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Alessandro Valignano' Interpretation to Chinese Culture

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Abstract

Alessandro Valignano was sent to the East for missionary work by the Society of Jesus in 1574 and died in Macao in 1606. During the 32 years of Eastern missionary work, he served as several posts and contributed greatly to the spread of Catholicism in India, China and Japan from the end of the 16th century to the beginning of the 17th century. Especially, he was a far-sighted organizer and planner of the Jesuit Missionary Strategy in China during that time. He had made outstanding contributions including establishing a rational Chinese cultural outlook, changing the missionary strategy in China, implementing the "cultural adaptation policy", establishing a missionary school to train the missionaries who could master Chinese and be good at cross-cultural communication, so as to be suitable for the future of the Jesuit missionaries and remove some man-made obstacles to adapt to Chinese culture.

Key words: Alessandro Valignano; Missionary strategy; Interpretation of Chinese culture

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INTRODUCTION

Alessandro Valignano (1539-1606), an Italian missionary, whose Chinese name was Fan Li'an, received a doctor of law when he was 19 years old. In 1574, Alessandro Valignano was sent to the East to preach, and died in Macao in 1606. During his 32 years of missionary service in the East, Alessandro Valignano, who served as a regional inspector of all-India, an archbishop of the Diocese of India, an inspector of Chinese and Japanese dioceses, and a member of the Catholic Church in India, contributed greatly to the spread of Catholicism in India, China and Japan from the end of the 16th century to the beginning of the 17th century. Some Catholics praised him for "the genius of Alexander and the martial arts of General Anibar." (Henri, 1933, p.139) Michel Ruggier who was the First Jesuit in Mainland China, said that "he opened the China's door which was closed very tightly with humility and perseverance," (Zhang & Liu, 1987, p.16) while Bernard R. P. Henri who was French famous Jesuit Sinologist, said that he was "a stone for the construction of the Chinese church. Without his advocacy, it would not be easy to succeed in all sorts of great undertakings." (Henri, 1933, p.143)

1. ALESSANDRO VALIGNANO'S RATIONAL VIEW OF CHINESE CULTURE

Valignano took full advantage of the opportunity of touring all parts of East India after his appointment in Dagua in September 1574 to gain a detailed understanding of the various situations concerning China. He has met with missionaries in China many times to find out their views on the situation in China and their true feelings of missionary. With the exception of Macao, Valignano has not been to the mainland of China. Most of his knowledge was obtained from books and reports or talks from Chinese missionaries. After July 1578, Valignano

was in Macao for the first time for 10 months, as provided a good opportunity for him to study the situation in China carefully. Since then, Valignano had also paid special attention to reading and collecting literature about China. "One of the first things to care about is to actively search all kinds of (Chinese) books. Spare time at work is devoted to check out the Chinese books in his room with the help of a few people who have gathered together." (Henri, 1933, pp.58-62) Through translation and with the help of the pictures in the books, Valignano had a deep understanding of China's human history, geographical conditions, daily life and social etiquette, "eating, dressing, ceremonial, language, social customs, etc., the seats of the guests, the form of the building, the furnishings of the interior, the appearance of medical treatment and the education of children are all different from those in Europe and some are quite the opposite, but everything is reasonable." (Henri, 1933, 249) Also include some maps of China, which reflected the cultural situation in various parts of China, and "Valignano has also referred to it briefly". (Matteo, 1580-1609/1986, p.34) On the basis of some understanding of the actual progress of the missionary mission and the specific situation in China, Valignano was trying to clarify the very confusing situation in European records of China. He took the opportunity to accept the instruction of the Jesuit general to write "A Biography of St. Francisco Xavier", and to carefully screen and examine the various materials collected from all over the world according to the principle of "very true and sure". A more detailed and accurate account has been given of all aspects of China, including "the people, towns, natural products, land and fertility, court income, local wealth, inland taxation, industrial management, government and internal affairs." (Alessandro, 1598/1896, p.54) Bernard R. P. Henri who was French famous Jesuit Sinologist, called it "everything, a very complete reference book." (Henri, 1933, p.250) Therefore, in his book of St. Francisco Xavier, the historical, geographical, political and social customs of China, most of which are adapted to the present situation in China. "Although they were old works of 300 years ago, they can still be fully recorded today." (Henri, 1933, p.250)

