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Reseña de "Journey to the East: The Jesuit Mission to China" de Liam Matthew Brockey
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Liam Matthew Brockey

*Journey to the East: The Jesuit Mission to China*

This book carries Harvard University Press’s Belknap Press imprint, which is habitually reserved for texts of long-lasting importance and of superior scholarship, and after reading it from cover to cover I cannot but say: deservedly so. Its title, as the author himself discloses on pp. 3-4, refers to one of the four master novels of Chinese tradition, namely *Journey to the West* (Xiyouji). As it happens, this intertextual allusion is not all too far-fetched since the Chinese novel recounts the historical journey made by Xuanzang, a seventh-century monk, from China to India in order to find the true meaning of Buddhism. By contrast, Brockey’s *Journey to the East* tells in great detail how starting from the late sixteenth century the Jesuits travelled the long and strenuous way from Lisbon to the Middle Kingdom in a both relatively large-scale and long-term attempt to eventually convert the Chinese empire to the Christian faith. Almost antithetically to *Journey to the West*, which is a fictional text based on historical facts, the book under review is primarily a work of history packed with a whole deal of narrative energy. This energy of course enhances the book’s readability but on some few occasions also its rhetorical dashingness (such as for example Brockey’s metaphorical use of “Neptune” [p. 234], “the Grim Reaper” [p. 401] and “caput mundi” [p. 371]). In fact, this book is on the whole so captivating that for most parts you can read as if it were a novel, and the ideal location to peruse it would be sitting on a bench next to Lisbon’s Torre de Belém, overlooking the Tagus as it mingles with the Atlantic. Once the point of departure for the *naus da Índia*, this now appears to be a perfect place to embark on a long bookish journey which by means of a beautifully bound volume takes us back to China in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries.

Readers of the Chinese *Journey to the West* know that the text they are exposed to in modern editions of this novel is in fact the result of earlier versions of the same story, which were developed and circulated over a period of several centuries. Similarly, Brockey’s *Journey to the East* is clearly not the first account of the Jesuit mission in China. Quite the opposite, this happens to be a topic that historians have profusely written about since the first half of the twentieth-century when archival and library resources relating to the history of the Jesuit China mission became increasingly acces-
sible to researchers. To name but the most important book length treatments of the China mission, there is George Dunne’s *Generation of Giants* (1962), Jacques Gernet’s *Chine et Christianisme* (1982), Jonathan D. Spence’s *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* (1985) and, most recently and at the same time most exhaustively, the first volume of the *Handbook of Christianity in China* (2001), edited by Nicholas Standaert from the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven. From a hard-core academic viewpoint that tends to be impervious to the pleasures of grand narrations, the main question we should ask is to what extent Brockey’s version distinguishes itself from all these and many other accounts of the China mission. To put it in very simple terms, what is new and valuable about *Journey to the East*?

Anyone who cares to take a closer look at different scholarly accounts of the history of the China mission will notice that the primary texts behind these works do not always coincide. Rather, what these different versions of the same story reveal, especially if we arrange them chronologically, is that each tends to rely on a different pool of original sources, thus contributing to a gradual sophistication of the China mission’s historiography. To a great extent, this situation is of course related to the existence of a sheer quantity of materials generated by those involved in or reacting to the China mission in the time between 1579 and 1724. Moreover, the high degree of dispersion that these valuable resources have been exposed to in the course of centuries requires enough mobility from any engaged scholar to be able to travel to various destinations around the world as well as enough persistence to be able to locate and retrieve the documents actually required, depending on the catalog situation and professional assistance available at a specific location. Due to the additional fact that the story of the China Jesuit mission was documented, more often than not completely independently from each other, by both the Chinese and Western actors present on or simply observing the scene, historians are confronted with a linguistic Babel consisting of myriads of texts which were written, not always in a readily intelligible manner, in Chinese, Portuguese, French, Latin, Italian, Spanish and some other languages, being often interspersed with various macaronic idiosyncrasies.

