

## **A Tale of Dynastic Change in China: The Ming-Qing Transition through Athanasius Kircher SJ's *China illustrata* (1667)**

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In 1667, as European readers opened Athanasius Kircher SJ's<sup>1</sup> long-awaited *China monumentis illustrata* (China Illustrated through its Monuments), they encountered the first of the book's many drawings, which portrayed the major contributors to the Jesuit enterprise in China.<sup>2</sup> The two prominent missionaries Matteo Ricci SJ<sup>3</sup> and Johann Adam Schall von Bell SJ<sup>4</sup> are depicted presenting a map of the Chinese empire. Above them, in the sky, appear St. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus, and St. Francis Xavier, the pioneer Jesuit missionary to Asia. The message to the readers is quite clear: all the information to be found in the book is the fruit of a joint, cross-generational effort, made by a unified Jesuit China mission. However, during many years of Kircher's work on his book, neither China nor its Jesuit Vice-Province were united.

The turbulent 1640s saw the end of Ming rule over China (1368–1644), and the rise of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), governed by the foreign Manchu emperors. Although 1644 is acknowledged in

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- 1 Athanasius Kircher, \* 2.V.1602 Geisa (Germany), S.J. 2.X.1618 Paderborn (Germany), † 27.XI.1680 Rome (*Sommervogel* IV, 1046).
- 2 See frontispiece in Kircher, *China illustrata*.
- 3 Matteo Ricci, \* 6.X.1552 Macerata (Italy), S.J. 16.VIII.1571 Rome, † 11.V.1610 Beijing (Dehergne, *Répertoire*, 219).
- 4 Johann Adam Schall von Bell, \* 1.V.1592 Cologne (Germany), S.J. 21.X.1611 Rome, † 15.VIII.1666 Beijing (Dehergne, *Répertoire*, 241).

modern historiography as the symbolic year of dynastic shift, the transition from Ming to Qing was a much longer, more complicated and painful process. Years after the conquest of Beijing, pretenders of the Ming branch continued to claim rule over China, maintaining small but persistent strongholds in its southern regions. The Jesuit missionaries, like their Chinese counterparts, found themselves split between different rulers and different causes. While many missionaries proclaimed loyalty to the new Qing regime, others remained in contact with the different so-called Southern Ming courts, sometimes functioning as key agents in the service of Ming pretenders. The conflicting views among the Jesuit missionaries incited tensions and disagreements, as well as yielding competing information which was circulated in Europe. As the present study shows, some of this information came in the form of Jesuit eyewitnesses to events in China, apparently working on opposite sides of the political divide, and in contact with Kircher during their visits to Rome.

Surprisingly, all that complexity leaves no trace in Kircher's influential book. Instead, *China illustrata* offers its readers a confused and highly inaccurate general description of the events, in which Kircher managed to portray an idyllic and almost fictional picture of a unified and triumphant China mission.<sup>5</sup> Throughout his long career, the colourful Jesuit was indeed criticized time and again for his intellectual errors.<sup>6</sup> In the case of China, however, it seems that he possessed the best sources available. Kircher's position in the Collegio Romano, at the heart of Rome, set him at the centre of a global network, linking him with worldwide information, and enabling him to work closely with Jesuit missionaries — and, as will be outlined, particularly with envoys of the China mission, with whom he met personally during their visits in Europe.

Thus, by providing a larger contextual frame within which to view Kircher and the sources for his work, this study argues that the enigmatic presentation of the Ming-Qing transition in *China illustrata* should not be explained by the author's lack of knowledge, but rather in relation to the political, religious, and intellectual preoccupations that underpinned Kircher's scholarship, and the world around him. Seen in this light, it will be demonstrated, Kircher's 'mistakes' were made in an attempt to reconcile different

5 Kircher's description of the events is very short. See Kircher, *China illustrata*, 99–104.

6 For an account of Kircher's intellectual errors, see Findlen, "The Last Man", 1–48.

voices among the conflicting Jesuit sources, and to integrate them into a coherent, easy-to-follow narrative. The emerging narrative, though perhaps regarded by modern eyes as an unpolished scholarly work, reflects a pious vision of history and should therefore be read as a religious-apologetic text, and specifically as a meticulously-crafted defence of the Jesuit enterprise in China.

Indeed, as the essay explores, it may have been precisely this vision that appears to have attracted audiences to the work at the time of its publication: *China illustrata* was a bestseller and remained so for decades, when it continued to be quoted, copied, and referred to by various writers. The iconic book's role in shaping European views regarding China thus remains without question. Perhaps because of its factual weaknesses, however, and despite its popularity at the time, and its clear significance for the history of China's reception in Europe, Kircher's version has been overlooked by historians in favour of other European reports of the Ming-Qing transition.<sup>7</sup> The present essay seeks to draw attention to the historical significance of this work; it foregrounds Kircher's puzzling narrative and draws a link between events in China and the religio-political interests, and influences, of the Jesuit intellectual who was once termed "the last man who knew everything".<sup>8</sup> On a broader level, an examination of Kircher's narrative, his sources, and *milieu*, sheds light on the ways in which historical knowledge was produced and perceived in the seventeenth century, and particularly within Jesuit scholarly circles.

Kircher's imprecisions thus are cast in a new light that includes searching for context, influences, sources, and motivations for the work; at the same time, it traces the work's imprecisions along well encrypted paths that used rhetoric and philological manipulations to present this portrait of China. To this end, the first two parts of the essay provide the necessary background for evaluating the historical frame for the work and identifying some of the sources of its apparent inaccuracies: Part 1 provides an overview of the Chinese dynastic shift and Part 2 explores the ways it affected the Jesuit mission. Part 3 turns the focus from China to Rome,

7 For studies on the European presentation of the Ming-Qing transition, see Chen, "Three Contemporary Western Sources"; Van Kley, "News from China", 561–82; Van Kley, "An Alternative Muse", 21–43; For a more recent debate on that subject, see Keulemans, "Tales of an Open World", 190–234.

8 The term was used as the title of an edited volume by Paula Findlen. See Findlen, ed., *Athanasius Kircher*.

investigating Kircher's relations with some missionaries whose conflicting textual and oral reports of China became the main sources of *China illustrata's* Ming-Qing transition narrative. It argues that Kircher's efforts in mediating between the different missionary agendas resonated in his narrative. The narrative itself is presented in Part 4 along with a close analysis of its inaccuracies and their possible sources, showing that most of the so-called mistakes served political, religious, or literary purposes, some of which can be traced to the themes discussed in the first parts of the study. Finally, Part 5 contextualizes the narrative in relation to the period's intellectual tendencies, and Kircher's historiographic perceptions, bringing full circle the effort to frame this enigmatic text and its author within the *milieu* into which it was born.

### The Reality behind Kircher's Narrative

In the canonical Chinese text *Daxue* (The Great Learning), Confucius asserts: "When the clans are in order, the country is governed. When the country is governed, all under heaven is pacified".<sup>9</sup> However, by 1644 it seemed that China was anything but ordered, governed or pacified. That chaotic year saw emperors of three different dynasties occupy the Dragon Throne in Beijing. In an overwhelming turn of events, the Chongzhen Emperor (r. 1627–44) of the Ming committed suicide and let rebel leader Li Zicheng (1606–45) take over the capital as head of the short-lived Shun dynasty, only to be driven away a few weeks later by the Qing army.<sup>10</sup>

Though Kircher's narrative addresses all these main storylines, it strays from actual chronology, overemphasizes some of the proceedings, and devalues others. Yet not all these 'mistakes' are easily detected. For the majority of Kircher's Western readers, who possessed very little, if any, knowledge of contemporary China, the alterations were probably seen as subtleties. The same might be true for some present-day readers as well. Thus, a brief overview

9 家齊而後國治，國治而後天下平。 Translated by the author from the Chinese text. Online transcription at the Chinese Text Project: <https://ctext.org/liji/da-xue/zh>. Compare with a translation by James Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, 223. For a discussion on the Chinese concept of "all under heaven", see Zhao, "Rethinking Empire", 29–41. All further translations, unless otherwise stated, are by the author.

10 For further reading on the fall of Beijing, see, for example, Brook, *The Troubled Empire*, 238–59; Swope, *The Military Collapse*, 190–207; Wakeman, *The Great Enterprise*, 225–318. On the short Shun interregnum, see Wakeman, ed., *Telling Chinese History*, 59–97.

of the actual events in China is indispensable before probing more deeply and critically into Kircher's narrative.

Historians have thoroughly studied the reasons for the fall of the Ming, and the lack of consensus as to which catalyst was the most crucial suggests that the origins of the crisis were manifold. Traditional explanations tend to associate the dynasty's downfall with the negligent rule of its last sovereigns, who estranged themselves from imperial duties and delegated crucial responsibilities to the court eunuchs. The leadership vacuum had led to growing corruption in state and military systems and the degeneration of their bureaucracies. Furthermore, the alienation of the Ming emperors from the public sphere and their indulgence in hedonistic palace life became a massive fiscal burden on the state.<sup>11</sup> Responsibility for funding the extravagant court, in addition to the ongoing military campaigns and the dwindling imperial treasury, was dropped on the population's shoulders in the form of inflated taxes, which only intensified the people's distress and resentment.<sup>12</sup>

But even if we accept the role of moral imperial conduct in the Ming's breakdown, the dynastic shift in China should not be seen as dependent upon the personal failures of a few emperors, but rather as the ultimate result of wider and deeper undercurrents. The crucial outcome of the decline in imperial authority was that it prevented the last Ming administrations from handling the major global challenges of the seventeenth century: economic crises, natural disasters, and military threats.<sup>13</sup>

Among the last Ming rulers, it was the Chongzhen Emperor who was destined to face the worst circumstances. The first was the severe economic decline China had suffered throughout the first decades of the seventeenth century, and its escalation by the 1640s.

11 For example, it has been estimated that by the seventeenth century there were about three thousand court ladies and the fantastic number of twenty-thousand eunuchs in the imperial palace in Beijing. See Wakeman, "China and the Seventeenth-Century", 31.

12 The land tax, for instance, increased from 4 million taels in 1618 to 20 million in 1639. See Parker, *Global Crisis*, 120.

13 The upheavals in China are often seen as a part of the larger "General Crisis" of the seventeenth century. On this paradigm, see, for example, Trevor-Roper, "The General Crisis of the 17th Century", 31-64; Hobsbawm, "The General Crisis of the European Economy", 33-53. On China and the general crisis, see Atwell, "A Seventeenth-Century 'General Crisis' in East Asia?", 661-82; Atwell, "Some Observations", 223-44; Goldstone, "East and West in the Seventeenth Century", 103-42.

During the seventeenth century, the Ming's earlier self-sufficient economy became gradually dependent upon silver exports from Japan and the New World. Some historians estimate that about half of the silver mined in the Americas may have reached China, with an even greater amount exported from Japan.<sup>14</sup> While playing a vital and active role in the emergence of a global economy, the Ming empire became reliant upon international economic trends. It was severely affected by the European depression of the 1620s and by the slowing-down of the silver trade during the late 1630s and 1640s. The shortage in silver had led to a drastic inflation of prices and increasing demand for taxes. Due to the corruption in state bureaucracies, these taxes were prevented from reaching their destination, and the imperial treasury was gradually becoming drained.

Even more alarming for the Chongzhen reign was a devastating series of natural catastrophes on an unprecedented scale, which China confronted from the late 1620s.<sup>15</sup> Droughts, severe cold, and plagues of locusts led to famines and epidemics, claiming the lives of millions. As crops withered and food supplies shrivelled, the price of grain mounted dramatically.<sup>16</sup> Consequently, many survivors of the calamities suffered dreadful poverty and found themselves without a house or sources of income. The big cities were filled with beggars, and corpses of those who had starved to death lay in the streets.<sup>17</sup>

All that culminated in the growing delegitimization of the Chongzhen regime. The appearance of natural disasters was traditionally seen in China as "calamities from heaven" (*tianhuo*), which came as punishments for moral misconduct. The Chinese emperor, also regarded as the "son of heaven" (*tianzi*), was the one to be blamed. In traditional religious doctrines, natural disasters

14 See Flynn and Giráldez, "Born with a 'Silver Spoon'", 202; Wakeman, "China and the Seventeenth-Century", 30.

15 The disasters were first witnessed in the empire's north-western provinces (mostly in Shaanxi), but soon spread eastward to the Yellow River valley and Shandong, and southward over the Yangzi delta.

16 In northern Zhejiang, a picul of rice was traditionally sold for 1 tael but rose to 4 taels by 1641. See Wakeman, *The Great Enterprise*, 6.

17 For a survey of the natural disasters, see Brook, *The Troubled Empire*, 249–52. On the role of climate, see Zheng et al., "How Climate Change Impacted the Collapse of the Ming Dynasty", 169–82. On epidemics during the time, see Dunstan, "The Late Ming Epidemics", 1–59; Lee et al. "Climate Change and Epidemics", 53–63.

signalled heaven's displeasure with the emperor's rule, and the decline of his "heavenly mandate" (*tianming*). Together with the contemporary hardships and the general economic depression, the Chongzhen regime was contested by a rising number of rebels who wished to free themselves from Ming rule. And so, on 24 April 1644, it was not the Qing, but rather rebel leader Li Zicheng, who camped with his forces at the gates of Beijing.

