The Impact on the European Humanities of Early Reports from Catholic Missionaries from China, Tibet and Japan between 1600 and 1700

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At a time when the countries of the Far East are rapidly becoming future world powers, when China is surpassing Germany as the most important export nation in the world and India is vying to rise up from the level of a developing country, it is sometimes necessary to remind us of the paucity of information on this part of the world in the not so distant past. And while the travelogue of the Venetian Marco Polo stands out as the one account that became widely known in the Middle Ages as it chronicled the journeys of the members of Marco Polo's family to the Middle Kingdom under Kublai Chan during their two separate voyages from 1260 to 1266 and anew from 1271 to 1295, there were rare earlier official contacts with this empire apart from trade relations that followed the silk routes: Chinese sources report of a Roman 'mission' that reached China in 166 A.D. There is a record in the *Hou Hanshu* ('History of the Later Han Chinese Dynasty') that a Roman delegation arrived at the Chinese capital Luoyang in 166 – during the reign of Marc Aurelius (161-180 A.D.) – and was greeted by Emperor Huan of the Han Dynasty.[1]

In an analysis that focuses on the impact on the European humanities of early reports from missionaries in the Far East, there is one discovery that more than anything else strengthened the resolve of the Catholic Church to pursue its mission: In 1625 a stele was unearthed that miraculously documented the presence of early Christian congregations in China. It chronicled that in 635 Alopen (or Aluoben), a Syrian monk and a group of other religious men from Persia were officially escorted from the Western outposts to the court of the T'ang dynasty at its capital, Ch'ang-an (= Xi'an) on the Yellow River.[2] Alopen and his fellow travellers were Nestorian Christians, members of a religious group that the Roman church considered heretic until Pope John Paul II readmitted them in 1994. They came to a court that was surprisingly open to foreign influences as the Chinese empire enjoyed a period of peace that is now called the Buddhist Golden Age. For over two centuries Nestorians gained a strong foothold in China until severe

domestic and foreign problems toward the end of the T'ang dynasty resulted in virulent anti-foreign sentiments, and in 845 an edict dissolved all monasteries – primarily Buddhist but also Nestorian congregations. And for hundreds of years this early Christianization of China was all but forgotten until the 'Nestorian Stone' – as the stele is sometimes called – gave new impetus to the Jesuits in their efforts to convert the Chinese, as we shall see.

While the mission of Alopen was thus virtually unknown in the West in the Middle Ages, there were several other Christian travellers whose accounts were documented toward the end of this period, such as those of the Franciscan Plano Carpini to the Mongol ruler from 1245 to 1247; of Friar William of Rubruck's travels to the Great Khan at his new capital, Karakorum, from 1253 to 1255; of Friar John of Montecorvino's journey to Beijing via Madras, India, at the end of the thirteenth century; or of the travels of Odoric of Pordenone and his party, who reached their destination in 1342. Most of them were Franciscans, and they all profited from the relative openness of the ruling Mongols to religious beliefs, be they Buddhist or Christian. In their reports back to Rome the friars mentioned that they had to contend with Nestorian Christians among the Mongol elite whose way of life they seriously questioned. Nonetheless the Franciscans managed to establish small footholds in the vast Mongol empire before the Mongols were ousted by the Ming dynasty between 1368 and 1387, which for all practical purposes ended the second flowering of Christianity in China. And while the reports of these early missionaries back to the Vatican and European courts were taken rather seriously, it is surprising that the narratives that reached the public were often met with the same disbelief that Marco Polo's account evoked after he had dictated it in a Genovese jail to a fellow prisoner in 1298 – and after it became widely known in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.[3]

The Portuguese Empire: Trade and secrecy

The renewed Chinese hostility toward most foreigners – trade was still allowed with Persian merchants along the Silk Road – was the most serious stumbling block when the new era of sea voyages began at the end of the fifteenth century. Columbus's westward exploration in 1492 intensified the rivalry between Spain and Portugal over the allocation of new territories, which culminated in 1494 in the Treaty of Tordesillas. It promulgated that all undiscovered non-Christian lands to the West of the Cape Verde islands were to become Spanish possessions while those to the East belonged to Portugal. Vasco da Gama's discovery of the maritime route to the Indian subcontinent around the Cape of Good Hope in 1498 not only ushered in the establishment of Portuguese settlements in India

– Portugal's spice monopoly greatly contributed to the country's wealth in the sixteenth century – but also meant that Portuguese ships were the only means of transportation for the renewed missionary efforts in India, China and Japan.

For such efforts began as the Spaniards and Portuguese discovered or occupied more and more lands on both sides of the globe. Portugal, in particular, tried to prevent the dissemination of information on its exploits in the Far East, and little relevant information became known in print for decades. In 1540, after successive appeals to the Pope asking for missionaries for the Portuguese East Indies, Francis Xavier – one of the founding members of the Society of Jesus created in 1534 – decided to heed this call. He established missions in India and Japan and died in 1552 on an island off the coast of the Chinese mainland. And while Franciscan monks continued missionary work in Japan with some success, it took another half a century until the first Catholic priests – again Jesuit fathers – were finally allowed to present themselves in Beijing.

The Jesuit mission and the rise of Oriental studies

It is fair to say that the advent of Jesuit missionaries in China more than any other element left a lasting imprint on the European humanities of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and ushered in the curiosity and increasing awareness of this enormous realm among Western scholars. One of the earliest Jesuits to receive permission to set foot on the Chinese mainland and the first to gain access to the imperial court in Beijing was the Italian Matteo Ricci (1552-1610). Despite all his intellectual prowess, his linguistic skills and technical know-how Ricci owed much of his success to the inordinate amount of time he devoted to the preparation of his journey to Beijing beginning with his arrival at Goa in 1578. When he reached the Jesuit mission in the Portuguese trading port of Macao four years later, some of his peers were still overcoming their objections to the kind of accommodation that the total immersion in the Chinese language and customs of the newly arrived, progressive Jesuits proposed.[4] Surprisingly enough some of these progressive missionaries received permission to establish residence in the city of Chao ch'ing (Zhaoquing) upstream from the Portuguese trading port of Macao, and Ricci was one of the four fathers whose letters to the Jesuit General in Rome catalogued the years 1583 and 1584 in this outpost. The missionaries were well received, in part at least since they assented to wearing robes that resembled those of Buddhist monks – which blurred the differences between the two religions, of course. (Nonetheless this 'assimilation' marks the beginning of the so-called accommodation with Chinese customs and cults that was to dominate missionary efforts a century later and ended with the dissolution of the Jesuit order in 1773.)

