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To Dubrovnik in the perspective of early modern European intellectuals
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Citation:
Vekarić, N. (C. A. 2002). To Dubrovnik in the perspective of early modern European intellectuals. Annales Historiae, 3(1), 9-72. Retrieved from: https://hdl.handle.net/10474/2444

Version: Publisher's Version

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Note: To cite the publication please use the most published version if applicable.

Yu Yongwen in the Perspective of Early-Modern European Intellectuals

Issue 1
Vol. 1 No. 1 (2021)
Received: 2021-06-30
Accepted: 2021-08-30
Online Publication: 2021-12-31
Pages: 1-8
DOI: 10.7176/JCH/1-1-01
URL: http://www.iiste.org/Journal/JCH/1-1/JCH1-1-01.pdf

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Keywords
Yu Yongwen
Jesuits
Jesuit Reduction Hypothesis
Confucianism
Neo-Confucianism
Scholastic Dualism
Scholastic Rationalism
Leibniz
Spinoza

Introduction

Arriving in Hebiao Fuzhou in September 1671 with a Jesuit companion and their three catechumens (later he would meet a third, who was a Japanese Christian Bonaventure, the Jesuit of Nagasaki, who was also a Jesuit), Yu Yongwen (1617-1689) was the first Chinese Christian priest to publicly proclaim the Christian faith in the Fujian province, and the first to be ordained by the government office and spend his days dwelling in the countryside of Gulou Province, among almost a century of open, and particularly about the last two decades, hostilities between the Japanese-aided Qing and Ming (Yue) Qing-Ming Dynasties, a rather outstanding feat for a Christian priest in a Confucian-dominated society. Yu Yongwen's intellectual contribution to Confucian-oriented scholarship is unquestionable, and it was the successful of the reformed Confucianism that gave work into finally prepared with Neo-Confucianism. Yu Yongwen's Christian Confucianism, which was the first of its kind, was a brilliant fusion, a brilliant synthesis of Confucian, "Taoist, Buddhist, Chinese, Modern." Yu's intent to unveil Roman Catholic Christianity to the Chinese, and the Chinese to Christianity, was a "Jesuit Reduction Hypothesis" (Pollock Forthcoming). Jesuit missionaries in China, from the beginning, adopted three strategies, approach the Chinese intellectual and Confucian scholarship, and the Chinese Confucian scholarship, and the Chinese Confucian scholarship. Matteo Ricci, the Jesuit Apostle to China, was a Christian Confucian. "Other Influencing Relations in Jesuit Science" (Pollock Forthcoming). Yu Yongwen, the Jesuit Apostle of Fujian, was a Christian of early modern period

between the government and agricultural workers and were not interested in putting an end to private ownership of land and allotting a plot to work to actual cultivators as Pan'gye proposed. This reflected different conditions and traditions rather than being related to more or less advanced forms of the economy.

Conclusions

The limited sample of West-European thinkers I have confronted, albeit superficially, with Pan'gye's work suggests that Pan'gye was to a rather unexpected degree in tune with developments in Europe that in their totality have received the label of "Enlightenment," the trend in intellectual history that according to Jonathan Israel in its most radical form was initiated by Benedictus de Spinoza. The limitations of Pan'gye's work pointed out by James Palais seem more to be defined by norms and standards that are characteristic of the nineteenth and twentieth century than by those of Pan'gye's European contemporaries and eighteenth-century thinkers. This is of course not to say that Pan'gye was in all respects in accord with the thinkers we have mentioned. For that the political and social context was too different. Enlightenment thinkers had to contend with powerful church organizations that, often in concert with authoritarian secular power, tried to constrain free thought and tended to be intolerant of criticisms of their orthodoxy. Religiously, European countries were generally divided, which often led to conflicts. Therefore, the advocacy of toleration and free speech was an import element in the thought of Enlightenment thinkers. Another characteristic of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European intellectuals was that they were not constrained by boundaries between the humanities, including theology, and the natural sciences, which hardened from the nineteenth century onward. Isaac Vossius was a philologist who besides his writing on China also wrote about biblical chronology, on winds and tides, the source of the Nile, and the origin of light, while he made observations with the microscope and telescope, the latter of which enabled him to describe the mountains on the moon.[50] For a similar breadth of learning in Korea we have to look to Tasan rather than to Pan'gye. But this does not distract from the value of Pan'gye's proposals, wide-ranging in their own way, which I have suggested, would quite likely have been regarded positively by the thinkers of the early European Enlightenment. In the final analysis, however, that fact may be thought of as of minor importance. Pan'gye's policy proposals should not be judged by any extraneous, for instance Western, yardstick (including that of "modernity"), but on their merits for improving the conditions of Chosŏn Korea, the aim he had set for himself. An aim, we might add, which Spinoza would have heartily applauded.

[50] Erik Jorink & Dirk van Miert, "Introduction. The Challenger, Isaac Vossius and the European World of Learning," in *Isaac Vossius (1618–1689), Between Science and Scholarship*, p. 2.

Citation

For attribution, please cite this work as:

Walraven, Boudewijn. "Yu Hyŏngwŏn in the Perspective of Early-Modern European Intellectuals." *Korean Histories*, July 4, 2025, 4–15. khjournal.com/archives/volumes/2025/pangye.html.

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