The dramatic turn of events in the imperial palace during that night is complex and unclear, since none of the Chinese chroniclers seemed to have witnessed it.<sup>18</sup> Realizing that he was trapped in the city and without any hope for future rule, the Chongzhen Emperor summoned the empress and asked her to commit suicide. Later, he asked his consorts and daughters to do the same. According to some sources he even slew one of his daughters with his own sword. Then the agonized emperor ascended to Coal Hill (*meishan*), behind the Forbidden City, and hanged himself from a tree. On the following day, Li Zicheng's army entered the city, beginning the short rule of the Shun dynasty.

While Beijing was torn by the rebels, the Qing Manchu army was waiting behind the Great Wall for its window of opportunity. The Manchus began their long march to the Dragon Throne as a small confederation of Jurchen and Mongol clans, northeast of the Ming empire's borders. The same droughts that struck China were probably what drove the leader Nurhaci (1559–1626) to launch attacks on Korea and China, during which he managed to seize large territories in eastern Liaodong. The attacks and raids intensified during the reign of Nurhaci's son — Hong Taiji (1592–1643) — who changed the name of his people to "Manchu" and in 1636 proclaimed the Qing dynasty.<sup>19</sup> Though Hong Taiji died in 1643 and did not live to see his dynastic ambitions fulfilled, only a few months later, his six-year-old son was enthroned as the new emperor of China.

Learning of the Chongzhen Emperor's tragic death, Ming general Wu Sangui (1612–78), commander of the largest military force in northern China, now faced a difficult dilemma: should he turn his forces towards Beijing and fight Li Zicheng, or should he

18 For more on the different descriptions of the Chongzhen emperor's suicide, see Wakeman, *The Great Enterprise*, 262–66; Swope, *The Military Collapse*, 190–207.

19 It is debatable whether Hong Taiji was a personal name or a title. It is rendered "Hong" or "Huang" in Chinese, and "Hung" in Manchu. For further reading, see, for example, Crossley, *A Translucent Mirror*, 164–65.

continue blocking the Manchu army at Shanhai pass? Wu's motives remain a mystery, but his decision was clear. He opened the pass, surrendered to the Manchus, who promised to avenge the Ming emperor's death, and together defeated Li Zicheng forces, easily taking control of Beijing.

The conquest of the rest of mainland China, however, was not as swift as the capture of its capital. The Qing forces faced not only bandit brigades and local warlords, but also persistent opposition by Ming loyalists. In the southern regions of China, descendants of the Ming imperial branch claimed for legitimate rule and established opposing regimes.<sup>20</sup> None of the 'Southern Ming' administrations lasted long, and by 1662, the last Ming pretender — the Yongli Emperor (r. 1646–62) — was executed by the Qing. Yet, during the late 1640s and early 1650s, the Qing army suffered considerable losses that made some believe in the prospects of a Ming restoration.<sup>21</sup>

### **Jesuit Conflicts during the Ming-Qing Transition**

Kircher's narrative concerns the Jesuit enterprise in China as much as it concerns its political cataclysm, and therefore the state of the China mission during the turbulent times should be accounted for as well. Like all who lived in China, the Jesuits eventually had to pick sides in the dynastic conflict, a decision which proved to be difficult and problematic. As Liam Brockey has noted, the Jesuit mission certainly "did not wager all on the Qing horse".<sup>22</sup> Since the missionaries were scattered, and sometimes cut off from their administrative centres, each had to adjust himself to the conditions of his own environment. Schall, the only European eyewitness of the events in Beijing, proclaimed loyalty to the Qing already during the first days of their rule, while his colleagues in the south advised and supported some of the Southern-Ming regimes. Some missionaries found themselves in the middle of the violent struggles, and an

20 The reign of the Southern-Ming emperors was short, and at times overlapping: The Hongguang Emperor in Jiangsu (1644–45), the Longwu Emperor in Fujian (1645–46), the Gengyin Emperor in Zhejiang and later in Fujian and Guangdong (1645–55), the Shaowu Emperor in Guangdong (1646–47), the Dongwu Emperor in Nan'ao island, Guangdong (1648–49), and the Yongli Emperor in Guangdong, Guangxi, and later in Yunnan (1646–59), then taking refuge in Burma (1659–62).

21 For a description of the Yongli rule in 1649, given as part of a report concerning the current affairs in India, see ARSI, *Jap. Sin.* 125, ff. 156v–59r. Also, see Rule, "The Jesuits and the Ming-Qing Transition", 256.

22 See Brockey, *Journey to the East*, 111.



unfortunate few even met their death.<sup>23</sup>

While the Jesuit Vice-Province avoided identifying itself officially and exclusively with one dynasty, at the ground level missionaries did not abstain from active participation in the fighting. Francesco Sambiasi SJ,<sup>24</sup> for example, was recruited by the Southern-Ming Hongguang Emperor (r. 1644–45) to acquire Portuguese weapons in Macao and later functioned as a close consultant of his successor, the Longwu Emperor (r. 1645–46).<sup>25</sup> Supporting the local Ming regimes would have rewarded the missionaries in case these regimes had secured their rule, a scenario which did not seem far-fetched during that time. It remains ambiguous whether such support was a planned strategy or simply the outcome of individual actions in times of communication disruption. But whatever the reasons, the entangled agendas and opposing loyalties caused much distress among the Jesuit missionaries.

By the 1650s, the conflicting voices within the Vice-Province of China found their way to Rome where, to the great embarrassment of the Society, two envoys of the China mission were simultaneously promoting contradictory agendas. As Kircher attests in the preface to *China illustrata*, the envoys also became essential sources for his book.<sup>26</sup> Their oral testimonies and, even more importantly, their textual legacy, shaped much of the information in *China illustrata*. Thus, understanding the incompatible agendas of those two missionaries is the key for solving some of the ambiguities in Kircher's narrative.

The more renowned of the two envoys was Martino Martini SJ,<sup>27</sup> the procurator of the Vice-Province of China who became widely known through the publication of bestselling books such as *De bello*

23 For example, Rodrigo de Figueiredo SJ (1594–1642), who died in Kaifeng along with his Christian community when Ming forces cut the dikes along the Yellow River in an attempt to subdue the rebel forces of Li Zicheng. See *Ibid*.

24 Francesco Sambiasi, \* 1582 Cosenza (Italy), S.J. X.1602 (30.IV.1603 in Pfister), † I.1649 Guangzhou (China) (Dehergne, *Répertoire*, 238; Pfister, *Notices biographiques*, 136–43).

25 Brockey, *Journey to the East*, 111. Sambiasi's embassy to Macao is recorded in the Annual Letter of the Southern part of the Vice-Province of 1645. See António de Gouvea SJ to General Mutio Vitelleschi SJ, "Annu da Vice-Provincia". BA 49–V–13, f. 555r–60r. Fuzhou, 15 June 1646. Transcribed in Gouvea, *Cartas Ánuas da China*, 270–85.

26 Kircher, *China illustrata*, 1.

27 Martino Martini, \* 1614 Trento (Bishopric of Trent), S.J. 8.X.1632 Rome, † 6.VI.1661 Hangzhou (China) (Dehergne, *Répertoire*, 166–67).

*Tartarico Historia* (1654) and *Novus Atlas Sinensis* (1655).<sup>28</sup> The other representative of the China mission was Michał Piotr Boym SJ,<sup>29</sup> who arrived in Europe a few months prior to Martini, charged with performing a completely different task. In contrast to Martini, who had already pledged allegiance to the new Manchu rulers of China, Boym was dispatched as an ‘imperial envoy’ of the Southern-Ming Yongli court to raise European support for the Ming cause. The case of Boym and Martini has been dealt with thoroughly in previous research.<sup>30</sup> This is unsurprising, since it contains all the ingredients of a good drama — fame, jealousy, and even tragedy. For the scope of this essay, however, one point should be emphasized: the duality of two China mission envoys touring Europe simultaneously and promoting different ideas, serves as a striking example of the lack of uniformity among the China Jesuits during the Ming-Qing transition period.

Boym’s legation was presented from the outset as purely religious, since he brought with him concrete evidence regarding the latest conversion of the Yongli imperial family. Aided by the powerful Christian eunuch ‘Achilles’ Pang Tianshou (d. 1657), Boym’s colleague Andreas Koffler SJ<sup>31</sup> had managed to baptize in 1648 the empress dowager (Helena), the emperor’s legitimate wife (Anna), the emperor’s mother (Maria), as well as the emperor’s infant son and heir to the throne (Constantine). Boym’s official task was to deliver letters to the Pope and to the Jesuit General, expressing the family’s devotion to the Catholic faith.

Yet Boym’s arrival in Europe aroused much doubt and suspicion. Not only was his journey seen as politically motivated, but also (and

28 Martini’s *De bello Tartarico historia* was published by the famous Plantin-Moretus printing house during the procurator’s stay in Antwerp in 1654. His *Novus atlas sinensis*, however, was rejected due to its unusually large plates. It was eventually published in Amsterdam in 1655 by the renowned cartographer Joan Blaeu (1596–1673) who included the China Atlas as part of his *Theatrum orbis terrarum, sive, Atlas novus*.

29 Michał Piotr Boym, \* 1612 Lwów (Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth), S.J. 16.VIII.1631 Krakow, † 22.VIII.1659 Tonkin (Vietnam) (Dehergne, *Répertoire*, 34).

30 For recent scholarship on the Martini-Boym affair, see Golvers, “Michael Boym and Martino Martini”, 259–71; Rule, “The Jesuits and the Ming-Qing Transition”, 243–58; Sena, “Macao and the Contours of Michał Boym”, 273–300; Miazek-Męczysłowska, “The Chinese Christians”, 34–50.

31 Andreas Xavier Koffler, \* 1612 Krems (Austria), S.J. 16.X.1627 Vienna, † 12.XII.1652 Guangxi (China) (Dehergne, *Répertoire*, 137). Some scholars date Koffler’s birth to 1602 or 1603, and his death to 1651. See, for example, Miazek-Męczysłowska, “The Chinese Christians”, 36.

even worse), he was associated with the vanquished side, while Europe, under the lead of the Portuguese, was moving towards engagement with the new political order. Opposition to his mission began in via. By the time of his departure from China, on 1 January 1650, the Portuguese authorities in Macao had already concluded that the Ming cause was lost but allowed the legation to leave only after being threatened with excommunication by the Jesuit Visitor of Japan and China, Sebastião da Maya SJ (r. 1650–51), who supported Boym's undertaking.<sup>32</sup> Boym met further Portuguese opposition in Goa for political reasons, where he was prevented by them from travelling further by sea. Accompanied by his Chinese attendant, Andreas Zheng, he resumed his journey overland through Persia, Armenia, and Turkey, arriving by ship in Venice in December 1652.

The hostile atmosphere surrounding his mission continued in Europe, again, on political grounds. Boym was forced to remain for several months outside of Rome, in Loreto, from which he sent assurances in a letter to the Jesuit Superior General Goswin Nickel SJ<sup>33</sup> that his mission was purely religious, not political.<sup>34</sup> Even when allowed to enter Rome, Boym was denied an audience with both Pope Innocent X (r. 1644–55) and the Propaganda Fide.<sup>35</sup> Rumour in the city had it that he was an impostor, and that his letters were fraudulent. These accusations resonated in a toxic pamphlet, circulated in the city by an anonymous 'Servant of the Church' (*Servus Ecclesiae*).<sup>36</sup>

After a long wait in Rome, the written responses Boym eventually received from the newly-elected Pope Alexander VII (r. 1655–67), General Nickel, and King João IV of Portugal (r. 1640–56) were

32 Sebastião da Maya, \*1597Lisbon, S.J. 1611, + 16.VI.1664 Macao (China) (Dehergne, *Répertoire*, 163). On his approval of Boym's legation, see Pelliot, "Michel Boym", 113–14; Sena, "Macao and the Contours of Michał Boym", 298–99. Later, da Maya served as Visitor for another term in 1653–58.

33 Goswin Nickel, \* 1.V.1584 Koslar (Germany), S.J. 3.IV.1604, + 31.VII.1664 Rome (*DHCJ* II, 1631–33).

34 Boym's letter, dated 21 February 1653, is found in ARSI, *Jap. Sin.* 77, ff. 130r–v.

35 While Boym was in Rome, the Congregatio de Propaganda Fide conferred four times to discuss his case, on 1 April 1653, 22 July 1653, 16 September 1653, and 24 August 1654. A final approval of his letters of reply was granted on 24 September 1655. See Miazek-Męczyńska, "The Chinese Christians", 44.