The texts of the communications of these four priests were published in a 1586 Jesuit letterbook[5] and were certainly used for propaganda purposes by the order as they contained valuable information on the Chinese people and their political system. Returning to Macao when the outpost was closed by Chinese authorities a couple of years later, Ricci not only spent the next decade perfecting his mastery of the Chinese language and customs but published extensively. Balancing his skills in the sciences with his training in the humanities, Ricci produced his earliest version of a Chinese world map in 1584 and in 1595 his first book in Chinese, *On Friendship*. In this way he set a pattern that many of the later Jesuits tried to follow: Their extensive training both in Europe and in Jesuit stations on the fringe of the Middle Kingdom meant that upon having gained access to the imperial court their ultimate goal of converting the Chinese, especially the ruling class, involved their engagement both in the natural sciences and in the humanities. Many publications in both areas can be taken as proof of this approach that of course never lost sight of the ultimate goal, the Christianization of China.

Ricci's initial visit to Beijing in 1598 failed after a few months as the Japanese invasion of Korea made foreigners suspect. Only after the publication of a greatly improved second world map in 1600 was Ricci finally permitted by decree to submit his credentials – and priceless presents – to representatives of Emperor Wan-li (1563-1620). (Ricci never met the reclusive ruler face to face.) The Jesuit was elevated to the rank of an imperial mandarin and spent the remaining nine years of his life in the house on the palace grounds that the Emperor made available for him and his companions.

Ricci's publications during this period are highly informative; one of the later versions of his world map, produced at the behest of Wan-li, reveals the astute graphic adjustment of the representation of China during the two decades Ricci devoted to the improvement of his geographical knowledge of the host country [Fig. 6 (pages 190-191)]. When he died in mid-1610, the Emperor donated a piece of land for the burial plot and stele of the one foreigner the Chinese have revered to this day. In 1615, five years after his death, a fellow Jesuit, Nicolas Trigault, translated the Italian text of Ricci's *Journals* into Latin.[6] This voluminous material, together with a growing number of similar publications on China, undercut Portugal's efforts to limit information on the Far East: As early as 1586, two years before Valignani's collection of letters, the first book illustrating the Chinese writing system with reproductions of ideographs appeared. Juan Pedro González de Mendoza (1545-1618), a Spanish Augustinian monk in the service of Philipp II, spent three years in China. His experience – based on earlier accounts by Martin Ignacio de Loyola – provided material for the *Historia de las cosas más notables, ritos y costu[m]bres del gran reyno de la China*,[7] the first history of China

in the West. It was almost immediately translated into English by Robert Parke as *The Historie of the great and mightie kingdome of China*. The second edition of Richard Hakluyt's widely read *Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiqves, and Discoveries of the English Nation* of 1599 relied heavily on these sources in the section dealing with the Middle Kingdom.[8] By the end of the sixteenth century, European scholars began to discuss some of the intriguing aspects of this remote part of the world. One of the earliest was Sir Francis Bacon, who in his 1605 *Of the Proficience and Aduancement of Learning*[9] analyzed the tonal language of the Chinese and proposed to build a universal language on 'real characters' that could be similar to what he mistakenly considered the 'hieroglyphs' of Chinese writing. Despite these somewhat erroneous assumptions Bacon's ideas influenced linguistic discussions for the rest of the century.

Beyond early factual accounts it was again the Jesuits who tried to make available to the West some important Confucian works – which Ricci had already described in his *Journal* – and translate them into European languages. (In fact the Italian saw the greatest Chinese philosopher, Confucius, at the same level as the European philosophers of Greek and Roman antiquity, but he explicitly favoured the 'original Confucianism,' which lacked the religious elements found in the later neo-Confucianism that conflicted with Christianity.)[10] There were also attempts at translating the *Four Books*, the introduction to the Confucian canon; they culminated in 1687, when several Jesuit fathers published *Confucius Sinarum philosophus*[11] ('Confucius, the Philosopher of the Chinese') in Paris. Along with further Jesuit accounts of the so-called Eight Trigrams used in Taoist cosmology to represent the fundamental principles of reality and their relationship with the Yin/Yang principles this body of information had a considerable impact on European philosophers of the later seventeenth century, such as Leibniz. More perhaps than any other material on China such newly acquired insight into the philosophical and linguistic world of thought of this ancient civilization influenced pre-Enlightenment discussions in the humanities of the West.

While Ricci had suspected that the mystical Cathay of Marco Polo and other earlier writers was identical with the China he was now describing, the ultimate proof only came when Trigault's edition of Ricci's *Journals* narrated the 1602-1605 journey of Brother Bento de Goës. This fellow Jesuit died on the far western borders of China, which he reached in search of the mysterious Cathay following orders from his superior in Agra, India. Fortunately de Goës managed to send his travelogue on to Ricci in Beijing. This account greatly contributed to the identification of Marco Polo's mysterious Cathay with the China that was now being discovered.[12]

For the West, this was perhaps the most intriguing piece of information on China, the elusive realm in the East for centuries. More than his various suc-

