

## 7 ▼ Matteo Ricci, JOURNALS

Wherever they went in Asia, the Portuguese sought more than commercial profit. They also sought to convert nonbelievers to Christianity, and to do so they enlisted the help of the Society of Jesus, or Jesuits, a new religious order founded by the Spaniard Ignatius Loyola in the 1540s. The greatest prize for European missionaries was China, where the Portuguese arrived in 1514, and after a series of misunderstandings and conflicts, were granted permission to build a permanent settlement and carry on trade in Macao, approximately thirty miles south of the major port city of Guangzhou. Macao also became the base from which the Jesuits planned and managed their missionary work in China.

Hindered by thin funding and the Chinese refusal to allow Catholic priests on the mainland, the Jesuits' missionary efforts made little progress until 1582, when officials allowed the Jesuits to establish a residence in Zhaoqing, a city some sixty miles west of Guangzhou. This was also the year in which a thirty-one-year-old Italian Jesuit, Matteo Ricci, fresh from training in Rome and Goa, took up residence in Zhaoqing. Under Ricci's leadership, the Jesuits developed a missionary strategy that differed from their tactics in Japan, where they had preached Christianity directly to the common people. In China, the Jesuits targeted intellectuals, officials, and ultimately, members of the imperial court, whom they sought to impress by learning Chinese, adopting Chinese dress, giving gifts of clocks and other mechanical instruments, and displaying their scientific and mathematical erudition. By the early 1600s, approximately two dozen Jesuit priests were active in China, with residences in several cities including the capital, Beijing, where in 1601 on the strength of his knowledge of astronomy and mathematics, Ricci was invited to establish a residence by the Wanli emperor himself. Here Ricci remained until his death in 1610, by which time the Jesuits had converted several thousand Chinese, including some members of the imperial family.

In addition to winning converts, the Jesuits also made enemies, and they could never be sure if permission granted by one official to establish a residence in a city would be withdrawn by that official's successor. An example of the difficulties they faced is the episode that took place in Nanchang in 1607, when local magistrates sought to close the Jesuit residence. The course of events is recorded in Ricci's journal, which a Jesuit colleague edited and published shortly after Ricci's death. In Ricci's account of the Nanchang incident, we can see some of the cultural barriers and attitudes that made the Jesuits' efforts to accommodate Christianity to Chinese civilization so difficult.

### QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

1. What aspects of Christianity most offended the Confucians who brought charges against Jesuits?