In terms of sources and their language(s), the most original aspect about the book under review is that it prioritizes Portuguese language materials, both in an admiringly systematic and extensive manner for that matter. Surprisingly, especially if we recall the pivotal importance of the Portuguese Padroado for the logistics and other crucial aspects of the China mission, this is in fact the first time in the history of the field that a researcher has decided to set his principal focus on this kind of materials. Specifically, Liam Brockey tapped the information for his book mainly from the Jesuítas na Ásia collection at the Biblioteca da Ajuda in Lisbon, commonly abbreviated as BAJA,
and to some extent also from the Japonica-Sinica, the Lusitania, and Goana collections stored at the Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (ARSI) in Rome. The BAJA collection contains eighteenth-century copies of documents once found in the Society of Jesus’ archive in Macao and related to both the Vice-Province of China and Province of Japan, consisting of sixty-one volumes and more than thirty thousand manuscript pages, which, by the way, tend to be rather indecipherable to the untrained eye. Since there exists no detailed and on the whole reliable catalog-cum-guide to this collection (two volumes of which are curiously to be found at the Biblioteca Nacional in Lisbon!), we can imagine the enormous reading load that Brockey has taken upon himself in order to be able to write the book under review. In generic terms, the information *Journey to the East* relies upon derives to a great extent from letters, specifically *Litterae Annuae* and regular correspondence to and from the different locations of the China mission. But Brockey also recurred to other kinds of red tape, especially reports and regulations, as well as publications authored by the Jesuits of the China mission.

Substantiated by this vast amount of primary sources, the actual book is structured in two parts, namely “Charting the Course” (pp. 23-203) and “Building the Church” (pp. 205-401), and each of these parts consists of five chapters respectively. This main text is bracketed by an “Introduction” and a “Conclusion” (pp. 403-419), which is followed by endnotes and an infelicitously skimpy index. Aside from the rather disappointing feature – which was perhaps motivated by Belknap Press’s editorial policy rather than by the author himself – that it does not include a general bibliography listing all the primary and secondary sources used, *Journey to the East*’s architectural arrangement is somewhat ingenious since it allows its reader to zoom chapter by chapter into the concrete reality of the Jesuit China mission. Whereas Brockey provides us first with a chronology of the mission – which includes its beginnings (Chapter 1 “An Uneasy Footfall”, pp. 25-56); its first persecution and the recovery therefrom (Chapter 2 “In the Shadow of Greatness”, pp. 57-91); its trials and tribulations during the Ming-Qing transition (Chapter 3 “Witnesses to Armageddon”, pp. 92-124); its apogee in the early Qing (Chapter 4 “The Problem of Success”, pp. 125-163); and its disharmonious but final showdown in the eighteenth century (Chapter 5 “Between Tolerance and the Intolerable”, pp. 164-203) –, in the second and in fact most original part of his book he unravels in great detail the curricular and later on professional challenges that a Jesuit missionary had to go through before going to and while acting in the China mission.

Accordingly, Chapter 6 (“In the Apostle’s Classroom”, pp. 208-242) describes in rather vivid terms the intellectual training that Jesuits were exposed to at their colleges, specifically the Colégio do Espírito Santo at
Évora, and follows them on the ships to Goa and India, thus revealing how difficult it was for these college students – many of whom, after hearing the Annual Letters read to them in their school, became obsessively consumed with the wish of serving in the Far East - to be actually selected for the China mission and how utterly nightmarish, at least by modern standards, and for a good many Jesuits even lethal the actual travel conditions were on the ships circulating between Lisbon, Goa and Macao. In Chapter 7 (“Learning the Language of Birds”, pp. 243-286) we are provided with an account of how the first Jesuits tackled the Chinese language and later on devised an efficient curriculum to master Mandarin and the classical learning related to it. Chapter 8, “The Business of Conversion” (pp. 287-327), which is mainly focused on the proselytizing work undertaken by the missionaries, reveals that in demographic terms the overwhelming majority of Chinese Christians were in fact of plebeian extraction, thus toppling or at least redressing the “conversion from top down” paradigm as it was put forth in previous accounts of the history of the Jesuit China mission. Chapter 9, “A Good Method and Order” (pp. 328-365), deals with the sophisticated logistics that the China missionaries had to devise in order to cope with the huge pastoral burdens brought about by the ever growing population of Chinese converts. In the final chapter, “Brothers of Passion and Mercy” (pp. 366-401), Brockey takes a close look at the lay piety associations run by and populated with Chinese converts, focusing on their organizational structure as well as the various devotions that were conducted by these multifarious groups.

