

Guo Liancheng and his Journey to Italy

Preliminary remarks

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The aim of this article is to present the first step of my research on Guo Liancheng 郭连成 and his voyage to Italy. Guo is the author of a travel diary entitled *Xīyóu bǐlǜè* 西游笔略¹ -*Brief Account on the Journey to the West*- which has already been published three times, but that is still not well known among scholars and sinologists.

1. Previous travel literature

Of course, Guo was not the first Chinese to go to the West, we have in fact several travel accounts before his and many of them are gathered together in the famous collection edited by Zhong Shuhe 钟叔河, *Zǒuxiàng shìjiè cóngshū* 走向世界丛书 (From East to West)².

In Zhong Shuhe's brief history of Chinese travellers³, the author gives a summary of many Chinese who went to the West from ancient times up to the beginning of the XX century. This brief summary may help to better understand the value of Guo's work, though this book is not included in the above mentioned collection.

¹ From now on, I will refer to the book as XYBL.

² Zhong Shuhe 钟叔河, *Zǒuxiàng shìjiè cóngshū* 走向世界丛书 (From East to West), Changsha: Yuelu shushe, 10 vols. See also Wang Xiqi 王锡祺, *Xiǎofānghú zhāi yúdi cónghāo* 小方壺齋輿地叢鈔 (Collections of historical writings from the *Xiaofanghu* Studio), Shanghai 1897.

³ Zhong Shuhe, *Zǒuxiàng shìjiè. Jìndài Zhōngguó zhīshì fēnzǐ kǎochá xīfāng de lìshǐ* 走向世界. 近代中國知识分子考察的历史 (Toward The World. History of the Modern Chinese Intellectuals investigating the West), Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2000.

1.1 Rabban Bar Sauma

Of the many anthologies about Chinese travel accounts of the West, Rabban Bar Sauma's report is regarded as the first⁴. Rabban Bar Sauma (c. 1220-1294) - Chinese name 巴琐马 Ba Suoma⁵ - was a Uighur monk who "became Visitor-General of the Nestorian congregations in the East and, as ambassador of Arghun, the Mongol Ilkhan of Persia," he went to the West in 1287 and "visited the Pope and the kings of Byzantium, France, and England"⁶. His report, however, is written in ancient Syrian, so it cannot be properly considered as "Chinese"⁷.

1.2 Fan Shouyi

Then, we have to mention Fan Shouyi 樊守義 (1682-1753), also known as Louis Fan. Following the Italian Jesuit Francesco Provana, Fan was in Italy between 1708 and 1720. Once back in China, he wrote a short report on his experience upon order of Emperor Kangxi 康熙 (Shengzu 聖祖, r. 1662-1723). This report is entitled *Shēnjiànlù* 身見錄 (Eye-witness Account)⁸. Even though this book is known as

⁴ See, for instance, the anthology compiled by Jeanette Mirsky, *The Great Chinese Travelers*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1965 or Zhong 2000, pp. 35-39.

⁵ Zhong 2000, pp. 35-36.

⁶ Mirsky 1965, p. 175.

⁷ There is no Chinese translation of the book but Rabban Bar Sauma's travel narrative has been translated into English twice. See James A. Montgomery, *History of Yaballaha III*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1927; and E. A. Wallis Budge, *The Monks of Kublai Khan*, London: Religious Tract Society, 1928 (Online version available in: http://nestorian.org/history_of_rabban_bar_sawma_1.html).

⁸ A manuscript copy of Fan Shouyi's short report is kept in the Italian National Library "Vittorio Emanuele" and it was discovered by chance in 1936 by the Chinese scholar Wang Zhongmin 王重民 in: *Quarterly Bulletin of Chinese Bibliography* (Chinese edition) 3, 4, pp. 231-238. Then Fang Hao published it in: *Zhōng-Xī jiāotōng shǐ* 中西交通史 (History of the exchanges between China and the West), Vol. 4, Taipei, 1954, pp. 186-195. Giuliano Bertuccioli translated the whole report into Italian language. See: Giuliano Bertuccioli, "Fan Shouyi e il suo viaggio in Occidente", in Michele Fatica e Francesco D'Arelli (eds), *Matteo Ripa e il Collegio dei Cinesi. La missione cattolica in Cina tra i secoli XVIII-XIX, Atti del Colloquio Internazionale*, Napoli, 11-12 febbraio 1997, Napoli: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1999, pp. 352-375.

the “earliest Chinese account of Europe based on first-hand acquaintance”⁹, nevertheless, as Professor Giuliano Bertuccioli says, the report does not have great literary value and lacks personal considerations¹⁰. Moreover, being published only recently, this book “certainly has had no influence on the Chinese knowledge of Europe”¹¹.

