

ZE10061404 - 2010-06-14

Permalink: <http://www.zenit.org/article-29598?l=english>

## **SYMPOSIUM AIMS TO BUILD EUROPE-ASIA BRIDGES**

### **Pays Tribute to Father Matteo Ricci**

ZURICH, Switzerland, JUNE 14, 2010 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- A symposium began today at the University of Zurich, gathering international scholars to build bridges between Europe and Asia, natural sciences and the humanities, and different ways of thinking.

This was the objective laid out for the two-day symposium on the theme, "Europe in China -- China in Europe: Science and Technology as a Vehicle to Intercultural Dialogue."

The event is being held in honor of the 400th anniversary of the death of Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), a Jesuit missionary from Italy who worked in Asia and is called "the protagonist of interaction with China through science" by the conference organizers. The symposium is being sponsored by the Swiss-Chinese Association and the Swiss-Chinese Chamber of Commerce.

Today, the presenters gave various addresses on the topic "Protagonists of Cultural Exchange Between Europe and China."

Benjamin Elman of Princeton University, also a Changjiang visiting chair professor of Fudan University in Shanghai, China, spoke about "Rethinking the Macartney Mission of 1793 in Light of the Limits of the Jesuit Mission in China."

He addressed the history of China's development of natural science, speaking about the successes that are rarely known by Westerners.

The scholar pointed out that Europeans have tended to herald the success of Western science while assuming the failure of other countries to reach this level of modernity. He

attempted to bridge the gap between this European viewpoint and the Asian perspective by describing some of this little known history.

Elman acknowledged the role of Catholic missionaries in disseminating knowledge, bringing European learning to China and reporting about Asia to the Western world.

He explained that during the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), Chinese and Manchus often brought Jesuit experts into their governments in order to tap their Western knowledge of the latest mathematical, astronomical, military and surveying techniques.

It would be a mistake to underestimate the efforts of the Chinese to master this knowledge brought by the Jesuits, Elman stated. He encouraged the study of history from the Chinese perspective so as to properly value their accomplishments and promote mutual global understanding.

#### Cultural mediation

Michela Fontana, who is from Rome but lived in Beijing for several years to study the effect of the Jesuit missionary's work there, gave a presentation on "Matteo Ricci and the Use of Science in Cross-Cultural Understanding."

She spoke about how the missionary, who lived in China from 1582 until his death in 1610, pioneered cultural mediation.

The scholar described the Jesuit's work using science to gain the respect of the learned Chinese, and how he was the first European to have the emperor's approval to live in China during the Ming dynasty.

She noted Ricci's efforts to bridge the gap between Europe and China by sending reports home about Asia and translating Western books into Chinese.

As well, Ricci paved the way for other Jesuit missionaries who were to follow after his death, bringing with them the latest advances in mathematics, astronomy, geography, hydraulics, botany, mechanics, architecture, and medicine.

Nikolaus Fiva

One of these Jesuits was Nikolaus Fiva (1609-1640), who was the first Swiss missionary in China. He was ordained in Goa, India, and celebrated his first Mass there in front of the relics of St. Francis Xavier.

Xu Wenmin of the East Asia Institute in Bonn, Germany, gave a presentation on the missionary's life in an address: "Chinese Scholar Officials and the Jesuits in the Transition from Ming to Qing: Wei Xuelian and the Swiss Jesuit Nikolaus Fiva as a Paradigm."

Born in Fribourg, Fiva entered the Society of Jesus in 1628. He was sent to the East Asian mission before completing his theology studies, and set off from Portugal to India with 31 others.

Father Fiva arrived in Nanjing, China, in 1638, where he quickly mastered the local language. He also worked in Hangzhou, where he died in 1640.

Symposium participants ended today by taking part in a panel discussion on the "Phases of Intercultural Encounter: Jesuits, Protestants, Scientists."

Tuesday, the event's focus will be "Intercultural Attraction and Antagonism."

It includes presentations such as "The Rhetoric of Trust: Science and Religion in Jesuit Paratexts," by Joachim Kurtz of the Heidelberg University, Germany.

Father Artur Wardega, director of the Macau Ricci Institute, will give an address titled "From Macao up to Beijing (1582-1610) -- Matteo Ricci and Euro Jesuit Enterprise in China: Portrait of a Jesuit."

--- --- ---

On the Net:

Symposium: <http://www.bodensee-institut.ch/ausstellung-etccte/symposium/>