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The China Mission at Work (Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries):
Outcomes of the *Res Sinicae* Project

Author: Cristina Costa Gomes and João Teles e Cunha, University of Lisbon

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The China Mission at Work (Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries): Outcomes of the *Res Sinicae* Project

CRISTINA COSTA GOMES AND JOÃO TELES E CUNHA¹

I've nothing to report but to say that the [Propaganda Fide] fathers from Sichuan and Yunnan passed through here [Xiangtang, Hunan]. Father [Jean] Basset was very pleased with himself to think he was triumphant over the Society [of Jesus] and said boldly [*atrevidamente*] that God wanted to mortify the Jesuits in this matter because he knew how wrong we were, and that we failed to grasp [the content of] Chinese books. I answered, thanking [him] for the good idea he had of us, and congratulated him on his opinion, as he was able to fathom and understand all Chinese books better than we could. However, I feared that if His Reverence was questioned in this matter as Monsignor Charles Maigrot had been, something similar could happen to him. Believe me that afterward the cleric above never repeated something similar [again].²

Fr. João Duarte's (1671–after 1750) letter serves as an introduction to the mechanics of the Society of Jesus's activity in China in the early modern period. It reveals many of its main characteristics: the jurisdictional and national rivalries between the Padroado Jesuits and the fathers of the Propaganda Fide, contending interpretations of accommodation and the Chinese Rites, and the role played by culture and science in the persistence, evolution, adaptation, and vitality of the Jesuit presence in China from the late sixteenth century. The letter was written at a crossroads for the Catholic missions in China after Carlo Tommaso Maillard de Tournon (1668–1710) had brought an end to the Chinese Rites controversy in 1707, plunging the missionaries into a period of turmoil and uncertainty.³

This was nothing new for the China mission, which had been plagued by periods of turbulence since 1600, including the Ming–Qing dynastic succession (1618–84) and

1. Researcher of the Centre for Classical Studies, School of Arts and Humanities, University of Lisbon; and Professor at the Institute of Asian Studies, Portuguese Catholic University (Lisbon).

2. Letter of Fr. João Duarte to Fr. Tomás Pereira, Xiangtang December 2, 1707. Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (hereafter ARSI), *Jap.Sin.* 171, fol. 163^v.

3. On the Chinese Rites controversy, see Claudia Von Collani, "The Jesuit Rites Controversy," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Jesuits*, ed. Ines G. Županov (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 893–99. On Maillard de Tournon's mission, see Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia, "Imperial China and the Christian Mission," in *A Companion to Early Modern Catholic Global Missions*, ed. Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 360–61.

the so-called Captivity of Canton (1666–71),⁴ which almost led the Jesuits to be eradicated from Chinese soil. The Society of Jesus, however, rose to the challenge and managed to reinvent itself time and again, always in connection with science and technology, acting as an intermediary in the cultural and scientific dialogue between China and Europe.⁵ In a letter to Superior General Giovanni Paolo Oliva (1600–81, in office 1664–81) in 1670, the Portuguese Jesuit Fr. António de Gouveia (1592/94–1677) summarized the situation when he wrote “believe me Your Paternity that we owe to his [Fr. Ferdinand Verbiest’s (1623–88)] Mathematics our sojourn in China.”⁶

The Development of the Peaceful Mission

Science is not usually connected with the notion of Christian mission, the conventional definition of which can be found in Jesus’s words to the apostles: “Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature.”⁷ The Gospel was disseminated in various ways from the first century CE. In the Middle Ages, two stances coexisted. One, the Crusade, which began in 1095, was violent and militaristic in its methods.⁸ The other, more peaceful approach was developed with the emergence of the mendicant orders, the Franciscans (1209) and Dominicans (1216), whose members were used by the papacy to spread the Gospel outside Europe from the thirteenth century, taking advantage of the *Pax Mongolica*. When the first nonviolent mission ended at the beginning of the fifteenth century, it was clear that the mendicant orders’ work had been hampered by a number of shortcomings,⁹ including a deficient missionary methodology, inadequate recruitment and training, lack of knowledge of local languages and culture, and poor financing and logistics.¹⁰

If Catholic missions outside Europe dwindled at the beginning of the fifteenth century, Iberian expansion opened new windows of opportunity for missionary work, first in the Atlantic—Africa and the Americas—and later in Asia. Missionary activity started slowly. It was initially carried out by Franciscans and Dominicans, who worked within a specific jurisdictional framework, the *Padroado*, as the papacy had given rights

4. On the Captivity of Canton (1666–71), see Thierry Meynard, “Missionary Writings during the Canton Exile (1666–1671): Crisis in the Manchu–Christian Relationship,” *Religions* 15, no. 3 (2024): 295. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15030295> (accessed January 31, 2026).

