**CHY4U Unit 1, Activity 5**

**Backgrounder on China’s Foreign Relations and Matteo Ricci**

**c. 1300**

* Marco Polo visited the court of the Mongols and wrote about it (exotic, rich)
* Chinese ships had transported spices from the Moluccas to the Muslim merchants who took them across the Indian Ocean to India. From there they went on to Venice through the Mediterranean.

**1368**

* Ming dynasty began after overthrowing foreign rulers, the Mongols

**1407-1433**

* Zheng He’s voyages (time of exploration, assertion of Chinese dominance on the world’s biggest ships)
* Voyages ended and Chinese became less interested in the outside world

**1300s-1500s**

* Japanese pirates started raiding Chinese coastal ports

**Portuguese started to get interested in the east and came to dominate the spice trade**

* 1488 Bartolomeu Dias rounded the southern tip of Africa
* 1498 Vasco de Gama got to India
* 1540s Portuguese began contact with Japan

**Portuguese got interested in China**

* 1552 Francis Xavier (a founding Jesuit) tried to go to China
* 1552 Ricci was born
* Ricci studied math and astronomy under famous Humanist Catholic scholars in Rome
* 1557 Portuguese got territory of Macao
* They had many questions about China: Diogo Lopes de Sequeira, 1508 asked: “if they are Christians or heathens, if their country is a great one, and if they have more than one king amongst them…and if they are not Christians, in what do they believe and what they adore, and what customs they observe…”

**What the Jesuits found – wealth and strictly controlled foreign trade**

* China’s economy and society was wealthy and advanced, compared to backwards Europe, because of its silk, tea, cotton and porcelain exports
* There was not much demand for western goods (save for silver)
* All foreign trade with China had to go through the city of Canton
* Sino-centric point of view of the emperor; “Since our empire owns the world, there is no country on this or other sides of the sea which does not submit to us.”
* Jesuits were interested in geography, and wrote a lot of letters back to Rome to communicate their findings about the new cultures they visited

**Jesuit Ways of Interacting**

* Jesuits tried to “do” as the natives do – accommodated to their ways, participated in them (e.g., Ricci dressed as a Confucian scholar)
  + There are different interpretations of whether this was ‘deceitful’ or not, as some Chinese at the time said
* Ricci and other Jesuits focused their efforts on the Chinese elite (and they learned Mandarin in order to converse with them)
* They impressed the Chinese courtiers with European things such as prisms, clocks, a clavichord (predecessor of the piano) and maps

**Maps**

* 1584 Ricci’s world map was first created (put Asia in the middle, but didn’t make China as large as Chinese usually showed it to be, also highlighted Europe as a unified Roman Catholic continent)
* 1602 His map*, The Thousand Countries of the World*, was created – combined European geographic knowledge with Chinese woodblock printing technology, engraving and annotating (see a copy of the map at <http://ricci.asianart.org/> )
* 1607 a copy of Ricci’s map was given to the Chinese emperor
* Ricci was even invited to the palace and was designated a scholar
* They succeeded in gaining some (200-2500) converts to Christianity, some including palace officials
* 1610 Ricci died
* 1660s Many in the Chinese court turned against Christianity as seen by the words of scholar official Yang Guangxian:
  + “[The Jesuit Father] *M. Ricci wished to honor Jesus as the Lord of Heaven (Tianzhu) who leads the multitude of nations and sages from above, and he particularly honored him by citing references to the Lord‑on‑High (Shangdi) in the Six Classics of China, quoting passages out of context to prove that Jesus was the Lord of Heaven. … Those who argue like this are no more than beasts able to speak a human language.”*

**Sources**:

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