36 ARSI, *Jap. Sin.* 77, ff. 118–20. An Italian translation of Boym's response to the accusations, sent to the Propaganda Fide in 1653, and entitled *Risposta alle demande del Servo della Sta Chiesa*, is found in ARSI, *Jap. Sin.* 77, ff. 121r–24v.

polite and friendly in tone, yet none offered the practical help that Boym might have wished for. Boym's death on the border of China, on his way back to deliver the reply letters, after learning of the recent defeats of the Yongli army, have commemorated him as a tragic hero, a naïve fighter for a lost cause.

Martini, on the other hand, was generally successful in achieving the goals of his mission. The procurator managed to attain in Rome an important reversal of the 1645 anti-Jesuit ruling concerning the Chinese Rites Controversy, to procure generous funds from different European sovereigns, to draft new recruits for the aging mission, and to promote it in public lectures and through the publication of widely-circulating books.<sup>37</sup>

Still, the dichotomy between Martini's mission as procurator and Boym's legation deserves further consideration. There is no doubt that Martini was the one holding the official procurator role. He was commissioned by the recently-reappointed Vice-Provincial Manuel Dias the younger SJ<sup>38</sup> and by Francisco Furtado SJ,<sup>39</sup> who at the time was promoted from Vice-Provincial (c. 1635–50) to the office of Visitor (1650–53).<sup>40</sup> Nonetheless, though Boym presented himself as a legate of the Yongli imperial family, his mission was also officially approved

37 The Chinese Rites Controversy was a long dispute between the Jesuits and other religious orders regarding the Jesuits' toleration of the performance of traditional rites among Chinese converts. For further reading, see Mungello, *The Chinese Rites Controversy*. For a study of the events from Chinese perspective, see Standaert, *Chinese Voices in the Rites Controversy*. On Martini's successful fundraising, see Clossey, *Salvation and Globalization*, 178.

38 Manuel Dias the younger, \* 1574 Castelo Branco (Portugal), S.J. 2.II.1593, † 4.III.1659 Hangzhou (China) (Dehergne, *Répertoire*, 76–77). Dias already served as Vice-Provincial in 1623–35.

39 Francisco Furtado, \* 1589 (1587 in Pfister) Island of Faial (Portugal), S.J. 1610, † 21.XI.1653 Macao (China) (Dehergne, *Répertoire*, 103; Pfister, *Notices biographiques*, 151–53).

40 During most of the 1640s, due to the communication disruptions in China, the Vice-Province was divided into North and South regions, each governed by a different Vice-Provincial. In 1641 Giulio Aleni SJ (1582–1649) was appointed as Vice-Provincial of the South while Furtado, who governed as Vice-Provincial from 1635, remained Vice-Provincial of the North. The role of Vice-Provincial was recombined with the appointment of the experienced Manuel Dias the younger. However, after arriving in Hangzhou and assuming the office of Vice-Provincial in 1649, Manuel Dias Jr. seems to have kept Furtado, also in Hangzhou, as the Superior of the North. Dias — “aged, infirm, and almost blind” — probably preferred to share authority with the skilful Furtado, notwithstanding the official instructions from Rome. See Sebes, “Philippine Jesuits”, 194; Leitão, “The Contents and Context”, 102–03.

and coordinated by Visitor Sebastião da Maya. The disorder during the transition period is reflected not only in the duality of envoys, but that of their superiors as well. Apparently, although patents for his new office arrived by 1650, Furtado managed to make his way from central China to Macao — the official residence of the Visitor — only in the following year.<sup>41</sup> As a result, Sebastião da Maya assumed the role of 'Acting Visitor' in Macao, as long as the appointed Visitor was delayed in Hangzhou.<sup>42</sup> George Dunne even suggested that by the time of Martini's appointment in 1650, Furtado was still unaware of his own promotion to the office of Visitor.<sup>43</sup> This assumption undermines the conventional view regarding the pre-eminence of Martini's appointment.

Boym, therefore, seems to have had considerable support on his departure for Europe. In fact, in view of this support, some scholars explain Martini's decision to depart from Fujian instead of taking the usual route via Macao as an attempt to avoid troubles, considering Macao's support for Boym.<sup>44</sup> From the assertive letters of Superior General Nickel to Martini, in which he warned the procurator not to sabotage Boym's mission, it is clear that the head of the Society of Jesus was seeking to defend Boym's legation. Yet, soon after departing for Europe, Boym had already lost the support of the Portuguese on political grounds; Nickel's endorsement of him thus was probably an effort to save the Society further public embarrassment by underlining the religious motivations that led a member under his governance to undertake such a journey, at the same time avoiding being seen as politically motivated or politically backing the wrong side. Whatever the case, it is clear that Boym's legation was taken seriously and, at times, was even more privileged than Martini's procuratorate. With no one legation purely 'official' or 'alternative', the context, circumstances, and events surrounding

41 Sebes, "Philippine Jesuits", 194.

42 Paul Rule has regarded that duality as "a temporary arrangement whereby, due to the disrupted communications, a Visitor for China operated independently of the Visitor in Macao". Rule, "The Jesuits and the Ming-Qing Transition", 256.

43 Dunne, *Generation of Giants*, 332.

44 This notion is suggested in Sena, "Macao and the Contours of Michał Boym", 296–97. However, contradicting this theory is the information supplied by the same author, regarding Martini's later discovery of Boym's legation, on his arrival to the Philippines. In contrast, Joseph S. Sebes SJ explained Martini's travel through Manila as derived from the need to deliver letters to the superiors of the Philippine Province. See Sebes, "Philippine Jesuits", 194–96.

these two travelling Jesuits in the 1650s thus was anything but simple, and indeed, must retain the complex reading just provided here.

The Martini-Boym affair reached its climax with the arrival of the two fathers in Rome, which, as Kircher explained, was one of the reasons that motivated the composition of *China illustrata*.<sup>45</sup> Kircher, as will be shown now, became one of the key mediators in the delicate Martini-Boym situation.

### **Kircher and his Sources Meet in Rome**

Despite their parallel travels and different views, Boym and Martini may not have been in conflict with each other.<sup>46</sup> The two fathers never met in person while in China, and neither of them seems to have known about the other's mission before leaving for Europe. According to Martini, when he heard about Boym's journey, on arriving in the Philippines he asked his superiors to be sent back to his post in Hangzhou, but was refused and ordered to proceed.<sup>47</sup> Whether this was true or not, the letters exchanged between Martini and Superior General Nickel reveal that, once in Europe, Martini repeated his request, this time to the Superior General himself, to be relieved of his duties. On a political level, his official set of tasks as procurator did not include pro-Manchu propaganda, and therefore his mission was not overtly contradictory to Boym's in this arena.<sup>48</sup> In Rome, Martini aided Boym significantly by translating and validating the Ming imperial

45 Boym arrived in Europe (Venice) in December 1652 and was allowed into Rome only a few months after. Martini arrived in Europe in August 1653 (Bergen), and reached Rome during the autumn of 1654. Both remained in the city at least until December 1655.

46 As Tereza Sena has argued, by presenting the two envoys as rivals, many modern historians inadvertently endorse Boym's version of events, as we shall see, further in this analysis: "Macao and the Contours of Michał Boym", 294.

47 "Cum enim Manilae p. Michaellem Macao Romam abivisse, primum audissem (ex epistolis quas ipse p. Michael ad patres Philippinarum Macao dederat) quamprimum per proprium sinica navi vectum redeundi in Sinammearum licentiam rogavi, sed accepto in Macasaria responso iter progredi". ARSI, *Fondo Gesuitico* (F. G.) 649/379, ff. 1r–2v. Martini to Nickel, Brussels, 20 February 1654. Published in Martini, *Opera Omnia*, 235–36.

48 As a matter of fact, Martini himself was involved in the short-lived regime of the Southern-Ming Longwu Emperor (r. 1645–46). At the recommendation of Zhejiang warlord Zhu Dadian (1581–1646), Martini was recruited as military advisor to the high-rank official Liu Zhongzao (1605–49). He aided in forging Western cannons for Liu's brigades, earning the title "Gunpowder Mandarin" (huoyao dachen). See Mungello, *The Forgotten Christians*, 25; Menegon, *Ancestors, Virgins, & Friars*, 94.

letters for the Propaganda Fide.<sup>49</sup> While in Genoa, at the beginning of the return journey, Boym and Zheng were assigned to Martini (and his group of recruits), to whom, in his role as procurator, was entrusted the role “to take care [of them], and to manage their expenses”.<sup>50</sup>

In addition to this contact between the men, Martini’s general view regarding Boym’s legation can be discerned in a confidential letter to Superior General Nickel. Apparently aware of the suspicion circulating against Boym, and shortly before his arrival in Rome, Martini wrote an endorsement of Boym from Brussels on 20 February 1654:

There is truly no reason for me to condemn [Boym’s] legation, since it is genuine, and Father Michał was indeed sent by the queen to offer obedience to the Supreme Pontiff; to which affair I give an honorific testimony in the book *De bello Tartarico*, and I attest likewise to anyone who is asking.<sup>51</sup>

However, tensions undoubtedly existed. Through the correspondence between Martini and Nickel, we discover that Martini’s arrival in Rome was seen as troublesome by both Boym and the Superior General, who at the time were engaged in clearing Boym’s name from the political overtones that his mission had acquired. Indeed, the above-quoted letter was written in reply to Nickel’s

49 Rule, “The Jesuits and the Ming-Qing Transition,” 253.

50 “... duodecim omnino sunt socij quorum curam hic habere debeo, ac sumptus procurare, nimirum: - p. Michael Boym, ... Andreas Sina.” ARSI, Jap. Sin. 162, f. 18v. Martini to Nickel. Genoa, 19 February 1656. Also published in Martini, *Opera Omnia*, 451. The group, however, was eventually split up, and each of the envoys sailed on a different ship. One of Martini’s recruits described Boym in a letter as the Father in charge of the rest of the Jesuits on the ship: “Patres eramus numero novem, quatuor Lusitani, unus Polonus qui et superior, Anglus unus, ac Belgae tres”. ARB, *Fonds Jez., Fl.-Belg.* L. 812–915, f. 80. Ignasce Hartoghvelt SJ to Thomas Dekens SJ. Goa, 4 May 1657. A full transcription of this letter is found in Bosmans, *Documents*, 470–73.

51 “Nulla enim mihi est ratio ob quam Legationem improbem cum illa vera sit, et p. Michael vere a Regina sit missus ad praestandam Summo Pontifici ob[oedienti] am; cuius rei ego honorificum do testimonium in libello De bello Tartarico et omnibus etiam petentibus testor”. ARSI, F. G. 649/379, f. 1r. Martini to Nickel. Brussels, 20 February 1654. Published in Martini, *Opera Omnia*, 235. See Martini’s remark on Boym’s legation in Martini, *De bello Tartarico*, 106. Martini described the legation in a positive way yet refrained from mentioning Boym’s name, referring to him instead as “a Father of our Society” (*patrem e nostra Societate*).

earlier reproach of Martini for reports circulating that Martini was critical of Boym. According to the Superior General, the stakes were high. He wrote to Martini on 7 February 1654:

Not without resentment, provoked by [reading] the various letters [sent] to me, I come to know of the many things told by Your Reverence against Father Michał Boym and his legation. This matter is of greater importance than Your Reverence probably thinks. For it is not only the reputation of the individual Father Michał that is at stake, but rather those of Your Reverence, of me, and of our Society.<sup>52</sup>

Martini, for his part, promised that interrupting Boym's legation was never his intention but, in the same breath, he could not avoid adding that "more prudent men, considering the present state of things, judge that King Yongli's restoration of rule over China is morally impossible".<sup>53</sup> Further, against Nickel's accusations, the procurator complained about the hostility he felt from Boym's side in past correspondence:

Father Boym sent me most unpleasant letters, as if he was offended by me, in which are collected things that I wrote solely to Your Paternity, and he believes that my arrival hinders not only his legation, but also other businesses that he considered conducting for the China Mission. I wish to ask Your Paternity, for God's sake, to entrust by all means the entire affairs of the procuratorate to the Father, and that [Your Paternity] deign to exempt me from the charge [of procurator].<sup>54</sup>

However, as the correspondence between Martini and Athanasius

52 "Non sine dolori[bus] sensis ex variorum ad me literis intelligo multa narratae a RV. contra P. Michaellem Boym eiusque Legationem. Res ea maioris est, quam fortassis arbitratur RV., momenti. non enim unius P. Michaelis res aut fama agitur, sed et RV., et mea, et Societatis nostrae". ARSI, *Fl. Belg.* 6.I, 584v. Nickel to Martini. Rome, 7 February 1654.

53 "Prudentiores considerato praesenti rerum statu, iudicant moraliter impossibile esse Regis Jumlie Regnum Sinarum restitutionem". ARSI, *F. G.* 649/379, f. 1v. Martini to Nickel. Brussels, 20 February 1654. Published in Martini, *Opera Omnia*, 237. Compare with the translation in Rule, "The Jesuits and the Ming-Qing Transition", 252.

