

# INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATIONS: A TALE OF TWO TRAVELERS

*Is it not a joy to have friends come from afar? Is it not a pleasure to learn and then to practice often what one has learned?*

Aristotle

Patrice Pendell

Two travelers shared a mission to promote friendship and a date in history. In 1610 Matteo Ricci travels ended and Hachimaru's began. Perhaps a coincidence crossing on a date, their stories are framed by the happenstance of mutual missions which resonates across time and remains relevant and useful. Appropriately through the lens of an international communication friendship project developed for university English as Foreign Language (EFL) classes, travelers distanced by time, cultures and commission revealed their conspicuous connections. This essay will expound the kindred spirits of some seemingly unlike bed-fellows- Matteo Ricci, a Jesuit priest who opened China to the world and Hachimaru, a mascot doll who welcomed the world to Nagoya, Japan. This is the story which was told in 1610 and 2010. And it is story of how friendships have universal methods and applications including EFL pedagogy.

## Matteo Ricci: A 1610 Ending



Matteo Ricci was born in 1552 near Rome in Macerata, Italy. At sixteen Ricci was sent to Rome to study law but entered the Jesuit mission at Sant'Andrea. He studied under Christopher Clavius, a famous Jesuit polymath, astronomer and humanist. After ordination as priesthood in 1582 he was sent to Macao, which was a Portuguese territory in southern China. After arriving he taught humanities and continued his intensive language studies. Ricci remained in China until his death in 1610. More than his mission it was his methods that were remarkable, and it is these universal applications for intercultural communications which connect to a teacher on an international journey,

an EFL class at a Japanese university and their mascot who is another traveler, Hachimaru. These methods and connections are the inspirations for this paper.

### **A Chinese Context for Ricci**

Ricci arrived in China in the late Ming Dynasty and it was as it happens, it was a good time to open the door to the West to the China. The Ming Dynasty in China (1368-1644 IME) was an era filled with many significant events and advances in Chinese history. The voyages of Zheng He (1371-1433) extended China's trade to Persia with the first voyage from 1405 to 1407 comprised of 317 vessels and an estimated force of 26,800 members. During the first quarter of the 15th century construction projects included the restoration of the Grand Canal and the Great Wall as well as the establishment of the governmental center in Beijing at the Forbidden City. By the 16th century the China was activity trading the Portuguese, the Spanish, and the Dutch. Merchant families began to produce examination candidates to become scholar-officials and adopted cultural traits and practices typical of the gentry. These growing scholarly populations were keen to discuss the classics as well as other contemporary topics. The intelligencia challenged each other in enthusiastic discourses. One of the most popular to scholarly debates was the concept of friendship. The late Ming Dynasty when Ricci arrived in China might be called the 'Golden Age of Friendship' (Xiping, 2006). As Xiping explained, from these debates there were three identified themes on friendship popular in these debating societies and are defined collectively as the 'Essence of Friendship'. The first concept was spiritual reliance or the necessity of friends relying on one another for the cultivation of virtue and learning; the second was material assistance or the importance of friendship to render financial or politically support; and the third being the practice of seeking friends in all corners of the land.

This was the context into which a foreign missionary man entered China. Ricci vehemently applied himself to learning the language, culture and making friends. Ricci approached the Chinese with respect and as he integrated into a foreign culture, he became more Chinese. He embraced Chinese food, clothing, and respect for Confucian moral standards. Quintessentially Ricci adopted a strategy which is still a model for intercultural communications and merits further discussion.

### **An Accommodative Strategy**

Ricci did more than study Chinese and the writing of Chinese scholars and philosophers. And rather that push his agenda, the primary strategy was to attract the Chinese to Catholicism through shared learning and demonstrating an exemplary life. A demonstrative example of this was Ricci's choice to adopt the traditional dress of the Chinese scholars rather than a Catholic cassock robe. This and in many other

ways Ricci accommodated Chinese culture and philosophies as he incorporated Chinese customs in his daily life as well as spiritually.

Ricci knew it would take more than speaking the language or wearing Chinese clothes if Catholicism was to have a lasting impact in China. He needed the support of China's leadership. Ricci was determined to enter Beijing and win the goodwill of the emperor. But Beijing was closed to foreigners and he was repeatedly denied the papers required for travel. After thirteen years in 1601, Ricci was granted permission to travel to Beijing. Along with offering intellectual advances, Ricci prepared some gifts and 'toys' to win favor with the Chinese Emperor Wanli (1572-1620). He brought valuable knowledge but he opened the door with some frivolous fun.

### Opening A Forbidden Door

Ricci knocked on the door of the Forbidden City in Beijing bearing gifts. Ricci presented many gifts and yet each had a purpose to instruct through fun and intellect. The scope of this paper allows only for a brief description of a few of these gifts in two categories: toys and teachings.