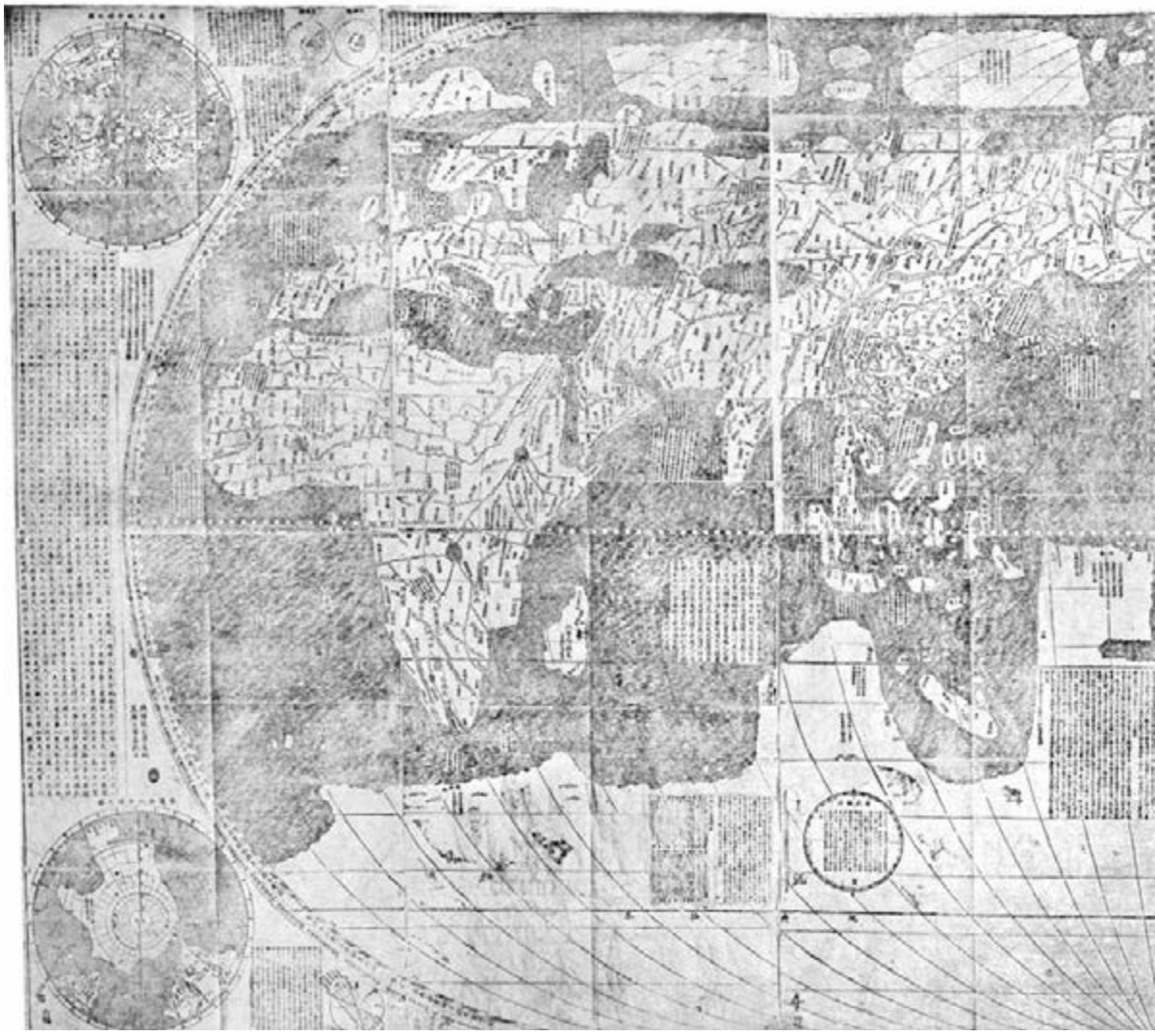
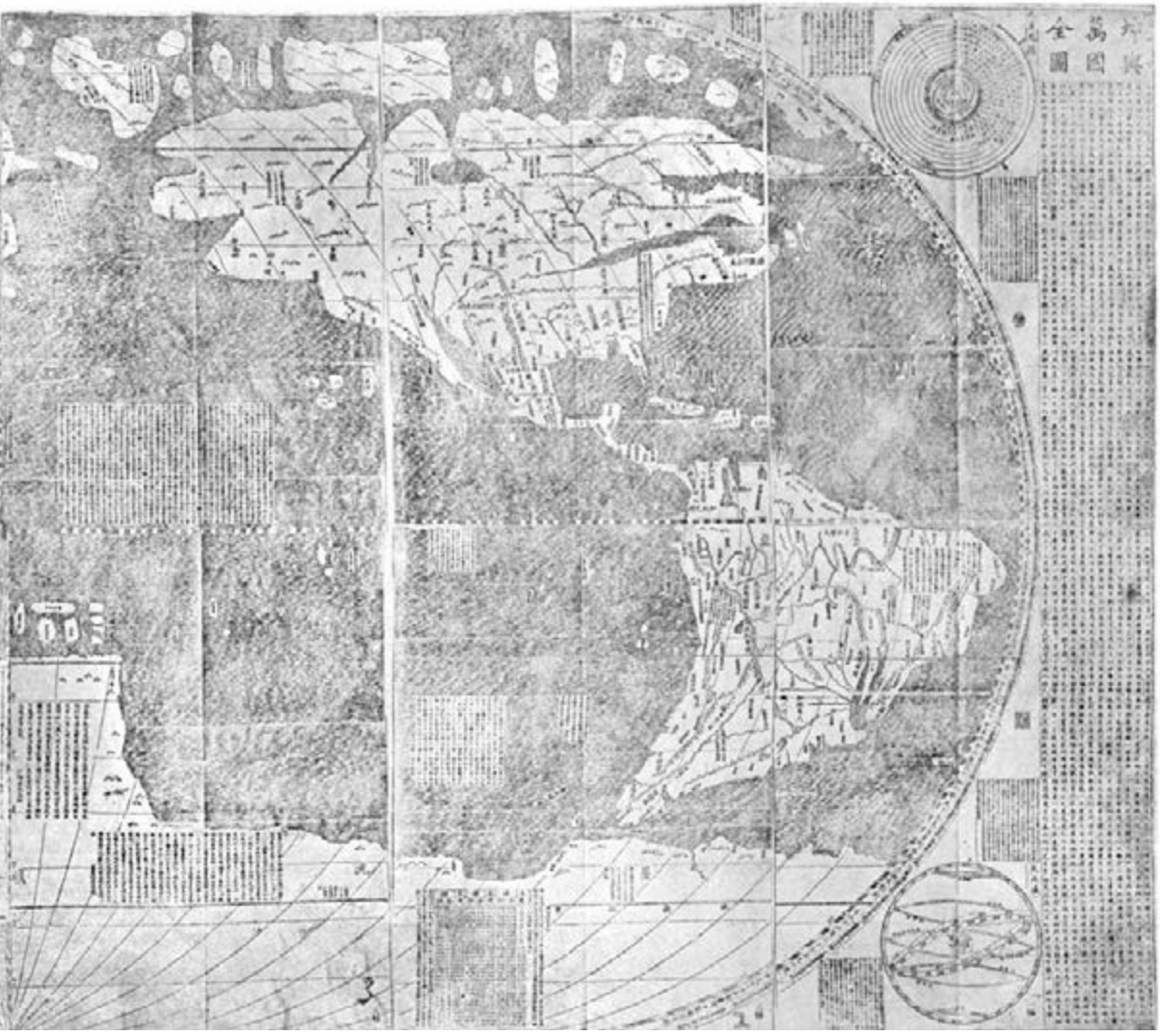


Fig. 6: Matteo Ricci, with Zhong Wentao and Li Zhizao, Six-part map of China (*Kunyu Wanguo Quantu*), 1602, woodblock print, 152 x 366 cm, Vatican Library, Rome

cessors, Ricci's extensive stay in China allowed him to characterize the men and women of his host country as 'a people both intelligent and learned,' as Ricci wrote in 1609 in his last letter to Rome. The Jesuit described the written Chinese language as one consisting of 'ideographs resembling the hieroglyphic figures of



the ancient Egyptians,'[13] an incorrect comparison by modern standards that another Jesuit, Athanasius Kircher (1602-1680), would dramatically exploit when he proposed a direct linkage between these two systems in his 1667 standard work on the Far East, *China* [...] *illvstrata*.[14] Ricci identified 'the use of accents and tones [...] to lessen [...] the difficulty of equivocation or doubtful meaning' and properly spoke of 'five different tones or inflections.' Much of this linguis-

tic information – while not unknown by the time Trigault published it in 1615 – led to intense discussions of the Chinese system and was used by European scholars ranging from Francis Bacon to Descartes, Mersenne, Hermann Hugo all the way to Kircher and Leibniz in their attempts at creating some sort of universal written communication.[15] Overall the most striking characteristics of the Chinese, Ricci summarized, were their peaceableness; their efficient means of self-control; the strict hierarchization of government and society; isolationism; and xenophobia.[16] Yet despite these various contrasting identifications and their discussions in learned circles, it may be true – as Nigel Cameron put it some twenty years ago – that 'the Western world remained obstinately faithful to the China of Marco Polo and of that inspired literary robber and romancer Sir John Mandeville.'[17]