Valignano's understanding of the superiority of Chinese civilization was mainly reflected in the third chapter, "Chinese Wonders", in his book "A Biography of St. Francisco Xavier", which was intended to make the Europeans really understand Chinese civilization and break the fixed attitude that Europe is the world. He wrote: "China can be said to be different from the other kingdoms of the East, but it has to surpass them; this is the most important and abundant thing in the whole East; It is very similar to Europe in a number of ways, such as abundance, perfection, and in many places." (Alessandro, 1598/1896, p.83) Then he listed the seven advantages of China: "it is the largest country governed by a single

king; it is the most populous country in the world; no country in the world is more fertile and rich in food and clothing; no country seems to have more wealth than any other country; no country seems to be as magnificent and prosperous as it is, and its inhabitants are the most industrious in the world; of all the discovered countries, it is the most peaceful and best governed." (Alessandro, 1598/1896, p.84) As a Jesuit with a doctorate in law, Valignano was more interested in the state of government, which was more important than the other six stories. In this chapter, Valignano talked about the situation of the king of China and his family. Its advantages were: the official could only pass the examination, it referred to the importance of the academic, the abundance of the collection of each city, and the general situation of the natural philosophy, the ethical philosophy and the science; the general rank order was the most methodical in the form of the government he had seen in the world to date; the decrees were carried out with drive and sweep; the removal of any obstacle in this country was a deliberate resort to peaceful means; the measures taken to disperse the royal family in the provinces and officials were to be taken to prevent the rebellion. As Bernard R. P. Henri who was French famous Jesuit Sinologist pointed out that the original preacher's discovery of the Chinese civilization, or "the first cause of the praise of the Jesuits is the organization of the Chinese city in comparison with the system of the 16th-century European and even the whole world is that China is superior to Europe in the country system, and then is the ancient or ethical view of the Chinese nation." (Henri, 1937/1993, pp.65-71) This kind of knowledge is made by Valignano. Although he did not highly agree with the oriental culture, he was able to observe and study on the basis of the recognition of the value of the oriental culture and the equal treatment of the bellicose who claimed the value of the oriental culture.

However, in his book, Valignano pointed out the shortcomings of the Chinese people and gave concrete reports on the cruelty of the officials, the cowardice of the soldiers, the fear of foreign affairs and the mentality of xenophobia, rape and theft, and so on. (Henri, 1933, p.249)

2. TO IMPLEMENT THE "CULTURAL ADAPTATION" MISSIONARY STRATEGY

Francisco Xavier's missionary work in China failed, and his wish was realized 20 years later when Valignano who followed Francisco Xavier and had an important influence on the spread of Catholicism in China, took the post of Far Eastern Christian Patrol.

During his first stay in Macao in 1578, Valignano visited Chinese missionaries, and talked to Andoni, who had attended Francisco Xavier's deathbed, in order to understand the ideas and deeds of this forerunner. In

addition, he collected a large amount of information about China. Through translation and reading Chinese books, so as to have a certain degree of understanding of China's geography, culture, history, and so on, all his efforts are to "rekindle the enthusiasm of the sleeping expedition to China." (Matteo & Nicolas, 1983/1953, p.142) At this time, the Macao church authorities are carrying out the policy. At this time, the Macao Church authorities are pursuing the "Portuguese Policy", among the Chinese Catholics in Macao, which was the so-called "Portugalization" and meant that the Chinese who were forced to convert to Christianity should have a name commonly used by Portuguese, speak Portuguese, wear Portuguese national clothes and live according to Portuguese customs. In his letter to the president of the Society of Jesus, Valignano made it clear that "the only way for missionaries to enter China is to absolutely avoid the route followed by missionaries who have traveled to other countries before." (Henri, 1933, p.178) Later, despite the opposition of the upper echelons of the East Indian Church, he established a group in Macao, in which, contrary to past practice, he said, "While the Chinese are still Chinese, the missionaries of the West also should be Chinese." The purpose of Valignano's doing was to "divide work and cooperate within the right limits between Chinese missionaries and Western missionaries in China." (Henri, 1933, p.194) It was clear that this reform was conducive to the development of the Church in China. He therefore solemnly declared to the president of the Society of Jesus that such reform was "impermissible".

