

## Editorial Foreword

### The Ruins of History and Cultural Memories

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When asked to view the “Roman ruins of Britain”, British writer Hilaire Belloc replied that “Britain is a Roman ruin.”<sup>①</sup> This remark was made when the prosperity and glory of the sixty years of Victorian reign was still evident, and when Rome had long since become a “ruined Christendom,”<sup>②</sup> so what did Belloc’s comment signify?

When the American scholar Harold Bloom was collating his lectures at Harvard University into a book, the title he used was equally surprising: *Ruin the Sacred Truths*.<sup>③</sup> These lectures covered topics from the Bible, Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, even Freud, and all were names treasured by Harold Bloom – so why did he speak of “ruins”?

No matter whether “Christendom” or “Sacred Truth”, the case may be similar to that of the Roman temples in the words of Friedrich von Schiller: “the temples retained their sanctity for the eye long after the gods had become a theme for mockery.” In other words, worship, and understanding of gods will always undergo change; but the decayed temples preserve a certain kind of sacredness. In this light, “ruins” are precisely “marbles full of meaning”.<sup>④</sup> That “Britain is a Roman ruin” may also refer to this. It is also for this reason Harold

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<sup>①</sup> Quoted from John Senior, *The Death of Christian Culture* (New York: Arlington House Publishers, 1978), 164.

<sup>②</sup> John Senior, *The Death of Christian Culture*, 164.

<sup>③</sup> Harold Bloom, *Ruin the Sacred Truths* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987).

<sup>④</sup> Friedrich von Schiller, *Mei yu shu jian*, trans. XU Hengchun (Beijing: China Federation of Literary and Art Circles Press, 1984), 62-63.

Bloom quoted the metaphysical poet Andrew Marvell in his title: “the argument held me a while misdoubting his intent, that he would ruin ... the sacred Truths to Fable and Old Song.”<sup>①</sup>

*Omnia mutantur, nihil interit* [everything changes, nothing perishes]; it disappears like the frost on the post road. When we gaze out over the fields, all that is visible are ruins. As the ruins of Roman temples pile up and form “marbles full of meaning”, as the ruins of the “sacred truth” perdure in “fables” and “songs”, so the cultural memories contained in the ruins are so profound that we can hardly shear them off.

Viewed from another perspective, cultural memories not only deposit histories but also sift “meaning”; they not only sustain our very selves, but are also complemented by “ruins.” Because only when we salvage our memories amidst historical ruins, can we hope to touch the cultural archetype; only when we retrace the “ruins” in our cultural memories, can we hope to reveal the logic of our history. The historical encounter between Christianity and Chinese culture may be of this type. It has been hundreds of years since the early missionaries came to China, yet the controversies over “*Jing Tian*” (revering Heaven), “*Zun Kong*” (venerating Confucius), and “*Ji zu*” (sacrificing to ancestors) are still being discussed and dug over, still being used as the model for discussing unresolved issues.

In 2008, the Macau Ricci Institute began to compile, translate and edit the Latin manuscripts in the Jesuit Archives in Rome, an undertaking which has once again shown the value of “ruins”. Fr. Artur K. Wardega’s article in this issue offers a historical record of the meeting between the Most Illustrious Lord Bishop of Conon? Yan Dang and Emperor Kangxi, which allows us to see some of the drama of that historical moment.<sup>②</sup> It is worthwhile noting that these “Europeans”

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<sup>①</sup> Andrew Marvell, “On *Paradise Lost*,” *Ruin the Sacred Truths*, title page.

<sup>②</sup> Artur K. Wardega, “Fr. Tomás Pereira, S.J. and the Struggles of the Society of Jesus for its Mission at the Kangxi Court: Diversity of Interest and Shared Cross-yards of Survival in Sino-Western Relations,” this issue 31-49.

not only “performed the ceremonies” and “bent their knees”, but were scolded by Emperor Kang Xi because the writings the missionaries submitted to the emperor were “swarming with errors.” What is interesting is that Yan Dang did not mention the Rites controversy, “*Jing Tian*”, “*Zun Kong*” or “*Ji Zu*”, because he was advised not to write of these. But Emperor Kangxi specifically asked him about the three controversial issues, and told him explicitly that “*Tian* signifies the Lord of heaven, of earth, and of all beings. . . . We celebrate rites in honor of Confucius, and of our ancestors who have died, in order to demonstrate our love and reverence for them.” The Emperor warned Yan Dang, “Listen! There are three points which you have called into question. If you are not happy with them you should consider leaving the country.” For the Emperor thought if Yan Dang did not change his ideas, his visit to China would not strengthen but destroy his religion.<sup>①</sup> Yan Dang was barely able to hold his own in response, and his answers were of the “I do not have the capacity to debate with Your Majesty”, or “I do not know” variety. He presented eight gifts to the Emperor, but only one was accepted by the Emperor, and the other gifts were sent back. A scene like this is, if not breathtaking, then certainly intense. If the record is true, and the Emperor’s might and bearing were as described, then it justifies the phrase his “extraordinary kindness and given a consideration of the situation?”

In fact, there has long been controversy over the three issues among western missionaries as well as other Westerners. For instance, Voltaire defended for the Chinese on the ritual of sacrificing to ancestors, and defended Confucian ideas as “the purest moral ideas” and the “simplest religion”. He also argued in favor of the “prohibition against Catholicism” in the Qing Dynasty.<sup>②</sup> In order to refute the misunderstanding of the Chinese “*Tian*” by his compatriots, Voltaire

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<sup>①</sup> Artur K. Wardega, “Fr. Tomás Pereira, S.J. and the Struggles of the Society of Jesus for its Mission at the Kangxi Court: Diversity of Interest and Shared Cross-yards of Survival in Sino-Western Relations,” 44.

