In 2006, my wife and I had the privilege of visiting the Zhalan cemetery and viewing the gravesites of Matteo Ricci and his Jesuit colleagues, Johann Adam Schall and Ferdinand Verbiest. These sites, located outside the old city gate in Beijing, were restored after the Cultural Revolution and commemorated in 1983, on the 400th anniversary of Ricci’s arrival in China. The memory of the Jesuit mission to China is now carefully preserved, for it was the Jesuits who were largely responsible for opening up China to Europe in the modern period. This early encounter between East and West endures in significance.\textsuperscript{1}

A constant theme in East-West encounters, over the centuries, is the endeavor of the Western visitors “to change China,” in Jonathan Spence’s felicitous phrase. These efforts failed for the most part, for the Chinese proved to be exceedingly adept at turning the barbarians against themselves and protecting what they most valued in their culture and way of life. Yet, the story of the various attempts to bring about change “speak[s] to us still . . . about the ambiguities of superiority, and about that indefinable realm where altruism and exploitation meet.”\textsuperscript{2}

This story has a special salience in our own time. With the explosive growth of transnational commerce, professionals in developed countries, especially the United States, have expanding opportunities to spread their particular ways of doing things around the world. And many of our compatriots, we know, are eager to take advantage of these opportunities. In the United States, as my Harvard colleague William Alford observes, we have a long history “of endeavoring to enlighten, if not save, our foreign brethren by exporting ideas and
institutions that we believe we have realized more fully.” Indeed, the principal reason my wife and I were in Beijing in 2006 was to participate as faculty members in a training program for Chinese government officials. Engaged in our own form of missionary work, we presented ourselves as experts in “best practices” (regarding social policy and professional ethics, respectively) and attempted to persuade our audience of their superiority.

Missionary work, however, raises fundamental questions, as Bill Alford notes. Under what conditions, if any, should professionals of one country be seeking to promote in another their own values and commitments? Are we correct to assume that our standards of good professional conduct have universal applicability? Does missionary work reflect a failure to appreciate alternative modes of human flourishing? Whether the export of values results from genuinely cooperative endeavors or from taking advantage of vulnerable populations, practitioners are obligated to confront the far-reaching effects of their efforts and assess the standards by which they operate. To begin examining these questions, this chapter explores the work of the figures whose gravesites are located in the Zhalan cemetery. It is estimated that more than 900 Jesuits worked in China from 1583 until they were expelled in the mid-eighteenth century. The focus here is specifically on the initial period and especially on the most well known of the Jesuit visitors, Matteo Ricci, who set the pattern for the Jesuit mission in China for many decades (with occasional reference to Schall and Verbiest). These professional missionaries worked unabashedly to export the values of the Christian gospel and Catholic practices. In so doing, they also exported Western knowledge, skills, and ways of doing things in other domains.

I should emphasize that I am not a historian or an expert on China. My training is in practical ethics, and my interest here (and in the addendum to this chapter) is in what I call the ethics of exporting ethics, for which the Jesuit adventure in China provides an especially intriguing example to learn from.

The Society of Jesus and Early Modern Catholicism

Let’s begin by setting the scene, with a brief sketch of the political and cultural context of the Jesuit mission.

The Society of Jesus was founded by Ignatius of Loyola and a small group of fellow students at the University of Paris in 1534 and received papal approval in 1540. Society members tended to come from elite