1.3 Xie Qinggao

The oldest account present in the above mentioned collection of Zhong Shuhe is Xie Qinggao’s Hǎilù 海錄 (Maritime Records, 1820)¹², in which many western countries are so roughly described that many scholars now doubt that Xie Qinggao had actually been there and it would be more reasonable to believe that he had only been to England and Portugal.. Since he was both blind and illiterate, Xie gave an account of his experiences at sea to another person. The compilation of *Maritime Records*, thus, has been ascribed for ages to Yang Bingnan 揚炳南 even though Yang’s edition seems to be a version of an earlier lost transcription¹³.

1.4 Lin Zhen and Rong Hong

Then, in chronological order, there are Lin Zhen 林鍼 and Rong Hong 容閔, two of the first Chinese to go to the United States.

⁹ Endymion Wilkinson, *Chinese History: A Manual (Rev. & enl.)*, Harvard-Yenching Institute monograph series; 52, Cambridge (Ma): Harvard University Press, 2000, p. 747.

¹⁰ Bertuccioli 1999, p. 347.

¹¹ Federico Masini, “Different Chinese Perception of Italy from Late Ming to Late Qing” in *China in seinen biographischen Dimensionen (Gedenkschrift für Helmut Martin)*, Herausgegeben von Christina Neder, Heiner Roetz und Ines-Susanne Schilling, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2001, p. 568.

¹² Xie Qinggao 謝清高 (1765-1822), born in the province of Guangdong, boarded a foreign trade vessel (probably Portuguese) at the age of eighteen. After becoming blind at thirty-one, he returned to China and settled in Macao. For an English translation see: “Xie Qinggao: Selections from *Jottings of Sea Voyages* (translated by Mark Calthorhill)” in Eva Hung (ed.), *Renditions, A Chinese-English Translation Magazine: Chinese Impressions of the West (Special Issue)*, nos. 53/54, Hong Kong: 2000, pp. 159-163.

¹³ *Rendition* nos. 53/54, p. 159.

Lin Zhen (1825-?) learned English in Xiamen; then, at the age of twenty-five, he left for the USA where he became a teacher of Chinese. He is the author of *Xīhǎi jìyóu cǎo* 西海纪游草 (Records on the travel in the Western Sea, 1849), a short poem about his experience as a teacher in New York¹⁴.

Rong Hong (1823-1912), instead, was a student and a very famous one, as he was the first Chinese to graduate from Yale University. He went to the USA in 1847 and left us the work *Xīxuédōngjiàn yóuji* 西学东渐游记 (known in English as *My life in China and America*)¹⁵, which is not a travel account but an autobiography, printed only in 1909.

In short, these two works do not contain any real impressions or descriptions of the West¹⁶.

Together with these authors, it is known that many young Chinese went to Italy following Catholic priests to study at the famous Collegio de' Cinesi, but it is also known that they did not left any written evidence to be found of their stay in Naples¹⁷.

Chronologically speaking, Guo Liancheng comes after Lin Zhen and Rong Hong but he and his travel diary are not mentioned in any of the great collections of Chinese journals about the West -printed in China or abroad - though his XYBL (*Brief Account on the Journey to the West*) has some important features that make it different from previous travel literature:

1. it is a personal and unofficial account (≠ Fan Shouyi)
2. it is a prose work with some poems (≠ Lin Zhen)
3. it is a travel diary in which the author takes note of what happens day after day (≠ Rong Hong)

¹⁴ On Lin Zhen's life and work see Zhong 2000, pp. 50-59.

¹⁵ The book was first published in New York in 1909 with the title *My Life in China and America* and then translated into Chinese and published in 1915 with the Chinese title *Xīxuédōngjiàn yóuji* 西学东渐游记 which can be translated as *Records on the Introduction of Western Learning to the East*. In the USA, Rong Hong is known with his name in the Cantonese pronunciation, i.e. Yung Wing. The transcribed text of Rong Hong's (Yung Wing) memoir is available online in "The Yung Wing Project" website: <http://web.pdx.edu/~lorz/index.htm>. See also Hummel 1943-44, p. 402-405 and Zhong 2000, p. 50.

¹⁶ Zhou Zhenhe in: Guo Liancheng, *Xīyóu bǐlùè* 西游笔略, Shanghai: Shanghai Shudian Press 上海书店出版社, 2003, p. 2.