The toys Ricci brought included prisms, a harpsichord and a clock. Ricci demonstrated a prism which was a complete novelty to the Chinese. The simple and profound the division of light into a commonplace rainbow must have been quite extraordinary. The European harpsichord was another exotic gift which demonstrated the elegance of cultures foreign to the Chinese. Ricci composed a set of eight madrigals, each of which



Wanli Emperor (1572-1620 IME)

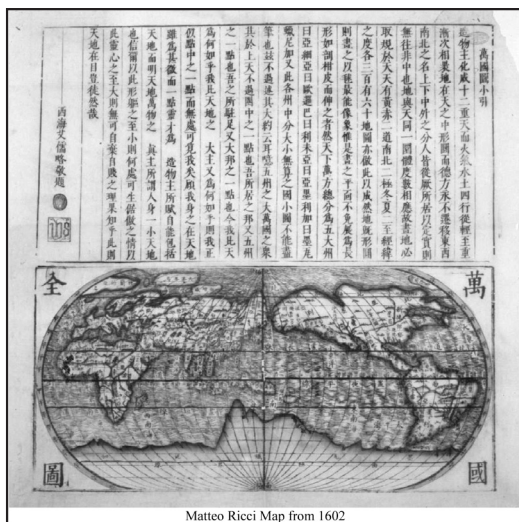
bore a moral and religious significance. The most provocative gift for the Chinese and productive for Ricci to gain access to the imperial court was a guilt-chime clock. This too was completely new technology for the Chinese, and was of particular interest to the Emperor who had never seen such a device. When the clock stopped and no Chinese scholar could start it again, the Emperor sent for Ricci who repaired it. Although Ricci never met the Emperor, the access to the Forbidden City was insured through his gifts and clock maintenance. Common-place and exotic both in function (telling time) and form (chimes and movements), the

clock as well as all Ricci's gifts garnered a great deal of interest and imperial favor followed. He was able to develop and build relationship with key officials: first though 'frivolous' gifts and then a lasting impact from his intellectual contributions.

Ricci taught many significant ideas and shared Western knowledge unknown to the

Chinese and three will be discussed in this paper. These topics and others were written by Ricci, translated in Chinese and published. (Appendix 1) Three intellectual contributions will be discussed including memory technique, cartographic revelations and a book on friendship.

Ricci had a phenomenal memory and used a technique called the Memory Palace (Spencer 1984). It is a technique which when applied enables one to remember thousands of names, facts, concepts and/or images. The technique uses loci, or location, to place a memory as if one put away a dish, so it can be easily retrieved. It is an ancient method which employs actually visualizing a structure to place things one wants to remember. The origin of memory loci comes from an ancient Greek story. A famous Greek poet, Simonides of Ceos (556-468 BME), had just given a performance when there was a terrible earthquake in a theatre. He had just left the theatre and escaped being crushed. In the collapsed hall the flattened bodies were so disfigured that they could not be identified for proper burial. But Simonides was able to remember where each of the guests had been sitting, and so was able to identify all for burial. This experience suggested to Simonides the principles which were to become central to the development of the mnemonic technique referred to the Memory Palace. Ricci described this system in Chinese in his work, A Treatise On Mnemonics. He advanced this technique to the Chinese as an aid to passing examinations and the extensive memorization required for Chinese scholars. Ricci also gained favor with the Chinese imperial service which required taking difficult entry exams. The Chinese were impressed and eager to learn this mnemonic technique. Ricci taught Chinese scholars who were burdened with the task to remember thousands of *kanji* as well as philosophic adages and bureaucratic facts. The memory palace technique was useful to the Chinese and bridged a challenge common to both cultures.



Matteo Ricci Map from 1602

The second contribution concerns Ricci skills as a cartographer. The first world map Ricci presented to the Chinese was met with disbelief and distain. The Chinese believed China was certainly the 'center of the world' and had to be much bigger than any other country. Ricci re-drew the map and in his diplomatic acumen positioned China in the center. Faced with the perception of cultural-centricity, this conundrum was suitably solved by Ricci. In October 2010 the Ricci Map, one of only two remaining in good condition, was

purchased by the James Ford Bell Trust for one-million USD. It was the second most expensive map ever sold. This map is located at the University of Minnesota Library in the United States.

I was stunned when read about Ricci's map. In my tenure at a Japanese Cultural Center (JCC) in Washington State in the Pacific Northwest where I taught about Japanese culture, a similar concept and solution was directed at tens-of-thousands of American children. American visitors to the JCC were introduced to Japan by viewing two world maps. First people viewed a familiar map which was made in America with the U.S. in the middle. Then, a second map was shown which was made in Japan with Japan in the middle. When asked (specifically to those unfamiliar with world geography) who/where is the center of the world the inevitable response was made by pointing at the map with the home country in the middle. It was intriguing that Ricci's model to draw a map relative to the culture of context still has applications and benefits 400 years later. By seeing how we look at the world our identity, even mirrored through as a mundane map, it is instructive in 1610 or 2010. Perhaps in 2410 geography will be taught with holography imagines negating the use of proprietary placements. After all, who can be the center of the world?