<sup>②</sup> M. De Voltaire, *A Philosophical Dictionary*, vol. 1 (Strand: W. Dugdale, 1843), 264-269.

referred to the inscription on the monument erected to mark the 1689 Treaty of Nerchinsk between China and Russia: “a marble monument, on which the following memorable words were engraved in the Chinese and Latin languages: - Should any ever determine to rekindle the flames of war, we pray to sovereign reign of all things, who knows the heart, to punish their perfidy.”<sup>①</sup> To interpret “Tian” as “the sovereign reign of all things” is in line with Kangxi’s claim that “*Tian* signifies the Lord of heaven, of earth, and of all beings.” Therefore, for Voltaire, the Chinese are not “idolators”, nor “atheists”, but hold to the “adoration of a supreme God.”<sup>②</sup>

In China, we have various interpretations of “*Tian*” such as in the *Zhou Yi*, “*Tian xing jian, jun zi yi zi qiang bu xi*” 天行健，君子以自強不息 (As Heaven keeps vigor through movement, a gentleman should unremittingly practice self-improvement.), or in the *Shang Shu* “*Huang tian wu qin, wei de shi fu*” 皇天無親，惟德是輔 (Great Heaven has no affections; - it helps only the virtuous.). Mencius also states that “*Jin xin, zhi xing, ... ze zhi tian*” 盡心、知性……則知天 (He who has exhausted all his mental constitution knows his nature. Knowing his nature, he knows Heaven). The Emperor Kangxi and Voltaire’s interpretations of *Tian* do not exhaust all meanings of the Chinese “*Tian*”. The more interesting question is what Voltaire draws on for his interpretation.

If we read Voltaire’s writings more carefully, some doubt emerges: the 1689 Treaty of Nerchinsk was composed in Manchu, Russian and Latin, while the monument was inscribed in five languages, namely Manchu, Mandarin, Russian, Mongolian and Latin. Historically, there have never been any “memorable words engraved in the Chinese and Latin languages”. Besides, if this monument was erected by the Chinese and the Russians, why it was engraved only in Chinese and Latin, and not Russian? Perhaps Voltaire was thinking of one detail: the Minister Suo E’tu sent by Kang Xi to negotiate with the

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<sup>①</sup> M. De Voltaire, *A Philosophical Dictionary*, vol. 1, 268.

<sup>②</sup> Ibid.

Russian had two Jesuit missionaries as his translators, Fr. Thomas Pereira and Fr. Jean-Francois Gerbillon. Wardega even claims that Fr. Pereira was sent by the Emperor “to negotiate successfully a border treaty with Russia at Nerchinsk,” and that the “Emperor even put the destiny of the whole country in his hands”. Such claims may be exaggerated, but apart from the monument and the official text of the Treaty of Nerchinsk, it is true that the only other records related to this Treaty are found in Fr. Pereira and Fr. Gerbillon’s diaries, written in French and Latin. Might this be the source of “the sovereign reign of all things”? There are many other things waiting to be discovered in this single “ruin”, and it might not be futile to compare it to Schiller’s “temple” or Bloom’s “Fables and Songs”.

If we investigate further the document Wardega cites in this issue we notice that Fr. Pereira was present when Yan Dang went to see Emperor Kangxi, but that he was silent for the whole session. As Fr. Wardega points out, Fr. Pereira had adapted to Confucian values “as the only means and way to the throne of the Golden Dragon”. He warned the Legate several times but was “constantly disregarded to his eventual cost.”

In the encounter between Christianity and Chinese culture, the origin of the “Three-Self principle” is another memory that should be salvaged. For the western missionaries, this was originally a mission aim, the “three-self goal”. “Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson sought to clarify the main goal of mission and the most effective means of realizing it. The concept of the indigenous church emerged as the central construct of mission theory. A church was judged to be indigenous when it was self-propagating, self-financing and self-governing.”<sup>①</sup> In this way mission was not intended to “civilize” the heathens, but to focus on the “educational work for the preparation of native pastors and their wives to be conducted only in the

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<sup>①</sup> Gerald H. Anderson, ed., *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions* (New York: Simons & Schuster Macmillan, 1998), 698.

vernacular.”<sup>①</sup> This principle was adopted and developed by the churches in China, and its focus has been different from that of the missionaries. It has gradually become the “three-self principle” stressing the independence of the Church. Historical ruins are sometimes left with us as reality in just such ways.

Looking back in history, we often have complex feelings about gains and losses. As a Chinese poet once sighed, “*Ci qing ke dai cheng zhui yi, zhi shi dang shi yi wang ran* 此情可待成追憶，只是當時已惘然” (Such feeling cannot be recalled again, it seems long lost e’en when it was felt then.) We should not have any regrets, or sigh in dredging cultural memories from “ruins,” because if we ignore the origins, traces and deposits of our history, we should be like those described in the following: “Christianity has become increasingly materialistic since the Renaissance, so that many professing Christians have it confused with social panaceas. They await the coming of a secular messiah who will lead the world into a workable United Nations – to peace, prosperity, freedom from sickness, old age, and death. Such a view ill equips a man for understanding anything, certainly neither Christian nor Oriental thought.”<sup>②</sup>

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<sup>①</sup> Gerald H. Anderson, ed., *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions*, 20.

<sup>②</sup> John Senior, *The Death of Christian Culture*, 61.