During this period, he tried several times to Guangzhou to preach, but all were successful. This impressed him deeply with the difficult situation of preaching in China. He was said to have leaned against the threshold of his residence, overlooking the interior, and sighing, "When shall thou open the rock?" (Louis, 1932/1995, p.20) Before him, the Jesuits Barracuse, Goth, Pelace, and Liebera tried hard to preach inland, as he did without success. This situation led him to reflect and realize that "the only way to preach in China is to absolutely avoid the path followed by missionaries going to other countries, because times have changed, this is no longer the case that missionaries can 'hold the Bible in one hand', with the sword given by the emperor in one hand, even though force was not used to cultivate faith but to protect the life of the missionary, it was not a method that could be used in the great empire of the far East." (Henri, 1933, p.274) Valignano's understanding has the turning point significance of the missionary strategy. That is to say, in the face of a Chinese nation with a high degree of culture and civilization, strict and orderly state management and powerful military power, it is necessary to abandon the means of conquest or coercion by force and adopt the method of confluence with the Chinese people and identify with the Chinese culture. The meaning of this idea is extremely profound,

and it provides the method guide to those missionaries who made great efforts to preach in China. Later missionaries succeeded only after practicing this method. Matteo Ricci praised Valignano as the "father of Chinese missionary", based on this.

3. TO ATTACH IMPORTANCE TO MISSIONARIES' CHINESE LEARNING AND STUDY OF CHINESE CLASSICS

Valignano believed that the first step for European missionaries to "Sinicize" and to change their missionary strategy was to learn Chinese characters. In view of the fact that the Jesuits in Macao were unable to select the right person to undertake the task of learning Chinese, Valignano sent a letter to the head of the Indian district for the training of the missionaries. Later, Valignano went to Japan, but the plan was correct and Michele Ruggieri and Matteo Ricci, who would make a great contribution in China in the future, were sent from India to Macao to learn Chinese.

To some extent, language is the main tool of heterogeneous cultural communication, Valignano known what as means. Biographies and Bibliographies of Jesuits in China said: "Valignano needs to train his staff before he can run his business. The most important condition is to be familiar with Chinese first." (Louis, 1932/1995, p.352) This took into account not only the need to communicate with the Chinese in Chinese during preaching, but also the use of the local language for missionaries to communicate with the local people in their daily lives. The tendentiousness of the language used by both parties in the communication collision of foreign culture was also the performance of both sides. When the universal language of the world, such as English, was not present at that time, as a sojourner, it should be better to learn Chinese. But many of the missionaries had no idea of this, and when he arrived, the Macao church not only did not study Chinese, but also asked the Chinese to be baptized to learn the Portuguese and to conform to the Portuguese style of life. Another reason, of course, is that Chinese is a difficult language for them to understand. Father Michele Ruggieri later sent to Macao was given the first task of learning Chinese. He wrote and said:

"The priest who inspected the ministry wrote to inform me that I was learning Chinese language and making parallel progress in the three aspects of reading, writing and speaking. As soon as I received the order, I tried my best. But the Chinese language is not only different from ours, but also different from that of any other country in the world. There is no letter, no number of words, and a word had the meaning of a word. Even for the Chinese, it takes 15 years to read their books. I was really disappointed when I first read together, but because of the will of the order, I would do my best to follow this order

and back it up with as much perseverance as I could.” (Henri, 1933, p.183)

Father Michele Ruggieri’s learning of Chinese was ridiculed and stopped by all sides, and the letter tried to defend him after learning about it in Japan, but it could not extinguish the ridicule. Valignano’s wisdom was demonstrated in the course of later missionary missions. When Michele Ruggieri appeared in front of Chinese officials in fluent Chinese after a hard and arduous study, “even senior Chinese officials are very polite and polite because they see a foreigner who knows the language and characters of his country. Treat Michele Ruggieri with exception. When others visit, they all bow down and worship, but allow Michele Ruggieri to stand.” (Henri, 1933, p.183)