The most refreshing aspect of Brockey’s long narrative is that it succeeds in breaking through the hagiographic patina that has been tenaciously sticking to the historiography of the China Jesuit mission, especially since the publication of the still very readable Generation of Giants by George H. Dunne, S.J. Iconoclastic attempts – such as Gernet’s infamous Chine et christianisme, which at closer look is tainted by its biased and sometimes even manipulative use of Chinese sources as well as by its reductionist “langage = pensée” paradigm, and Spence’s The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci, which is elegant to the point of being an aesthetic rather than a realistic re-enactment of things past – have not succeeded in euhemerizing the protagonists in this epic of allegedly superhuman heroism. In Journey to the East, by contrast, we are given humanlike portraits of the Jesuit missionaries, which include light but also a lot of shade. Take for example the fate of Nicolas Trigault (1577-1628) who apparently became so upset about the issue of the controversial Chinese terms for God that he “committed suicide in 1628 in a fit of depression over his inability to defend conclusively the use of Shangdi” (p. 87). Note that none of the previous accounts - not even the entry dedicated to Trigault’s biography in the standard Dictionary of Ming Biog-
raphy, 1368-1644 (1976) – cared to mention this tragic but eventually all too human ending of a ‘China hero’. Another example concerns the formation of an indigenous clergy in China. In historiographic terms, it is commonly postulated that the Jesuits of the Vice-Province, since they tended to be rather conservative, failed at training Chinese converts to become priests, and that it was only after the arrival of the French Apostolic Vicars in China from the 1680s that the missionaries began to attach much more importance to the formation of a native clergy. The version that Brockey presents us with is slightly different. In fact, after ordaining three Chinese men, namely Wu Yushan, Liu Yunde and Wan Qiyuan, the Portuguese Padroado was ready to train more Chinese to become priests. Unfortunately, as Brockey reveals, the case of Wan Qiyuan presented problems: “In the early autumn of 1689, Wan ‘disappeared one night, jumping over the wall’ of the Jesuit residence in Shanghai. In February of the following year, he appeared in northern Fujian Province asking for shelter and pardon from the local Jesuits. (...) As a result, the Vice-Province became so hesitant to accept Chinese priests that it would take four decades and another round of harsh persecutions before native Jesuits formed a significant portion of the missionary group” (p. 151). Note that Wan’s escapade and its consequences to the formation of a native clergy are not mentioned in other important accounts of the history of the Jesuit mission in China, most notably in the otherwise extremely reliable Handbook of Christianity.

It seems to me that Brockey tends to exaggerate the Handbook of Christianity’s allegedly biased emphasis on the missionary strategy to convert the Chinese empire from top down (see esp. pp. 47-48). In fact, he himself relies heavily on this encyclopaedic work as far as his statistics regarding the number of converts, residences and priests for the whole period of the China mission are concerned, which clearly proves that Standaert and his contributors took into full account both the top down and down top strategies applied by the Jesuit missionaries in China. However, it has to be admitted that Brockey’s description of the China mission and its inner workings is by far more dynamic and organic than anything else that has been available on this topic before. This is definitely related to the fact that, contrarily to the mainstream research on the China mission, Journey to the East is not preoccupied at all with the scientific and otherwise sophisticated work of the Jesuit ‘giants’ (Ricci, Schall von Bell, Verbiest et alii) at the Chinese imperial court. Rather, Journey to the East’s approach is decidedly pedestrian, in the best sense of this word, by virtue of the fact that it tells us the story of the mission church “from the ground up”, i.e. with a special and very close focus on the nitty-gritty details in terms of logistics, financing, conflicts and other “down-to-earth” aspects of this Jesuit enterprise. Statistically,
this was an extremely successful enterprise, counting by the beginning of the eighteenth-century 33 residences, 266 churches, 14 chapels, 290 oratories and a yearly average increase of 14,600 baptisms (excluding the foundlings). The sacraments were administered to over 196,000 Christians. This huge success was problematic however due to the tiny priest population working at the China mission, specifically thirty-six men, six of whom were based in Beijing and three in Shanghai respectively. Since the number of adherents increased and the number of priests stagnated, the challenge of overseeing the religious activities of the mission church on an everyday routine basis fell increasingly to the missionaries’ auxiliaries, who were commonly referred to as catechists. In spite of the presence of these assistants, the few priests tended to be quite overworked simply for the fact that with the exception of baptism they were the only ones entitled to administer the sacraments to the Chinese converts. This presented the Vice-Province with a logistical challenge of tremendous proportions which could only be solved through maximum rationalization of priestly effort. Or as Brockey puts it: “In the relatively short span of forty years since the mission church had begun to grow in earnest (...) the Jesuits had been transformed from the primary propagators of a new religion into the overburdened managers of far-flung and ever-expanding Christian communities” (p. 136).