5. See the classic book by David Mungello: *Curious Land: Jesuit Accommodation and the Origins of Sinology* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1989).

6. Letter of Fr. António de Gouveia to Fr. Giovanni Paolo Oliva, Canton, March 6, 1670. ARSI, *Jap.Sin.* 162, fol. 298^v.

7. Mark 16:15.

8. Jonathan Riley-Smith and Susanna A. Throop, *The Crusades: A History* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023). Crusading persisted in Catholic Europe until the seventeenth century; see Géraud Poumarède, *Pour en finir avec la Croisade: Mythes et réalités de la lutte contre les Turcs aux XVI^e et XVII^e siècles* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2009).

9. The causes for its decline were varied and had to do with the demographic effects of the Black Death, which hit the missionaries hard; the Great Schism (1378–1417), which diverted attention and resources to European matters; the conversion of Mongol rulers to Islam (including the Ilkhanids and the Golden Horde); and the Timurid Empire’s expansion, which isolated Latin Christian communities in Asia from Europe, making it impossible for them to survive; see Peter Jackson, *The Mongols and the West* (Harlow: Pearson Longman, 2005), 256–89, here 260.

10. Jackson, *Mongols and the West*, 260–79.

to the Iberian rulers over the religious administration of the newly acquired territories in Africa, the Americas, and Asia.¹¹ While missionary work in the Americas took place under the direct rule of Portugal and Spain, as these were settlement colonies, in Asia the situation was different. Given the characteristics of the Estado da Índia, a ramshackle collection of fortresses and factories from Mozambique to Japan connected by a network of trading routes, of which only a few possessions in India (Goa, Bassein, Daman) had a small hinterland, a shift to a land presence later followed in Sri Lanka and Mozambique. Therefore, only a limited amount of missionary work was carried out under the direct protection of the Portuguese crown, and most of the missionary work took place outside the Estado's jurisdiction from the 1530s.

Peaceful missionary methodology had improved little since the Middle Ages. Franciscans only made small inroads outside Portuguese-held territories in Asia, in India's Fishery Coast, as limited training, numbers, cultural awareness, and linguistic knowledge continued to prevent the European missionaries from working effectively. Traditionalism prevailed. However, this began to change with the Society of Jesus's arrival in India in 1542. In the period that followed, Jesuits gradually became involved in education with the creation of a college in Goa in 1543,¹² the first of many they established in Asia, changing the way missionaries were prepared and educated. Jesuit success had to do with training, with a growing emphasis on cultural awareness and the development of linguistic skills related to the language of the places in which they worked.

The means the Society of Jesus used to spread Christianity in Asia, specifically the printing press, heralded modernity: catechisms, vocabularies, and other religious works were printed in Portuguese, Latin, and Asian languages following the creation of printing works at Goa in 1556,¹³ which was later replicated in Japan and China.¹⁴ But events could negatively impact the mission's regular publishing activity. In China, for instance, Fr. Prospero Intorcetta's (1625–96) printing work demonstrated the impact such events could have on missionary strategies. His translation of the "Doctrine of the Mean" (*Zhongyong*), entitled *Sinarum scientia politico-moralis* (Chinese political-moral science), was printed in Chinese xylographic blocks in Guangzhou in 1667, during the so-called Captivity of Canton; but its Latin translation ended up being printed in movable type at Goa in 1669,¹⁵ as Intorcetta was on his way to Rome as procurator of the vice-province of China. Intorcetta resumed his printing activity in Hangzhou (Zhejiang) after returning to China in 1673, but this was cut short in 1691, when the local viceroy (Zhu Hongzuo?) closed his church, burned his library, and Chinese block-

11. For Portugal, see Roland Jacques, *De Castro Marim à Faífo: Naissance et développement du padroado portugais d'Orient des origines à 1659* (Lisbon: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1999).

12. Sebastião Gonçalves, *Primeira parte da historia dos religiosos da Companhia de Jesus*, ed. Joseph Wicki (Coimbra: Atlântida, 1957), 1:120–32.

13. Charles R. Boxer, "A Tentative Check-List of Indo-Portuguese Imprints," *Arquivos do Centro Cultural Português* 9 (1975): 567–99, here 567.

14. Even if the Franciscans had preceded them by two years, with Fr. João de Vila do Conde supervising the edition in Lisbon of a primer in Tamil (rendered in Latin characters) and Portuguese in 1554; see *Cartilha em Tamul e Português impressa em 1554 por ordem do rei* (Lisbon: Ministério da Educação Nacional, 1970).

