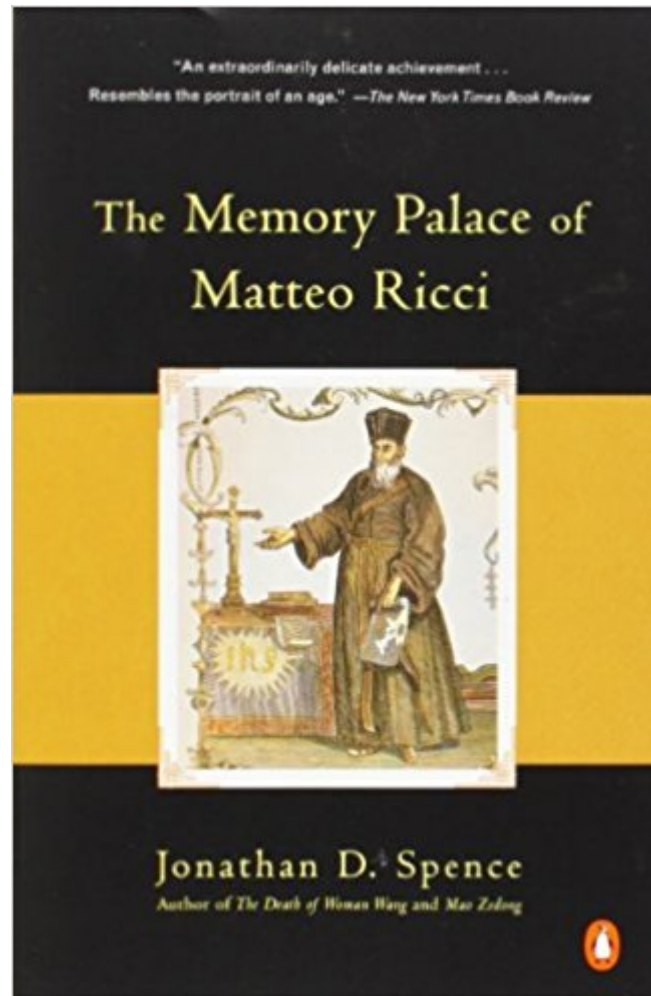




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# The Memory Palace Of Matteo Ricci



## Synopsis

From the renowned historian and author of *The Death of Woman Wang*, a vivid and gripping account of the 16th-century missionary's remarkable sojourn to Ming China. In 1577, the Jesuit Priest Matteo Ricci set out from Italy to bring Christian faith and Western thought to Ming dynasty China. To capture the complex emotional and religious drama of Ricci's extraordinary life, Jonathan Spence relates his subject's experiences with several images that Ricci himself created—four images derived from the events in the Bible and others from a book on the art of memory that Ricci wrote in Chinese and circulated among members of the Ming dynasty elite. A rich and compelling narrative about a fascinating life, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* is also a significant work of global history, juxtaposing the world of Counter-Reformation Europe with that of Ming China.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Matteo Ricci (1552-1616), an Italian Jesuit, entered China in 1583 to spread Catholicism in the largely Confucian country. In order to make a persuasive argument for the educated Chinese to abandon their traditional faith for the new one he was carrying, Ricci realized that he would have to prove the general superiority of Western culture. He did so by teaching young Confucian scholars tricks to increase their memory skills—an important advantage in a nation with countless laws and rituals that had to be learned by heart. Ricci attracted numerous students with this method; more important, Ricci came to have a sympathetic understanding for China that he communicated to Rome, and thence to the European nations at large. Spence's portrait of Ricci is a gem of historical

writing. --Gregory MacNamee

Praise for *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci*:  
... Resembles the portrait of an age.  
Review  
"A gripping portrait of late-sixteenth-century cultural history in both the West and the East."  
Natalie Zemon Davis, Princeton University, author of *The Return of Martin Guerre*  
"An extraordinary tour de force, a work of literature and at the same time a remarkable wide-ranging use of historical sources. This is the kind of history that most people in the profession cannot even begin to write."  
John King Fairbank, Harvard University

In *"The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci"*, Jonathan D. Spence captures the life of the Italian Jesuit Matteo Ricci, one of the first European to be allowed to live in China, following the model of the memory palace which Ricci presented to the Chinese. Ricci's Palace was formed in his mind where he identify every word with a picture or statue; each picture or statue would be placed in a room; and it would have a meaning and sub meaning behind it. The rationale behind the palace was to help the learner to memorize. In order to teach the Chinese this technique, Ricci wrote to them a book written in Chinese. Spence used four images from Ricci's book "each fixed in its own place and described in sequence," to reconstruct the life of Ricci. The First "was two warriors grappling, the second a tribeswoman from the west, the third a peasant cutting grain, the fourth a maidservant" (10). Moreover, Ricci's used specific "religious" pictures too in the Palace, which the author used to write about the Jesuit's life. Those pictures were of: "Christ and Peter at the sea of Galilee, of Christ and the two disciples at Emmaus, of the men of Sodom falling blinded before the angel the Lord, and of the Virgin Mary holding the Christ Child"(11). Spence noted that mnemonic art is rooted in European History. The First image, the warrior image, which is built upon a Chinese ideograph of war wu, symbolize the meaning of "to prevent [war]" or peace (24). In This chapter, the author explores Ricci's life which is full of scenes of war and violent. Since his Childhood in Macerata, Italy, Ricci's heard of killings in the streets between two Italian families. Furthermore, his town was "constantly aware of the Turkish attacks"(29). The author expend on explaining the relationship between The Ottoman Islamic Empire and Christian Europe. Wars were not uncommon in that area. But not only religious violence between religious was common, but even a struggles between the Jesuits and "members of other religious orders", where there was "little love between [Jesuits, Augustinians, Dominicans, and Franciscans]"(51). Moreover, The author summorze the wars between China and Japan. Nevertheless Ricci himself experienced violent while being in China