54 "P. Boym, quasi a me offensus, accerimis litteris ad me datis, de eo quod ad P. Vam solam scripsi, conquaeratur putetque meum adventum (non solum Legationi sed et negotijs alijs, quae pro Missione Sinensi agere cogitabat) obesse, rogatam P. Vam per Deum volo ut etiam procurationis negotia omnia patri committere meque exonerare dignetur". ARSI, *F. G.* 649/379, f. 1v. Martini to Nickel. Brussels, 20 February 1654. Published in Martini, *Opera Omnia*, 236. Compare with the translation in Sena, "Macao and the Contours of Michał Boym", 295.



Kircher discloses, Boym indeed had good reasons to fear for his “other businesses”. If Nickel was Martini’s interlocutor for discussing Boym’s political conduct, Kircher was his interlocutor for criticizing Boym’s intellectual activity. Still in Brussels, Martini shared with Kircher his doubts concerning the quality of information in Boym’s planned atlas of China (reduced by Martini to “a map”, *mappam*). Martini asserted that Boym “saw nothing of China, except a part of Guangdong province, and the entrance to Guangxi”.<sup>55</sup> Boym undoubtedly planned to have his atlas published, traceable to in an advertisement by his Parisian publisher Sébastien Cramoisy (1584–1669).<sup>56</sup> However, no maps were ever printed.<sup>57</sup> There is no evidence linking neither Martini nor Kircher to the shelving of Boym’s atlas, but in the same letter, when discussing Boym’s historical writings, Martini was far more explicit, asking Kircher to postpone the publication:

Regarding the account of the Tartar war ... I think Father Boym should do nothing, for he will hardly be able to understand the origins and progress of this war. Therefore, if he considers publishing such an account, Your Reverence will do only good if the matter would be put off, either until he would see my [account], or [until] I [see] Father Boym.<sup>58</sup>

Although both Fathers were apprehensive about the other’s presence in Europe, apparently their main concerns were dissimilar. While Boym felt intimidated by Martini’s views and promotion

55 “Nihil de Sina viderit praeter aliqua Quantum provinciae, et initia Quamsi”. APUG, 567, f. 252r–v. Martini to Kircher. Brussels, 21 February 1654. Published in Martini, *Opera Omnia*, 249. For more on Martini’s view of Boym’s maps, see Golvers, “Michael Boym and Martino Martini”, 261–62.

56 See “Aduertissement au Lecteur” in Boym, *Briefve relation*, 73.

57 Boym’s atlas was probably composed between 1651–52. See Standaert, ed., *Handbook of Christianity in China*, 758. For a study of the Atlas and its distribution in European archives, see Szczesniak, “The Atlas”, 65–77. An important part of the atlas — a manuscript titled “Magni Cathay Quod olim Serica, et modo Sinarum est Monarchia. Quindecim Regnorum. Octodecim geographicae Tabulae” — is found in the Bibliotheca Apostolica Vaticana in Rome. See BAV, *Borg. cin.* 531; online at [http://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS\\_Borg.cin.531](http://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Borg.cin.531)

58 “Circa historiam de bello Tartarico ... P. Boym nihil facturum puto, nam vix scire poterit huius belli initia et progressum, unde si talem cogitat historiam edere, omnino bene faciet R.V., si res differatur, vel donec meam videat, vel ego P.rem Boym”. APUG, 567, ff. 252r–v. Martini to Kircher. Brussels, 21 February 1654. Published in Martini, *Opera Omnia*, 249.

of the political situation in China, Martini focused his criticism on Boym's literary endeavours. His willingness to support Boym in Rome suggests that he genuinely did not see Boym's legation as a threat. On the other hand, Martini seems to have been well aware of the great impact European publications had on the China mission. As procurator of the Vice-Province, he was distressed by the circulation of alternative, duplicate knowledge. Likewise, it is probably not a coincidence that Martini's arrows were aimed at Boym's atlas and historical narrative, without mentioning other projects such as Boym's great study of Chinese natural history (*Flora Sinensis*, 1656). On a more personal level, it is reasonable that the author of the *Atlas Sinensis* and *De bello Tartarico* did not want to risk the status of his greatest legacies in Europe.

Martini's reports to Kircher demonstrate how instrumental the latter was in shaping the Jesuit scientific writings of his time. Indeed, by the 1650s Kircher's fame rose to its peak. Since 1646 he was freed from teaching duties in order to pursue his diverse research; the establishment of his famous "Museum" in 1651 only added to his reputation in Rome. From his seat at the Collegio Romano, Kircher enjoyed the global reach of the Society of Jesus, communicating with missionaries, men of letters, artists, nobles, and diplomats. As a matter of fact, the Collegio was where Kircher and Martini began their long friendship. The German intellectual was Martini's teacher during his student days in Rome (1632–37), a point Kircher proudly highlights in the preface to *China illustrata*.<sup>59</sup>

Yet Kircher also developed a close relationship with Boym. During much of his long stay in Rome, Boym seems to have lodged at the Collegio, which gave Kircher an opportunity to study with him and discuss his materials. Kircher's friendship with Pope Alexander VII was perhaps the reason behind the latter's agreement to meet Boym in 1655.<sup>60</sup> Of course, Kircher also benefited greatly from his relations with the two China envoys. As he noted in his preface, the arrival of Martini and Boym in Rome was what prompted him to begin working on his book:

59 Many of Kircher's friendships with Jesuit missionaries began prior to their departure from Europe, and often while they passed through Rome. These ties are evident in the "Miscellanea Epistolarum" collection in the APUG archive, where many of the letters sent to Kircher by missionary correspondents are preserved. For a useful survey of the collection and Kircher's correspondents, see Wicki, "Die Miscellanea Epistolarum", 221–54.

60 For more on Kircher's long friendship with Pope Alexander VII, the former Fabio Chigi (1599–1667), see Rowland, "Athanasius Kircher's Guardian Angel", 250–70.

... Father Martino Martini of Trent — the remarkable author of the Chinese Atlas, and once a private student of mine in mathematics — shared [with me] quite a few materials, which he was able to employ by his sharp and ardent talent in a marvellous and diligent manner, having been well-trained for this in mathematics and sciences. ... He was followed by the Polish Father Michał Boym, who was sent to [Pope] Innocent X in Rome by the king and emperor of China Constantine and by his mother Helena, recently converted by the labour of the Austrian Father Andreas Xavier Koffler. He carried with him a remarkable and most worthy memory for future generations.<sup>61</sup>

However, the accounts which the two Fathers were circulating could not be easily reconciled. The problem became apparent with the publication of books by Boym and Martini, each portraying a different image of the political situation in China. Boym's narrative regarding the conversion of the Yongli imperial family was published in different versions and languages, all probably based on his early Italian *Breve relazione della China* (1652), or on unpublished Latin reports.<sup>62</sup> Naturally, Boym's reports highlighted the chances of the Yongli Emperor and the importance of his family's conversion, almost completely ignoring the Qing. These reports nonetheless were not as popular as Martini's *De bello Tartarico*, which became the magnum opus concerning the war in

61 "... P. Martinus Martinus Tridentinus, eximius ille Atlantis Sinici scriptor, olim privatus meus in Mathematicis discipulus, non exiguam supellectilem communicavit, qui uti ingenio acuto & perfervido, mirumque in modum curioso, Mathematicisque disciplinis ad haec probe instructo pollet. ... Successit huic P. Michael Boim Polonus, qui a Rege & Imperatore Sinarum Constantino, eiusque Matre Helena, ad Christianam fidem opera P. Andrea Xavierii Koffler Austriaci recens conversa, ad Innocentium X. Romam missus, admiranda & posterorum memoria dignissima contulit". Kircher, *China illustrata*, 1. Compare with the English translation of Kircher's book, in Van Tuyl, trans., *China illustrata*, iv. Note that here Kircher already mixes the facts, as Constantine (Zhu Cixuan, 1648–62) was only a child during Boym's legation, and certainly not the emperor of China, whereas Helena (Empress Dowager Xiaozheng, ca. 1594–1651) was not his mother, but rather the dowager of the Yongli emperor's father.

62 The Italian edition was apparently published in Rome in 1652. However, some researchers claim that all the vernacular editions of Boym's "Brevis relatio" originated in the unpublished manuscript "Brevis Sinarum imperii descriptio" (ARSI, *Jap. Sin.* 77, ff. 33r–66v.). For different voices regarding the prototype of Boym's books, compare Szczeńsiak, "The Writings of Michael Boym", 487–89; Pelliot, "Michel Boym", 126–27; Miazek-Męczyńska, "The Miraculous Conversions", 18.

China. The book gives a detailed and quite balanced account of the Qing conquest. Martini lamented the Ming's fall and the violence of the conquest, yet accepted the Qing as legitimate successors, and justified the transition by rational, moral, and even religious arguments.

It is plausible that Kircher was aware of other European accounts of the dynastic transition, some based on Boym and Martini. Boym's account was probably the source of the short description of the imperial conversions in *Progressus fidei Catholicae in Novo Orbe* (1653), while Johan Nieuhof (1618–72), secretary of the Dutch Embassy to the Qing court (1655–57), relied in his bestselling book (1665) on Martini's account of the Manchu conquest.<sup>63</sup> A few earlier reports which Kircher might have known of were published prior to the arrival of Boym and Martini. These early accounts — such as the *Suma del Estado del Imperio de la China* (Madrid, 1651) — relied mostly on Jesuit letters from Macao and the Philippines.<sup>64</sup> All highlighted the conversions at the Yongli court, the work of Andreas Koffler, and the Yongli imperial embassy to Macao, yet none mentioned Boym or his legation to Rome. In this sense, the early accounts differ significantly from Kircher's narrative, which relied mainly on Martini and Boym.

In explaining the dynastic transition in *China illustrata*, Kircher faced a twofold dilemma; not only did he have to reconcile the two conflicting individuals with whom he had personal contacts, but even more importantly — he had to reconcile two various, sometimes contradicting accounts which were already circulating throughout Europe. With this conclusion in mind, let us now turn to investigate Kircher's description of the events in China.

63 Various authors, *Progressus fidei Catholicae in Novo Orbe: I. in Canada, siue Nova Francia. II. In Cochinchina. III. In magno Chinensi regno* (Cologne, 1653); Johan Nieuhof, *Her gezantschap der Neêrlandtsche Oost-Indische Compagnie aan den grooten Tartarischen Cham, den tegenwoordigen Keizer van China* (Amsterdam, 1665).

64 Published by Pablo de Val, the *Suma* is based on the reports by the Jesuit superiors in China sent to the Philippines between 1638 and 1649. A copy of the original print, as well as an English translation, is found in an insightful study by Albert Chan SJ. See Chan, "A European Document", 75–109. Note that an almost similar text was published a year earlier in Mexico by Juan Ruyz. Another notable early account is titled *Relação da conversão a nossa Sancta Fe da Rainha, & Principe da China, & de outras pessoas da casa Real, que se baptizarão o anno de 1648* (Lisbon: Officina Craesbeeckiana 1650). For a survey of these accounts, see Pelliot, "Michel Boym", 104-07.

### Kircher's Narrative

In his iconic study of Jesuit accommodation and the origins of sinology, David Mungello has claimed that “Kircher’s *China illustrata* was shaped more by his encyclopaedic curiosity about the world than by an appreciation for the unique tensions of the China Mission”.<sup>65</sup> The present part suggests the opposite. Truly, as Mungello demonstrates, *China illustrata* was not in line with many of the missionaries’ intellectual efforts, as it “lacked the deeper interest and intellectual sympathy for Chinese culture”.<sup>66</sup> Yet as the previous part demonstrates, Kircher was highly sensitive to the unique political tensions of the China mission during the Ming-Qing transition. This sensitivity is echoed in his peculiar description of the events in China, which is now presented in detail.

In many ways, *China illustrata* marked the peak of Kircher’s career. The long-expected book appeared finally in 1667, after being promoted for several years. It was a work of encyclopaedic nature, compiled from oral and written accounts by fellow Jesuit missionaries, and adorned with high-quality engravings. Kircher wished to present his European readers with a visual, coherent, up-to-date summary of the information gathered not only from China, but from all East Asia. The diverse topics of the book reflect, as Florence Hsia puts it, “many of the intellectual obsessions that had patterned Athanasius Kircher’s own remarkably polymathic oeuvre, from the twinned histories of Christianity and paganism to the mechanical arts, natural history, and historical linguistics”.<sup>67</sup>

The description of the dynastic transition from Ming to Qing is found in the book’s *pars secunda*, which focuses on “the various journeys undertaken in China” (*De variis itineribus in Chinam susceptis*), in Chapter eight, titled: “The latest introduction of the Christian faith into China” (*Ultima fidei Christianae in Chinam introductio*). The specific location of the passage is significant for two reasons. First, while other sections can be seen as a study in philology (*pars prima*), pagan theology (*pars tertia*), or natural philosophy (*pars quarta*), in describing the dynastic transition, Kircher embraced historical methodology, deploying its prominent tool — chronology — quite freely. Second, we should bear in mind the context; the description is only a small fragment of the

65 Mungello, *Curious Land*, 173.

66 Ibid.

67 Hsia, “Athanasius Kircher’s *China Illustrata*”, 383.

bigger story Kircher wished to tell his audience — the history of Christianity in China. This point is instrumental in understanding his ‘mistakes’.

