Note from the Editor-in-Chief

This number of EASTM presents the second part of the special issue “Networks and Circulation of Knowledge: Encounters between Jesuits, Manchus and Chinese in Late Imperial China.” While the first part concentrated on the transmission of medical and pharmaceutical books from the West to China during the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries (Noël Golvers), the role of Jesuit Medicine under the Kangxi emperor’s (r. 1662-1722) patronage and its function within his imperial network (Beatriz Puente-Ballesteros), as well as Ferdinand Verbiest’s introduction and development of the screw in seventeenth-century China (Nicole Halsberghe), this issue is dedicated to studies in the history of historiography and notions of chronology. In his article entitled “Jesuit Accounts of Chinese History and Chronology and their Chinese Sources”, Nicolas Standaert unveils in a masterly way the Chinese and Manchu texts that were chosen by the Jesuits for their translations and compilations of works on Chinese history. These historical accounts were then transmitted to Europe, where they had a profound influence on the European worldview. By taking into account, in particular, characteristics of the chronology of Chinese historiographical works, he demonstrates in his painstaking and detailed contribution that, apart from other histories, the Jesuits relied heavily on works of the “outline and detail of the Comprehensive Mirror” (tongjian gangmu 通鑑綱目) and the “outline and mirror” (gangjian 綱鑑) traditions of the Ming period (1368-1644) that later, foremost as a result of the authoritarian selection made by the Siku quanshu 四庫全書 (Complete Library in Four Branches of Literature) project, fell into oblivion. These Ming texts attracted a wide readership during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, and it is quite probable that Chinese scholars had introduced the Jesuits to these works. The comprehensive and continuous histories written by the Jesuits on China were also something relatively new in Europe, and had an enormous impact on European intellectual life and scholarship, especially because they presented a chronology different to that found in the Bible, not only in relation to the creation of the world, but also the occurrence of the Flood.

The issue of the different chronologies of the Vulgata (creation of the world some 4000 years BC) and the Septuagint (creation some 5200 years BC) versions of the Bible leads into the article by Ad Dudink, “Biblical Chronology and the Transmission of the Theory of Six ‘World Ages’ to China: Gezhi aolüe 格致奧略 (Outline of the mystery [revealed through] natural science; before 1723).” In this detailed bibliographic and content-analytical study, Ad Dudink shows that the Gezhi aolüe is a summary of one of the
Manila incunabula, namely, the Gewu qiongli bianlan (Handy compendium for investigating things and extended knowledge; 1603), a work composed by the Dominican friar Tomás Mayor for the Minnan-speaking Chinese in Manila. Mayor’s work itself is based on Luis de Granada’s Introducción del Símbolo de la Fe of 1583. The article also presents an overview of which biblical chronology was used in Chinese Christian texts during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. As one of his conclusions, Ad Dudink stresses that one should be careful in suggesting that the Catholic missions in China during these centuries exclusively used Septuagint-derived chronologies, because there exist a small number of works, like the Gezhi aolüe, Gewu qiongli bianlan, and Renlei yuanliu (The origin of mankind; ca. 1700), which opted for a Vulgata chronology, embedded in a scheme of six “world ages” from Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Salomo and Zerubbabel to Christ. The differences between these two chronologies were noted at an early stage by Chinese scholars, such as Mei Wending 梅文鼎 (1633-1721), with the intention to highlight the inconsistencies in the “classic scriptures” of the West. Another significant contribution of this article is the identification of many biblical names as they were used in Minnan and Mandarin transliterations in Chinese Christian texts.

By way of a preview, let me announce that the next issue of EASTM is dedicated to the history of female textile production in traditional China. This special issue has Angela Sheng as guest editor, and she also provides an introduction on “Women’s Work, Virtue and Space: Change from Early to Late Imperial China.” This will be followed by articles by Alexandra Tunstall on “Beyond Categorization: Zhu Kerou’s Tapestry Painting, Butterfly and Camellia,” Huang I-Fen on “Gender, Technical Innovation, and Gu Family Embroidery in Late-Ming Shanghai,” and Li Yuhang, “Embroidering Guanyin: Constructions of the Divine through Hair,” and will be complemented by an “Epilogue: Textiles, Technology, and Gender in China” written by Dorothy Ko.

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