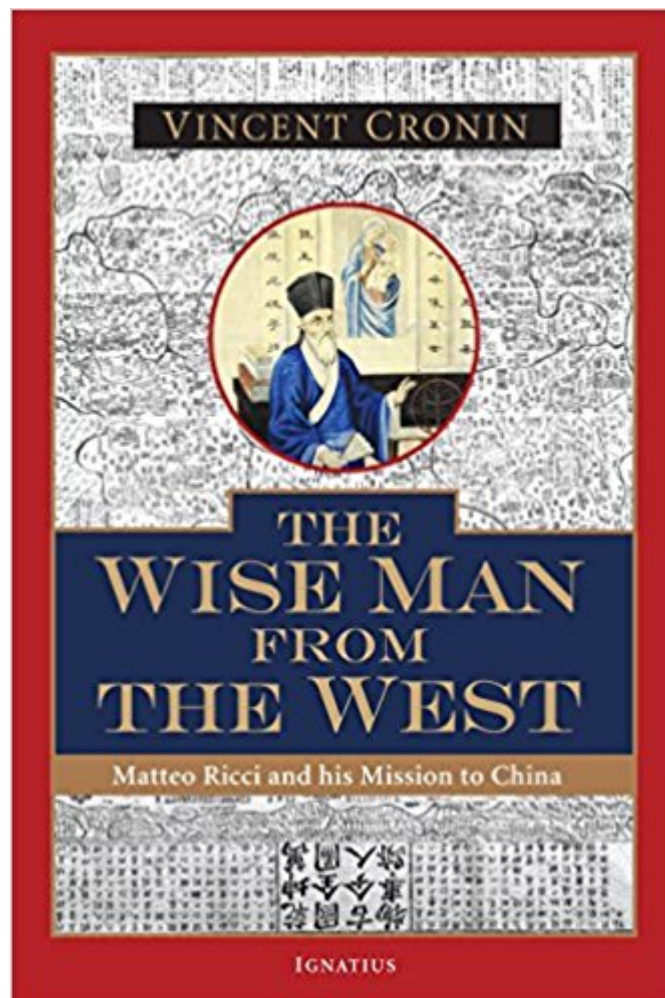




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# The Wise Man From The West: Matteo Ricci And His Mission To China



## Synopsis

This is the amazing story of the famous Jesuit missionary priest to China, Fr. Matteo Ricci, revered as a "Wise Man" by the Chinese. He arrived in China in 1582 and died there twenty-eight years later, having developing a deep knowledge of and love for the country, the culture and the people. Before Ricci's heroic mission, China was an unexplored land bordering on the vague, mysterious Cathay, and the West was no more than a rumor to the learned Mandarins, a distant unknown region lying beyond the bounds of geography. In the person of Father Ricci these two worlds met, and Vincent Cronin dramatically recreates the romance, the crossed purposes, the potential tragedy of that meeting. He shows us ancient China, the timeless state, with a civilization older than that wherein Christianity first found expression. Because Ricci loved this civilization and honored it, he was able to teach his strange new Christian doctrine with tact and sympathy. He carried much of the technological and philosophical wisdom of the late Renaissance Europe, and thus found favor among the Mandarins, the men of learning who enjoyed high status at the Imperial Court. He learned Chinese to discuss with them the problems in science and technology, and also questions of religion and the hereafter. He lived as a great scholar among great scholars and left behind him a memory worthy of the Christian faith he served. Well researched and written with an enchanting style, Cronin relied almost entirely on contemporary material only recently assembled, including Father Ricci's own letters and reports, and his account of China written in Peking before his death. The seed of Faith was sown and the crop, even after a century of atheistic communism, continues to grow in present-day China.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Matteo Ricci was, by any standards, an extraordinary man. One concludes from reading this riveting book just how pertinent Ricci remains to both modern China and to the Church, ever ancient and ever new." -- James V. Schall, S.J., From the Forward

"The binoculars of history have brought his life into focus so that Chinese and Western Christians can appreciate both his wisdom and his sanctity are worthy of emulation. This book focuses us today on someone who may be canonized at last and teach us his brilliant ways to evangelize."-- Fr. Mitch Pacwa, SJ, Host, EWTN Live

"A book which does for once deserve the all too lightly used adjective 'outstanding.'" -- Honor Stacy , New Statesman

"In this classic, Matteo Ricci and the other Christian missionaries to China truly come alive, reminding all of us that the heart of the New Evangelization still resides in going out of ourselves and boldly proclaiming the loving mercy of Christ, despite whatever cost."-- Fr. David Meconi, SJ, St. Louis University