The following breakdown of the Ming-Qing transition narrative in *China illustrata* aims to indicate the ways in which it diverges from both historical evidences and contemporary Jesuit narratives, as well as to probe possible sources of these misperceptions. This, in turn, may help elucidate Kircher’s enigmatic logic. Since thus far no manuscript version of *China illustrata* has been found, the following analysis focuses on a philological, and at times semiotic, examination of specific terms and phrases that Kircher used in the printed Latin edition, as well as a comparison with possible sources and factual historical chronology of the events.

Oddly, the very first mention of events related to the Ming-Qing transition in *China illustrata* is the conversion of the Southern-Ming Yongli imperial family, with no reference to the prior revolts, the fall of Beijing, and the Manchu invasion. The passage follows a short description of the ‘Nanjing persecution’, an attack on Christianity led by Shen Que (1565–1624), the vice-minister of the Nanjing Ministry of Rites, in 1616–17.<sup>68</sup> Kircher finds no problem in connecting the mission’s recovery from the crisis of the late 1610s and the entrance of Christianity to the Yongli court in 1648:

And so, when things were restored into a more tranquil state, Christianity rose up as high as it had been humiliatingly and violently suppressed [during the persecution]; for the faith of Christ not only extended itself to the largest degree among all the regions of the empire, but also entered the king’s palace. Its inviolable truth was so potent, that it drew, by the labours of Austrian Father Andreas Koffler, both the queen and her son into the love of it. Purified by the billow of Baptism, they celebrated their victory with the queen adopting the name Helena, and the son adopting the name Constantine.<sup>69</sup>

68 For more on the Nanjing persecution, see Brockey, *Journey to the East*, 66–69; Dudink, “The Inventories of the Jesuit House at Nanking”, 119–57; Dudink, “Opposition to the Introduction of Western Science”, 191–223.

69 “Rebus itaque in tranquilliore statur reductis Christiana res tanto surrexit altius, quanto humilius violentiusque fuerat depressa: Siquidem fides Christi non tantum sese per universos Imperii fines amplissime extendit, sed palatium Regis ingressa, tantum eius inviolabilis veritas potuit, ut & Reginam & Filium eius in sui amorem opera Patris Andrea Coffler Austriaci, traxerit; unde baptismatis unda abluti, Regina Helena, Filius vero Constantini nomine assumpto triumpharunt”. Kircher, *China illustrata*, 99.

Throughout the whole chapter, Kircher's description of the Jesuit China enterprise is given from a bird's-eye view. Thus, skipping the events between the 1610s and the 1640s is perhaps confusing, but cannot be entirely judged as a mistake. Nevertheless, Kircher's ambiguity is misleading. In describing the fugitive court of the last Southern Ming ruler simply as "the king's palace" (*palatium Regis*), and without any mention of the end of the Chongzhen rule, the Qing conquest, or the Southern Ming resistance, readers are given the feeling that the baptisms took place in *antebellum* Beijing, and that the imperial family which was converted to Christianity was ruling over the entire Chinese empire.

Kircher also repeats his mistake in the preface, by presenting Helena as the queen and mother of the crown prince Constantine. At first glance, this point might seem anecdotal, but as will be argued later, it is actually a telling example of Kircher's broader historical mindset. Helena, known in China as Empress Dowager Xiaozheng (ca. 1598–1651) was not blood related to either the Yongli Emperor or his son, but rather the legal wife of the emperor's deceased father.<sup>70</sup> Along with the royal minister Achilles Pang, she seems to have played a key role in the rest of the family's conversion. It is plausible that her assertive approach and devotion to the Christian faith reminded Father Koffler of the virtues of St. Helena, thus leading him to bestow on her the meaningful historical name.<sup>71</sup> As a matter of fact, all the names given to the baptized members of the imperial family denoted key figures in the history of the Church, serving in a sense as a *nomen omen*.<sup>72</sup> However, by presenting Helena as Constantine's mother, Kircher took Koffler's allegory a step further — straying from factual accuracy towards religious symbolism.

Can the false attribution of Helena be explained simply in terms of confusion? The answer varies according to the source. *De bello Tartarico*, which was unquestionably among Kircher's prime sources, contains only a brief mention of the Yongli imperial family, in which Martini refers to the conversions of "the emperor's mother, wife, and son, the heir of the entire empire, who is named

70 For more biographical details concerning the empress dowager, see Struve, "Wang, Empress Dowager, of Late Ming", 206–08.

71 Koffler's explanation of the name is cited in the *Suma*. He explains that the Chinese characters he chose (Liena) mean "reception of chastity". See Chan, "A European Document", 101.

72 This point is also brought up in Miazek-Męczyńska, "The Miraculous Conversions", 30.

Constantine."<sup>73</sup> The fact that Martini refrains from mentioning the empress dowager and does not refer to Maria and Anna by name might be the reason for Kircher's confusion. However, Boym's unpublished manuscript *Brevis Sinarum imperii descriptio*, as well as his subsequent published books, refer to all three royal ladies by name and state their relation to the emperor. The *Brevis Sinarum* explains: "The empress was named Helena, the queen and mother of the emperor [was named] Maria, the queen and wife of the same [emperor was named] Anna".<sup>74</sup> Considering Kircher's close textual reliance on Boym, who, according to Boleslaw Szczesniak, was the chief contributor to *China illustrata*, it is highly unlikely that Kircher sincerely considered Helena to be Constantine's mother.<sup>75</sup>

Furthermore, the following transcript of Helena's letter to the Pope, which Kircher attached to his book, contains the correct attributions of Helena, Maria, and Anna.<sup>76</sup> Strangely, on subsequent pages readers encounter both correct and incorrect attributions of the Yongli family. To use literary theorist Gérard Genette's terms, Kircher's treatment of the text (namely the narrative) differs from that of the *paratext*, that is parts of the book which are not included in the main narration but "surround it and extend it" (i.e. the preface, headlines, drawings etc.).<sup>77</sup> Citing official correspondence with the Holy See required Kircher to adhere strictly to the facts. In contrast, presenting his narrative left more room for literary alterations.

Helena's letter, together with a letter by Achilles Pang and official replies by Pope Alexander VII, is given after a brief presentation

73 "Imperatoris Mater, Uxor, ac filius, totius Imperii heres; qui Constantinus dictus est". Martini, *De bello Tartarico*, 105–06

74 "Imperatrix Helena dicta, Regina Impertoris mater Maria, Regina eiusdem coniu[n]x Anna." ARSI, *Jap. Sin.* 77, f. 57v. Boym, "Brevis Sinarum imperii descripto". A transcription of this passage is found in Miazek-Męczyńska, "The Miraculous Conversions", 28. An almost identical description, in the French published version, reads: "He [Andreas Koffler] gave the Empress the name Helena, to the queen mother [the name] Maria, and to the queen and legitimate wife of the Emperor, the name Anna". Originally: "Il donna à l'Imperatrice le nom d'Helene, à la Reyne mere celuy de Marie, & à la Reyne, femme legitime de l'Empereur, le nom d'Anne". Boym, *Briefve relation*, 59.

75 See Szczesniak, "The Writings of Michael Boym", 495. Hsia, on the other hand, identifies Martini as the main source. See Hsia, "Athanasius Kircher's *China Illustrata*", 383.

76 See Kircher, *China illustrata*, 101.

77 Genette, *Paratexts*, 1.



of the royal minister. This time, Kircher is correct in presenting the empress dowager and Achilles Pang as the driving forces behind Boym's legation:

... Achilles Pang — the supreme minister of the royal court, and a man imbued for a long time with the Christian laws — had been inflamed by the zeal of propagating the faith so much, that he solicited with urgent prayers, in letters sent separately to the Supreme Pontiff and to the General of the Society of Jesus, an ample supply of workers to be sent in China. [The family was] of such a great devotion towards the Apostolic See, that since they themselves were unable [to go] in person, they sent to Rome through Father Michał Boym pledges of their vows to come under obedience, addressed to the Supreme Pontiff.<sup>78</sup>

The papal letters, as readers will notice, are dated 1655. Yet only at this late period in time Kircher turns to describe the Qing conquest of 1644, as if the attacks occurred long after the conversion of the Ming imperial family. The subtitles around the paragraph make this notion abundantly clear: "The Tartar invasion interrupts the successful progress of the Christian cause".<sup>79</sup> Unlike Boym and Martini, Kircher describes the crisis almost without mentioning Li Zicheng's rebellion, which in reality was the main catalyst of the dynastic shift. Instead, the rebellion is referred to vaguely as an "internal war" (*intestino bello*):

And so, when these matters of religious engagement were advancing as desired, a new turbulence in the form of an attack from the north was made and interrupted the entire prosperous and fortunate transaction of the Christian cause, which they had hoped to confirm by means of a royal authorization of the Gospel to be spread throughout the whole empire. The Tartars were drawn in by internal war of the Chinese, and after the gates of the walls were burst, they

78 "... Pan Achilleus Regiae aulae supremus Minister, iam dudum Christianis legibus imbutus, vir zelo fidei propagandae adeo accensus erat, ut non semul literas tum ad Summum Pontificem, tum ad P. Generalem Societatis Jesu datis, de magna operariorum copia in Chinam transmittenda, instantibus precibus sollicitaret, tantae erga sedem Apostolicam devotionis, ut quod per se ipsos in propria persona nequirent, per P. Michaellem Boimum ad obedientiam Summo Pontifici praestandam votorum suorum vices subiturum, Romam amandarint". Kircher, *China illustrata*, 99–100.

79 "Tartarorum irruptio felicem Rei Christianae progressum interturbat". *Ibid.*, 103.

subjected to their dominion not only Beijing, but just like a flood, [they conquered] the entire China shortly after.<sup>80</sup>

The fall of the Ming reaches its climax with the suicide of the Chinese emperor. Here, Kircher recommends that his readers consult Martini's *De bello Tartarico*, although once again, his description differs somewhat from those given in both Martini's and Boym's books:

The Chinese king Vumlie reached such a low point, that at the time he was [even] deprived of an asylum from the Chinese rebels, and the great monarch was abandoned by everyone to a miserable death. In order not to be compelled to see with his own eyes the 'Iliad' of impending evils, he first killed both his mother and daughter by his own hand, and finally, driven by the hopelessness of the unexpected affairs, he ended his own life by hanging [himself]. Anyone of those who desire to know more about the formidable catastrophe of human affairs should consult Father Martino Martini's book *De bello Tartarico*.<sup>81</sup>

What should catch our attention here is the unusual name Kircher uses for the emperor — "Vumlie". Different European publishers have used different Latin transliterations for the Chongzhen emperor's name, yet all somehow resembled the phonetics of the Chinese source. For example, in *De bello Tartarico* — Kircher's declared source for this episode — the Chongzhen Emperor appears as "Zungchinus"; in Boym's unpublished manuscript *Brevis Sinarum* the name "Zum-cin" appears, in his *Briefve relation* the emperor is referred to as "Gun-kin", while in the earlier *Suma* the name "Cum

80 "His itaque prospere ad votum procedentibus rebus, ecce novus ab Aquilone turbo veluti impetu facto, totam Christianae negotiationis prosperam & fortunatam transactionem, quam ex facultate Regii diplomatis stabilita Evangelii per totum Imperium dilatandi sperabant, inturbavit: Tartari siquidem intestino Sinensium bello allecti, ruptis murorum claustris, non solum Pequinum, sed & veluti inundatione quadam universam Chinam paulo post suo subjecerunt imperio". *Ibid.*, 103–04.

81 "Rege Sinarum Vumlie ad tantas angustias redacto, ut dum locus evadendi, a rebellibus Sinarum eidem non concederetur, tantus Monarcha ab omnibus derelictus miseranda morte, ne malorum imminentium illiadem propriis oculis videre cogereur, primo propria manu & matre & filia interemptis demum vitam suam desperatione rerum in transversum actus, laqueo terminaverit; de quibus qui formidandam humanarum rerum catastrophem fusius nosse desiderat, is consulat P. Martinum Martinium libello de bello Tartarico". *Ibid.*, 104.