15. Boxer, "Tentative Check-List," 595–96.

prints as described by a contemporary witness, the Italian traveler Giovanni Francesco Gemelli Careri (1648–1724).¹⁶ Printing was also used to publicize the Jesuits' activities in Asia to a European audience, from at least 1549 in Portugal,¹⁷ in order to recruit new missionaries, attract patrons and funding, and advertise their success in bringing more Christians into the fold of Rome, particularly when the Protestant Reformation had split the continent into two opposing religious fields and the Catholic Church was on the defensive.¹⁸

Jesuit innovations spread to other fields that had hampered peaceful missionary work in the Middle Ages, especially organization, recruitment, and methodology, but the full development of missionary work continued to be hindered by limitations typical of the early modern age. Though centralized and hierarchical, Jesuit organization had to rely on regional structures and local decision-making given long delays in communications between the superior general in Rome and faraway places like India, China, and Japan, with it usually taking two years or more to complete the full circle of the decision-making process. Although better funded than its medieval forerunners, the Society of Jesus working within the Portuguese Padroado still suffered from cash-flow problems, as the king of Portugal—its patron—paid his annual stipend later than it was due. Revenues from properties in India and Portugal to finance Asian missions also took time to arrive at their destination, triggering conflicts when incomes dwindled in the seventeenth century, as was the case in the dispute between the province of Japan and the vice-province of China over land income in Carcavelos (Portugal).¹⁹ Jesuits also resorted to trade as another source of income, despite this often generating accusations of venality and greed. Procurators in India and Europe sold commodities to obtain money for the missions and offered Asian exotica and rare goods to monarchs, aristocrats, and hierarchs to obtain protection and funds. This can be seen in the activity of Fr. Marcelo Leitão (1679–1755), who ended up procuring in Portugal for the provinces of India and Japan and the vice-province of China.²⁰

Recruitment increased the number of missionaries entering the ranks of the Society of Jesus, even if missions continued to cover vast, thinly spread territories in Asia, like China. In the early modern period, missionaries could be easily obliterated when the course of events took a turn for the worse. Political upheavals, including wars, could lead to the deaths of missionaries working on the ground, the imprisonment of others, or force Jesuits to withdraw to safer places, leaving their missions unattended

16. Giovanni Francesco Gemelli Careri, *Giro del mondo*, part 4, *Contenente le cose più ragguardevoli vedute nella Cina* (Naples: Stamperia di Giuseppe Roselli, 1708), 112–13.

17. José Manuel Garcia, ed., *Cartas dos jesuítas do Oriente e do Brasil 1549–1551* (Lisbon: Biblioteca Nacional, 1993).

18. See the aptly titled work by Mark Greengrass, *Christendom Destroyed: Europe 1517–1648*, Penguin History of Europe 5 (London: Penguin, 2015), 308–86.

19. Isabel Murta Pina, “Álvaro Semedo e António Francisco Cardim,” in *Res Sinicae: Pessoas, papéis e intercâmbios culturais entre a Europa e a China (1600–1800)*, ed. Arnaldo do Espírito Santo et al. (Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 2022), 97–112, here 104–5.

20. Maria João Pereira Coutinho, “‘Homem de prendas e talentos’: Marcelo Leitão (1679–1755), procurador-geral da vice-província da China,” in Espírito Santo et al., *Res Sinicae*, 181–207, here 183.

for years on end, as happened in China during the Ming–Qing dynastic succession.²¹ Jesuit recruitment, on the one hand, was more successful than that of other Catholic religious orders, as the Society was able to select candidates from a wider European pool, making Italians, Spaniards, French, Flemish, and German missionaries a common sight in the Padroado. The cosmopolitanism of this type of recruitment, on the other hand, raised problems with the Padroado’s conservative hierarchy and other religious orders working on the ground, as well as prompting internal tensions between the Portuguese and other nationalities. In 1688, for example, the old Sicilian Jesuit Intorcetta cautioned his Portuguese brethren Fr. Tomás Pereira (1646–1708) to “make a particular reflection not to give matter to talk about you to the [Jesuit] fathers who are in China. Mortify a little bit your *national affection*; and with your usual prudence, do not interfere in matters of importance, be patient, and take the advice of your Elders.”²²

Rivalries had plagued the Padroado almost since its inception, but the situation deteriorated in the seventeenth century, when Rome, given the decline of Portuguese power in Asia and Lisbon’s inability to promote evangelization any further, created the Propaganda Fide (1622) in order to have its own men on the ground. Without the power to fend the Propaganda missionaries off, the Jesuits had to adjust to them, especially in China, a true magnet for missionary labor in the early modern period. Adjusting did not mean accepting, however, as Propaganda missionaries never approved of the Jesuit accommodation in China (known as Chinese Rites) and had a particular dislike of the Portuguese Jesuits.²³ Likewise, the Jesuits barely concealed their animosity for Propaganda missionaries, nor was any love lost between Portuguese and Italians, as seen in Pereira’s marginal annotations to the letter received from Fr. Giovan Francesco Nicolai da Leonessa (1656–1737): “This letter is from the Reverend Father Secretary [Nicolai da Leonessa], which also appears to be a clear mistake and maliciously pretends he aroused suspicion, if Your Reverence wants to take care of it. Praised be the Lord of truth, and [may he] confound the lie.”²⁴