Ricci – who relied heavily on Western know-how and technical expertise when he tried to gain access to the highest levels of Chinese bureaucracy – early on identified areas where Jesuit fathers whose schooling initially would focus on the humanities were then to be especially trained in the natural sciences in order to demonstrate the superiority of the West and thereby promote their missionary work. Such points of attack were Chinese astronomy, which used an obsolete lunar-solar calendar system whose inadequacy Ricci's Jesuit assistant proved a few months after his master's death when his calculations pinpointed a solar eclipse much more precisely than the Chinese astronomers. Another area where the Jesuits enjoyed absolute mastery was the production and/or repair of watches and technical instruments, such as telescopes – for more than a century they literally held the monopoly in these skills. Ricci's own expertise in cartography made him indispensable; later generations of Jesuits trained in surveying and mapmaking were similarly highly regarded. In return, Ricci's and later missionaries' reports from China greatly influenced European humanities in areas such as comparative religion, philosophy, or linguistics, as we have seen. However, the court appointments of Ricci or, after him, Johann Adam Schall von Bell and Ferdinand Verbiest, meant that the oaths of allegiance to the Emperor they had to swear automatically entailed a promise to remain in China for the rest of their lives. All three of them died there and were buried with high honours.[18]

Early Jesuit assessments of the potential success of their China mission

One letter sent to the Jesuit General Aquaviva and printed in 1601 may serve as a representative assessment of the chances a Catholic mission would have in China,

as seen in the very beginning of such efforts. Nicolò Longobardi listed a number of points in his 1598 communication:[19] (1) The Chinese realm is built on the highest degree of unity and conformity – an important factor in any future missionary work as top-down conversion should facilitate mass baptisms. (2) Uniformity of written language, which should also facilitate proselytization. (3, 4) The Chinese work hard, are rich, highly civilized and educated. (5) Even the common man knows how to read and write – which should facilitate the preaching of the gospel. (6) The numerous laws are strictly observed; government follows the teachings of Confucius. Christianity should be able to step right in. (7) The Chinese are immune to idleness. (8) But the people do not easily accept innovation. Longobardi fears that Confucianism might remain deeply rooted among the people. (9) The Chinese love domestic peace and tranquility; they live up to high moral standards and worship their ancestors. (10) But they are atheists, especially the scholars. Nonetheless this latter group, in particular, should be open to the acceptance of a single God and of the gospel.

This catalogue of information, and similar reports reaching the Jesuit General in Rome, clearly determined some of the missionary tactics that the order identified over the following years. Overall such lists may have been self-serving and too optimistic – at least when judged by modern standards. One of the Jesuits' prime goals was the conversion of high mandarins, something that Ricci had been attempting in vain; pandering to the common people, however, such as wearing Buddhist-type robes, was soon abandoned as the newly chosen garments of the literati put the Jesuits in a much higher social class, much closer to the target groups of the intelligentsia.[20] It is ironic that the potential conversion of the last Ming Emperor Chong Zhen (1611-1644) in the beginning of his short reign (1627-1644) may have been due to gratitude that he felt for the Jesuits who – much against their liking – were drafted into the production of Western-style cannons that proved superior in the repulsion of a Tartar attack on Beijing in 1629.[21] And while later Jesuits elevated to the rank of Mandarins enjoyed excellent working relationships with the respective emperors, their conversion remained an elusive goal.

Jesuit missionary efforts gained tremendous credibility in a different, totally unexpected way: In 1625 a nine-foot tall marble stone tablet or stele was unearthed in the outskirts of Xi'an.[22] Its inscription told the story about a group of early Christians in China for whom the Jesuits had been searching ever since their arrival. There were legendary reports of an evangelization of St Thomas the Apostle in these lands, and Marco Polo and some of the thirteenth-century Franciscan travellers had talked about many sightings of the Nestorian Christians. But now this stele – engraved with a large Syrian cross and dated 781 – described the 'Luminous Teaching,' in other words, Christianity, in Syriac and

Fig. 7: The Nestorian Tablet or Stele, dating back to 781, found near the former capital of Xi'an in 1625, Beilin Museum, Xi'an (rubbing)

Chinese [Figs. 7-8]. It chronicled the arrival of Alopen and his group of Syriac-speaking missionaries in 635 and recorded an imperial edict of 638 granting permission for the building of a church in Xi'an. The stone tablet – still preserved in the so-called Forest of Steles in this former Chinese capital – established proof of the existence of the Catholic faith in a land that the Jesuits were therefore now trying to re-Christianize. Within a decade Athanasius Kircher, the most prolific Jesuit writer of the seventeenth century, published a first translation in his work on the Coptic language, *Prodromus Coptvs sive Ægyptiacvs*;[23] in 1667, he returned to this material in his handbook on the Middle Kingdom, *China* [...] *illvstrata*, where he reproduced the stele on a stunning fold-out page [Fig. 9 (pages 196-197)]. In many ways this large folio work is part of the Jesuit propaganda aimed at demonstrating how the Jesuit order with all the expertise at its disposal was privileged to spread the gospel in this land – more than some of the other, competing Catholic congregations that had entered on the Chinese scene.

Fig. 8: Detail of Fig. 7: Crucifix on top of the nine Chinese ideograms

Jesuit success at the Imperial Court due to their expertise in technical disciplines

One of the experts in the fields of mathematics and astronomy that the Jesuit superiors sent to Beijing on Ricci's request one generation later was Schall von Bell (1592-1666). Like Ricci before him, he spent several years in Macao preparing for this arrival in Beijing in 1622, and like Ricci he had undergone a thorough training in the humanities but was specifically 'groomed' in the sciences in order to maintain the Jesuit foothold at the imperial court. Thus he published the first description of the Galilean telescope in Chinese in 1626 that the Italian had begun to assemble in 1609. Never at a loss for words, Schall claimed that 'now with the telescope there is no longer either small object or distant object. [...] Both heaven and earth become part of our visual field.'[24] The ultimate proof of this new technology came when the Jesuits predicted a 1629 eclipse of the sun to the very minute while the Chinese Bureau of Astronomy missed it by a full hour. A few months later an imperial edict entrusted the calendar reform to the Jesuits, and in 1638 Schall assumed complete responsibility, all the while working under the direction of a Chinese Director of the Astronomical Observatory.

