

Mutual influences between Portugal and China

By Father Benjamin Videira Pires

People from different ethnic groups and different cultures influence each other most readily in the areas which are most closely connected to and useful for everyday life. Primarily these areas are commerce, technology, science, the arts and in order of decreasing importance, social-political movements and finally, religion. This is not to say, however, that it is these environmental factors, in particular the economy, which give rise to religious expression, but rather that they have an external influence.

The Portuguese introduced new foods into China because their diet was not so heavily dependent on rice, especially the insipid steamed rice which is the basis for daily meals in China. The Chinese owe to us the introduction of corn, peanuts (now used extensively both in crude form and in several processed forms such as oil, cakes, butter) sweet potato, yam, tomato, lettuce, cabbage, watercress (still called Portuguese greens in Chinese) okra, mandioc, fruits such as papaya, custard-apple, guava, pineapple, several kinds of beans, aperitifs such as olives, drinks such as wines, coffee, milk and lactic products (cheese and butter) and the famous Portuguese chicken.

In addition to this list, we ought to mention apples, bay, cashew nuts, three kinds of banana, Malaguetta, pepper, chocolate, figs, grapes, (which only grow in Central and Northern China) mint onion, three kinds of pumpkin, three kinds of saffron, two kinds of tobacco, water-melon and so on. Some of these products were brought from America and Africa.

An important aspect of Portuguese Jesuit trading was the search for specific medicines and drugs, Western medicine being a major study within the Order. Father Luis de Almeida S.J. (responsible for introducing European medicine and surgery into Japan) traded, studied theology and was ordained as a Priest in Macau. Father Cristovao Ferreiro, S.J., the author of several medical texts written in Japanese, also lived in Macau for a while. On several occasions, doctors from Macau treated the emperor and his court in Peking. The "Apothecaries" or pharmacies in the college of the Mother of God (St. Paul's) and the S. Rafael Hospital became famous. It was the Portuguese who brought snuff from Brazil, thus giving rise to the production of exquisite little glass bottles, delicately decorated and so highly

valued by collectors, (Luis Gonzaga Gomes had an ebony showcase containing over three hundred of these rare flasks which he sold off at a very low price shortly before his death).

Tea was exported from Macau through Malacca and then Manila to India and the West. In Portuguese the word “cha” comes from the Cantonese pronunciation of the word, while “the” and “Tea” are derivatives of the Fukinese dialect. In the field of technology, the Portuguese missionaries Sabatino de Ursis and Miguel Bento carried out important projects in hydraulic engineering. Bento built a miniature village in the gardens of the Imperial Summer Palace outside Peking. In this village there was a mill for grinding rice, little streams, waterfalls and other water tricks which the Emperor could turn on in front of an enthusiastic court. However, the Emperor took the most delight in a marvelous water clock which decorated the landing of the huge staircase in the Hai Yen Tang. In turn, the twelve animals of the Chinese zodiac - the rat, the ox, the tiger, the rabbit, the dragon, the snake, the horse, the sheep, the cock, the dog, and the pig - spurted water for a whole hour and at midday water spouted from the mouths of all twelve animals simultaneously. This master-piece had taken Father Bento a considerable amount of the time to produce. The Chinese gave the Portuguese the compass, the axial rudder, multiple masts, gun powder and the lorcha which the Portuguese then adapted so that the hull and sails were Western.

The art of Cartography began in China under the auspices of Mateus Ricci and the Portuguese Jesuits who travelled throughout the Empire in order to chart their maps. The famed identification of Grand Cathay with China was also proved by Brother Bento de Gois’ journey lasting from 1602 until 1605. He travelled through Agra, Lahore, Kabul, Yarkand and Suchow (at the far end of the Great Wall) where he met the Jesuit Candidate sent by Ricci, Joao Fernandes, otherwise known as “Ciomim-li”.