To some extent, if this anachronistic simile is permissible at all, the Jesuit China mission – at least as it is described by Brockey – might remind some readers of a modern state university in Europe, say in France or Germany, which has on display a public façade that is extremely well-maintained – including some select research projects, wasteful cocktail receptions, interdisciplinary centers and the mastering of hyperbolic rhetoric for mediatic purposes - whereas the substance behind the scenes is both decaying and bursting due to a deliberate policy of overburdening the personnel and minimizing the budget resources. Trapped in the substance by their rigorous work ethic and heavy curriculum load, teachers and students feel both extremely disappointed at and therefore completely out of touch with the politicians at the top of their school but are at the same time not in the position to intervene or change the status quo. Similarly, the majority of the Jesuits in China were exerting themselves in their missionary work but at the same time in constant dire straits, also because they were dependent on the funds they received from outside China. Oftentimes the cost of life at court of the Peking Jesuits took up a substantial amount of the outside revenue available to the Vice-Province of China so that the surplus for those missionaries working in the periphery tended to be rather scarce. Well aware of the meager financial situation in the China mission, Carlo Turcotti, who acting as Visitor of the Vice-Province of China around 1700 was requested to evaluate the mission’s
potential, not only denied the mission church’s request for more men from Europe but even suggested the prospect of reducing the number of Jesuits who staffed the mission according to the possibilities of the present revenues. While educated audiences in Europe – on a rather regular basis and with the aim of collecting eventual donations – were being presented with and often inspired by publications and promotion tours related to and sublimating the efforts of the Jesuit China mission, the missionaries kept toiling at the different locations of the Vice-Province, relatively oblivious to the political trials and tribulations taking place in their homelands. Then at the end of the 17th century they were surprised by and angered at the arrival of rival missionaries, Franciscans, Augustinians, Dominicans, Propaganda Fide priests but most notably the French Apostolic Vicars, who from the beginning, albeit not yet familiar with the China terrain, already questioned the whole of Jesuits’ missionary strategies and efforts, moreover revealing an attitude of managerial arrogance and stubbornness (see esp. the tumultuous pp. 157 ff). Finally, theological disputes, better known as the Chinese Rites Controversy, were used as a wedge in the struggle for control of the mission church, thus leading to the “loss of China” by the second decade of the eighteenth century.

The picture we obtain from Brockey’s account is that the Jesuit mission in China crushed under the weight of its own success. The success not only attracted the Jesuits’ rivals, which eventually caused the mission’s doom. Rather, it generated pastoral obligations which could only be met by means of superhuman efforts on the part of the priests involved. Obviously, there was no time left for the missionaries to delve more deeply into native philosophical texts in order to find the ammunition necessary for fighting their battles over the Chinese rites, as José Soares, one of the missionaries at the imperial court, ruminated in 1705, perhaps rather speculatively but not entirely free of some clairvoyance. In addition, Journey to the East makes clear that with the arrival of the Apostolic Vicars and other rival confreres the former split between Elders and Moderns among China missionaries took on a distinctly nationalist coloring, which was primarily directed against the Portuguese and those involved with them. Ironically and perhaps the result of pure chance, this rift seems to persist in modern scholarship related to the history of the China mission. French, Belgian, German and Italian scholars in their almost invariably excellent contributions to the field have an exclusive focus on those confreres in the China mission who happened to have the same the nationality as the scholars themselves. This somehow distorted picture according to which Portugal was quasi only invisibly part of the China mission has been in any event substantially redressed by Journey to the East. One of this book’s main merits its that it shows convincingly how the Lusitanian impact on the development of the China mission was both
vital and *de longue durée*. Somewhat playfully, we could perhaps even say this collective memory of a previous rift leading the scholarly world to neglect anything related to Portugal was like Columbus’ egg for Liam Brockey since the resources necessary for his reconsideration of the Jesuits’ China mission “were hidden in the proverbial broad daylight” (p. 17). Hopefully, this voluminous book will inspire scholars to shift their research attention to some of the Portuguese ‘giants’ of the mission, such as Álvaro Semedo, Manuel Dias, Júnior or Francisco Furtado, all of whom have not yet been the subject of any kind of monograph or substantial article.