Fig. 9: Fold-out illustration of the Nestorian Tablet from Athanasius Kircher, *China monumentis qua sacris qua profanis* (Amsterdam: Van Waesberge, 1667)

The violent end of the Ming dynasty in 1644 did not, however, change Schall's position, as Shun Chih, the new Manchu Emperor and founder of the Qing (Ch'ing) dynasty, soon became aware of the advances in Western science and technology. After Schall – who had presented his reformed calendar as early as 1641 – predicted yet another solar eclipse to the minute in 1644, he was appointed Director of the Imperial Observatory and elevated to the level of a Mandarin of the Fifth Class. Finally, in 1658, he received the highest honour of becoming a Mandarin of the First Class – which did not prevent the powerful enemies of the Jesuit scientists to accuse them of high treason when upon the death of Shun Chih his six-year-old son Kang-h'si ascended the throne in 1661. The Jesuits suffered terribly during the long trial, were finally exonerated – but Schall had been weakened so much that he died a few months later in 1666. One of his faithful collaborators was Flemish-born Ferdinand Verbiest (1623-1688), who was jailed along with Schall. When Kang-h'si assumed full power in 1666, Verbiest on several occasions challenged the Chinese accuser of the Jesuits and new Director of the Observatory in the presence of the emperor, who in 1669 finally appointed Verbiest as the second Jesuit Director, a post he held until his death in 1688. Apart from several important astronomical publications, Verbiest also replaced Schall's older instruments on the platform of the observatory, where they have survived to this day [Fig. 10].[25] An exceedingly

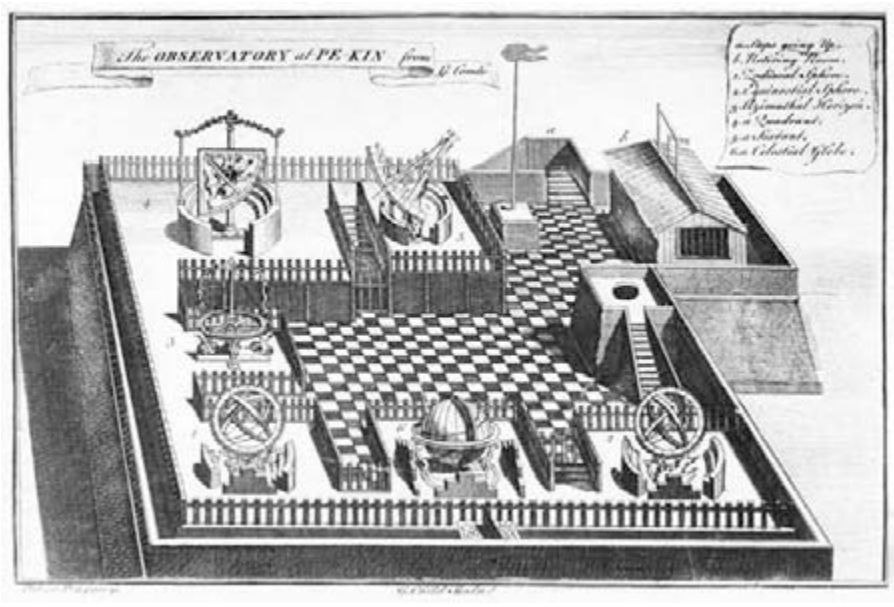


Fig. 10: The Beijing Observatory, image from J.B. du Halde, *The General History of China Containing a Geographical, Historical, Chronological, Political and Physical Description of the Empire of China* (London: Watts, 1741) © Hulton Archive/Getty Images

well-trained engineer, Verbiest – quite possibly like earlier Jesuits in Emperor Chong Zhen's short reign – was drafted to design and produce cannons for Kang-h'si's army, which performed well and enabled the emperor to put down a long-festering rebellion.[26] Despite the preponderance of his technical work Verbiest also published books in the field of theology and may have rearranged the Chinese grammar originally prepared in 1652 by Martino Martini (1614-1661), a South Tyrolean fellow Jesuit and long-time travelling companion.[27] Verbiest excelled in the Manchu language, the idiom still spoken at the Manchu court of Kang-h'si, and opened the field of Manchu studies by authoring the first *Grammatica tartarea*, also titled, *Elementa linguæ tartaricæ*, which was printed in Beijing.[28] Mastery of this language further facilitated his communication with the emperor.

The eight-year-long Jesuit exploration of a land route to China and Tibet

At about the same time the journeys to China that Western missionaries had to undertake on Portuguese vessels had become so dangerous, and so many lives were lost due to the increased harassment of these ships by Dutch and English warships and privateers, that the Jesuit General decided to send an exploratory party overland from Rome to Beijing to ascertain whether a land route might be a viable alternative. The newly published atlas *Novvs Atlas Sinensis* by Martino Martini[29] greatly facilitated such plans [Fig. 11]. Thus in early 1656 the Jesuit General sent detailed instructions for an overland journey to two young Austrian Jesuits, Bernhard Diestel (1623-1660) and Johannes Grueber (1623-1680).[30] They were to take the northerly route, the old Silk Road, and had to document their itinerary so that mission stations could subsequently be established. However, border wars between Persia and Afghanistan prevented them from pursuing their overland search; they were forced to travel on the well-known caravan route to Hormus and from there took boats to Macao. After three years they finally reached Beijing in August of 1659, where Grueber began his work as a mathematician for the imperial court while Diestel soon died from exhaustion.

Thanks to the intercession of Adam Schall, Grueber and a new travelling companion received imperial letters of protection that were to facilitate their return to India via Tibet and Nepal. And indeed Grueber and the Belgian Albert d'Orville (1621-1661) reached Lhasa after a six-month trek on 10 October 1661. Emperor Shun Chih's protection enabled them to remain in the Tibetan capital for one month and observe life and customs there. It was during this period that

