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## **Fan Shouyi, A Bridge Between China And The West Under The Rite Controversy\***

Many people are familiar with European missionaries like Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) who served as cultural bridges between China and the West. Not only did they bring Western knowledge and Christianity to China, translating in collaboration with Chinese literati important works of philosophy, theology and science, they also brought knowledge of China to the West, through letters, reports, books about China, and notably through their Latin translation of the Confucian books in the *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* (1687). In the last thirty years, scholarship came to stress the role of Chinese individuals and local communities in this cultural transmission. I would like to highlight here the life and role of Fan Shouyi 樊守義 (1682-1753), a Christian Chinese who have lived and studied in Europe for ten years (1708-1718), who became priest in Europe, and who was the first Chinese to write impressions of Europe and the Americas. With his double identity as a Chinese subject of the Kangxi emperor and as a Jesuit priest, he made efforts to fulfill his religious and political duties at the difficult times of the Rite Controversy.<sup>1</sup>

### **Fan Shouyi and his family background**

Fan Shouyi was born in 1682 in the city of Jiangzhou 絳州 (today Xinjiang 新絳) in the prefecture of Pingyang 平陽, in the southern part of the prov-

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is indebted to the scholarship of Dr. Paul Rule (1994; 1995) who had published some twenty years ago two research papers on Fan Shouyi. I have incorporated here documents recently discovered.

ince of Shanxi 山西. Jiangzhou was the center for the evangelization of Shanxi and Shaanxi 陝西 provinces, and it is associated with the work of the Italian Jesuit Alfonso Vagnone (1566-1640) who worked there from 1624 until his death in 1640. Because of lack of information about Fan's family background and early life, it is often assumed that he converted to Christianity thanks to the Piedmontese Jesuit Antonio Provana (1662-1720), (see for example Piastra 41). However, a Western report on the Chinese mission, kept today in the Archives of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in Rome, gives us precious information about his family Christian background and his early life (Archivum Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide vol. 12).<sup>2</sup> His father was a merchant but was drowned while crossing a river. The father was not baptized but the mother was from an old Christian family of Jiangzhou and thus Fan Shouyi was baptized quickly after his birth. Fate struck again the family since the widowed mother passed away only a few years after the death of Fan's father. So at the age of ten years old (around the year 1692), Fan Shouyi was orphan from both parents. He was entrusted to the care of his maternal uncles who also managed the wealth of the deceased father. The uncles were most probably Christian and so Fan Shouyi would have received a Christian education, alongside his formal education (Archivum Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide vol. 12).

### **Collaborator of the mission in the provinces**

According to the document of the Archivum Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide, the two uncles asked the Piedmontese Filippo-Felice Carrocci (1646-1695) to take Fan Shouyi to his church and to take care of him. The document does not spell out the motivation of the uncles; they may have discovered some good learning abilities in Fan Shouyi and decided to entrust him to a Jesuit priest. This may have happened around the year 1694 when Carrocci arrived in Jiangzhou (Dehergne 46; Pfister n. 414).

The young Fan Shouyi, now twelve years, could have maintained close connections with his family since they all lived in the same town. In 1695, Carrocci, just before reaching fifty years old, passed away, and Provana, a native of Nice (at that time belonging to the kingdom of Piedmont) arrived at Jiangzhou the next year to fill the position left vacant. He was then 36 years old, a mature man, but having spent only one year in China, he was still an infant in terms of Chinese knowledge. Because of the pressing needs of the mission, he did not go through the three years of studies of Chinese language and

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<sup>2</sup> Professor Rule graciously communicated to me the content of this precious document.

Confucian Classics, but was rushed to the apostolic field. He could speak basic Chinese, but probably he could not read and write it. Provana found in the Jiangzhou church Fan Shouyi, who was then fourteen. As we shall see, they were to become collaborators and intimate friends for the following 25 years, until Provana's death in 1720. The document of the Archivum Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide mentions the roles of Fan Shouyi as translator, catechist, and a companion of Provana in his missions, which covered indeed a large area especially since he was entrusted in the years 1699 to 1701 with the three provinces of Shanxi, Shaanxi and Henan. Fan Shouyi had gained a good grasp in Classical learning since he could explain to Provana the references to the classical books, which were often used by the Chinese literati. In several towns, Provana built churches, while he repaired in Taiyuan the church which had been built by the Flemish Jesuit Michel Trigault (1602-1667) (Pfister 478-479).