¹⁷ On the Collegio de' cinesi see: M. Fatica e F. D'Arelli (eds), *La missione cattolica in Cina tra i secoli XVIII-XIX. Matteo Ripa e il Collegio dei Cinesi*, Napoli: Istituto Universitario Orientale, 1999.

4. the main aim of the author is to present the West to his readers (i.e. Italy) with its technology, customs and habits;
5. it was first published in 1863 in Chinese (≠ Fan Shouyi, Rong Hong)
6. it has been ignored for more than a century.

2. Editions

XYBL has been published three times.

The first edition appeared in 1863, two years after Guo Liancheng had returned to China¹⁸. This is very important data because it means that the book was virtually available since 1863 and it could be consulted by any Chinese who desired to know the West better¹⁹.

In 1921 Guo's younger brother, Guo Dongchen 郭栋臣, edited a revised edition of the book with another title *Zēngzhù xīyóu bǐlǜè* 增注西游笔略 (Additional Notes on the Brief Account on the Journey to the West)²⁰. Guo Dongchen is also known as Giuseppe Maria Kuo, one of the most distinguished Chinese at the Collegio de' Cinesi and who spent many years in Italy first studying and then teaching in the Seminary²¹.

The third edition was edited by Shanghai Fudan University Professor Zhou Zhenhe 周振鹤, and published in 2003 in simplified Chinese²².

¹⁸ Guo Liancheng 郭連成, *Xīyóu bǐlǜè* 西游笔略, Èshěng Chóngzhèng shūyuàn zàngbǎn 鄂省崇正書院藏板 (publisher: Seminary of Hubei Province), *Tóngzhì èr nián xīnkè* 同治二年新刻 (2nd year of emperor Tongzhi's reign, reprint).

¹⁹ The great collection of Wang Xiqi, for instance, was printed only in 1897.

²⁰ *Zēngzhù xīyóu bǐlǜè* 增主西游笔略 (Additional Notes on the Brief Account on the Journey to the West), Wūchāng Tiānzhūtáng yīnshūguǎn 武昌天主堂印書館 (published by the Church of Wuchang), *Tiānzhǔ jiàngshēng yīqiān jiǔbǎi èrshíyī nián* 天主降生一千九百二十一年 (1921 AD).

²¹ G. M. Guo, born in Qianjiang 潛江 district (Hubei) on the 11th of February 1846, left for Italy in 1861 where he stayed for 12 years and took the vows at the Collegio de' Cinesi of Naples. After coming back to China in 1873, he returned to Italy in 1886 upon the orders of Propaganda Fide. He died in Hankou in 1923. See C. Sartori, *Elenchus biographicis ac chronologicis notis ornatus complectens missionarios exteros ac indigenos qui Sacrum obierunt ministerium in Vicariatus Apostolicis de Hu-quang, de Hu-peh, de Hupeh orientali, de Han-kow jam ab anno 1839 ad annum 1926*, Hankou 1926, p. 77, n. 35.

²² Guo Liancheng, *Xīyóu bǐlǜè* 西游笔略, Shanghai: Shanghai Shudian Press 上海书店出版社, 2003.

I took the 2003 edition as reference for my translation mainly because Professor Zhou added punctuation on the text in collaboration with Shanghai Shudian Press. My choice has been also influenced by what Professor Zhou wrote in his preface about the 1921 edition (edited by Guo's younger brother, alias Guo Dongchen). Zhou Zhenhe, in fact, underlines how Guo Dongchen carried out many, and often not suitable changes in the original text²³. But, in spite of these changes, the importance of the 1921 edition is still great because it has been reviewed by the Chinese scholar Fang Hao and, as far as I know, it is the only text which has some biographical notes on the author, Guo Liancheng²⁴.

Furthermore, Guo Dongchen is the author of an Italian adaptation of the book which appeared in a series of three excerpts in *Museo delle Missioni Cattoliche*, nos. 34-36-37 in 1867²⁵.

Despite three editions in the Chinese language and one reduced version in Italian, very few people in China or abroad have studied Guo's work and the book has never been translated into any western language.

This diary has been accidentally found by two different people, in Paris and in Rome, at about the same time. One is the above mentioned Zhou Zhenhe, the other one is the Italian historian Michele Fatica, professor at Naples University "L'Orientale"²⁶, who gave an important contribution to this research with his "Note sul viaggio di Pietro Guo in Italia (1859-1860)" (Notes on Pietro Guo's journey in Italy (1859-1860))²⁷.

²³ Zhou in XYBL 2003, p. 7.

²⁴ Fang Hao 方豪, *Zhōngguó Tiānzhūjiào shǐ rénwù zhuàn* 中国天主教史人物传 (Biographies of Historical Figures of Catholicism in China), Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1988 (3 vols), III, pp. 252-255.