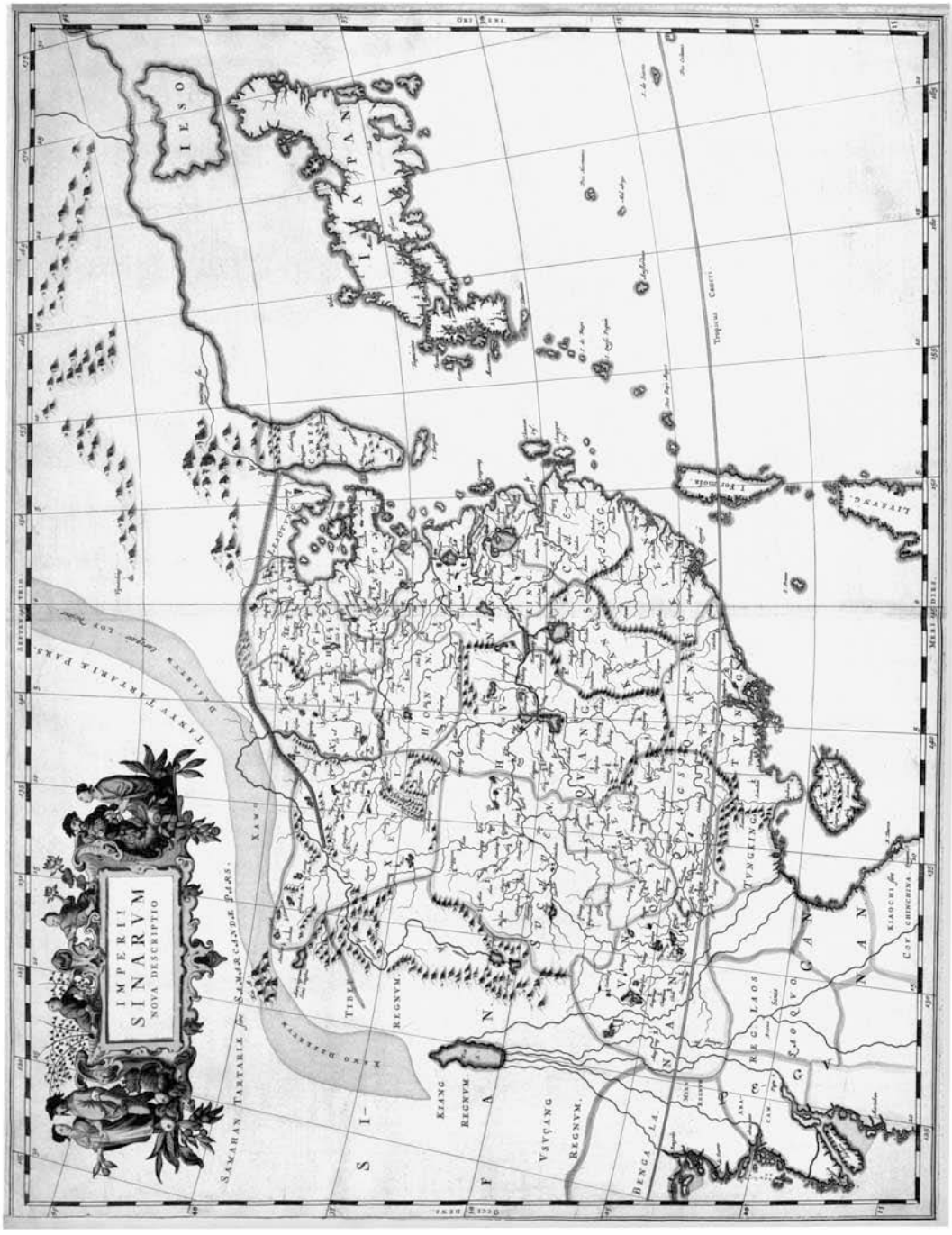


Fig. 11: Martino Martini, representation of China in *Novius Atlas Sinensis* (Amsterdam: Blaeu, 1655)

Grueber – well trained as a draftsman – produced the sketches that were used upon his 1664 return to Rome in Kircher's summary account of this eight-year-long journey in the 1667 *China* [...] *illvstrata*. Unfortunately the vast majority of Grueber's sketches were lost, and the summary in Kircher's publication remains the first written and illustrated record of this epic journey[31] as Grueber's further, detailed accounts sent to Rome from his new post in Transylvania never reached Kircher. Nonetheless, for 200 years Grueber's documentation in the *China* [...] *illvstrata* contained the earliest illustrations of Lhasa, the costumes of Tibetan men and women and even of the Dalai Lama – drawn from a half-size bust as the Jesuits were not allowed to see him face to face [Fig. 12].

Of particular interest within the purview of this analysis is Grueber's assessment of the apparent similarities between Tibetan-style Lamaism and Catholicism. Some of these had first been described in 1625 by another Jesuit, Antonio de Andrade (1580-1634), the earliest European to set foot on Tibetan soil in the west of the country. On several occasions Andrade spent a total of two years in Tsaparang, where on Easter Day 1626 the cornerstone was laid for the first

Fig. 12: The Potala Palace in Lhasa, from Athanasius Kircher, *China monumentis qua sacris qua profanis* (Amsterdam: Van Waesberge, 1667), p. 74

Christian church in Tibet.[32] On 6 November 1625, he sent a letter to his superior in Portuguese Goa that was printed a couple of years later but – despite several translations – remained relatively unknown.[33] Both he and forty years later Grueber noticed the following specious similarities: (1) They (the Tibetan Lamaists) celebrate holy mass with bread and wine; (2) they administer the extreme unction; (3) they bless marriages; (4) they pray for the sick; (5) they have processions; (6) they revere relics; (7) they have monasteries and nunneries; (8) they sing in choirs according to the customs of our faithful; (9) they fast several times a year; (10) they elect bishops; (11) they donate generous offerings and are well disciplined; (12) they send terribly poor barefoot monks all the way to China. Nonetheless, Grueber concluded, all of these similarities could only be the work of the devil since they were strikingly similar to rites and customs in the Catholic Church even though no European or Christian had ever been in this corner of the world. These observations were further confirmed by the members of the Capuchin order[34] to whom the Pope entrusted the Christianization of Tibet in 1704, which for about forty years led to a mission in Lhasa. (It goes without saying that seventeenth-century interpretation of such surprising similarities also surmised the influence of early Christians, such as the Nestorians, and even theorized that the elusive Prester John could have taken refuge in Tibet.)

In closing: The impact on the West of some other aspects of the Chinese civilization

Let me add a few concluding remarks. While this analysis has highlighted the impact on the European humanities of some of the early reports from the Far East, primarily from China, it has not touched upon many other aspects of the Chinese civilization that influenced the West during the Early Modern Period. Apart from efforts to commercialize silk production at just about every European court, the most salient one is the import and ultimate production of porcelain, initially in Germany. Less well known is the fact that the Chinese were early masters of bridge construction – at the end of the sixteenth century, Portuguese travellers to China described suspension bridges for the first time. In the 1683 edition of his *Relationes Curiosæ* Eberhard Werner Happel reports on chain bridges that the Chinese built across a deep ravine;[35] in 1741, the Austrian architect Fischer von Erlach (1656-1723) proposed to build the first such bridge in the West, specifically referring to Chinese models.

We have reached the end of the seventeenth century, the period under investigation. Two last references: On several occasions, we have encountered the most

important handbook on China published in the last third of the seventeenth century, Athanasius Kircher's *China* [...] *illvstrata* of 1667. This folio-size tome was the outlet for much of the material that Catholic missionaries sent to Rome from their various stations, especially the Far East; Grueber's account was featured just as much as that of one of his travelling companions, Heinrich Roth, who was the first to describe Sanskrit, the language of the Indian Brahmans.[36] But any further analysis of Kircher's compendium and some of his other relevant work would go beyond the pale of this investigation.