Fan Shouyi would have assisted Provana in securing the needed permissions from the Chinese authorities, developing talents for negotiation which would prove to be very useful later on in his dealings with the courts of China and Europe.

### Work in the capital

In August 1705, Provana and Fan Shouyi left Shanxi and went to Beijing for some business related to the visit of the papal legate Maillard de Tournon (1668-1710) (Dehergne n. 665). Through the recommendation of the Piedmontese Jesuit Claudio Filippo Grimaldi (1638-1712), who had been named director of the Imperial Astronomical Bureau in 1688, Fan Shouyi was admitted in the bureau, which informed the local magistrates of Jiangzhou about the nomination, requesting a board with an inscription to be set up at the entrance of his family house. According to a letter of the Jesuit Visitor Giovanni Laureati (1666-1727), Fan Shouyi held the position of junior clerk (*tianwensheng* 天文生). However it seems that he had no special knowledge in the field of astronomy, and Paul Rule suggests that this position was intended to give him a legal status and protection (Rule 1994).

The visit of the papal legate Tournon in Beijing in 1705 did not bring satisfaction to Kangxi regarding the issue of the Chinese rites, and thus Kangxi in 1706 sent his own ambassadors to Rome, Antonio de Barros (1657-1708) and Antoine de Beauvillier (1657-1708). Without any news from this first embassy, he sent in 1708 a second embassy consisting of Provana, José Ramón Arxó (1663-1711) and Jean-François Noël (1651-1729). The three Jesuits and Fan Shouyi sailed from Macao on January 14, 1708. What was the precise role

of Fan Shouyi in the embassy? Documents refer to him as a language secretary to Provana, but when this one arrived Italy, he came to give Fan Shouyi a more prominent role as being a witness in the Rites controversy (Provana to the Father General FG 730.9; Rule 1994).

According to the document in the Archivum Sacrae Congregationis de Propaganda Fide, Provana entrusted Fan Shouyi with a box containing the imperial documents, which was covered with a yellow veil. The imperial documents numbered a total of 69, consisting of copies of the original documents preserved in the imperial archives which Kangxi had himself examined and approved.<sup>3</sup>

### Stay in Europe

After a stop at Salvador de Bahia, in Brazil, Provana and Fan Shouyi, on September 7, 1708, arrived at Lisbon where the king of Portugal João V (1689-1750) received them in audience. In February 1709 they arrived Rome where the pope Clement XI (1649-1721) received them in audience. The mission of Provana was very difficult since the pope had decided not to allow the Chinese rites and confirmed to Provana that Tournon had acted in China in agreement with his instructions. Also, the Vatican considered that Provana did not have enough credentials to be received as ambassador of Kangxi, and furthermore forbade Provana to return China, at least until a new papal legate could be sent (Provana to the Father General FG 730.9).

Fan Shouyi could have decided to return, but perhaps did not want to leave his mentor, Provana, in such a difficult situation. Also, Fan Shouyi felt at that time the vocation for joining the Jesuits. He was now 27 years old, and had been living with them already for fifteen years. As we can read from his travel report, the *Shenjianlu* 身見錄 (Report about What I saw in person, 1721), Fan Shouyi was quite impressed by the Western civilization and by the cultural and social achievements of Christianity. He became also more aware of the Church politics, with different religious orders or congregations vying for influence, not always in an evangelical way. He was certainly aware that the Roman stance on the Chinese rites would bring many more difficulties for the Church in China. On December 15, 1709, he joined the Jesuit noviciate in Rome (Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu 175:29v.).

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<sup>3</sup> For a description of those documents, see: Rosso 1948: 179ff. These documents were published in Italian translation in the *Atti Imperiali Autentici, di vari Trattati, passati nella Regia Corte di Pekino, tra l'imperatore della Cina, e M. Patriarca Antiocheno, al presente Sig. Cardinale di Tournon negli anni 1705., e 1706.,* (Cologne: [1710?]).