Chim" is used.<sup>82</sup> The same name appears in the Annual Letters (*Litterae annuae*) of the period, which were sent by representatives of the Vice-Province of China to the General in Rome.<sup>83</sup> Since most of the European information regarding the Chinese imperial court drew on Jesuit sources, other non-Jesuit writers of the period used similar names. For example, in the same year *China illustrata* was issued, the Dutch poet Joost van den Vondel (1587–1679) published a dramatic tragedy based on the Manchu conquest, which he named after the last Ming emperor "Zungchin".<sup>84</sup>

Apparently, Kircher's use of the name "Vumlie" does not resemble other European transliterations. But what about the Chinese ones? The title "Chongzhen" indicates the Ming emperor's era name (*nianhao*), yet after his death the emperor was also known by a number of commemorative honorary titles — temple names (*miaohao*) and posthumous names (*shihao*).<sup>85</sup> None of them seem to correspond with "Vumlie", except for the abridged version of one of the emperor's posthumous names — the "Lie Emperor" (*Lie huangdi*).<sup>86</sup> However, the possibility that Kircher was referring to that name is farfetched. First, since the "Lie Emperor" was in use only among the Southern Ming regimes, which had almost disappeared by the beginning of the 1650s.<sup>87</sup> The Qing posthumous name for the Chongzhen Emperor — the "Duan Emperor" (*Duan*

82 See, for example, Martini, *De bello Tartarico*, 48. For the reference in Boym's "Brevis Sinarum Imperii descriptio", see ARSI, *Jap. Sin.* 77, f. 52r. Also see Boym, Briefve relation, 41. For a reference in the *Suma*, see Chan, "A European Document", 79.

83 See, for example, a citation in the 1643 Annual Letter of the Southern Vice-Province. BA, 49–V–13, f. 502r. Transcribed in Gouvea, *Cartas Ânuaes da China*, 123.

84 Joost van den Vondel, *Zungchin of Ondergang der Sineesche Heerschappye. Treurspiel. Venit summa dies, & ineluctabile tempus.* (Amsterdam: Voor de weduwe van Abraham de Wees, 1667). For more on this work and its sources, see Van Kley, "An Alternative Muse", 24–32.

85 On the differences between imperial titles in China, see Dubs, "Chinese Imperial Designations", 26–33.

86 The full posthumous name is nineteen characters long: "Zhaotian Yidao Gangming Kejian Kuiwen Fenwu Dunren Maoxiao Lie huangdi". It was given in the Southern Ming during the Hongguang reign.

87 There were, however, Chinese writers who continued to use the name. For example, see the work "Lie huangdi benji" (Basic Annals of the Lie Emperor) by the famous Ming-supporter essayist Zhang Dai (1597–1679), found in juan 1–2 of his *Shikui shu houji* (Supplement to Hidden Writings from the Stone Vaults). Online transcription at: <https://ctext.org/wiki.pl?if=gb&chapter=680919>.

*huangdi*) — was used far more frequently.<sup>88</sup> Second, because contrary to Chinese tradition, Kircher's Jesuit sources continued to refer to deceased Chinese emperors by their era names. And third, since the phonetic link to the "Lie Emperor" still leaves the initial part of the name "Vumlie" unclear.

This suggests that Kircher's usage of the name "Vumlie" did not stem from any of the Western or Chinese traditions, but rather was another clever mistake. Remarkably, the name differs from, but at the same time bears a striking resemblance to the one Kircher uses for the Yongli emperor — "Yum Lie", as it appears in the transcription of Helena and Achilles Pang's letters. Were there any hidden motivations behind Kircher's naming of the emperors? Did he try to link the Chongzhen and Yongli Emperors, convincing his readers that the emperor whose family was baptized is the same emperor who lost his rule over China? And perhaps, understanding that such a claim was too incredible, he altered the names slightly, allowing his readers to believe whatever they wanted to? Or, on the other hand, maybe Kircher was simply confused by the facts? Unfortunately, these questions remain unanswered.

The next and final part of the narrative can help clarify Kircher's logic, and his vision regarding the broader picture. As the following part of the chapter shows — despite the fear and confusion among the Christians, they eventually found the new Qing emperor's attitude towards Christianity to be "more favourable than they could ever wish or expect".<sup>89</sup> Finally, Kircher turns to describe the achievements of Adam Schall at the Qing court and the flourishing missionary activity under Qing rule. Judging from this narration, the imperial transition ended on a most positive note, at least for the Jesuits.

Let us now take a step back and review Kircher's argumentation. The short narrative of the Ming-Qing transition offered in *China illustrata* is at the heart of a wider narrative regarding the state of Christianity in China during Kircher's days. It can be summarized as follows: (1) Christianity was introduced in China; (2) its success attracted opponents and prosecutions; (3) the Christian faith

88 The full name is "Qintian Shoudao Minyi Dunjian Hongwen Xiangwu Tiren Zhixian Duan Huangdi". The commemoration and praise of the last Ming emperor were seen as important for the legitimacy of the Qing dynasty. See Wakeman, *The Great Enterprise*, 946.

89 "... eam tandem, quam aut optare aut sperare unquam poterant, proniorem comperere". Kircher, *China illustrata*, 104.

survived the persecutions and reached the imperial court; (4) imperial rule fell into the hands of barbarian conquerors; and (5) the Christian faith not only survived, but in fact flourishes to this day under the new political order.

While significantly altering historical reality, the resulting image balanced out the achievements of the China missionaries within the Ming and the Qing. In other words, Kircher reshaped events so they would fit both Ming and Qing loyalists within the Jesuit mission — equally emphasizing the importance of the Yongli family conversion and the Qing's openness towards the missionaries. By doing so, he blended the contradicting voices of Martini and Boym into a unified, yet quite imaginary narrative.

It was also a most clever literary trick. Kircher's narrative is a clear adaptation of another history of Christianity in an empire much more familiar to his readers: the Roman Empire, in which Christianity was introduced, persecuted, embraced by the emperor (Constantine), survived the fall of the empire, and flourished under the new 'barbarian' rulers. Viewing Kircher's narrative as an allegory elucidates many of its alleged 'mistakes', from the efforts to present Empress Dowager Helena as the mother of Constantine, to the alteration of factual chronology and the false representation of converted imperial family as rulers of the whole empire. These modifications were indispensable in the making of the parable.

The resulting history of Christianity in China as appearing in *China illustrata* can be regarded as a *hypertext* — a term taken from the field of semiotics, which is used to describe the relationship between a text and its literary source of inspiration — the *hypotext*. By echoing an earlier *hypotext*, the *hypertext* conjures different meanings in its readers' minds, in both conscious and unconscious ways, and without necessarily mentioning the source.<sup>90</sup> Kircher's account echoes the well-known narrative of the rise of Christianity in the West, which his European readers must have recognized regardless of its literary manifestation. Thus, the *hypotext* in this case is not even limited to one textual source, and perhaps should be better termed a *hyponarrative*. By creating a *hypertextual* link with such a fundamental narrative in Western culture, Kircher embedded the far-flung historical events in China in a familiar religious framework. Through this framework, he enabled the Society to enjoy a prestigious parallel to the roles of the Apostles, or that of St. Sylvester. Moreover, Kircher evoked in his readers'

90 Genette, *Palimpsests*, 5–7.

minds the concept of historic recurrence, implying that just as in the alluded story of Christianity in the West, in the same way Christianity's victory in China is only a matter of time.

Kircher was neither the first nor the only writer to give a religious interpretation to the historical reality in China. Martini, for example, explained the fall of the Ming as a punishment for their role in the Nanjing persecution. In relation to the first Manchu invasion of China in 1618, Martini wrote: "Let us admire the Divine Providence, which then set in motion a bitter war in China, when they were neglecting the Christian peace".<sup>91</sup> The composer of the *Suma*, linking the turbulence in China with other universal calamities in the 1640s, explained the fall of Ming as a work of Satan: "The coming of the year 1640 became fatal (if I may say so) to the world. At the very time of the uprisings and tumults in Europe and in Eastern India, the devil was plotting them also against China, causing the downfall and death of this king and queen".<sup>92</sup> In one aspect, though, Kircher differs from Martini and the *Suma*. While they used religious explanations to judge the historical events, Kircher altered the historical reality to fit his religious ideal. His motives for doing so, as argued in this essay, could have been both political and religious.

Ironically, by 1667 the triumphant vision of Christianity in China was further than ever from coming true. The new anti-Jesuit campaign led by the orthodox Confucian scholar Yang Guangxian (1597–1669) during the 1660s caused the impeachment and trial of Adam Schall and his colleagues, and the banishment of all missionaries who lived outside of Beijing to Guangzhou. By the time *China illustrata* was published in Europe, the China Jesuits were still unable to return to their posts (the banishment was lifted only in 1671) and Schall had passed away due to poor health.<sup>93</sup> Not only the fate of the China mission, but also the future of the whole Jesuit enterprise in East Asia did not seem promising at the time. One can consult the bleak report by India missionary Heinrich Roth SJ,<sup>94</sup>

91 "Divinam Providentiam admiremur, quae tunc acre bellum Sinis movit, quando Christianam pacem neglebant". Martini, *De bello Tartarico*, 30.

92 Translated in Chan, "A European Document", 81.

93 The most famous accusations of Yang were raised against the imperial calendar compiled by the Jesuits, hence the affair is known today as "the Calendar Case". For further reading, see Jami, "Revisiting the Calendar Case", 459–77; Brockey, *Journey to the East*, 126–36.

94 Heinrich Roth, \* 18.XII.1620 Dillingen (Germany), S.J. 25.X.1639 Landsberg (Germany), † 20.VI.1668 Agra (India) (Vogel, "An Old Letter", 609–11).

another of Kircher's sources for *China illustrata*, who, on his return from Europe to Agra in 1666, informed his correspondent that "the situation in this East is, if ever, certainly now most miserable".<sup>95</sup> Nevertheless, since *China illustrata* was already in press by 1666, and since letters from China could take years to arrive in Europe, Kircher should not be held responsible for neglecting to mention the recurring attacks on the Jesuits and on Christianity in China.

### **Scepticism and Piety in Seventeenth-Century Historiography**

The above analysis might produce a sharp dissonance in modern minds. On the one hand, Kircher's historical writing, as it appears in the Ming-Qing transition narrative, seems hopelessly inaccurate. Yet on the other hand, the popularity of *China illustrata* during the seventeenth century was undisputable. In the space of a few years, the book appeared in two Latin editions and was translated into Dutch (1668), French (1670), and English (1669, 1673).<sup>96</sup> The different editions continued to be widely circulated and quoted during the following decades. The juxtaposition of Kircher's inaccuracies and the book's remarkable success is puzzling not only from a modern perspective, but also considering what Peter Burke identified as the "increasingly frequent and radical criticisms of traditional historical practice" in the early modern period.<sup>97</sup> In other words, Kircher's problematic narrative was circulated within an intellectual *milieu* that was becoming highly sensitive towards the craft of history. Thus, while the previous analysis suggested a political and religious reading of the transition narrative, it is now time to focus on Kircher's role as historian and inquire whether his treatment of historical knowledge resonated with some of the historiographic tendencies of his period.

In 1668, only one year after *China illustrata* was published, the notable French writer François de La Mothe Le Vayer (1588–1672) published the book *Du peu de certitude qu'il y a en histoire* (The Uncertainty of History), in which he questioned the possibility of producing reliable historical knowledge. La Mothe Le Vayer focused on the problem of historical bias, wondering, for example,

95 "Status huius Orientis, si unquam, certe iam miserrimus est". Roth to Father Provincial of Upper-Germany Province. Surat, 9 October 1666. For the transcription and translation of the letter, see *Ibid.*, 609–19.

96 Hsia, "Athanasius Kircher's *China Illustrata*", 397; Szczesniak, "Athanasius Kircher's *China Illustrata*", 388–90.

97 Burke, "History, Myth, and Fiction", 265.

what the image of the Punic Wars would have been if European readers had access to Carthaginian historical records.<sup>98</sup> This kind of scepticism, that came to be known during the period as 'Historical Pyrrhonism', became widespread among intellectuals in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. An even greater concern of the Pyrrhonists was the problem of historical authenticity. Critical studies of ancient texts beginning in the Renaissance had revealed many cases of forgery, the most famous of which was Lorenzo Valla's discovery of the fabricated 'Donation of Constantine'.<sup>99</sup> The accumulating evidences of historical counterfeit led classical scholar Jean Harduoin SJ<sup>100</sup> to go so far as to claim that the vast majority of texts from antiquity had been forged.<sup>101</sup> In that suspicious intellectual setting of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, historians were often accused of "basing their accounts of the past on forged documents, and writing about characters who never existed and events that never took place".<sup>102</sup>

It is no wonder, then, that in a period which one contemporary defined as the 'Age of Criticism', the recurring inaccuracies in Kircher's scholarship became the target of many intellectual arrows, and naïve admiration of his scholarly projects, if it ever existed, did not last far beyond his own days.<sup>103</sup> Kircher's quasi-scientific methods, as well as his passion for Hermetic wisdom and metaphysics did not correspond with Enlightenment rational thought, just as his wide-ranging oeuvre no longer matched the "increasingly specialized and jealously guarded expertise" of the Age of Reason.<sup>104</sup> The Jesuit intellectual was gradually becoming the subject of criticism and academic disdain. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716), who, as a young scholar had been fascinated by *China illustrata*, concluded in 1716 that Kircher "understands nothing". A year before, in his *De charlataneria eruditorum* (The Charlatanry of the Learned), Johann Burkhard Mencke (1674–1732)

98 Ibid., 267.

99 Ibid., 263. Valla published his *De falso credita et ementita Constantini donatione declamatio* (Discourse on the Forgery of the Alleged Donation of Constantine) in 1440.