If the situation was already tense between the Padroado Jesuits and the Propaganda missionaries in China, things got worse with the arrival of the French Jesuits belonging to the Missions Étrangères de Paris. Funded by King Louis XIV (1638–1715, r.1643–1715) to emulate and compete with the two existing religious structures—that of Portugal and the one belonging to the papacy—the Missions Étrangères added a

21. Cristina Costa Gomes and João Teles e Cunha, “‘Miseries, tribulations, and calamities’: António de Gouveia as an Eye-Witness to the Seventeenth-Century Eurasian Crisis,” *Ming Qing Yanju* 26 (2022): 113–49, here 118, 137–38.

22. Letter of Fr. Prospero Intorcetta to Fr. Tomás Pereira, Hangzhou, November 20, 1688. ARSI, *Jap.Sin.* 164, fol. 117^v. Our italics.

23. As was the case with Fr. Bernardino della Chiesa (1644–1721), who wrote to his superiors in Rome complaining of a young Jesuit who had been called to Beijing by Fr. Tomás Pereira, under the auspices of the Kangxi Emperor, to work at court only because he was a Portuguese, though he had no knowledge of mathematics. Letter of Fr. Bernardino de la Chiesa to Rome, Canton, November 28, 1691. ARSI, *Jap.Sin.* 165, fols. 133^r–134^v, here fol. 133^v.

24. Letter of Fr. Giovan Francesco Nicolai da Leonessa to Fr. Tomás Pereira, Nanjing, January 8, 1689. Biblioteca da Ajuda (Lisbon), cod. 49-IV-64, fols. 11^v–12^r, here fol. 12^r.

third layer of missionary jurisdiction to China in 1688.²⁵ Until a peaceful *modus vivendi* was reached in the eighteenth century, Portuguese and French Jesuits engaged in a barbed correspondence, with the French Jesuits refusing to acknowledge the Padroado's jurisdiction, as seen in the terse exchange of letters between Fr. Jean de Fontaney (1643–1710) and Pereira in 1693.²⁶

Early modern Jesuit missionaries developed a more comprehensive methodology than their medieval predecessors. Franciscans and Dominicans had baptized people, fulfilling the second part of Jesus's message to the apostles,²⁷ but they did little else to make the new converts comply with Christian teachings and lead a Christian life. Medieval conversions proved to be short-lived as people—particularly the Mongols—soon relapsed into their former religious practices. Cultural and linguistic barriers, as well as a reduced number of missionaries, had compromised lasting conversions, and though this deficiency had been identified, it was never resolved.²⁸ Things had improved little by the sixteenth century, as Fr. Sebastião Gonçalves recognized in his history of the Society of Jesus in Asia (completed in 1614), when he wrote about early Franciscan attempts to evangelize in India. Gonçalves told the story of Fr. Vicente de Lagos (d.1552), whose mission in Cranganore (Kodungallur) among the Saint Thomas Christians (the South group or Tekkumbhagar) simply meant their Latinization and was met with opposition from the converts' parents when he punished his students for not learning with due diligence.²⁹

Cultural and linguistic barriers were as alive in the early 1540s as in the Middle Ages. Significantly, Gonçalves dedicated an entire chapter of his chronicle to “the great contradiction and difficulty that evangelical preachers had in promulgating the law of Christ in India,” where he dealt with the predicaments of converting Muslims, Hindus, and Jews to Christianity, not to mention how the Portuguese behaved in a very unchristian way in Asia.³⁰ On the subject of persuading non-Christians to convert to Christianity, Gonçalves could draw on medieval polemical literature that had been created with conversion in mind, specifically that written by Ramon Llull (c.1232–c.1315), whose works and life were closely connected with evangelization in the late Middle Ages.³¹ At the Council of Vienne (1311–12), Llull was a forerunner of early modern missionary methods in advising that colleges be created to teach Jewish, Arabic, and other Asian languages to increase conversions,³² and he also favored dialectics as a way to

25. Bernardo Mota, “Duas breves trocas de correspondência entre Tomás Pereira e os matemáticos do rei francês nos anos de 1691 e 1693,” in Espírito Santo et al., *Res Sinicae*, 149–79, here 140–50.

26. Letter of Fr. Jean de Fontaney to Fr. Tomás Pereira, Beijing, June 24, 1693. ARSI, *Jap.Sin.* 132, fols. 153^r–153^v, here 153^r.