²⁵ *Museo delle Missioni Cattoliche* is the first Italian missionary journal, founded by Propaganda Fide in 1857 in Turin.

²⁶ Michele Fatica found it in the catalogue by author of the Vatican Apostolic Library in 1999, while Zhou discovered the manuscript in the library of the Société Asiatique in 2000.

²⁷ Michele Fatica, "Note di Pietro Guo in Italia (1859-1860)", in: *Scritture di Storia*, Quaderno n. 2, Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, maggio 2001. See also Michele Fatica, "Il cinese e le cose d'altri. Le novità della tecnologia occidentale descritte da Guo Liancheng nel suo viaggio nella metà del mondo (1859-1860)", in: Annamaria Palermo (a cura di), *La Cina e l'Altro, Atti del IX Convegno dell'Associazione Italiana Studi Cinesi*, Napoli-Capri, 14-16 ottobre 2003, pp. 273-293.

Though it is a preliminary approach to the book, Fatica's work is very interesting from a historical point of view, especially regarding the history of catholic missions in Hubei, but most of all because he has been able to trace back Guo's journey in Italy through Italian sources.

The aim of my research, therefore, is to complete an annotated and critical translation of XYBL through a comparison of Chinese and Italian sources.

Apart from these preliminary observations, the importance of this book lays on the fact that, as I've pointed out before, *Brief Account on the Journey to the West* can be considered as the first personal and unofficial account of the West. As Professor Zhou writes: "If we look at the text with a modern eye, probably we should feel as if the exotic touch, in the foreign lands described, is too poor, nevertheless, considering the time during which it was written, it is an outstanding travel diary without precedent"²⁸.

For all these reasons, XYBL can be regarded as the first travel diary that is rich in detailed descriptions and personal considerations about western countries, Italy in particular. It is thus in my opinion, a work worthy of further research as well as a very important primary source in the field of the history of cultural exchanges between China and the West.

3. Main features and genesis of XYBL

The book consists in three parts:

1. a preface by Lu Xiashan on the author and the book²⁹;
2. the author's preface;
3. the travel account, divided in three parts or *juàn* 卷.

The first and the third *juan* describe the travel from China to Italy and from Italy to China and the second is the account of Guo's experience in Italy.

The leader of the group was the Italian Apostolic Vicar Celestino Spelta (Chinese name Xu Leisi 徐类思). There were also two young Chinese priests with Guo: Luo Wenda 罗文达 and Xu Guangcheng 徐光承 who, together with Guo, left for Italy on the 6th of April 1859³⁰. They arrived in Sicily on

²⁸ Zhou in XYBL 2003, p. 1.

²⁹ Lu Xiashan 陆霞山, as Zhou writes in his preface on the 2003 edition of the book, was a catholic chinese who went to Italy in 1850. He studied in Naples for eight years and then returned to China. Although he spent a long period abroad, he did not write anything on his experience in Europe (Zhou in XYBL 2003, p. 2).

³⁰ They returned to China on July 27 1860.

September 11th and then began to travel throughout Italy where they visited Naples, Rome (where Pope Pious 9th received them), Genoa, Voghera (hometown of the Apostolic Vicar Celestino Spelta), Turin and many other Italian cities. Although he took data from western sources, each time Guo Liancheng “is able to describe scenes of everyday life in the streets of Italian cities with immediacy and poignancy”³¹. Apart from the Pope, the young Chinese had the chance to meet some influential Italian people such as Vittorio Emanuele II of Savoy who, in two years, would become the first king of Italy³²; the Jesuit astronomer Angelo Secchi³³, Head of the Observatory at the Collegio Romano and a woman scientist, Caterina Scarpellini, who worked in the Capitoline Observatory in Rome³⁴. All this was possible due to the fact that Guo Liancheng understood Italian, as he himself writes:

As soon as I landed, the natives came around to look at me. Seeing that, though my clothing was unusual I was able to understand their language, all of them came closer and began to question me³⁵.

XYBL follows a sort of fixed scheme: the description of every place, in fact, is often followed by a poetic composition – mostly qīlǜ 七律 or lǜshī 律诗.

The text is also full of literary quotations, especially from Tang poets and Su Dongpo’s *fu* (particularly from the first and second 赤壁賦 Chibi fù, “The Red Cliffs”). Additionally, the text contains some drawings which were probably made by Guo Liancheng himself together with some prints published in western reviews of that time.

