

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University · Loyola Heights, Quezon City · 1108 Philippines

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Philippine Studies vol. 37, no. 4 (1989) 479–487

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Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

Notes and Comments

A Note on the *Shih-lu* of Juan Cobo

A L B E R T C H A N, S. J.

The University of Santo Tomas Press has recently published an edition of the *Pien Cheng Chiao Chen-Chu'an Shih-lu* of Juan Cobo, O.P. which was first published in Manila in 1593. The latest edition is edited by Fidel Villaroel, O.P. and raises a number of interesting questions.¹

On the right side of this book, we read the following Chinese characters: 新刻僧師嘯嘯嘆嘆無極天主正教真傳寶錄章之一. The recently engraved *Wu-chi T'ien-chu cheng-chiao chen-ch'uan shih-lu* composed by the Monk (Priest) Master Kao Mu Hsien. Chapter one. The characters on top of the page read, 辯正教真傳, 章之首, i.e., Head chapter [First chapter]: A Discussion of the Real Traditional Propagation of the True Religion. This appears to me to be the correct title of the book given by Juan Cobo. To call it 辯正教真傳寶錄 (*Pien cheng-chiao chen-ch'uan shih-lu*) is to mix up the title of the book and its chapters. Juan Cobo tells us clearly in the last paragraph of this book that there had been a discussion of the existence of God, but few really grasped the truth. It is for the benefit of those who seek the true faith that he tries to demonstrate this from ancient traditional teachings in the hope that he might lead them to the right path. Strictly speaking this book is not apologetics. Of the nine chapters, only the first three deal with proofs for the existence of God. The other six deal with the sciences. According to

The Chinese characters in this article were done by Collen C. Lo of Chinese Studies Program, Ateneo de Manila University.

1. *Pien Cheng-chiao chen-ch'uan Shih-lu*. 辯正教真傳寶錄. By Juan Cobo, O.P., Manila, 1593. Edited by Fidel Villaroel, O.P. (Manila: University of Santo Tomas Press Manila, 1986). Contents I-III; General Introduction, I-X; Introduction to the *Shih-lu*, 1-93; Text with translations in Spanish & English, pp. 100-379. Notes to the text; Bibliography; Index to proper names. 408 pages.

Cobo, this book serves as an introduction to Catholic doctrine which he expected to explain more fully after his diplomatic service (to Japan).²

MISSIONS TO THE MANILA CHINESE

While the Spanish government was interested in the politics and trade of China, missionaries were looking forward eagerly to its evangelization. Chinese merchants who had come to trade in the Philippines long before the Spaniards, began to take great interest in doing business with the Spaniards. A Spanish government report said that Chinese ships usually arrived between Christmas and May and numbered between forty and fifty. In 1587, thirty Chinese ships of considerable size were said to have arrived with a great store of commodities, horses and cows. The number of men who came was estimated at about three thousand. The estimated number of Chinese in Manila in 1588 was over ten thousand.³

Previously they had built houses and settled in Tondo, close to the city of Manila. In this vicinity there was an Augustinian monastery. Seeing that these people were of good understanding, one of the religious had started to teach them the Christian doctrine. When the governor was informed of this he came to see the place and gave permission to the leading Chinese to move to this new place, known to the Spaniards as *Parián*. One of the more learned Augustinian monks was appointed vicar to look after them and another was named assistant with the hope that these might learn Chinese and work for the conversion of the inhabitants.

The Jesuits had also made an attempt to carry on this work in Manila. It was suggested that some of them should learn the language of these Chinese traders so as to be able to help them to understand the faith. Classes had actually started, but the Chinese instructor refused to continue, saying that their house was too far from the city and the journey under the hot sun was intolerable.⁴

In 1585, the Dominicans in Spain decided to form a province in the Philippines to evangelize the natives and the Chinese residents and eventually to move to mainland China. A group of 24 gathered in Seville and on 17 July 1586 they set sail for Mexico. They left Mexico for the Philippines on the feast of St. Mathias (24 February). By then, the number of volunteers was reduced to ten. Some of the others chose to stay in Mexico while others sought to return to Spain.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 379.