27. Mark 16:16 “Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved; whoever does not believe will be condemned.”

28. Jackson, *Mongols and the West*, 262–63.

29. Gonçalves, *Historia da Companhia de Jesus*, 1:84–85.

30. Gonçalves, *Historia da Companhia de Jesus*, 1:86–92.

31. Jackson, *Mongols and the West*, 264.

32. Richard A. Fletcher, *La croix et le croissant: Le christianisme et l'islam de Mahomet à la Réforme* (Paris: Éditions Louis Audibert, 2003), 155–56.

discuss, convince, and win debates between Christians and members of other religious congregations.³³

Jesuits capitalized on this medieval experience, and it was their attention to learning languages and cultural knowledge that distinguished them from the other Catholic orders working in Asia from the 1540s. The Jesuits thus created vocabularies, dictionaries, and other linguistic works that were used as teaching tools in Jesuit colleges across Asia. China was no exception. Fr. Manuel Dias S nior (1560–1639) authored the first work for those seeking to learn Chinese, the *Ratio studiorum for Our Brethren Who Will Study the Letters and Language of China*,³⁴ which was completed in 1626.³⁵ Notably, Dias S nior’s plan of studies replicated at a local level, with a similar abbreviated title and for a particular objective (to learn Chinese), what the Society of Jesus had issued centrally for the general use of its colleges worldwide in 1599, the *Ratio atque Institutio Studiorum Societatis Iesu* (Method and system of the studies of the Society of Jesus).

Jesuit missionary methodology also delved into the cultural environment of the places where they were going to work. This led to accommodation (*accommodatio*) with local traditions, of which the best-known examples in Asia were the Malabar Rites in South India and the Chinese Rites in China. Cultural awareness also had other dimensions, such as the translation of works from Asian languages to Latin and European vernacular languages, as well as Jesuit works on Asian civilizations. This effort occupied successive generations of Jesuits. In China, for instance, they discovered the key teachings of Confucius (c.551–c.479 BCE) and started translating his works in the late 1500s, with Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) and later generations of Jesuits adding their own contributions to this enterprise. In the 1660s, for example, Fr. In cio da Costa (1603–66) translated the *Sapientia sinica* (Chinese wisdom), which Intorcetta edited in 1662; other Jesuits were also connected with this collective endeavor, which ultimately culminated with the printing in Paris of the work *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus, sive Scientia sinensis Latine exposita* (Confucius, the Philosopher of China, or Chinese science explained in Latin) in 1687.³⁶

Perhaps nowhere else in Asia was this cultural dialogue more complex than in China, as the Jesuits worked as middlemen in both directions—as disseminators of Chinese works in Europe, and of European science and technology in China. The few Jesuits that had remained confined in Beijing in 1669 were well aware of how dependent their presence in China had become on science and technology. In a letter to their

33. As seen in his *Llibre del gentil i dels tres savis* (Book of the gentile and of the three savants [c.1274]), which influenced the anonymous fourteenth-century work *Corte imperial*. See *Corte imperial*, ed. Adelino de Almeida Calado (Aveiro: Universidade de Aveiro, 2000).

34. Manuel Dias S nior, “Ratio studiorum para os nossos que ham de estudar as letras e lingua da China, feyto no anno de 1624, polo Padre Manoel Dias Senior Visitando esta Vice Provincia conforme a ordem 2^a do Capitulo 4 das Gerais que por elle mandou o Padre Gabriel de Mattos Visitador no anno de 1622,” Biblioteca da Ajuda, cod. 49-V-7, fols. 310^v–315^r.

35. Liam Matthew Brockey, *They Went to the East: The Jesuit Mission to China, 1579–1724* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 256–57. Isabel Murta Pina, “Manuel Dias S nior/Li Manuo,” *Bulletin of Portuguese-Japanese Studies* 15 (2007): 79–94, here 92.

36. Stefano Benedetti, “Sapientia Sinica (1662): Sulla prima traduzione a stampa dei dialoghi confuciani ad opera di Prospero Intorcetta,” *Atti e memoria dell’Arcadia* 3 (2014): 167–208, here 167–75.

confrères in Guangzhou, Gabriel Magalhães (1610–77), Lodovico Buglio (1606–82), and Verbiest asked for replacements in order to prepare for the future and continue enjoying imperial favor and protection:

We ask your Reverences for the following positions. First, one or two priests must be prepared as mathematicians, because Father Ferdinand Verbiest is unique, [...] and two, or one for filing and hammering. Nor should your Reverences despise missionaries who are mechanics, when the husband of the Queen of Heaven and Earth, of the greatest Lady of the world, of the Virgin Mother of God, was a mechanic, and a skilled carpenter; [know your Reverences that] I value more a file and a saw than miters and crowns of pontiffs and emperors; great is my honor, and my glory, for I am God's mechanic, and an artisan of Christ.³⁷