A third Ricci contribution this paper will explore is his book called Treatise on Friendship as know as On Friendship 100 Maxims for a Chinese Prince written in 1595. Ricci's ideas on friendship were in fact a 'hot topic' for the Chinese. It was perfectly chosen to take full advantage of a trend among the educated classes in the late Ming Dynasty as it was the 'Golden Age of Friendship'. A small sample follows retrieved from an online Catholic Dictionary with Chinese characters:

**Number 1**

*My friend is not another person – my friend is my half, another me. So I have to regard my friend as myself.*

「吾友非他，即我之半，乃第二我也。故當視友如己焉。」

**Number 2**

*My friend and I though we have two bodies, we have only one heart.*

「友之與我，雖有二身，二身之內，其心一而已。」

**Number 50**

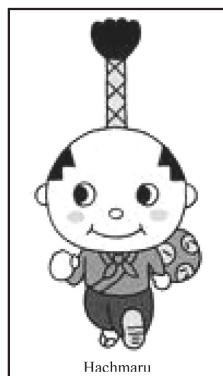
*Friendship prevails on kinship because kinship can exist without mutual love, friendship can not. Even without mutual love the relationship of kin is still there, but without mutual love how can friendship exist?*

「友於親惟此長焉：親能無相愛親，友者否。蓋親無愛親，親倫猶在：除愛乎友，其友理焉存乎？」

Ricci book On Friendship was a reprinted many times in the Ming Dynasty making

it the equivalent of a 'best-seller' in 1605. The particular popularity of the subject garnered huge success.

### Hachimaru- A 1610 Beginning



Mascots are just one dimension of Japanese cuteness or *kawai*. The Chinese characters for *kawai* (可愛) literally mean lovability or the ability to receive and give love. The *kawai* concept is an omnipresent aspect of Japanese popular culture and there are mascots everywhere even for the government metropolitan police, fire department and defense forces. Additionally mascots are ascribed character traits which serve their mission and make the mascots seem more real. When the Nagoya launched a year-long campaign for the 400-year anniversary celebrations, they created a special mascot to promote the city worldwide: Hachimaru. He is a *samurai*

doll with a big head and big smile: a friendly face. Hachimaru is a traveler and was born in Nagoya in 1610 the same year Nagoya was founded. He loves meeting people and traveling. He carries *negaiboshi* (wishing stars) wrapped in a cloth *furoshiki* as a knap-sack and gives these wishes to people he meets as a gesture of friendship. He participated in many Nagoya anniversary celebrations together with his friends. When my international communication project was looking for a mascot, Hachimaru was the perfect solution. He became the cornerstone of an international communications project designed to create a friendship network managed by EFL classes at a Japanese university.

### Opening A EFL Door

Developed for EFL classes at a Japanese university, the Nagoya Next Door (NND) project aimed to incorporate culture and international communications in an imaginative way using the Internet. Coincidences turned this challenge into an opportunity. I had experience with friendship-doll exchanges from the Japanese Friendship Doll Program at Mukogawa Gakuin where I also taught about the relative context



of culture through world maps. A project synergy developed from the concept of friendship dolls, a Nagoya City promotion, and the application of Internet communications in EFL learning (Belcher, 2006; Hawisher et al., 2006; Savignon & Sysoyev, 2002; Takaoka, 2004; Yashima, 2002). There were many Internet options but was there a doll that fit this EFL context? The city of Nagoya promotion offered a mascot and partner as the campaign promoted Nagoya domestically and globally The potential was apparent:



Hachimaru making friends.

- Doll whose universal appeal was charming
- Oversee replies/progress on the Internet
- Learning where EFL was fun and personal
- Leverage partnerships for participation



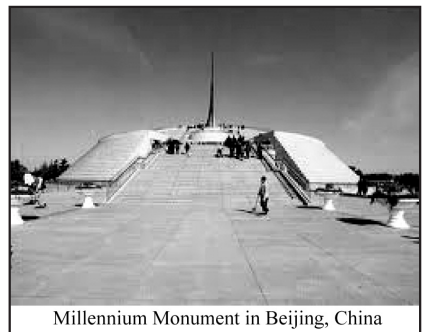
Nagoya Next Door and the EFL university class.