3. Archivo General de las dos Indias [henceforth AGI] Leg. 18A, Ramo 4, nos. 73 and 76.

4. *Monumenta Mexicana*. Rome, 1959. vol. 2, pp. 208, 404, 717.

We have quite a detailed report by Governor Santiago de Vera on the work of the Dominicans among the Chinese. This report was dated 13 July 1589, and reads:

Since I came to this part of the world, I have made an attempt to make sure that the religious try to learn the language of the Chinese so as to convert and to teach those who are in this country, the usual number of whom I have mentioned. As things are not easy and I have been kept occupied with the natives of these islands, I have had to let this matter go. Now that the Dominicans are here, I have given them the task of the evangelization of the Chinese. I have given them the instructors to teach them the language, and I have had a church and a house built for them in the *alcazería*, known as the parian, which is at the tip of Tondo, and there they are given supplies for living. Two of them have done so well that one can now understand and speak the language well, and the other has learned it within a short time. They now preach and instruct and convert many. Already they have a community of Christians. This year on Holy Thursday they held a procession of blood with great devotion. I hope in the Lord (since these people are so intelligent and constant in what they learn and have no particular [religious] sect of their own) that they may be converted in good time.⁵

CHINESE CATECHISMS

Of these two friars mentioned in the report of the governor we have no doubt that one of them, perhaps the latter was Juan Cobo, since he was detained in Mexico for affairs of the Order, and arrived in the Philippines a year after the others. Diego Aduarte, who wrote the *History of the Province of the Holy Rosary* said that Cobo had learned 3,000 Chinese characters.⁶ Among other works attributed to him is a *Doctrina Christiana*, a catechism written in Chinese and published in Manila in 1593, a xylographic edition. The name of the author is not mentioned, but the title page states that the book was composed by the priests from the Order of St. Dominic ministering to the *sangleys* (Chinese merchants). The language of the book is in the colloquial Fukien dialect and the terms used are not easy to understand. This is understandable if one takes into account the fact that Catholic

5. AGI, Aud. Filip., Leg. 18A, Ramo 4, no. 85.

6. Diego Aduarte, *History of the Province of the Holy Rosary*, vol. 1 (Madrid, 1962), p. 219.

terminology was not known to the Chinese pagans in those days, and to avoid misunderstanding, transliteration was often used. The sound of this must have been very strange to Chinese ears. Perhaps this *Doctrina* was a compilation of the notes made by the priests of the Order to instruct the people, eventually published in book form.

The style of the *Wu-chi T'ien-chu cheng-chiao chen-ch'uan shih-lu* composed by Juan Cobo is quite different from the *Doctrina Christiana*. It is quite elegantly written and it reads more like Chinese writing. The Catholic terms used are close to those employed by missionaries of the later periods. The writing reveals that the author was deeply absorbed in the study of the *Four Books* on which many of the phrases are modelled. At the same time he must have dabbled in the writings of other classics and works by Neo-Confucian philosophers. As a good philosopher himself, Cobo was able to produce his book in the Scholastic manner, lucidly and eloquently.

In chapter eight he cites a number of examples as illustrations of the natural instincts with which the Creator endowed the animals for their preservation. This reminds us of the *Chi-jen shih pien* 田奇人十篇 written by Matteo Ricci in which he quoted many delightful stories from old European classics to confirm his teaching. They were new to contemporary Chinese readers who were captivated by the novelty. Among European writers of the old days this practice seems to have been quite common. *Bestiaries*, i.e. medieval treatises on beasts, are not infrequently employed by the authors. There is no particular author of a bestiary. It is a compilation, a kind of scrapbook, which has grown with the additions of several hands. Its sources go back to the distant past, to the Fathers of the Church, to Rome, to Greece, to mythology and ultimately to oral tradition. In the case of Cobo's book, the illustrations are derived from the writings of Luis de Granada, and the latter from some ancient writings on *bestiary*.⁷