Jesuits also used their presence in China for their scientific endeavors. Fr. Manuel Dias Júnior (1574–1659), for instance, was the author of an astronomic treatise written in Chinese entitled *Tianwenlüe* (Epitome of questions on the heavens) (concluded in 1614 and printed in 1615), making Galileo Galilei's (1564–1642) observations, made two years earlier in Italy, available to a Chinese audience.³⁸ In 1618, Dias Júnior transmitted his observations on the comets that had been seen over East Asia to his correspondents in Europe,³⁹ including Manuel Severim de Faria (1584–1655),⁴⁰ a well-known Portuguese polymath whose discoveries in Asia circulated in the European Republic of Letters.⁴¹ Dias Júnior, like other Jesuits, was also an accomplished writer, with his annual letters providing an ethnographic description of China for readers living in Europe. In 1616, for example, he portrayed with minute precision—probably based on Chinese printed materials and reports of eyewitnesses—the funeral of Empress Dow-

37. Letter of Frs. Gabriel de Magalhães, Lodovico Buglio, and Ferdinand Verbiest to their brethren in Guangzhou, Beijing, January 18, 1669, Biblioteca da Ajuda (Lisbon), cod. 49-IV-62, fols. 532^r–532^v. Given its content, it is likely this passage was written by Magalhães.

38. On the scientific work of Dias Júnior, see Henrique Leitão, “A Periphery between Two Centers? Portugal in the Scientific Route from Europe to China (16th and 17th Centuries),” in *Travels of Learning: A Geography of Science in Europe*, ed. Ana Simões et al. (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2003), 19–46; Leitão, “The Contents and Context of Manuel Dias's *Tianwenlüe*,” in *History of Mathematical Sciences: Portugal and the East Asia, III; The Jesuits, the Padroado, and East Asian Science (1552–1773)*, ed. Luís Saraiva and Catherine Jami (Singapore: World Scientific, 2008), 99–121; Rui Magone, “‘God is in the details’: Manuel Dias' *Tianwenlüe* [Epitome of Questions on the Heavens] and the Scientific Strategies of the Jesuit Mission to China in the Early Seventeenth Century,” in *Empires on the Move: Encounters between China and the West in the Early Modern Era (16th–19th Centuries)*, ed. Dejanirah Couto and F. Lachaud (Paris: EFEO, 2007), 227–45; and Magone, “The Textual Tradition of Manuel Dias's *Tianwenlüe* 天問略,” in *The Jesuits, the Padroado, and East Asian Science (1552–1773)*, ed. Luís Saraiva and Catherine Jami (Singapore: World Scientific, 2008), 123–38.

39. Letter of Fr. Manuel Dias Júnior to Fr. Nuno Mascarenhas, Macau November 14, 1618, ARSI, *Jap.Sin.* 17, fols. 188^r–188^v; here fol. 188^v.

40. Letter of Fr. Manuel Dias Júnior to Fr. Manuel Severim de Faria, Macau, November 18, 1618, Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal (Lisbon), *Fundo Geral*, MS 29, no. 22, fol. 1.

41. Liam Matthew Brockey, “An Imperial Republic: Manuel Severim de Faria Surveys the Globe, 1608–1655,” in *Portuguese Humanism and the Republic of Letters*, ed. Maria Barbara et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 265–85.

ager Xiaoding (1545–1614), which had taken place in the previous year, detailing all its ceremonies and their meaning.⁴²

Early modern missionaries working in the Padroado also had to negotiate their status vis-à-vis the state where their evangelization work took place, especially when these states were situated outside of the Estado da Índia's jurisdiction.⁴³ This often made things difficult, as their association with Portugal meant being identified with Portuguese interests in the area, exposing them to awkward situations. In 1669, for example, when Catholic missionaries faced expulsion from China, the few remaining Jesuits in Beijing were the target of accusations from their rival Yang Guangxian (1597–1669):

Your Majesty [the Kangxi Emperor (1654–1722, r.1661–1722)] cannot use these men because they are dealing with nothing other than rebellion: first they took Japan, and then the Philippines, now in these years they have tried to take over your empire by building, with the silver and the blood of the poor [Chinese], many churches, which are fortresses against Your Majesty, and if I had not discovered it already, their foreseen intentions would have had the intended effect. Their [Christian] law is diabolical, and as such they only profess rebellion, as the One who was crucified on a cross as a rebel.⁴⁴