When Valignano came to Macao for the second time, synthesizing the experience he gained in his missionary mission in Japan, he reformed the Macao church. Not only were the Chinese baptized Chinese allowed to maintain their original appearance and living habits, Western missionaries also wanted to be “Chinese” and wrote to the president of The society of Jesus demanding that the system be fixed without arbitrary change. In mainland China, Valignano instructed missionaries to adapt to local customs and to integrate into them. When Matteo Ricci lived in Guangdong for a period of time, it was found that in order to make use of the influence of Buddhism, it was not favorable to communicate with the Confucian class when he first came into China, and it was convenient to put forward in 1592 that he should change the dress and crown of the Confucian scholar in order to keep his hair. Although this idea was not consistent with Valignano’s initial experience and decision in Japan, he enthusiastically supported the major change of Matteo Ricci, instructing him: “the inspection led the priest to believe that these requests were very reasonable, so he granted them one by one. And personally responsible for reporting each request in detail to the Roman Jesuit General Father, and also to the Father.” (Matteo, 1580-1609/1986, p.276) When Matteo Ricci entered Beijing, he discussed with some priests the contents of tolerant Chinese etiquette. These “ritualistic instructions for the application of Matteo Ricci to the Chinese, Father Valignano has been reviewed and approved.” (Matteo, 1580-1609/1986, p.276) It can be seen that every important step taken by the Chinese missionary mission was carried out under the plan and instructions of Valignano. He was not only responsible for the selection and dispatch of personnel for Chinese missionary missions, the support of funds and the missionary route from the south to the north, from the top to the bottom of the social structure, but also gave guidance and instructions from the nuances of the missionary methods. Let the Chinese missionary group adapt to the general policy of Chinese customs, according to the circumstances.

4. TO ESTABLISH MISSIONARY SCHOOLS TO TRAIN JESUITS WHO ARE GOOD AT CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION

Michele Ruggieri and Matteo Ricci successfully obtained the opportunity to preach from Macao to the mainland because of their mastery of Chinese language, which made Jesuit Eastern Inspector Valignano realize the importance of learning Chinese language and literature and Chinese etiquette and customs. In 1594, Valignano proposed to the General President of the Jesuit Church of Rome to set up a university in Macao to train Jesuits who were going to preach in mainland China or other eastern countries so that they could learn and master a series of knowledge about China. Then the missionary activities can be carried out smoothly. With approval, St. Paul’s College, which led 14 Jesuits to Macao in 1578, was expanded and upgraded to the St. Paul’s College of higher Education, and became a higher institution of higher learning for the training of missionaries. Many famous Jesuits such as Niccolo Longobardi studied or taught in the school.

In accordance with the Jesuits’ missionary needs in China, the College referred to the syllabus and curriculum requirements of the Portuguese University in China, and offered courses in Chinese, Latin, philosophy, theology, astronomy, mathematics and music. One of the most important required courses in class is Chinese course. Each participant has to study because it is the necessary language ability of the Jesuits in China and the Far East to study. Not only do the students have to study, but also some of the busy teachers have to learn. The math teacher’s name was added to St. Paul’s College’s roster of graduates because he was also a student studying Chinese at the college. The St. Paul’s College trained hundreds of missionaries who knew Chinese language and Confucian traditional culture from adopted the educational model of the Middle Ages University in Europe, which laid the foundation for the Jesuits to spread the Christian faith.

CONCLUSION

In general, Alessandro Valignano was an organizer and mastermind with foresight and sagacity in the Jesuits’ missionary strategy in China. He successively established a rational Chinese cultural outlook, changed the missionary strategy in China, implemented the “cultural adaptation policy”, established a missionary school, trained missionaries who could master Chinese and be good at cross-cultural communication, so as to be suitable for the future of the Jesuit missionaries and remove some man-made obstacles to adapt to Chinese culture.

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