"A delightfully told story of a truly remarkable man." -- Rodney Gilbert , New York Herald Tribune

Vincent Cronin, son of the Scottish novelist, A J Cronin is a doyen of English letters. His book *The Last Migration*, which won the Heinemann Award, was based on his own journey with the Gashgai of southern Iran. He widened his reputation with his outstanding biographies of Christianity's first missionaries to India (*A Pearl to India: the Life of Roberto de Nobili*) and to China (*The Wise Man from the West: Matteo Ricci and his Mission to China*), and a range of later biographies - of Napoleon, Catherine the Great, Louis (XVI) and Antoinette, and his masterly *Four Women in Search of an Ideal* (Caroline de Berry, Marie D'Agoult, Eve Hanska and Marie Bashkirtseff). Vincent Cronin lives in Brittany.

This book transports a reader to a world where it took years to get from one place to another by amazingly built wooden crafts. You were cramped into a vessel with at least 500 people and no food/guaranteed, and maybe you made it or maybe not. *The Wise Man from the West* shakes one out of complacency into a reality where a type communication is brought to an imaginative new level, which actually opened closed doors. I learned to appreciate the unknown world that Marco Polo and others entered and left us with their impressions, writings, maps, and descriptions, which in reality, planted the seeds that bloomed into a new world of which we now must explore and leave our impressions.

This was an absolutely fascinating narrative of the journey of the first Jesuit missionaries to China in

the late 16th Century--full of novelistic, even though historical, detail.

Fr. Matteo Ricci was an Italian Jesuit priest who lived from 1552 to 1610. He was also a founding member of the Jesuit China missions. He arrived in China in 1582, and it was here that he received his name "Wise Man." Vincent Cronin, was a British writer and popular historian, who is known for his writings on famous historical figures such as Napoleon, Marie Antoinette, and Catherine the Great. The fact that chose to write a book on Fr. Ricci is a testament to how important this missionary was in history. That book is entitled *The Man from the West*, and I would like to tell you a little bit about it. The book begins with Fr. Ricci experiencing a call to missionary work in China. We then see their beginning time in China, getting acclimated with the land and culture, and meeting some of the government officials. We then see him preparing to meet the emperor, Wan-Li, because he believed that would help him gain ground in the missionary work. We then see the many struggles Fr. Ricci experienced in his vocation, including being held prisoner and clashing with the Buddhists. The book, naturally, ends with his death and also the death of the mission work he started as well, not because of him but because of a change in political climate mixed with a change of the evangelization method the newer missionaries used. Fr. Ricci was a great priest and a great man. His method of evangelization was much more tolerant and open-minded, compared to others who followed after him. He didn't go into China with a mission of convert or perish. He came in with a sense of love and understanding. He tried to understand their culture and what made them who they were. He took Asian works and had them converted to Latin, and took Western works and had them converted to Chinese. This showed respect to the people, their past, and their culture. It was through this these methods and simply exuding Christ's love that he was able to succeed in a hostile situation. I really found this book to be a fascinating read and appreciated the style with which Vincent Cronin wrote as it made the history come alive and shed light on a great man in Catholic history who many might not know about. It is truly a fascinating read, and one I think you should pick up when you have a chance. This book was provided to me for free by Ignatius Press in exchange for an honest review.

Of all the books written about Matteo Ricci in China, Vincent Cronin's "Wise Man From the West" is still the easiest to read. Cronin's father was A.J. Cronin, author of "The Keys of the Kingdom". Love for China is in the family's veins. As is good English. Vincent's book is a pleasure to read just for its beautiful English. "Wise Man" traces Ricci's path from birth in Italy, to study in India, to arrival in Macau, to stays in Zhaoqing, Shaoguan, Nanchang, Nanking and finally Beijing where died in

1610. The book shows how Ricci was a Renaissance scholar in the best sense, open to and respectful of other people's ideas and beliefs, becoming the first bridge person between Chinese and Western culture. Cronin describes how as a missionary Ricci was centuries ahead of his time, promoting the genuine culturalization of Christianity in China. A timeless book, in timeless English, most relevant for our time when contact between China and the rest of the world continues to grow.

This was a well-written biography of Matteo Ricci, focusing on his life and work in China. While I found his political struggles and his fellow missionaries and converts interesting, I believe it's my disinterest in their mission that put me off. Treasure-hunters, business officials, and/or adventurers I will gladly read about, but pious Christian men are much less interesting. It was especially tedious knowing how little Christianity influenced China, though Ricci was rather clever in his attempts, it just wasn't the right continent to grab converts.

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