At the close of the century, Kircher's *China* [...] *illvstrata*, but also his earlier *Œdipvs Ægyptiacvs* [...][37] with its section on Chinese writing were some of the sources that Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716) used in his extensive deliberations of an *Ars combinatoria*. They led to his interest in the Chinese writing system, which – as he hoped – could lead to a clearer differentiation between *signum* and *notio* and could pave the way to an analysis of a logical structure of this system. Ultimately this would connect with his combinatorial work, for which the Chinese *Yijing* and its hexagrams provided a possible model. After more than two decades of keen interest in matters Chinese Leibniz published an analysis of information related to the Middle Kingdom in the *Novissima Sinica* of 1697.[38] He documented his extensive knowledge in a preface that presented his astute interpretation of the situation in China. It showed his long-cherished goal of a Sino-European exchange of knowledge 'in which Europeans taught Chinese geometry, First Philosophy and revealed religion while the Chinese in turn taught natural religion and practical philosophy – 'practica philosophia [...] id est Ethicæ et Politicæ,'[39] as David Mungello characterized Leibniz's approach. In some ways like Kircher in his *China* [...] *illvstrata* a generation earlier, Leibniz provided a forum not only for an extended report on the history of the Jesuit mission in China up to 1692 by the rector of the Jesuit College in Peking but also included a brief account of an astronomical work in which Ferdinand Verbiest discussed stellar observations carried out on behalf of Emperor Kang-h'si in preparation of the new Chinese calendar.[40] Despite the small print run – a second printing occurred two years later – this book, in particular the detailed prefatory material that Leibniz prepared, provided yet another impetus for renewed scholarly discussions of China, its political system, philosophy and its civilization in eighteenth-century Europe. In some ways Leibniz summarized the lasting impact that one hundred years of ever more reliable information on the Middle Kingdom had on the West, an impact clearly felt in the humanities where – as had become quite evident over the years – China had the most to offer.

Notes

1 'In the ninth *yanxi* year [166 CE], during the reign of Emperor Huan, the king of Da Qin (the Roman Empire), Andun (Marcus Aurelius *Antoninus*), sent envoys from beyond the frontiers [...] to offer elephant tusks, rhinoceros horn, and turtle shell. This was the very first time there was [direct] communication [between the two countries]. The tribute brought was neither precious nor rare, raising suspicion that the accounts [of the 'envoys'] might be exaggerated.' John H. Hill (transl.), *The Western Regions According to the* Hou Hanshu. *The* Xiyu juan 'Chapter on the Western Regions' from *Hou Hanshu* 88. 2nd, revised ed., 2003. URL: http://depts.washington.edu/silkroad/texts/hhshu/hou_han_shu.html#sec11 (accessed 04/05/2011). The Roman Emperor 'Andun' or 'An tun' (thus the historical Chinese transliteration) may well have been Marc Aurelius (161-180 A.D.), who out of reverence to his late predecessor Antoninus Pius (138-161 A.D.) took on Antoninus's name.

2 Nigel Cameron, *Barbarians and Mandarins. Thirteen Centuries of Western Travelers in China* (Hong Kong, Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 1989), 17-27; *Catholic Dictionary: Alopen*. URL: http://dictionary.editme.com/Alopen (accessed 04/05/2011).

3 Marco Polo's account circulated in more than one hundred manuscripts before it was published in Giovanni Battista Ramusio's 1553 compilation of the great medieval journeys in his book, *Delle navigazioni e viaggi* (Venice: i Giunti); further editions well into the seventeenth century.

4 'It is a waste of time [...] to learn the Chinese language and to consecrate himself to a hopeless enterprise,' was the verdict that a fellow Jesuit pronounced who preferred to rely on translators and pursued the Europeanization of the Chinese. Quoted by Michele Ruggieri, who upon arrival at Macao in 1579 was freed from all other duties in order to focus on the learning of the language. See 'Introduction' to M. Howard Rienstra (ed., transl.), *Jesuit Letters from China 1583-84* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 10-11.

5 The original publication dealt primarily with the mission in Japan and tagged on the letters from China: *Avvisi del Giapone, de gli anni M.D. LXXXII, LXXXIII, et LXXXIV, Con alcuni altri della Cina dell' LXXXIII et LXXXIV: Cauati dalle lettere della Compagnia di Giesù: Riceuute il mese di dicembre, M.D. LXXXV* (Rome: Francesco Zanetti, 1586). Further letters were published by Alessandro Valignani, *Avvisi della Cina, et Giapone del Fine dell'anno 1587* [...] (Venice: Giolito de Ferrari, 1588). See Cameron, *Barbarians*, 188-189.

6 Matteo Ricci, *De Christiana Expeditione Apud Sinas. Suscepta ab Societate Jesu*, ed. by Nicolas Trigault (Augsburg: Mang, 1615). Four more Latin editions were followed by three French versions and translations into German, Spanish and English.

7 Madrid: Pedro Madrigal, 1586 (=1587). English translation London: Edward White 1587.

8 London: Bishop, Newberie and Barker, 1599.

9 Expanded discussion of this material in Bacon's own 1623 Latin translation (*De dignitate et augmentis scientiarum* [...] (London: Haviland) of the 1605 *Of the Proficience and Aduancement of Learning* (London: Tomes).

10 David E. Mungello, *The Great Encounter of China and the West, 1500-1800*. 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD, *et al.*: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 48-50.

11 *Confucius Sinarum philosophus, sive Scientia sinensis* [...], transl. into Latin by Philippe Couplet S.J. *et al.* (Paris: Horthemels, 1687).

12 *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Matthew Ricci: 1583-1610*, transl. from the Latin by Louis J. Gallagher, S.J. (New York: Random House, 1953), esp. 499-521. Ricci narrated that during Bento de Goës' way east from Afghanistan as part of a caravan, he met merchants on their return from 'the so-called Cathay. There, in Peking, they had lived in the same House of Ambassadors with the Fathers of the Society of Jesus, and so they were able to give Brother Goës first-hand information about Father Matthew Ricci and his companions. It was in this way that Bento first learned [...] that China was, in truth, the Cathay for which he was headed.'

13 *Journals*, 26-30.

14 *China Monumentis quà sacris quà profanes* [...] (Amsterdam: Jansson and Van Waesberge, 1667). See also Hartmut Walravens, *China illustrata. Das europäische Chinaverständnis im Spiegel des 16. bis 18. Jahrhunderts*. Catalogue of the Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel (Germany) 55 (Weinheim: Acta Humaniora, VCH, 1987). A recent collection of essays on Kircher is: Paula Findlen (ed.), *Athanasius Kircher. The Last Man Who Knew Everything* (New York, London: Routledge, 2004).

15 For an overview see the author's monograph: Lingua Universalis. *Kryptologie und Theorie der Universalsprachen im 16. und 17. Jahrhundert*. Wolfenbütteler Forschungen 38 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1988), esp. 83-98.

16 Cf. Lavinia Brancaccio, *China accommodata: Chinakonstruktionen in jesuitischen Schriften der Frühen Neuzeit*. Literaturwissenschaft 9 (Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2007), 93-95.

17 Cameron, *Barbarians*, 189.

18 Demel, *Fremde*, 76-77. Trigault reports that in 1615 missionaries already living in China were definitely subject to this imperial edict as they were considered 'bearers of state secrets.'

19 'Exemplvm Epistolæ a [...] Anno 1598 ex China conscriptæ [...],' in: *Recentissima de amplissimo regno Chinæ* [...] (Mayence: Albinus, 1601), 1-49. Excerpts translated in Demel, *Fremde*, 188-191.