Eight years before Cobo's book saw the light, in China the first catechism was published in Chinese by Michele Ruggieri, an Italian Jesuit who was the first missionary to enter and settle in China. He first arrived in Macao in 1579 where he spent two years learning Chinese. In 1581 he went to Canton and the following year to Chao-ch'ing. We are told that he started to prepare a catechism in 1581 but it was not published until three years later. A letter of Alonso Sánchez indicates that 1,500 copies were printed and they were widely distributed. Cobo who had read it had adopted a number of the terms in

7. Cf. *The Bestiary: A Book of Beasts*, tr. from Latin Bestiary of the twelfth century, made and ed. T.H. White (New York, 1954 and 1960).

his writing. Like Ruggieri he called himself *seng* (originally: a Buddhist priest), and the church *ssu* (originally: a Buddhist monastery). His book entitled *T'ien-chu shih-lu* is clearly an adoption of Ruggieri's catechism: A true record about God.

It is interesting to note that Juan Cobo calls himself a Fo-lang-chi 佛郎機, a term given to the Spaniards and Portuguese. Ruggieri, on the other hand, made himself known as a monk from West of India, since neither Italy nor Europe were then known to the Chinese.

Cobo wrote his book in a literary style, as did Ruggieri. However, when it came to the transliteration of proper names the Chinese characters are often different in each book: the former using the Fukien dialect while the latter employing Cantonese. Thus, Cobo would use 亞 難 for Adam and Ruggieri would say 亞 當; for the name Jesus, Cobo writes 西 士 while Ruggieri has 耶穌 所. Furthermore, one encounters difficulties when dealing with Catholic terminology which does not exist in Chinese usage. The term *ho-shang wang* 和尚王 (pp. 101, 193), for instance, is used to mean a bishop, and at times it can mean a pope. Since Cobo's book is mainly concerned with philosophy and science, there was little problem with theological terminology. Ruggieri's *T'ien-chu shih-lu*, however, being the first catechism in Chinese, had to face difficulties with religious terms. In the second edition of this book, we come across the mystery of the Holy Trinity: one nature and three persons. The translation of these terms is given in Chinese followed by the transliteration to make sure that the terms are clearly explained. In the same way, the term limbo is translated as: "a place where the ancient saints stayed" and the transliteration is given as *ling po* 令 孛 (limbo).

THE WORK OF JUAN COBO

Juan Cobo must have heard from missionaries who had been in Macao about the Jesuits in Kuang-tung and Chao-ch'ing 肇慶. Or perhaps, he may have learned from the Chinese in Manila of late Matteo Ricci, who had published his map of the world (1584). The event had caused a great sensation among the scholars in China. Within a period of fourteen years this map was printed twelve times and in six provinces. This might have been an inspiration to Cobo to produce something scientific and to write a philosophic treatise on the existence of God. The Chinese are by nature curious and they are eager to learn.

As we have seen, Juan Cobo came to the Philippines in 1588, one year after the first group of Dominican missionaries. Nevertheless, he

was able to accomplish a great deal. The *Beng sim po cam* 明心寶鑑 published in 1592, which is the first Chinese book published in a European language, and the *Wu-chi T'ien-chu cheng-chiao chen-ch'uan shih-lu*, won him fame as the first Spanish sinologue. From the testimony of his brethren in religion, Cobo was well versed in many branches of studies. From the *Shih-lu* one can see his learning well expressed in the Chinese language. The production of such a book requires a mind well trained in Western culture and at the same time able to express these ideas in lucid Chinese.

