1717–61) together with the Manchu Fulahe, a teacher at the school. While Rossokhin became a leading teacher in the Russian Language school, he translated a number of essential Chinese and Manchurian historical works into Russian, including *Zizhi Tongjian Gangmu* (資治通鑑綱目) by the well-known Ming-Qing Confucian Zhu Xi (朱熹, 1130–1200).⁵

The multilingual expertise enabled Rossokhin and other Sinologists to shift easily between two cultural traditions for different purposes, including a political one. In 1737, at the request of the Senate of the Russian government, Rossokhin began to translate the history of the Qing dynasty in collaboration with Aleksei Leont’ev (1710–86), a probationer of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission in Beijing from 1743 to 1745. Two decades later, Leont’ev published their sixteen-volume work, titled *Detailed Description of the Origins and Conditions of the Manchu People and Their Customs, Consisting of Eight-Banners* (1784). Moreover, Leont’ev followed the order of Catherine II (Yekaterina Alexeevna, 1729–96) to translate several official legal works of the Qing Empire. Apparently, the ruling elite in Russia expressed this special interest for a genuine admiration of China’s alleged superiority over all other nations for the pragmatic intent to reinforce their enlightened monarchical order by using China as a convenient parallel example.⁶

In the first half of the nineteenth century, members of the Russian Ecclesiastical Mission became reputed Sinologists and made notable contributions to Russian intellectuals’ research on Chinese culture, history, and language. They acted as interpreters of Chinese culture, as well as its original chroniclers in the Russian language, thereby promoting the formation of what was essentially a new mode of Sino-Russian interaction. At a time when Russian people’s knowledge about China largely depended on the reports of the Jesuit missionaries in China and various secondhand texts from Europe, the endeavors of these early Russian Sinologists opened an alternative channel, though

3. Vladislav Sorokin, “Two and a Half Centuries of Russian Sinology,” in *Europe Studies China: Papers from an International Conference on the History of European Sinology*, ed. Ming Wilson and John Cayley (London: Han-Shan Tang Books, 1995), 111–12.

4. Susanna Soojung Lim, *China and Japan in the Russian Imagination, 1685–1922: To the Ends of the Orient* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 42–61.

3. Standart, *Handbook of Christianity in China*, 372.

4. Su Fenglin 宿豐林, *Istorija kul'turnyx otnoshenij Kitajja s Rossiej do serediny 19 veka* [History of cultural relations between China and Russia until the mid-19th century] (Vostok-Zapad: Istoriko-kul'turnyj almanax: M.: Vostochnaja literature, 2002), 75.

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Index

- Académie Royale des Sciences, 33
 Academy of Fine Arts (Russia), 45
 Aesop, 16
 Africa, 18, 67
 Alacoque, Marguerite-Marie, 78–80, 83, 89
 Albazin (in Beijing), 38
 Aleni, Giulio, 27n92, 50
 Alexander I, 44
 Alexy (Vinogradov), Hieromonk, 44
 Allen, Young J., 110
 Amsterdam, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 25, 26, 33n121
 Anglo-Chinese College, 72
 anti-Christian (anti-foreign), 91, 93, 95, 98
 Antwerp, 11, 13, 14, 16, 17, 22
 apostasy, 95, 100–102
 Arundel, Countess of, 33n121
 August the Strong, 33n121
 Avvakum (Chestnoj), 46
 Bahr, Florian, 54
 Barthes, Roland, 52n8
 Batavia, 19, 25, 72
 Bauer, Andrew, 100–101
 Bayle, Pierre, 31
 Becanus, Willem, 22
 beheading, 102
 Beijing (北京), 11, 13, 14, 18, 25, 28, 37, 38, 39, 40, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 49, 50, 52, 56, 95, 100, 103, 118
 Belinsky, Vissarion, 42
 Benckendorff, Alexander von, 41
 black magic, 93, 95, 96–97, 99, 102–4
 Blaeu, Johannes, 13, 21
 Bloemaert, Cornelis, 14n23
 Bodleian Library, 26
 Bouvet, Joachim, 24n80
 Boxer Uprising, 91, 93, 96–99, 103
 Boyer, Joseph, 85–86, 88
 Boyle, Robert, 26
 Brac, Albert, 27n94
 Brinck, Ernst, 15
 British East India Company, 73
 Brune, Pierre de la, 25n82
 Buddhism, 23, 38, 94, 95, 99
 Buys, Jan, 14n22
 calligraphy, 29
 Canton Trade System, 64
 Carmélite order, 85–86, 88
 Cartesianism, 30
 Catherine II (Yekaterina Alexeevna), 39
 Cen Chunxuan (岑春煊), 95, 103–4
 Central Asia, 10
 Charme, Alexandre de la, 80
 Charmoy, François Bernard, 40
Chibei outan (池北偶談), 51n6
 China Inland Mission, 115
Chinese Christian Intelligencer (*Tongwenbao* 通問報), 109, 112
 Chinese Christian Virgins, 82, 86–88. See *shouzhennü*
Chinese Monthly Magazine (*Cha shisiu mei yue* 蔡世俗每月統計傳), 110