100 Jean Harduoin, \* 23.XII.1646 Quimper (Brittany), S.J. 25.IX.1660 Paris, † 3.IX.1729 Paris (Sommervogel IV, 84–111)

101 Matytsin, "Historical Pyrrhonism", 243.

102 Burke, "History, Myth, and Fiction", 269.

103 Ibid., 270.

104 Findlen, "The Last Man", 7.



dismissed Kircher as “the most foolish of polymaths”.<sup>105</sup> Those who were interested in the study of China now found more updated and accurate Jesuit encyclopaedic publications such as the *Description Geographique, Historique, Chronologique, Politique, et Physique de l'Empire de la Chine* (1735), which was widely read and praised by Enlightenment thinkers.<sup>106</sup>

Kircher's inaccuracies and overstatements also provoked criticism during his lifetime, some of which was aimed directly at *China illustrata* and at Kircher's historical writing. An English reviewer of *China illustrata*, who was quick enough to publish an article in *Philosophical Transactions* already in June 1667, remarked sceptically that parts of the book “pretend to persuade [sic] the Reader, that Christianity was spread over all Asia by St. Thomas the Apostle, and his Successors; and hath [sic] been there continued, though not without great Eclipses, to these very times”.<sup>107</sup> The last part of the sentence obviously refers to Kircher's presentation of the Jesuit introduction of Christianity in China. The reviewer added that Kircher “acknowledges himself much obliged to [Martino] Martinius, and his *Atlas Sinicus*; as also to Michael Boim, a Polonian [sic]”.<sup>108</sup> These names were familiar to European scholars in the 1660s, and therefore, some careful readers must have noticed Kircher's deviation from his textual sources.

One eminent sceptic reader of Kircher was the Dominican missionary Domingo Fernández Navarrete (ca. 1618–89). Navarrete, who was in China between 1658 and 1670, published on his return to Europe a highly popular account, in which Kircher is repeatedly criticized for his inaccuracies.<sup>109</sup> However, none of these criticisms is aimed at Kircher's Ming-Qing transition narrative. Navarrete himself presented a description of the dynastic transition that is far more polished and comprehensive than Kircher's. Yet like Kircher,

105 On Leibniz and Mencke's criticisms, see *Ibid.*

106 Jean-Baptiste Du Halde SJ, *Description géographique, historique, chronologique, politique et physique de l'Empire de la Chine et de la Tartarie chinoise* (Paris: Le Mercier, 1735). For more information, see Mungello, *Curious Land*, 125.

107 Anonymous, “Account of Athanasii Kircheri”, 484.

108 *Ibid.*

109 Navarrete, *Tratados históricos, políticos, éticos y religiosos de la monarquía de China* (Madrid, 1676). For an example of Navarrete's criticism of Kircher, see Mungello, *Curious Land*, 170–71. For other mentions of Kircher in the book, most of which are sceptical in tone, see the early English translation: Navarrete, *An Account*, 2, 31, 40, 83, 103, 188, 198, 255, 282, 288.

his narrative was based on second-hand information, and therefore was not entirely free of mistakes. Mindful of that, when portraying the Chongzhen Emperor's suicide, Navarrete apologized that "it is no easy matter to have all particulars true".<sup>110</sup> Remarkably, in his description of the Yongli Emperor, Navarrete repeated Kircher's mistaken attribution, stating that the emperor's "wife was a Christian, her name Helen, and her son's name Constantine".<sup>111</sup> It is plausible that Navarrete's knowledge on that matter was based on European textual sources and, in that case, *China illustrata* was probably the source of confusion.<sup>112</sup> Navarrete's reliance on Kircher, just like his condemnations, attest to the centrality of *China illustrata* in the seventeenth century. Nonetheless, within non-Jesuit intellectual circles, that centrality went hand-in-hand with a sense of scepticism towards Kircher.

Criticism of *China illustrata* was also levelled by some of Kircher's colleagues. The China envoy Johann Grueber SJ,<sup>113</sup> who was Roth's companion in the arduous overland journey from China to Europe and another major source for Kircher, wrote him after reading the book in 1669: "I wish you had at least sent me the headings of the chapters before going to press; ... there are certainly points in *China illustrata* that need correction, especially the drawings ... I shall send you the emendations for insertion in case the work should be reprinted".<sup>114</sup> Grueber's recollections from his trans-Himalaya journeys were essential in Kircher's studies of East Asian religions and geography. No wonder, therefore, that Grueber's reproaches targeted the visual representations of people and landscapes which he himself had painted. In a letter from 1670 Grueber complained

110 Ibid., 336.

111 Ibid., 338.

112 Navarrete, who believed Constantine to be still alive, went as far as to suggest that "perhaps God may preserve Constantine for his greater Glory; for, nothing that is violent is lasting". Ibid., 339.

113 Johann Grueber, \* 28.X.1623 Linz (Austria), S.J. 13.X.1641 Vienna, † 3.IX.1680 Sárospatak (Hungary) (Dehergne, *Répertoire*, 121).

114 "Utinam mihi vel salten titulos ante impressionem misisset ... Sunt quidem aliqua in China Illustrata quae maxime quoad delineationem emendatione indigerent ... mittam tamen veram correctionem Vestrae Reverentiae, ut, si forte opus reimprimeretur, elnendari posset". APUG, 558, f. 36r. Grueber to Kircher. Trnava (Hungary), 20 September 1669. Translated in Wessels, *Early Jesuit Travellers*, 167–68. For online access, consult the Stanford Athanasius Kircher Correspondence Project at: <https://web.stanford.edu/group/kircher/cgi-bin/site/>

once again about “some mistakes in *China illustrata*”.<sup>115</sup> This time, he expressed a specific concern about the illustration of the Chinese emperor, who was depicted standing next to a dog. Grueber was worried that such a representation might be taken as an insult in China and requested Kircher to make the necessary amendments in the future versions.<sup>116</sup> While much of the correspondence between Grueber and Kircher is preserved, unfortunately there seem to be no traces of criticism by Martini, Boym, or any other of Kircher’s sources, regarding the latter’s historical writing and in particular vis-à-vis the reports of the Ming-Qing transition. It is also unknown if Kircher shared his early drafts with Martini and Boym, and whether such drafts existed while the two were in Rome. In fact, Grueber was probably the only one among Kircher’s missionary sources who lived long enough to read *China illustrata*.<sup>117</sup>

Grueber’s criticism indicates that the inaccuracies in *China illustrata* extended beyond the writing of history. Indeed, even an untrained eye easily notices many other unempirical claims and fictional elements in Kircher’s description of the natural world in Asia. Among few are ‘the cat-bats’ in Kashmir and ‘the flying turtles of Henan’.<sup>118</sup> And yet, a distinction should be drawn between *China illustrata*’s treatment of natural-scientific knowledge (part of the field then known as Natural Philosophy), and religious-historical knowledge, as it seems that Kircher did try to refine at least some of the scientific knowledge he had offered. A convincing example is found in the last pages of the book, where the printer, or more likely Kircher himself using the printer’s voice, informs the readers about new insights in the author’s research of the ‘Cobra de Capelos’ serpent:<sup>119</sup>

115 “Aliquas mendas in *China illustrata*”. APUG 559, f. 79r. Grueber to Kircher. Trnava (Hungary), 17 March 1670. Online at the Stanford Athanasius Kircher Correspondence Project.

116 See Wessels, *Early Jesuit Travellers*, 169. The image Grueber was referring to is found in Kircher, *China illustrata*, in an unnumbered page following page 112.

117 Heinrich Roth died in 1668 but was already in India when *China Illustrata* was published. Another significant source – the Japan Procurator Giovanni Filippo de Marini SJ (\* 1608 Taggia (Italy), S.J. 18.II.1625 Rome, † 17.VII.1682 Macao) left Europe already in 1666. See Dehergne, *Répertoire*, 73.

118 See Kircher’s explanations and illustrations in Kircher, *China illustrata*, 84, 204–05.

119 I am indebted to Ann Blair for her useful insights regarding the following passage. As she has suggested, Kircher embraced the voice of the printer in order to avoid admitting his inaccuracies, and perhaps gain more credibility. The insertion of that passage might have been a way for Kircher to credit one of his contacts, Sebastião de Almeida SJ (1622–83?), who is mentioned as the source of the topic.

After most part of the drawings in this work were printed, benevolent reader, an accurate description of these serpents was handed to us by the author. But since he could not refer to it in its place, on page number 81, we concluded it is better to present here the curious research of the exotic animal, for our study in the Republic of Letters, than to suppress it completely.<sup>120</sup>

The gathering of new information continued even after the book was in press, and, as Kircher struggled to convince his readers, promoting updated and accurate natural-scientific knowledge was significant enough to be added in later stages. All this is in marked contrast to Kircher's seemingly raw and unpolished historical knowledge regarding Christianity in China. Considering the growing historiographic awareness of his generation and the fact that he was sensitive enough to revise other genres of knowledge in the book, one wonders what guided Kircher's historiographic approach? What set of values underpinned a historical mindset that, as it turns out, was incompatible with the emerging intellectual tendencies of his time?

One possible explanation has to do with Kircher's reliance on earlier Renaissance traditions. Kircher is often depicted as an intellectual who lived on the threshold of old and new sciences, leaping between different traditions and blending them according to his needs. While some of his works employed the quantitative and empirical scientific trends of his time, others embodied older scholarly traditions, echoing in particular Renaissance intellectual frameworks such as Neoplatonism and Hermetism. This could well explain his view of history. The art of writing history was regarded in Renaissance Europe as a part of the humanities (*studia humanitatis*) and therefore maintained "close relations with both grammar and rhetoric and so philology".<sup>121</sup> Indeed, *China illustrata's* Ming-Qing transition narrative seems in this fashion much more rhetoric than factual. Yet such an explanation — which regards Kircher as a kind

120 "Postquam hoc opus, Benevole Lector, maximam partem typis impressum erat, nobis ab auctore fuit subsequens haec Serpentis Cobra de Capelos dicti, accurata descriptio; sed cum suo loco, Pag. nimirum 81. ob praedictam rationem inseri non posset, satius iudicavimus hic cam curioso exoticorum animalium indagatori, pro nostro in Rempubl. Literariam studio, exhibere, quam penitus suppressere". This paragraph appears at the end of the book's index in an unnumbered page. See Kircher, *China illustrata*, "Typographi lectori salutem".

121 Kelley, "Philology and History", 233. Also, see Grafton, "Renaissance Readers", 642-43.

of ‘intellectual fossil’ — has been challenged by recent studies since it fails to contextualize Kircher’s approach as a unique product of his time and Kircher himself, albeit eccentric in so many ways, as a characteristically seventeenth-century Baroque mind.<sup>122</sup>

Another possibility is that Kircher’s reports on the “latest introduction of the Christian faith into China” were not necessarily regarded as historical writing. The proceedings Kircher was referring to occurred, to a large extent, during his lifetime. Kircher recognized and fully exploited this aspect, and was at pains to highlight his direct links to the events in China, mainly by way of his friendship with Jesuit eyewitness sources. By doing so, Kircher not only gained credibility, but also distanced himself from the role of historian and thus discharged some of the Pyrrhonist criticisms. While Pyrrhonist historians questioned the reliability of ancient texts and accused historians of believing them naively, Kircher presented himself as the grand-editor of eyewitness accounts whose authority was less easily questioned. As members of the same organization, these eyewitness sources were bound to Kircher by links of solidarity and friendship. Therefore, both Kircher and his readers may have judged the account of the Jesuit enterprise in China as current affairs knowledge, rather than history in its traditional sense.

Moreover, the usage of diverse *paratext* such as transcribed letters, maps and, most notably, the visual representations that gave *China illustrata* its name, had made the book appear as less historical. A significant *paratext*, in this sense, is the book’s index. During the seventeenth century, indexes were used mostly in natural philosophy works. The appearance of an index in *China illustrata* suggests that Kircher saw his book as belonging to this category. Particularly, indexes may show what features in the text authors wanted to highlight and what they preferred to leave hidden.<sup>123</sup> *China illustrata*’s index contains mostly terms and place names. It does not, however, contain a single reference of any of the figures mentioned in the Ming-Qing transition narrative. This suggests that Kircher did not wish his readers to pay too much attention to the small details in his narrative. Instead, the index helped in directing careful readers to other sections which Kircher might have felt more comfortable with.

Finally, we must consider once again the dynamics between

122 See, for example, Mori, *History Ad maiorem Dei gloriam*, 1; Stolzenberg “Four Trees”, 163–64.

123 Blair, “Annotating and Indexing”, 74.

the religious and intellectual facets of Kircher's scholarly identity. Kircher, for his part, saw no problem in the coexistence of the two components. He regarded himself as a vital figure in the Republic of Letters of his days and promoted Jesuits' broader participation in it.<sup>124</sup> The cohabitation of Kircher's religious and intellectual self-identifications was also apparent to contemporaries. Heinrich Roth, for example, once referred to him as "a man of God's glory and a son of the Republic of Letters".<sup>125</sup> However, other members of this so-called Republic were quite ambivalent in their appreciation of the Jesuit polymath. Paradoxically, many European intellectuals saw Kircher equally as a controversial and an indispensable source.<sup>126</sup> On the one hand, his links to the global reach of the Society of Jesus placed him in a privileged position within European scholarly circles. Kircher functioned as a buffer that gathered and distributed exotic information which, even if not used by his counterparts, was a source of inspiration and debate.