The Guos were a literati family so Guo Liancheng’s cultural background was very rich: he received both a traditional and western education. He knew a little Latin and he made large use of western sources in his work. For example, he quotes Hobson’s *Natural Philosophy and Natural History*³⁶ to describe the principle of mirages or the principle of the steamship. About the steamship he writes:

³¹ Fatica 2001, p. 2001.

³² XYBL 2003, p. 70.

³³ XYBL 2003, p. 91.

³⁴ XYBL 2003, p. 93.

³⁵ XYBL 2003, p. 61.

³⁶ Chinese title 博物新篇 Bówù xīn piān by Benjamin Hobson (1867-1873), published in Canton in 1854.

Steamship, mostly called “火船” (steamship) or “火轮船” (wheel steamship) by the Chinese people while westerners called it “水汽船” (steamship). We call "steam" the vapour that, after heating water, is compelled to rise³⁷.

This passage shows well how Guo Liancheng was obliged to use new words and neologisms to describe the western world but many of these new expressions, after a transition period, didn't survive and were replaced by more widespread ones. In the below table there are few examples of the new words Guo used in his diary:

XYBL		MODERN CHINESE	ENGLISH TRANSLATION	
窥天楼	kuītiānlóu	观象台	guānxiàngtái	Observatory (astr.)
病人院	bìngrényuàn	医院	yīyuàn	Hospital
博览院	bólǎnyuàn	图书馆		Library
踢球场	tīqiúchǎng	体育场	tǐyùchǎng	Stadium
绘像所	huìxiàngsuǒ	照相馆	zhàoxiàngguǎn	Photo studio
自燃灯	zìrán dēng	煤气灯	méiqìdēng	Gas lamp
水轮机院	shuǐlúnjīyuàn	纺织厂	fǎngzhīchǎng	Textile mill
瓮道	wèngdào	隧道	suidào	Tunnel

Among the western sources he quoted in his account, Guo Liancheng also put in some excerpts taken from the review “Chinese Serial”³⁸ to explain the rotation and revolution of the earth:

³⁷ XYBL 2003, p. 20.

³⁸ This is the English name of the monthly *Xiá'ěr guānzhēn* 遐迩贯珍, published in Hong Kong by the Morrison Education Society. On the monthly see: Matsuura Akira 松浦章, Uchida Keiichi 内田庆市, Shen Guowei 沈国威, *Kaji kanchin [Xiaer guanzhen] no kenkyū: 1853-1856 Chinese Serial 遐邇貫珍の研究*. Osaka: Kansai Daigaku Shuppanbu, 2004. The explanation of the rotation and revolution of the earth in particular, can be found in Chinese Serial 1853 no. 5.

There are two revolving movements of the earth: the first is a circuit of spinning movement on itself that, every day, produces the day-night cycle; the other one is a rotation lasting a year, around the sun which creates the four different seasons. Now, let's first talk about the principle of the rotation on itself. Try to hold a man and tell him: «the earth turns continuously». That man would surely laugh and say: «If it turns why can't I feel that?».³⁹

Additionally, Guo makes large use of Verbiest's *Kūnyú túshuō* 坤輿图说 (Illustrated Explanation of the Entire World, 1674) to describe Italy. In short, what is worth underlining is the fact that the author makes use of both Protestant and Jesuit sources and, unlike the Chinese literary tradition of the time, he always informs his readers of any source he quotes. What follows is a brief list of the western sources explicitly quoted by Guo Liancheng:

- Sabatino De Ursis, *Tàixī shuǐfǎ* 泰西水法, 1612;
- Giulio Aleni, *Tiānzǔ jiàngshēng yánxíng jìlùè* 天主降生言行纪略, 1635;
- Ferdinand Verbiest, *Kūnyú túshuō* 坤輿图说, 1674;
- Dominique Parrenin, *Jíměi piān* 济美篇, 1727;
- Joseph Edkins, *Zhōng-Xī tōngshū* 中西通书, 1852;
- William Muirhead, *Dìlǐ quánzhì* 地理全志, 1853-54;
- Benjamin Hobson, *Bówù xīnbīān* 博物新编, 1855;
- *Xiá'ěr guànzhēn* 遐迩贯珍, monthly published between 1853-1856.

In conclusion, XYBL is a very interesting text offering the scholar the opportunity to investigate more in depth its manifold aspects, ranging from the literary and linguistic to the historical one. Through my research and additional materials and data, I hope to be able to further enrich the panorama of the cultural exchange between China and the West.

³⁹ XYBL 2003, p. 34. In this and in the previous passage taken from XYBL, I've decided not to use a good english translation, in order to underline the translation difficulties of that period, due to the lack of suitable technical expressions and words.

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