The accusation backfired on Yang Guangxian,⁴⁵ but this type of allegation (of fomenting rebellion) could damage the Society of Jesus's reputation in China. To make things worse, the Portuguese crown often used Jesuits as diplomats Asia. Some worked as full-fledged diplomatic representatives, like Fr. Manuel Pinheiro (1556–1618), who brokered a peace deal between the Mughals and the Estado da Índia in 1615,⁴⁶ while others acted more indirectly as informal agents of Portuguese interests and could experience unexpected dilemmas. One such case happened in China in 1668, when the Board of Rites summoned Frs. Magalhães, Verbiest, and Buglio to translate a letter of the Dutch governor-general Joan Maetsuycker (1606–78), who wanted to sign a commercial treaty with China (favored by the viceroy of Guangdong). The three Jesuits did their best to prevent the opening of China to the Dutch, instead favoring the reception

42. Annual letter of 1615, Macau, December 30, 1616, ARSI, *Jap.Sin.* 113, fols. 394^r–424^v, here fols. 395^r–400^v.

43. In 1668, Fr. Gabriel de Magalhães made clear that difference in a letter to the Jesuits imprisoned at Guangzhou, adding that due to this situation, he had witnessed several prohibitions being placed on the missionaries' evangelization work in China since 1639; letter of Fr. Gabriel de Magalhães to his brethren in Guangzhou, Beijing, August 15, 1668, Biblioteca da Ajuda (Lisbon), cod. 49-IV-62, fols. 149^r–153^v, here 151^r–151^v.

44. Letter of Frs. Gabriel de Magalhães, Lodovico Buglio, and Ferdinand Verbiest to their brethren in Guangzhou, Beijing, January 18, 1669, Biblioteca da Ajuda (Lisbon), cod. 49-IV-62, fols. 526^r–533^r, here 529^v.

45. See Li Xuetao, "The Opposition of Confucians to Catholicism in the Early Qing Dynasty: Yang Guangxian and Kangxi Calendar Lawsuit (1664–1665)," *Journal of Cultural Interaction in East Asia* 11, no. 1 (May 2021): 25–36.

46. António Bocarro, *Década 13 da Historia da Índia*, ed. Rodrigo José de Lima Felner (Lisbon: Academia Real das Ciências, 1876), 1:356–57, 2:391.

of the Portuguese embassy headed by Manuel de Saldanha, who was waiting at Macau to be received in Beijing.⁴⁷

The privileged status the Jesuits acquired in China after 1671, particularly the close connection between the fathers in Beijing with the Kangxi Emperor, could sometimes prove more of a liability than an asset. In 1688, for example, Fr. Francesco Saverio Filippucci (1632–92) advised the Jesuits at Beijing not to act as intermediaries in the diplomatic negotiations with the Siamese embassy unless asked to do so by the Kangxi Emperor in order to avoid running the risk of ruining the Society's relationship with both countries.⁴⁸ Foreigners, and especially the Propaganda Fide missionaries in China and their superiors in Rome, started seeing the Jesuits as the power behind the throne with the ability to do or undo diplomatic relations. This led Filippucci to forbid his brethren in Beijing in 1688 to favor or sabotage foreign embassies from establishing diplomatic relations with China.⁴⁹ However, this was ultimately to no avail, as that suspicion was still alive at the beginning of the eighteenth century, damaging the reputation of the Society of Jesus globally.

Res Sinicae

One of the main objectives of the project “*Res Sinicae*: A Database of Latin and Portuguese Sources on China (16th–18th Century); Survey, Edition, Translation and Studies” (PTDC/LLT-OUT /31941/2017) is to highlight the relevance of Portuguese sources to the study of the China mission. This is attested by the preceding pages, as most of the documents used and the studies cited were edited and produced by the project's team from 2018. The project aims to draw attention to the Portuguese Jesuits' role as cultural and scientific brokers between Europe and China and vice-versa. Portuguese Jesuits have been sidelined by other more familiar Italian, Flemish, French, or German names, despite the important role they played in the cultural, scientific, and artistic exchanges between China and Europe in the early modern age. As most of the materials written by them, either in Portuguese or in Latin, remain in manuscript form in archives and libraries scattered across the world, scholars have difficulty evaluating their historical importance. Making these materials available to researchers through a digital platform will hopefully change the perception of their cultural, scientific, technological, and artistic relevance.⁵⁰

Res Sinicae, however, is not a nationally biased research project, as it tries to weigh the real contribution of the Portuguese Jesuits to the field of proto-Sinology and to assess it by taking into consideration their participation in multiple strategies: of the Padroado, of the Society of Jesus, of Ming and Qing China, and so on. As mentioned previously, this involved various jurisdictions and led to frequent conflicts, often inside

47. Letter of Frs. Gabriel de Magalhães, Lodovico Buglio, and Ferdinand Verbiest to their brethren in Guangzhou, Beijing, January 18, 1669, Biblioteca da Ajuda (Lisbon), cod. 49-IV-62, fols. 526^r–533^r, here 532^v–533^r.