when his house was attacked by a group of criminals. His leg was injured because he jumped from the window, and "[it] never recovered completely"(58) .Another Theme of Ricci's life is presented by the author through a religious picture which shows peter swimming toward Jesus; the theme is water. The Author explores the world of seas and it's dangers; the Portuguese ships and it's might and flaws; Ricci's own journey from Portugal to to Goa ; and the troubles faced him in the Chinese rivers. At one point, Joao Barradas , a Chinese convert to Christianity anda close friend to Ricci, was killed after the ship over turned in the river. Ricci survived by miracle(92).The second Image, which is built on the Chinese ideograph yao, explores the relationship between the monotheistic religions in China, Europe , and in Ricci's experience. In one event, Ricci was close to convert the Muslim emperor of India where an extremely expensive polyglot bible was prepared to be sent as a gift to the Muslim Emperor Akbar. Although tension existed between all those religion, respect and universal views could be found in Italy. Furthermore, The author shows explore the multi-culturist Rome, at the time , where Jesuits spoke many languages .Reason and science is the theme of the second religious picture: The road to Emmaus. In this chapter Spence shows how well trained the Jesuits were; the amount of books existed in Rome; Ricci's ability to use Science and philosophy to evangelize; and how the memory palace helped Ricci to write books in Chinese. According to Spence, it took Ricci twelve years to master Chinese. He translated many books from Latin to Chinese without carrying them with him , but by using his memory palace.The Third Image "Profit and Harvest" is based on the Chinese character li, which means profit. The theme of this chapter is economy. The author explore the role of gifts to achieve goals; Ricci's financial struggle in china; the Jesuit investment in the silver-silk trade with Japan; Ricci's experiences on how to buy house in China; Chinese suspicion of Ricci to be an alchemist; and his gifts to the emperor.The third religious picture was the men of Sodom. This chapter explores the moral issues. For example , poverty and prostitution in Rome; slavery in Lisboan; Chinese selling their children for slavery ; criticism by Ricci of the actions of Buddhist monks who killed and robbed people while respecting Confucianism; and the spread of Homosexuality in China.In the final Chapter , the author combined the fourth image which is built on the Chinese ideography hao, with the fourth religious picture; The Virgin Mary carrying Jesus. The theme explores many different topic in relation to Mary. For instance, The relation between Mary and the Jesuit order, and the Marian Sodality movements in Europe, india , and China. The Virgins Mary images, which the Jesuit helped to print, attracted many to Christianity in china. Indeed one of the pictures had effect on the Chinese scholar Xu Guangqi that "it acted as a catalyst to his conversion" (247). However, many Chinese misinterpreted those pictures; they thought that the Christian God was a woman! Nevertheless, Ricci's books on Christianity, criticism

of Buddhism, and admiration of Confucianism, drew much attention, debate, and respect to him from Chinese scholars and intellectuals. In conclusion, the book is a journey to the world of 16th and 17th century explorer. Not only is the book full of the rich life and experiences of Matteo Ricci, but it is full, also, with the historical context of the world at that period. Spence's style and narrative, made Ricci's life alive to the reader.

Tough & difficult. Not what I expected, but that's my problem, not the book's.

This book was purchased for a class. Although a bit unusual at times, Spence's book is well written, informative, and discusses how the East and West dialogued on philosophy and religion.

Used it on my senior thesis, such an interesting book. Extremely easy to read, hard to put down.

The author knows his stuff.

I loved this book. The mixture of history, mnemonic device, theology, missionary activity, and social and political thought is entrancing. Dr. Spence has displayed the cultural and spiritual ethos, not only of the title character, but of an era, place and time. The breadth of scholarship is impressive, as are the language and imagery used to present it. I cannot speak to the accuracy of the material presented, but am so intrigued, now, by the period, that I soon will be able to. I highly recommend this book.

As I grow older, I worry sometimes about the aging 'muscle' in my head. I had noticed that Thomas Harris mentioned this book in the back of his novel Hannibal, so I ordered it; Not to be like the fictional Dr. Lecter, but rather to develop my memory and keep it honed. This is book about history, about discipline, about a passion. Spence knows his stuff, to be sure, but I find his style to be aggravating--the research is phenomenal and very much appreciated, but there are times when it interrupts the flow of the read. This is the only reason I give it four stars instead of five. Otherwise, it is a Five-star. I like the book immensely, and I am learning.

great book

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