There remains a question we would like to ask: Did Juan Cobo actually write the book by himself, or was there some Chinese scholar who assisted him in polishing the style? We agree with Fr. Antonio Dominguez who states that: ". . . since he (Cobo) could not have written the Chinese text in the form that it has now, Cobo must have availed himself of the services of a Chinese scholar or stylist," (*Shih-lu*, 39). The reasons we give are: 1) Juan Cobo had been in the Philippines for less than five years at the time when the *Shih-lu* was published. All this time he was working among the sangleyes who were not well educated in the Chinese Classics; 2) it would take more than five years for a Chinese student to produce the style we read in the *Shih-lu*. 3) Some of the vocabulary and expressions in the book are not commonly used in ordinary writing. Only scholars and philosophers employ terms such as 蟬, 蛇, 蟻, 粘, 魚, 魃, 勳, 顯, 太初, 太虛, 太極, 一元, 天主無極之德, 運於冲漠之表; 穹窿覆幬, 無聲無臭 (p. 271); 自天地設位, 元會運世, 萬物化醇, 其大生廣生之主, 有自來矣 (p. 205); Finally, Fr. Do-

minguez says that "references to this Chinese co-author are evident in the work." Our guess is that this co-author must have been a scholar who had fairly long contact with Spanish culture. If not it would have been impossible for him to grasp Western ideas and to put them into Chinese. The solution perhaps may be found in the letters and reports from Santiago de Vera, Governor of the Philippines, who had given the Dominicans instructors to teach them the Chinese language.

Father Villaroel, editor and translator of the book, has done a fine job in assuring that Juan Cobo's writings become better known to the world. Besides his own research with all its erudition, he has also shown us what has been accomplished by some of his confreres in his order. One can imagine all the difficulties he encountered in his translations, both in Spanish and English. It is a book written four centuries ago when the West and the East met for the first time, and attempted to communicate ideas that are quite different. Then, there

were new terms to be coined and old terms which did not always fit in exactly with the new ideas. In the latter case, unless the new idea is clearly defined, the old term might cause confusion.

SOME TEXTUAL NOTES

Cobo in his book uses the term Wu-chi 無極 sixty-two times, and the term T'ai-chi 太極 is employed twenty-seven times. According to the translation, Wu-chi is rendered as *infinite*, but there is no explanation for the term T'ai-chi. On p. 393, note 33, the T'ai-chi li is explained as "la razón primordial. Es como la virtualidad de donde dimanan todas las cosas y permanece en ellas dandoles el ser y el movimiento." In general, this term is translated as "infinite," the same as the translation of Wu-chi, infinite (pp. 158, 167, 181, 197, 213, 264). Sometimes the term is translated as *un Señor soberano*, (p. 156); *Señor infinito* (p. 173) *Dios infinito* (p. 181); *el espíritu infinito* (p. 202). The same term "太極之理" has diverse translations: *la razón primordial* (p. 149); *la razón del infinito* (pp. 176, 188, 190); *las razón de lo soberano* (p. 202). Since there are no explanations or definitions for different terms, it is puzzling to the readers and one may even raise questions about the accuracy of these translations.

It is to be noted that the term T'ai-chi 太極 is an ancient term which appeared both in the *Book of Changes* (I Ching 易經) and in the writing of the philosopher Chuang Chou 莊周 (circa 270 B.C.). This term, however, did not become important until the Sung period when the Neo-Confucian philosopher Chou Tun-i 周敦頤 (1017-73) developed a theory in his book, the *T'ai-chi-tu-shuo* 太極圖說. This was a treatise on the diagram of the T'ai-chi in which the origin and development of the universe is explained. The T'ai-chi is considered as a primordial force (氣 chi) from which came the two principles (兩儀), Yang 陽 and Yin 陰. From these two principles in turn came heaven, earth, and all natural phenomenon. Chu Hsi 朱熹 (1130-1200) on the other hand, considered the T'ai-chi as "reason" (li, 理); the amalgamation of all the "reasons" for the origin of all beings. The early Jesuit missionaries in China were cautious in the use of the term T'ai-chi because it has nuances of materialism or idealism. Furthermore, these explanations are liable to lead to pantheism. There is no doubt that Juan Cobo employed this term to mean the supreme God. However, a pagan scholar who knows only Chinese philosophy might interpret this term after the teaching of the Neo-Confucian school. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why the book did not circulate widely and disappeared after the death of its author.

