

Special Issue: Calendar and Astrology in Early Qing China

Guest Editor's Introduction

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When the Chinese “encountered” Western astronomy, they felt problems in, or conflicts with, it. The problems have to do with various different things—cosmological ideas, astronomical systems, computations, instruments, and so on. But the most important was the problem concerning the calendar, the preparation and pronouncement of which was one of the most important functions of the state.

Some Western methods of preparing calendar appeared more accurate than current Chinese method in use at the time, sufficiently so to make the government adopt them as the method to construct the imperial calendar. But the problems and conflicts persisted in spite of—or, because of—this measure. The three papers in this special issue, originally presented in the Second Templeton International Conference on Science and Religion in East Asia, held in Seoul on 12-14 December 2013, deal with the diverse aspects of such problems and conflicts.

The most conspicuous was the so-called Calendar Case (*liyu* 曆獄) that took place in the early Kangxi court. Again, it was not simply a clash of astronomical methods or cosmological world pictures, but various other aspects, as Catherine Jami illustrates in the first paper in this issue. In her review of the previous works on the Calendar Case, which she presents after a succinct summary of the events during the Case, what Jami considers the most important contributions were the works of Huang Yi-long, who put the Calendar Case in its context by seeing the importance of the astrological use of the calendar. She also credits Chu Pingyi for bringing in the political dimension of the conflicts. After pointing out the need to study the Manchu sources more carefully, she comes up with her own account of the two missing elements: 1) some more examples showing the political dimension of the Calendar Case: for example, an apparent paradox of the Manchu regents siding with the Han Chinese to oust the Jesuits, especially Schall; and 2) the role of the celestial phenomena, importance of the “sight” in Kangxi’s desire to be in “control.” Jami’s paper persuades the readers that the various different functions expected of the Astronomical Bureau, including the astrological ones, needed to be studied properly for a full understanding of the Calendar Case, which cannot be reduced to a simple scientific debate or religious persecution.

An important factor underlying the conflicts, shown in Jami's paper, was the astrological uses of the calendar. Astrology and astronomy, or *tianwen* 天文 and *lifa* 曆法 as they were referred to in Chinese, were closely tied to each other in traditional China. The traditional Chinese calendrical system, into which Western astronomical knowledge and techniques were incorporated, included the subject of astrology, and astrological beliefs and practices continued to have importance after the adoption of Western methods. Astrological implications of the calendar were maintained both by the Astronomical Bureau, which was in charge of the imperial calendar, and among the scholars for a long time after the Jesuit takeover of the Bureau. Also, the calendar continued to be used by the practitioners of various occult techniques. Chu Pingyi's paper looks into this situation, and discusses how calendar and astrology were connected to each other in the minds of many Confucian scholars, and how such connections were viewed by later scholars who disconnected them and excluded the astrological uses of the calendar. In doing this he uses the term "numerology" to cover not only astrology but such other mantic techniques as geomancy, physiognomy, and "genethlialogy."

The close tie between astrology and the calendar can be seen clearly through the key actor in the Calendar Case, Yang Guangxian 楊光先 (1597-1669), who connected the two in his attack against the Jesuits. As Chu Pingyi shows in his paper, the critical problem was the Western calendar's adoption of the "*dingqi*" 定氣 method of determining the 24 fortnight periods (*jieqi* 節氣) based on the true position of the sun. The new method created problems in the astrological and geomantic practices carried out using those calendrical data. For the Confucian scholars who considered the use in such "numerological" activities to be important functions of the calendar, this naturally became a source of opposition to the Western calendrical method. Indeed, Yang Guangxian based much of his criticism of the Western calendar on the astrological and mantic significance of the calendar. He even faulted the Jesuits for not fully understanding this important aspect of the calendar, and said that they did not properly understand the *li* of calendar (*lili* 曆理), which for him meant "to comprehend the cultural significance and usages of the calendar/almanac rather than the details of its calculations."

To illustrate the persistence of the Confucian literati's perception of links between astrology and calendar, Chu Pingyi presents an interesting example of Liu Xiangkui 劉湘燧, a student of Mei Wending 梅文鼎 (1633-1721), an expert on both calendrical astronomy and geomancy. Readers are also reminded that even Mei Wending considered astrology as a useful tool for the control over the common people and as a warning sign against the emperors, and argued that the literati should have knowledge of astrology. Chu throws light on the situation from the eyes of later scholars who separated calendar making and numerology, mainly Ruan Yuan 阮元 (1764-1845) one and a half centuries later. Analyzing Ruan Yuan's account of Yang Guangxian in the *Chourenzhuan* 疇人傳, Chu shows how Ruan approved Yang's "correct" stand against the Christian religion, but not the way he

mixed calendar making and numerology, nor his incompetence in the technical problems of calendar making. Chu Pingyi's paper ends with his consideration of how, as the result of their separation of calendar and numerology, Ruan Yuan and his colleagues recast the meaning of the term "*chouren*" 疇人.

The conflicts occurred not only between groups or between individuals, but also within an individual. Chu Longfei's paper illustrates this by a careful analysis of the *Lixue huitong* 曆學會通 of Xue Fengzuo 薛鳳祚 (1600-1680), for whom the most important task for the Chinese astronomers of the time was to integrate the Chinese and the Western astronomical systems. As Chu Longfei argues, Xue believed that he had fulfilled this task with his new system, mostly based on the *Tianbu zhenyuan* 天步真源. Chu shows how Xue tried to make his new system conform to the "Chinese" system of calendrical learning.

Astrology was important in Xue Fengzuo's "*huitong zhongfa*" 會通中法, because for him the ultimate purpose of calendrical learning was to "regulate and arrange all human affairs in accordance with the heavenly rule and mandate." With his close examination of Xue's *Lixue huitong*, Chu Longfei shows how Xue perceived the relation between calendar and astrology, and argues convincingly that the real problem for Xue was how to coordinate European astronomy and Chinese astrology. Actually this had already become an important issue during the Chongzhen 崇禎 reform. Xu Guangqi 徐光啓 (1562-1633) held the traditional belief that the sky was a celestial counterpart to the imperial hierarchy, and even expected application of Western astrological knowledge in agriculture and medicine. Thus, Xue Fengzuo turns out to have carried out Xu Guangqi's famous slogan, "Melt the materials of that side, and incorporate them into the mould of the Datong [calendar]" (鎔彼方之材質, 入大統之型模). But in presenting his own work, Xue characterized it with a modified form of Xu Guangqi's slogan: "Melt the materials of each side, and incorporate them into the mould of my learning" (鎔各方之材質, 入吾學之型範).