On the other hand, some of Kircher's intellectual presumptions drew upon religious theories and Counter-Reformation thought, which were severely disparaged by his non-Jesuit contemporaries.<sup>127</sup> For them, Kircher not only differed in his intellectual background, but also in his religious orientation and belonging to a highly spiritual and politically active organization. This point is in line with a group of studies that challenge the traditional tendency of overemphasizing the scholarly role of the Jesuits, while overlooking their religious orientation. Rather, recent works highlight the Jesuits' devout, militant, and edifying sides, at the expense of what was once regarded as their curious one.<sup>128</sup>

Nevertheless, one should be cautious when trying to distinguish too sharply between the Jesuits' scholarly and religious self-identification in the early modern period: for contemporary Jesuits such identities were intertwined. Jesuit scientific activity

124 Hsia, "Athanasius Kircher's *China Illustrata*", 394.

125 "...vir Dei gloria et rei litterarie nate". APUG 562, f. 113r. Roth to Kircher. Venice, 7 May 1664. Online at the Stanford Athanasius Kircher Correspondence Project.

126 As Findlen has noticed, although some intellectuals "continuously found fault with Kircher's mathematics and natural philosophy and questioned his philology. At the same time, they asked for more". Findlen, "The Last Man", 28.

127 Miller, "Copts and Scholars", 144–45.

128 Curto, "European Historiography on the East", 537. Examples of this notion are found in Menegon, *Ancestors, Virgins, & Friars*; Zhang, "About God, Demons, and Miracles", 1–36.

was performed within the context of the Society's Ignatian teaching religious program to 'find God in all things', and its in the expansion and consolidation of the Catholic confession.<sup>129</sup> In fact, the prime role of science, as many saw it, "was to prove the theological truth, not to express or develop new worldviews and certainly not to contradict any theological claims".<sup>130</sup> The same applies for Kircher's historical writing, all the more so when it comes to the history of the Church. In this case, factual accuracy was subjugated, perhaps unconsciously, to religious ideals.

Beyond being religiously devoted, or even religiously subjugated, Kircher's history was also intended to be pedagogical, as he himself attested in a correspondence with the previously-mentioned Adam Schall. In a letter from April 1664, Kircher informed Schall of his upcoming project and disclosed some educational motivations underpinning his labour:

I have a book, presently unpublished, called *China Illustrated through its Sacred and Profane* [Monuments]; in which there is a frequent mentioning of the glorious deeds [done] by Your Reverence; in which I also set forth examples of Our Fathers' labours in the vineyard of Christ, for future generations to imitate.<sup>131</sup>

The letter sheds more light of the philosophy that shaped the book. As Kircher explained to Schall, in its essence *China illustrata* was intended to be educational. The glorification of Schall and his colleagues was meant to create a model of imitation for future generations — whether these were missionaries, young novices, or lay readers.<sup>132</sup> Needless to say, such a noble goal demanded an ideal presentation of the Jesuit missionaries and their role at the critical juncture in China's history.

129 See Harris, "Confession-Building", 289.

130 Sela, "From Theology's Handmaid", 19.

131 "Habeo modo pro manibus librum qui inscribit CHINA qua sacris et profanis illustrata; a quo gloriosorum a RV. gestorum frequens mentio sit; in quo et PP.NN exemplatos [sic] in vinea christi labores posteritati ad imitandum propono". APUG, 563, f. 292r. Kircher to Schall. Rome, 16 April 1664. Online at: [http://gate.unigre.it/mediawiki/index.php/Page:AKC\\_1664\\_04\\_16\\_563-292.pdf/1](http://gate.unigre.it/mediawiki/index.php/Page:AKC_1664_04_16_563-292.pdf/1)

132 The same kind of historical awareness is also evident in the preface to the book, where Kircher presents Boym's letters as "a remarkable and most worthy memory for future generations" (admiranda & posteriorum memoria dignissima). See Kircher, *China illustrata*, 1.

Interestingly, in the seventeenth century such perceptions of history coexisted along with the new historiographical sensitivities of the period. The popularity of Kircher's books speaks for itself. Even if surrounded by a constant aura of controversy, Kircher seems to have known his audience well. It is important to bear in mind that the vast majority of that audience consisted of amateur readers, who possessed neither the required knowledge nor the intellectual tools to evaluate Kircher's writing critically. Moreover, the vast spectrum of sentiments within Kircher's audience, extending from admiration to disdain, served the Society of Jesus. Kircher's superiors, who at times approved his writings in contrast to the recommendation of internal Jesuit censorship, must have understood a simple truth — controversy sells.<sup>133</sup>

All in all, Kircher's book should not be taken plainly as an intellectual-scientific project. *China illustrata* was no less a religious, political and even pedagogical work, which was shaped by the author's relationships with his human sources, his concern for the future of the Jesuit missionary enterprise and, above all, in light of his devout view of history. Despite widespread criticism, and despite the period's increasing sensitivity towards historical bias and authenticity, *China illustrata* has won extensive, long-lasting popularity. This fact suggests that during the seventeenth century, such sensitivities were mainly intellectual, not popular.

### Conclusion

Kircher's intellectual oeuvre has attracted much scholarly attention in recent decades and has become increasingly acknowledged as a unique case of Baroque, or perhaps early-modern mentality which, as Paula Findlen has suggested, did not necessarily follow "the road to modernity but a rather different project".<sup>134</sup> The present essay offers further inquiry into that intriguing scholarly project. Focusing on a section of Kircher's historical account of Christianity in China, it examines the ways in which historical knowledge was produced, perceived, and used by one of the period's most extraordinary minds.

On the factual level, it is clear that the Ming-Qing transition narrative presented in *China illustrata* — one of the seventeenth

133 On Kircher's complicated relationship with the Jesuit College of Revisers (Collegium Revisorum), see Siebert, "Kircher and his Critics", 79–104.

134 Findlen, "The Last Man", 8.



century's most authoritative books regarding China — was far from being accurate. Kircher manipulated the chronology of the main events, neglected to mention key figures, provided a mistaken transcription of the Chongzhen Emperor's name, and misled his readers into thinking that the Jesuits had baptized the Ming imperial family before the Qing conquest, once the Ming dynasty ruled over the entire Chinese empire.

On a more theoretical level, this essay suggests reading Kircher's narrative religiously and politically rather than historically, and to judge it as a rhetorical-apologetic attempt to reconcile the different Jesuit narratives which were circulated in Europe, especially those of his main sources Michał Boym and Martino Martini. Kircher's goal was to tell a glorious story of the triumph of Christianity in China. The image of a united China mission was essential for this story. It was theology, rather than history, that was on the Jesuit intellectual's mind.

However, understanding Kircher's efforts simply in terms of the end that justifies the means would be an insufficient explanation. Rather, it could be that for Kircher, theology and history were entwined. His cyclical perception of history is in fact consistent with his broader scholarly approach, which claims for the complete connectivity of knowledge. In his book *Magneticum naturae regnum* (The Magnetic Kingdom of Nature), also published in 1667, Kircher wrote: "We search for the connection of the whole universe and also the connection among all corporeal things by a new and unique method".<sup>135</sup> The root of this perception is religious. Kircher embraced the idea that the essence of everything in the world is none other than the essence of God. From this proposition, as one historian has noted, "it is easy to conclude that *Omnia in omnibus* (everything is in everything) — the cherished theme of Neoplatonism since the Renaissance".<sup>136</sup> Since all things are intertwined by Divine Providence, then history, and especially the history of Christianity, should be no different.

Of course, reconstructing the European memory of the events in China also benefited the Jesuit Vice-Province of China, which appeared in Kircher's descriptions as more triumphant and united than it ever was. Perhaps it is best to conclude with Kircher's own closing words in: "Goodbye, reader, please excuse any errors.

135 "Totius quoque universi, atque adeo rerum omnium corporearum nexus, nova & singulari methodo investigamus". Kircher, *Magneticum naturae regnum*, 19.

136 Camenietzki, "Baroque Science", 318.

Everything is done for the greater glory of God and the honour of the Holy Virgin and Mother".<sup>137</sup>

### Summary

The Jesuit polymath Athanasius Kircher SJ is among the prominent writers of seventeenth-century Europe, and his *China illustrata* (1667) was one of the most celebrated and influential works on China of the period. The present essay examines the contexts and sources for Kircher's description of the fall of the Ming dynasty and the conquest of China by the foreign Qing dynasty, a monumental event of global significance which attracted the attention of European scholarly circles and foreign powers alike. Strangely, while Kircher's network of social contacts provided him access to the best sources available on the matter, including eye witnesses, as this essay outlines, his presentation of the events in China is odd, inaccurate, and, at times, misleading.

However, a closer examination of Kircher's sources — especially the first-hand accounts of events from fellow-Jesuits visiting Rome — reveals tensions, disagreements, and conflicting narratives that existed within the Jesuit China mission during the transition period and might have influenced the author. Kircher's intellectual enterprise was always intertwined with his religious piety and promotion of the Society of Jesus. Thus, this essay proposes that his 'mistakes' can be seen as an attempt to reconcile contradictory voices among the Jesuit missionaries and to offer a unified narrative to European readers, reshaped to fit the author's devout vision of history as well as the religio-political needs of the Society of Jesus and its China mission.

### Resumé

Le polymathe jésuite Athanasius Kircher SJ compte parmi les écrivains majeurs de l'Europe du XVIIe siècle, et son *China illustrata* (1667) a été l'une des travaux sur la Chine les plus loués et influents de cette époque. Le présent essai analyse les contextes et les sources de la description par Kircher de la chute de la dynastie Ming et la conquête de la Chine par la dynastie étrangère des Qing, événement monumental de portée mondiale qui a attiré l'attention des milieux intellectuels européens comme des puissances coloniales. Étonnamment, alors que les relations personnelles de Kircher lui

137 "Vale Lector, & si quae occurrerint, excusa. OMNIA ad M[aiorem] D[e]i G[loriam] Virginiſque Matris honorem & gloriam". Kircher, *China illustrata*, 237.

donnaient accès aux meilleures sources disponibles en la matière — y compris les témoins oculaires, comme le souligne cet essai — sa présentation des événements en Chine est étrange, imprécise, et parfois trompeuse.

Toutefois, un examen plus approfondi des sources de Kircher — en particulier les témoignages de première main d'événements de confrères jésuites en visite à Rome — révèle des tensions, des désaccords et des récits contradictoires qui ont existé au sein de la mission jésuite en Chine pendant la période de transition et qui ont pu influencer l'auteur. La démarche intellectuelle de Kircher a toujours été étroitement liée à sa dévotion religieuse et à la mise en valeur de la Compagnie de Jésus. Ainsi, cet essai suggère de considérer ses «erreurs» comme des tentatives de réconcilier des voix contradictoires au sein des missionnaires jésuites et d'offrir à ses lecteurs européens un récit uniforme, réadapté de manière à être conforme à la vision dévote que l'auteur a de l'Histoire, ainsi qu'aux besoins religiopolitiques de la Compagnie de Jésus et de sa mission en Chine.

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**Glossary of Cited Names and Terms in Chinese**

- Chongzhen 崇禎  
 Daxue 大學  
 Dongwu 東武  
 Duan huangdi 端皇帝  
 Gengyin 庚寅  
 Hong Taiji 皇太極  
 Hongguang 弘光  
 Huoyao dachen 火藥大臣  
 Li Zicheng 李自成  
 Lie huangdi 烈皇帝  
 Lie huangdi benji 烈皇帝本記  
 Liu Zhongzao 劉中藻  
 Liena 烈納  
 Longwu 隆武  
 Miaohao 廟號  
 Nianhao 年號  
 Nurhaci 努爾哈赤  
 Pang Tianshou 龐天壽  
 Qintian Shoudao Minyi Dunjian Hongwen Xiangwu Tiren Zhixian  
 Duan huangdi 欽天守道敏毅敦儉弘文襄武體仁致孝端皇帝  
 Shaowu 紹武  
 Shen Que 沈樞  
 Shihao 諡號  
 Shikui shu houji 石匱書後集  
 Shunzhi 順治  
 Tianhuo 天禍  
 Tianming 天命  
 Tianzi 天子  
 Wu Sangui 吳三桂  
 Xiaozheng taihou 孝正太后  
 Yang Guangxian 楊光先  
 Yongli 永曆  
 Zhang Dai 張岱  
 Zhaotian Yidao Gangming Kejian Kuiwen Fenwu Dunren Maoxiao  
 Lie huangdi 紹天繹道剛明恪儉揆文奮武敦仁懋孝烈皇帝  
 Zhu Cixuan 朱慈煊  
 Zhu Dadian 朱大典