Alonso Sánchez (1547-93), one of the first Jesuit missionaries to the Philippines, visited China twice. Among his writings he had a brief account of the Chinese xylograph: "They (the Chinese) engrave the molds on a wooden board with which they produce as many papers as the number of books they wish to print. And for a different page one needs to engrave another board; as a consequence, one sees nothing worthy of praise either in their written characters which are numerous, nor in their books or paper or printing."⁸

Regarding the movable type mentioned on p. iii, it is to be noted that as early as the eleventh century they had already been invented in China by Pi Sheng 畢昇 (fl. 1030), a metalworker. The type was made from baked clay.⁹ Later in the Yuan period (1280-1368) wooden type was invented. By the middle of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) movable type made of copper began to appear. It is not surprising that the Chinese in Manila were able to produce such type.

I have listed in a brief Appendix, a number of errors in translation and misprints, which, however, should not detract from the genuine service which Fr. Villaroel has contributed in making Fr. Juan Cobo's book more easily available to scholars. It is a genuine piece of scholarship.

A P P E N D I X

We wish to point out some of the misprints in the original text and a few mistakes in the translation of the text:

A. Misprints in the original text counting from the right:

- | | | | |
|----------------------------------|---|-----------|---|
| p. 125, col. 6, | 精 | should be | 晴 |
| p. 117, col. 3, | 晚 | should be | 晚 |
| p. 193, col. 1, second character | 羅 | | 羅 |
| p. 209, col. 2, | 賸 | should be | 繕 |
| p. 332, last col. and p. 333, | 棠 | should be | 棠 |
| p. 336, col. 1, | 盲 | should be | 盲 |
| p. 339, cols. 4 & 6 | 卯 | should be | 卯 |
| p. 340, col. 9, | 特 | should be | 特 |
| p. 343, col. 2, | 十 | should be | 手 |
| p. 347, | 猴 | should be | 猴 |
| p. 351, col. 1, | 至 | should be | 至 |
| p. 379, col. 5, | 辨 | should be | 辨 |

8. Colin-Pastell, *Labor Evangelica*, vol. 1 (Barcelona, 1900), p. 533.

9. Cf. Shen k'uo 沈括 (1030-1094), *Meng-chi-pi-t'an* 夢溪筆談, ch'uan 18.

B. Some of the mistakes in the translations of the text:

p. 82, l. CHUN-CHING, should be CHUN-CHIU 春秋 p.146, last col. and 147 first col. 旃佛即機有得道僧師曰, 理有太極、此之謂奧妙. This should be read as one sentence: Por eso un padre español de mucha doctrina dijo . . . y así lo es.

p. 182, col. 1, 明心寶鑑天理篇. The title of this book is 明心寶鑑 *Ming hsin pao-chien*. 天理篇 T'ien-li pien is a chapter in this book. Hence p. 82, p. 183, note 52 (p. 394) should be corrected.

p. 190, col. 5. 古有一位君人者 the words 君人 should be translated as "king."

p. 191, col. 2 心得 has the meaning: "what one gains from intense study, meditation or practice." Unless one has ordinarily studied intensely on the subject, merely to try to contemplate the primordial and infinite reason

p. 194, col. 2. The two characters are 漏碗, a leaky bowl. It is not a special utensil used in the Ming period as is explained on note 58 (p. 394).

p. 379 本廟僧羨導迷古典. Here Juan Cobo states that his writings came from the (traditional) ancient writings of the Church, such as the *Holy Scripture* or the works of the Fathers, etc. Thus to say: "Según lo escrito en los *clasicos chinos*," is incorrect. Columns 5 and 6 seem to hint that the *Shih-lu* is part of a catechism compiled by Cobo from which he took out several chapters and had them rendered into the classical Chinese style. This explains the first two Chinese characters on the title 新刻, "Newly engraved."