Mathematics and Astronomy drew together the cultures of China and Europe. The Jesuit missionaries in the Portuguese Missions of the Orient took with them more advanced knowledge regarding geometry and Algebra. The Jesuit "Court Fathers" held the Presidency of the Mathematics Tribunal for over one hundred and fifty years. The Jesuits also took more sophisticated techniques for manufacturing astronomical instruments. Nevertheless, they were never able to present a united front on the question of whether the universe was geocentric or heliocentric. While some of the second generation missionaries such as the Swiss Johan Terrenz Schreck and the Bohemian, Wenceslau Kirwitzer were enthusiastic followers of the Copernican theory, news of Galileo's condemnation in 1632 altered this bias and Ptolemy's

theory regained popularity. Sabation de Ursis (who died and was buried in St. Paul's Cathedral in Macau) had explained his theory in precise Chinese as early as 1611.

In spite of the shortcomings on both sides, the encounter between the Chinese scholars and the Jesuit scientists was recognized in 1635 with the appearance of the noteworthy joint agreement on scientific knowledge established by Hsu Kuang-Chi, Li Chih-Tsao, Li Thien-Ching and the Jesuits, Schreck, Schall von Bell, Rho and Longobardi.

Macau's architecture is a mixture of East and West. The old tea salons on Rua Nova de El-Rei (now Avenida do Cinco de Outubro) the old pawn-brokers built like forts, the "opium dens" down in the inner harbour and typical Chinese houses coexisted quite peacefully with essentially Mediterranean styles of urban structures built round squares, yards filled with European trees, open spaces and alleyways, cobbled streets, and back-breaking steps reminiscent of Lisbon and Oporto. It is unfortunate that now we are presented with such uncharacteristic speed in the present development of the city. It is worth noting Edgar Quinet's observation that "The Lusiads is the poem which brings the West and the East together." Camoes, "the most complete Renaissance artist", lauded the Portuguese and their encounters with Chinese culture, combining the epic, tragic concept of life - the most noticeable point of comparison between Chinese and Western art - with the Lyricism and mysticism of man in harmony with nature. The greatest influences we have had from Western literature", writes Junichiro Tanizaki, "was for love to be freed". Although China does not have the epic it is rich in romance and drama which also expresses the fullness of life. Oriental poetry maintains a classical calm for it does not reach an ecstatic point but dies away before it reaches the proportions of an epic. The song, "Sobolos Rio" was written after Camoes was shipwrecked on the reefs in the China Seas and is one of the Poet's most mystical moments.

This article would not be complete without taking a look at how the two cultures have influenced each other in the fields of clothing, sewing, games and other pastimes although each one of these covers an extremely vast area. In *Tres Jogos Populares de Macau - Chonca, Talu, Bafa'*, Ana Maria Amaro shows that talu is really Portuguese billiards, introduced by the Jesuits in 1712 and played until this century. Chinese children still play popular Portuguese street games and the kites which are flown in the gentle autumn breezes from the tops of mountains are another joyful point in common shared by both Portuguese and Chinese children.

Playing cards probably originated in India and was brought to the Iberian Peninsula by the Arabs at the end of the Middle Ages. From there they spread throughout Europe. The Portuguese brought them to China and Japan and they are mentioned in the life of St. Francis Xnvier. The most popular card games in Macau are bridge and poker. In the casinos, baccarat and trente-et-quarante are popular. However there are over three hundred kinds of card games, some of them found only in Macau. Mah-jong was probably invented in the Sung Dynasty (960 - 1279) but it was only about fifty years ago that the Portuguese adopted this game. Since then the Portuguese have slightly varied the game by introducing marvels and flowers into the groupings.

It would take more than a hefty time to give an in-depth analysis of how Western and Chinese cultures have influenced each other in Macau. Religion was one area of influence, although not particularly outstanding. Other areas, in particular social and political doctrines, changed the traditional regimes of China as time went by, and especially after the revolt of the Protestant nations and France's revolutionary commercialism and "philosophism".

That remains today of the ancient civilization of China, of the early Chou, Hon, Tang, and Ming dynasties? We can see magnificent works of art in their museums, mostly in Peking and Taipei, and national monuments throughout the huge expanse of land which now more than ever before is subject to State control. We must think of these people, not in the communist sense of an anonymous mass of people but rather as a quarter of the earth's population. We have over one billion conscientious human beings with a great history and potential for giving new life, hope and future to their motherland and also of making a tremendous contribution to the progress of the world.