The two years of noviciate would have meant a separation from Provana. From 1712 to 1714, Fan Shouyi studied Latin and philosophy in Milan, and from 1715 to 1717, theology in Turin. Through those six years of academic training, Fan Shouyi would have been exposed to a wealth of philosophical and theological knowledge, and have gained a deep intellectual foundation for his Christian faith. During his studies in Milan and Turin, Provana was staying in those cities, though not necessary in the same houses, and thus could have helped Fan Shouyi in those abstract studies, making sure that Fan Shouyi could be qualified for ordination to priesthood, which happened in 1717 (*Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu* 175:29v.).

The Red Manifesto of Kangxi arrived Rome in 1718, confirming that Kangxi had dispatched Provana as ambassador. Provana could not be retained any longer in Europe, and was finally allowed to return China. However, the pope did not entrust Provana with any mission, but decided to send Carlo Ambrogio Mezzabarba (ca. 1685-1741) as a new papal legate. In May 1719, Provana and Fan Shouyi sailed from Lisbon (*Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu* 175:29v.).

## **Return to China**

On May 19, 1719, some twelve years after they had departed Beijing, Provana and Fan Shouyi sailed from Lisbon back to China, but on March 15, 1720, Provana died at sea off the cape of Good Hope. Fan Shouyi arrived Macao on July 17, 1720. He regarded himself as the guardian of the body of Provana and as the executer of the mission that Provana had received from Kangxi. Though he had not received any official mandate either from the pope or from the emperor, he probably felt the duty to serve the Church and China, and thought that he could help promoting the relationship between the two. Even before the boat had landed in Macao, Chinese officials knew that it was carrying the body of Provana, and that there was on board a certain Fan Shouyi, disciple of Provana. The Chinese officers interviewed him in Macao, and dispatched a report from Guangzhou to the court, mentioning that Fan Shouyi “had been in the service of Provana from his youth and so accompanied him in 1707.” (Document n. 2873; Rule, 1994).

After a short stay of a week in Macao, Fan Shouyi moved to Guangzhou, bringing the body of Provana and some of his belongings. There he resided at the Jesuit Church. The officers interviewed him for a second time, and Fan Shouyi gave more details about the mission of Provana in Rome, writing in his testimony that in Rome they “were received in audience by the Sovereign Pontiff; we explained in detail to the Sovereign Pontiff His Majesty’s decrees

about Duoluo's [Maillard de Tournon] arrival in China, his disputes on the rites and his activities; when the Sovereign Pontiff heard all this, he clasped his hands and burst into tears; he said: 'When did I ever bid Duoluo go to China and say such things and do such deeds?'" (Rosso 333).

Though Clement XI would have backed up Tournon on the issue of the Chinese rites, he may have expressed feelings of sadness and even anger at the way Tournon had dealt with Kangxi. But more than anything else, the words of the pope as reported by Fan Shouyi tell us the psychological motivations of Fan Shouyi who strived to maintain the possibility of communication between Clement XI and Kangxi. As much as Fan Shouyi was eager to carry out the mission of Provana, Kangxi himself was left without any news from the people he had dispatched to Europe. Indeed, de Barros and de Beauvillier had died on sea in January 1708, and Provana in March 1720, while Arxó and Noël were prevented from returning. Though Fan Shouyi had not been officially missionned by Kangxi, he was part of the imperial embassy and the only left to report. Provana had made Fan Shouyi to play in Europe the role of a Chinese witness, although without much success; now Fan Shouyi could become for Kangxi a Chinese witness of Europe, and as we shall see, he had some influence on Kangxi. When Fan Shouyi received the call to come to the court, he had to leave Provana's coffin in the Jesuit church of Guangzhou next to the Western gate<sup>4</sup> and it is only on 17 December, 1722 that Provana was buried in a mausoleum under the instruction of Kangxi.<sup>5</sup>

Fan Shouyi departed Guangzhou on August 5, and arrived in October 1720 at Jehol, Kangxi's summer residence. Fan Shouyi found himself in a difficult situation since he had to explain why Provana had delayed so long his return to China and also about the position of the pope on the question of the Chinese rites. Fan Shouyi could not hide the fact that Rome had not entrusted Provana with any official answer, but had chosen instead Mezzabarba who was soon to arrive China.