The basic project design was to use the Nagoya mascot doll, Hachimaru, as a friendship courier. Thirty-two Hachimaru dolls were sent initially to 10 countries on four continents. The NND project provided a range of activities for EFL classes including writing, international travel, Internet communications, and oral discussions. In particular and relative to this paper, a delegation of university students traveled to China where they met with Chinese students and performed a skit in English and Chinese that explained the NND project at the Japanese Pavilion during the Shanghai World Expo in

Shanghai, China. The NND project was an EFL opportunity created for the Internet that embraced friendship and the personal nature of communication. The charming face of Hachimaru was amazingly disarming. And surprisingly, whether young or old, at a World Expo in China or chillin' with students on the steps in Liverpool England, Hachimaru had an amazing ability to open people's hearts. Hachimaru in hand, strangers became friends—just like they lived next door. Making friends from afar and sharing cultures from a character born in 1610 and the memory of another who died in 1610- maybe not such a coincidence.

### Travelers from Afar

Hachimaru, nine EFL students another professor and I traveled to China to attend and perform a skit at the World Expo in Shanghai. Since the NND project mission was to create a friendship network, it was a natural association to also visit Chinese sites known to Ricci. In Shanghai where was a special exhibit from Italy commemorating the 400 years since Ricci's death at the Shanghai Museum. Relics of his presence were on display. The exhibit honored his contributions to building better world understanding and friendship. And there were even a few of the 'toys' Ricci had presented to the



Millennium Monument in Beijing, China

imperial court including the famous clock. Following the Shanghai visit and tour, the students returned to Japan but I continued on to Beijing. The mission was to retrace the steps of Ricci and share a friend from afar- Hachimaru. One of the Ricci sites in Beijing is found at a special monument built to commemorate the new millennium. It is a massive the sun-dial and inside there is long fresco celebrating individuals who



Hachimaru with Pendell at Ricci's tomb in Beijing.

made significant contributions to five-thousand years of Chinese civilization. Only two Westerners are represented: Marco Polo, the man who made China known to the West and Matteo Ricci the man who made the West know to China. Another site I was able to visit was Ricci's grave. It is noteworthy that Ricci was the first foreigner allowed to be buried in Beijing. It was particularly moving to bring Hachimaru to China and see the power if his friendly face. In China and as a



Making friends in Beijing.

foreigner, I found I was often hawked by vendors trying to sell their goods. They say, 'Come here, friend, I will make you a good deal... Hey you're my friend, come over here...' But when I brought out Hachimaru, people stopped the sales hype. A sincere smile came over their faces and they asked about Hachimaru and me. The power was remarkable. It was as if suddenly I became just a neighbor- just like next door.

### Friends- Just Like Next Door



Hachimaru at the Globe Theatre, London.

This has been the tale of travelers linked by a date: 1610. Shakespeare wrote the Tempest and his plays were being performed at the Globe in London. Ricci had opened the door to the world to China. Hachimaru would open the door to Nagoya to the world. And yet there were universal ideas and concepts which crossed time and cultures. This is a story of learning and how perceptions affect intercultural communication. It is a story of how Japanese EFL classes came to know more about the world and real people while learning English. It is a lesson that 'frivolous' things can have more meaning and power than we give them credit for. And it is the story of how these simple things can be the cornerstones to the complex endeavors of communication and friendship.

Ricci and Hachimaru set friendship into motion in the mundane. But in the fun and



familiar we see our shared humanity. It is in this moment friendships are forged. 1610 was a date shared. Ricci dedicated his life and learning to intercultural relations. Hachimaru charmed people (even cows) all over the world and conveyed love and friendship. Japanese college students learned first-hand EFL skills as a means to an end and created a global friendship network. Regardless of time or dates, 1610, 2010 or even 2410 the spirit of friendship is a joy shared. Intercultural relations are adventures and when 'communication when it does happen it, 'is as accidental as bumping into an old friend on a distant voyage, or just as surprising as welcoming as making a new one' (Ricci in Billings 2009). Let's be friends- just like next door.

## APPENDIX 1

### Matteo Ricci Writings (partial list)

- 1595 Treatise on Friendship (Chinese)
- 1596 Treatise of Mnemonic Arts (Chinese)
- 1607 Translates into Chinese Euclid's Elements of Geometry (Chinese)
- 1603 The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven (Chinese)
- 1608 Ten Discourses by a Paradoxical Man (Chinese)
- 1583-1610 The Journals of Matthew Ricci (Italian)

## APPENDIX 2

### Some 1610 Events

- City of Nagoya, Japan was founded and Hachimaru was born.
- Galileo Galilei first observes the four Galilean moons of Jupiter.
- Gates and 60 others arrive at Jamestown, Virginia USA
- Go-Yozei is Emperor of Japan (1587-1611)
- Henry Hudson searches for the Northwest Passage to the Pacific Ocean arrives at Hudson Bay
- James I, is King of England (1566-1625)
- Louis XIII is King of France (1601-1643)
- Matteo Ricci died and was buried in Beijing
- Shakespeare wrote the 'Tempest'
- Tokugawa government established in Edo
- Wanli is Emperor of China (1573-1620)

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