Even though Brockey made the effort to have a correct transcription of all the Chinese terms and names mentioned in his text – an endeavour which is not quite free of errors though (see for example Jiaoyun lun instead of Jiaoyou lun on p. 42, and Lipu instead of Libu on p. 49) –, Brockey is by training an expert in European history rather than a sinologist. In other words, he has none or at the most only limited reading skills in Chinese, and this becomes sometimes noticeable in the book. Let me give you some examples:

- On p. 262 and pp. 283-84 Brockey provides the reader with lesson samples from original textbooks compiled and used by the Jesuit missionaries for learning the Chinese language. However, he does not supply any Chinese characters or at least a pinyin transcription version of the sentences he translates in these passages. More importantly, he does not specify if these textbooks included Chinese characters at all.
- Although Brockey inserted on p. 275 an image of an impressive folio from the Confucian *Great Learning* (*Daxue*) that Francesco Brancati used and annotated during his lessons with Manuel Gomes in 1637, his own description and analysis of this folio on pp. 272-273 is somehow tautological and does not go beyond what is already visible on the image itself, at least to a sinologically untrained eye.
- Since the book is targeted mainly to readers who have little knowledge of (and oftentimes a lot of vague clichés about) the Chinese language I would have expected some clarification regarding Michele Ruggieri’s statement that he had memorized 15,000 characters in two years (p. 247), which is a lot by any standards and in fact at least 5,000 more than any top-notch late imperial Chinese literatus needed in order to be fully empowered with classical literacy. Apparently, what Ruggieri meant were not single characters but rather words resulting from the combination of two or more characters. Non-sinological readers would also have profited from some minimal explanatory remarks regarding the nature and structure of the *Qianzi wen* (Thousand Character Classic) which is mentioned on pp. 248-249 along with an
image from a folio including annotations by Matteo Ricci. The same applies to Brockey’s listing of the Confucian Wujing (Five Classics) (p. 253) which for some strange reason does not include the Zhouli (Rites of Zhou) and the Yili (Decorum Ritual).

On p. 90 Brockey states that the Buddhist-Daoist-Confucian melding known as the Three Teachings was called Sanxue in Chinese whereas the correct designation is Sanjiao.

Besides these linguistic weaknesses, Brockey sometimes supplies the reader with confusing information relating to China. On p. 50 for example he writes: “Ricci was helped in no small measure by the presence of throngs of metropolitan examination candidates who traveled to the capital every three years. These mandarins were eager to get copies of his books on Learning from Heaven.” Presupposing in this passage and passim that his readers are already familiar with the basics of the civil service examination system of late imperial China, which he never really explains, Brockey creates the impression that metropolitan examinees were already mandarins whereas in fact only those “happy few” (roughly one out of twenty to thirty at the metropolitan level) who succeeded in passing the competitions were actually entitled to be assigned an official “mandarin” post. In other words, if you wanted to become a mandarin you had to sit for and, more crucially, succeed in the examinations first. As long as you were still competing in the examinations, you were not quite a mandarin yet, even if you pretended, or at least aspired, to be one.

Slightly irritating is also Brockey’s sparse referencing as far as sinological information is concerned. On p. 43 for example we read: “While the Jesuits would never sit for the state examinations, and thus never gain the shengyuan (bachelor), juren (licenciate), or jinshi (doctor) degree of their literati peers, the keys to social status and political power in late imperial China, they wanted to be accepted on Chinese terms as learned men.” Despite the fact that he recurred to Benjamin Elman’s A Cultural History of Civil Service Examinations in Late Imperial China (2000) for obtaining information about the examination system (see esp. footnote 11 on p. 457), Brockey translates the examination degrees differently from Elman, who renders them as “licenciate”, “graduate” and “palace graduate” respectively. Unfortunately, Brockey does not reveal his other secondary source on late imperial civil service examination degrees, which, I assume at least, was Étienne Zi’s Pratique des examens littéraires (1894) or perhaps even the short account of the examination system as it is provided in Álvaro Semedo’s Imperio de la China (1642). Adding to the confusion is the fact that on p. 296 he introduces the term xiucai without mentioning that this was a designation used synony-
mously with *shengyuan* so that the non-sinological reader gets the erroneous impression there were actually four instead of only three official examination degrees in late imperial China.