### **Interpreter of the court for the Mezzabarba legation**

Fan Shouyi gained the trust of Kangxi who retained him as interpreter. From December 1720 to March 1721, Mezzabarba had several discussions with Kangxi's court officers, and he informed them that the pope had decided in his Constitution *Ex illa die* (1715) to forbid Chinese Catholics practicing

<sup>4</sup> Giovanni Laureati al Generale Tamburrini, Pechino, 15 Marzo 1721; I.S. 174, ff. 038r (corpus P. Provanae honorifice delatum est ad nostrum Templum extra portam occidentalem).

<sup>5</sup> The mausoleum was destroyed by some rebels in 1852-1853. See Guillemin.

rites to the ancestors, to Confucius and to the emperor. While the Jesuits had always presented the pope as being revered by all the kings of Europe, Fan Shouyi indicated that “the pope cannot order the English or the Dutch, and yet pretends to give orders in China.” (Villermaules 108). Thus, Kangxi came to be more informed about the real authority of the pope. As Benjamin Elman says, “a century of Jesuit portraits of the pope as emperor of the Church (*jiao-huang*) had unraveled” (Elman 165).

Fan Shouyi’s information about the limit of the papal power over Europe and about the necessity of the pope to compose with different factions within the church may not have been a surprise to an astute ruler as Kangxi. After all, though he himself was an absolute monarch, he perfectly knew the need to compose between the Manchu princes and the Han people. The knowledge about the relative weakness of papal authority may have influenced Kangxi in setting up more forcefully his policy towards the Catholic Church. Though Fan Shouyi was suspected by the Mezzabarba legation and even by some fellow Jesuits of endangering the mission of the Church, he was in fact rendering a great service to both the Church and China. By telling the truth, he played a constructive role for a mutual understanding.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Shenjianlu (1721), the first report on the West by a Chinese**

At the request of the court, Fan Shouyi wrote his account of his trip abroad. According to the preface, he composed the work in the “first month of the summer of 1721 and humbly presented to the princes, dukes and high officials”.<sup>7</sup> He described the coasts of South East Asia, and the cities of Salvador of Bahia, Lisbon, Palermo, Genoa, Leghorn, Pisa, Sienna, Rome, Naples, Florence, Bologna, Parma, Pavia, Milan and Turin.

What is very striking in this short report of some 4500 Chinese characters is the prominent focus on education. For example, in the section on Salvador de Bahia in Brazil, Fan Shouyi mentioned the university (*daxue* 大學) and the middle school (*zhongxue* 中學) “each well-constructed and beautiful, and much frequented.” He mentioned also that “the Jesuits built a college on the

<sup>6</sup> Also, the Mezzabarba legation was offended because at several occasions Fan Shouyi, an ordinary priest “was seated well above the legate.” But this was hardly surprising because Fan Shouyi had to seat with other court officers; see Villermaules 103.

<sup>7</sup> The *Shenjianlu* was not published during Fan Shouyi’s time, but a manuscript was discovered by the scholar Wang Zhongming 王重民 in 1936 in the National Library of Rome (Ms. Or. 264/2). The Chinese text was published for the first time by the Catholic priest Fang Hao 方豪 (1910-1980): *Zhongxi jiaotongshi* 中西交通史 (History of communications between China and the West): Taipei, 1953. Reprint: Shanghai shiji chubanshe 上海世紀出版社, 2015, 719-725. For the Italian translation see: Bertuccioli.

top of a hill, housing more than one hundred religious, with a library of fifty or sixty rows of shelves, containing several tens of thousands of volumes” (Shenjianlu, Zhongxi jiaotongshi 720). This college had been founded in 1552 by Manuel da Nóbrega (1517-1570).

About Lisbon, he noted the different levels (*pin* 品) in the curriculum of the schools: the primary schools (*xiaoxue* 小學) with four levels, the middle schools with two levels, and the university with three levels (Shenjianlu, Zhongxi jiaotongshi 721). The text refers also to “general college” (*zongxue* 總學) in Sienna – this *studium* was founded in 1255 and promoted in 1355 as *Studium Generale*, which attracted students from everywhere for the studies of investigation of things and of the fathoming of principles (*gewu qiongli zhi xue* 格物窮理之學) – the equivalent of philosophy for the Jesuits (Shenjianlu, Zhongxi jiaotongshi 721).