20 Brancaccio, *China accommodata*, 58-59, points out that such a change in clothing also – and at least as importantly – entailed a change in comportment and especially in the appropriate level of erudition. She also stresses that the change coincided with Ricci's realization that he had misjudged the position of Buddhist monks in Chinese society (who were much less highly regarded than he had originally thought), which contributed to his rejection of this religious group.

21 Reported in Michel Boym, *Briefve relation de la notable conversion des personnes royales, et de l'estat de la Religion Chrestienne en Chine* (Paris: Cramoisy, 1654), 45 ff., quoted in Demel, *Fremde*, 188-191.

22 See the extensive article by Timothy Billings, 'Jesuit Fish in Chinese Nets: Athanasius Kircher and the Translation of the Nestorian Tablet,' *Representations* 87 (2004), 1-42, here 1-3.

23 Rome: Propaganda Fide, 1636. For *China* [...] *illvstrata* see f.n. 15.

24 Quoted from Pasquale M. d'Elia, *Galileo in China* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1960), in: Cameron, *Barbarians*, 203-204, 206-207. It should be mentioned that the Jesuit missionaries actually introduced the heliocentric system to the Chinese although their order was opposing it in Europe – the enormous distance from Rome may have encouraged them to espouse what they personally apparently considered the most convincing system.

25 Augustín Udías, *Searching the Heavens and the Earth: The History of Jesuit Observatories*, Astrophysics and Space Science Library 286 (Dordrecht, Boston, London: Kluwer, 2003), 46-49.

26 Shu Liguang, 'Ferdinand Verbiest and the Casting of Cannons in the Qing Dynasty,' in: John W. Witek, S.J. (ed.), *Ferdinand Verbiest (1623-1688), Jesuit Missionary, Scientist, Engineer and Diplomat* (Nettetal: Inst. Monumenta Serica, 1994), 227-244.

27 Upon his return from China in 1653, Martini gave manuscript copies of his grammar to several scholars, where it was a highly prized possession. Another copy was mailed to Europe in 1689, but the original text of Martini's grammar is lost. The second edition of Melchésedec[k] Thévenot's *Relations de divers voyages curieux* [...] (Paris: Moette, 1696) contains the printed text of a Chinese grammar which may have been Martini's *Grammatica sinica*. See Giuliano Bertolucci, 'Martino Martini's *Grammatica Sinica*,' *Monumenta Serica. Journal of Oriental Studies* 51 (2003), 629-640.

28 Louis Pfister, S.J., *Notices biographiques et bibliographiques sur les Jésuites de l'ancienne mission de Chine* (Shanghai: Imprimerie de la Mission Catholique, 1932-1934), 358, quoted in Yves Camus, 'Jesuits' Journeys in Chinese Studies,' paper prepared for presentation at the 2007 World Conference on Sinology, Renmin University of China, Beijing. URL: http://www.riccimac.org/doc/JesuitsJourneys.pdf (accessed 4 May 2011).

29 *Novvus Atlas Sinensis* (Amsterdam: Jansson, 1655); German text version Amsterdam: Blaeu, 1655.

30 The following uses material from an article of mine entitled, 'Tibet im 17. Jahrhundert. Johannes Grueber, S.J., seine Reisebeschreibungen und die Frage ihrer Veröffentlichung,' *Daphnis: Zeitschrift für Mittlere Deutsche Literatur* 24 (1995), 375-400.

31 A very similar account appeared in 1672 in vol. II, Part IV of Thévenot's first edition of his *Relations de divers voyages curieux* [...] (Paris: Cramoisy, 1663-1673), 1-23 (separately paginated). See also f.n. 27.

32 Its remnants were discovered more than 300 years later by the Austrian traveller Heinrich Harrer, as he recounted in his book, *Seven Years in Tibet*, transl. from the German by Richard Graves (London: Hart-Davis, 1953). For the first Jesuits in Tibet see URL: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ant%C3%B3nio_de_Andrade (accessed 04/05/2011).

33 *Relatione del nove scoprimento del gran Cataio, overo regno di Tibet. Fatto dal P. Antonio di Andrade portoghese della Compagnie di Giesu l'anno 1624* (Rome: Corbelletti, 1627). Spanish translation: Madrid 1627; French rendering Paris: 1628.

34 Order of the Friar Minors (OFMCap.), an offshoot of the Franciscan order.

35 E. G. [Eberhard Werner] Happel, *Gröste Denkwürdigkeiten der Welt oder so genannte* Relationes Curiosæ. *Der Erste Theil* (Hamburg: Wiering, 1683), 'Noch etliche herrliche Brücken in China,' 677, 687-688. Rita Haub and Paul Oberholzer, *Matteo Ricci und der Kaiser von China. Jesuitenmission im Reich der Mitte* (Würzburg: Echter, 2010), 120-121.

36 Richard Hauschild, 'Der Missionar P. Heinrich Roth aus Dillingen und die erste europäische Sanskrit-Grammatik,' *Sitzungsberichte der Sächsischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Leipzig, Philologisch-historische Klasse*, Band 115, Heft 6 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1972).

37 Rome: Mascardi, 1652-1655.

38 Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Novissima Sinica Historiam Nostri Temporis Illustrata* [...] (Hanover: Förster, 1697). Second, expanded edition Hanover: Förster, 1699. Latin original and German translation in: Hermann Reinbothe and Heinz Günther Nesselrath, eds. and translators: G. Wilhelm Leibniz, *Das Neueste von China (1697) Novissima Sinica* (Köln: Deutsche China-Gesellschaft, 1979). See also Wenchao Li and Hans Poser, eds., *Das Neueste über China. G. W. Leibnizens* Novissima Sinica *von 1697*. Studia Leibnitiana Supplementa XXXIII (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2000), especially Hans Poser, 'Leibnizens *Novissima Sinica* und das europäische Interesse an China,' 11-28.

39 Leibniz, *Novissima Sinica*, Preface, fol.)(3 r-v. The entire quotation represents David Mungello's summary of Donald F. Lach's view of Leibniz's goals as Lach had expressed them in his seminal analysis: *The Preface to Leibniz'* Novissima sinica: *Commentary, Translation, Text* (Honolulu, Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press, 1957). See Mungello, 'How Central to Leibniz's Philosophy was China,' in: Wenchao Li and Hans Poser, eds., *Das Neueste über China*, 57-67, here 61. See also Wenchao Li, *Die christliche China-Mission im 17. Jahrhundert. Verständnis, Unverständnis, Missverständnis. Eine geistesgeschichtliche Studie zum Christentum, Buddhismus und Konfuzianismus*. Studia Leibnitiana Supplementa XXXII (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2000).

40 Ferdinand Verbiest S.J., *Qinding xinli ceyan jilüe* [Short Account of the Astronomic Observations for the New Calendar Prepared upon Imperial Request] (Peking, 1688). Verbiest had published a larger work the year before in Germany: *Astronomia Europæa Svb Imperatore Tartaro Sinico Cám Hy'* [Kang-h'si] [...] (Dillingen: Bencard, 1687).