This relative absence of sinological depth turns *Journey to the East* into a narrative screen of low-medium definition, i.e., as soon as the reader zooms onto a detail that is related to China the image becomes almost immediately blurry. Take for example Brockey’s statement that “the Jesuits would never sit for the state examinations”. Zooming in sinologically, it would be interesting to know if the Jesuits never sat for these examinations out of their own choice or rather because they were officially not allowed to take them or both. As Brockey indicates (pp. 266-267), the Chinese language curriculum of the Jesuit missionaries did specifically exclude the teaching of the eight-legged style, the mastering of which was the principal rhetorical expertise required at the competitions for the civil service. Perhaps this lack of interest was motivated by a both thorough and realistic assessment of what level of competence they were able to achieve as adult students of Chinese with relatively limited time resources at their disposal. It could also be, however, that this indifference towards the civil service competitions had fiscal reasons. As a matter of fact, only regular tax-payers and their sons were allowed to sit for the examinations in late imperial China. I wonder, somehow speculatively for lack of knowledge, if the Jesuit missionaries were required to pay taxes to the imperial government or if they were exempt from this burden by virtue of the fact that they were considered to be a religious formation by the authorities. Similar to their Daoist and Buddhist rivals, who were traditionally freed from the fiscal obligation and therefore barred from taking the examinations, the Jesuits would never compete for the civil service perhaps for the simple and unchangeable fact that they were not allowed as participants but presumably also due both to their foreign origin and their exclusive allegiance to Rome. In other words, unless they managed to associate themselves with high-ranking literati, the Jesuits were primarily perceived as somewhat religious “ersatz literati” (p. 257) despite their aim of wanting “to be accepted on Chinese terms as learned men”. At the same time, we also know that the Jesuit missionaries were rather apprehensive of the civil service examinations’ efficiency in terms of indoctrination. In 1683, Ferdinand Verbiest even tried to hijack the examination system by asking the Kangxi emperor to replace the eight-legged essay with a curriculum based on Aristotelian logic. In addition, we must assume that the Jesuit missionaries followed the triennial cycle of provincial and metropolitan examinations, travelling to those cities where the competitions took place in order to proselytize examinees. To cut short this chain of associations, the point is that Brockey’s tendentiously apodictic narrative frequently opens up an array of
sinological questions, thus making visible the potential for a more holistic, nuanced and eventually satisfying version of the same story.

In his “Conclusion”, Brockey tells the story of Francisco Pimentel who came to China as member of an embassy in 1670. For Pimentel, Peking was a huge disappointment since it lagged far behind its counterparts in Europe, such as Rome, Paris, and Lisbon: “The city’s buildings, just like those he had seen elsewhere in the empire, were made of poor materials and had oppressively low rooflines. The palaces of the rich were no exception; in any event, they had no outstanding features save a few pretty courtyards and painted chambers. What thoroughly fixed Pimentel’s opinion was that even the wealthy lacked comfort, their homes being insulated from Peking’s severe climate only by rice paper” (pp. 403-404). On his way through the rural periphery to Peking, by contrast, Pimentel met throngs of Christians and observed their desire for the sacraments, an experience that apparently not only stirred his soul but also impressed him about the China mission. To some extent, it seems to me at least, Liam Brockey’s perspective is not quite unlike Pimentel’s. While reading myriads of original sources on the China Jesuits, Brockey became gradually fascinated with the mission’s polyphony as it was audible on the fringes of the Chinese empire and quickly lost interest in the elitist discourse entertained by the missionaries in the Chinese capital. Like Pimentel, who lack of any previous experience saw China through exclusively European eyes, Brockey seems to have given preference to those data in his primary sources that were most digestible for a scholar with little sinological background. Instead of concluding the book with a comparison of the Society of Jesus’ different missionary projects around the world – which is by the way the exclusive subject of Dauril Alden’s highly readable The Making of an Enterprise: The Jesuits and Portugal, Its Empire, and Beyond, 1540-1750 (1996) –, Brockey might have instead outlined the innovative aspects but also the limitations of his narrative and pointed out the various directions that projects based on his narrative could take in the future, especially those with an interdisciplinary focus.

These criticisms are minor and in no way detract from a formidable study which at the same time succeeds in engaging and captivating its readers’ attention. Even though it may not be the definitive narrative of its subject, at least according to the present reviewer, this book is by all standards both a challenge and an invitation to the scholarly community not only to revise long-held opinions about the Jesuit China mission but also to keep exploring the different profundities, details and side-tracks of the long route that has been successfully chartered in Liam Brockey’s grandiose Journey to the East.

Rui Magone