About the Vatican, Fan Shouyi mentioned a “huge library with countless books and countless shelves and boxes, representing a complete collection of historical records of all the countries of the world from ancient times up to now” (Shenjianlu, Zhongxi jiaotongshi 722). This refers to the Vatican Library which had been formerly established in 1475. He mentioned also the colleges in Rome: “a college for the sons of the German aristocracy” (熱爾罵尼亞國公侯子弟之學宮; this is the Germanicum, founded in 1522), as well as “a college for the sons of the Greek nobility” (厄肋西亞世家子弟之學宮), “a universal college, for sons of the nobility from different nations” (各國世家子弟統學宮; this refers to the Collegio Romano founded by Saint Ignatius in 1551), and “a general college for locals, without distinction between aristocracy and common people” (本府總學; today the Sapienzia University) (Shenjianlu, Zhongxi jiaotongshi 723). All those colleges are devoted to the studies of philosophy. About Bologna, Fan Shouyi remarked that the people are “intelligent and eager to study” (*congming haoxue* 聰明好學) (Shenjianlu, Zhongxi jiaotongshi 724) – probably a reference to the students of the university of Bologna, the oldest in the world, founded in 1088. He made also a quick reference to the university in Milan.

All those mentions of educational institutions in the West are intended to show Europe as a place of learning and culture, similar in this respect to China. Before Fan Shouyi, Jesuits in China had introduced Heavenly Study (*tianxue* 天學) or Western Study (*xixue* 西學). Giulio Aleni (1582-1649) in his *Xixuefan* 西學凡 (1623) and Vagnone in his *Tongyou jiaoyu* 童幼教育 (c.1632) had described the education system of Europe. Thus, Fan Shouyi’s report can be understood as confirming the educational focus of Europe in general, and the Jesuits in particular. As Professor Meng Hua 孟華 suggests, Fan Shouyi wanted probably to satisfy the intellectual interests of Kangxi who promoted arts and science, in particular with the help of the Jesuits working at the court (Meng).



## Conclusion

After the failure of the Mezzabarba's legation, Fan Shouyi was active as a priest in North China. He died in Beijing in 1753, and was buried in the Catholic cemetery of Zhalan, near to the tombs of Matteo Ricci and other fellow Jesuits. The inscription on his tombstone mentions his 33 years of service in the mission and 44 years in the Society of Jesus. The design of the tombstone reflects his double identity, with the dragon symbolizing his loyalty to his country and the cross his Christian faith. All his life, he assumed this double identity, and amid difficult times has shown himself being faithful to both. In 1955, the Beijing Communist Party School took possession of Zhalan, and the tombstone of Fan Shouyi has become now a cultural relic under the protection of the Chinese state.<sup>8</sup>

## ABSTRACT

Much has been written about Matteo Ricci and others Western missionaries in China, and less attention has been given to Chinese Catholics. We present here the fascinating story of Fan Shouyi, a Chinese Catholic who came to Europe and decided to become a Jesuit. Returning to China, he played a role in the relations between pope Clement XI and the emperor Kangxi, a role not easy but quite constructive.

**Keywords:** Fan Shouyi; Chinese Catholics; Jesuits; cultural bridges; mission; evangelization

**Słowa kluczowe:** Fan Shouyi; chińscy katolicy; jezuici; kulturowe mosty; misja; ewangelizacja

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<sup>8</sup> The journal of the Beijing Communist Party School recently published an article on Fan Shouyi: See: Wu Boya [吳伯雅].

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Legend: Inscription on the tombstone of Fan Shouyi, Zhalan cemetery, Beijing.

[Translation from Chinese:] Master Fan was called Shouyi and had the sobriquet Lihe. He was a native of Jiangzhou in the Shanxi Province. He died on the 26<sup>th</sup> day of the 1<sup>st</sup> month of the 18<sup>th</sup> year of the Qianlong reign (28 February 1753) at the age of 71. He propagated the [holy] teachings for 33 years and lived in the Society for 44 years.

[Translation from Latin:] To God Most Good and Most Great. Father Louis Fan, a formed coadjutor of the Society of Jesus and a Chinese from the Province of Shanxi, entered the Society in Rome in 1709. After his return to China, he spent 33 years in the Mission. A tireless worker and a vigilant religious, he died in Peking of the 28<sup>th</sup> of February, in the 71<sup>st</sup> year of his life, his 44<sup>th</sup> in the Society.