48. Letter of Fr. Francesco Saverio Filippucci to Fr. Tomás Pereira, Guangzhou, March 30, 1688, Biblioteca da Ajuda (Lisbon), cod. 49-V-20, fols. 99^r–100^r, here 99^v–100^r.

49. Letter of Fr. Francesco Saverio Filippucci to Fr. Tomás Pereira, Guangzhou, September 16, 1688, Biblioteca da Ajuda (Lisbon), cod. 49-IV-63, fols. 367^v–370^r, here 369^r.

50. See <https://www.ressinicae.lettras.ulisboa.pt/?lang=en> (accessed December 3, 2025).

the same institution and within the Society of Jesus itself, and among the Portuguese Jesuits themselves. During the first half of the seventeenth century, for instance, the province of Japan and the vice-province of China engaged in a bitter dispute as the former tried to become an autonomous province. This fight was personified by Frs. Álvaro Semedo (1585–1658) and António Francisco Cardim (1596–1659). The controversy took place on two continents, first in Asia and then in Europe, with both men defending their jurisdictional positions in a flurry of printing activity. While Semedo expounded the growing importance of China for the Jesuits in the well-known work *Imperio de la China y cultura evangelica en el, por los religiosos[os] de la Compañia de Iesvs* (Empire of China and evangelical labor in it, by the fathers of the Society of Jesus) (printed in Madrid in 1642),⁵¹ Cardim defended the privileges of the Japanese province based on precedence and the persecutions and martyrdoms that had taken place in the Japanese archipelago in the celebrated book *Fasciculus e Iapponicis floribus, suo adhuc madentibus sanguine* (A bundle of Japanese flowers, still soaked in their own blood) (published in Rome in 1646).

These works became bestsellers in Europe, being published and translated in Portugal, Spain, Italy, France, Flanders, and England. This was the last burst of European printing activity with materials of Portuguese origin in East Asia. Semedo's *Imperio de la China* was the most influential book on China in Europe until Martino Martini's (1614–61) works took its place in the mid-1650s.⁵² Though the Portuguese Jesuits continued to produce materials in China up until their expulsion from Portugal and its empire in 1759, these never made it into the European printing presses as in the past, or even into those of their own country.⁵³ Thus the mid-seventeenth century is a dividing line regarding the printing of Portuguese originals about China in Europe. In the period thereafter, materials written first by Italians and then by French Jesuits contributed to forging the idea Europe had of China until the late eighteenth century. The known exception, Magalhães's *Doze excellencias da China* (Twelve excellencies of China), partly proves this point, since it was translated, reworked, and printed in French in 1688,⁵⁴ confirming the erosion of the Iberian channels of information in Europe.

Portuguese materials, however, continued to be produced to train new Jesuit missionaries in the language and the cultural background of China. Around 1700, for example, Fr. José Monteiro (1646–1738) authored the *Vera et unica praxis breviter ediscendi, ac expeditissime loquendi sinicum idioma Suapte natura adeo difficile* (True and only practice of learning in a short time and to speak the Chinese language expeditiously,

51. Isabel Murta Pina, "Representations of China in Álvaro Semedo's Work," in *History of Mathematical Sciences: Portugal and East Asia V; Visual and Textual Representations in Exchange between Europe and East Asia*, ed. Luís Saraiva and Catherine Jami (Singapore: World Scientific, 2018), 31–53.

52. Isabel Murta Pina, "Escrever sobre a China no século XVII: Álvaro Semedo e a obra *Imperio de la China*," in *Diálogos interculturais Portugal–China* (Aveiro: Universidade de Aveiro/Instituto Confúcio, 2018), 99–119.

53. Fr. Semedo is the exception, as the Castilian version of his *Imperio de la China y cultura evangelica en el, por los religiosos de la Compañia de JESUS* was printed in Lisbon by the Oficina Herreriana in 1731.

54. Gabriel de Magalhães, *Nouvelle relation de la Chine, contenant la description des particularitez les plus considérables de ce grand Empire* (Paris: Chez Claude Barbin, 1688). An English translation from the French appeared that same year.

by its very nature so difficult),⁵⁵ testifying to the Portuguese Jesuits' enduring effort to prepare missionaries to work in China by learning the language. Extant Chinese–Latin or Chinese–Latin–Portuguese manuscript dictionaries also attest to this effort, even if their Jesuit authors reused existing works created since the seventeenth century. Portugal's proto-Sinology had a restricted audience from its beginning—the missionaries themselves—and, as with other branches of Orientalism closely connected with the religious orders like Indology, the teaching of Chinese (or any other Asian language for that matter) was never institutionalized in a Portuguese university.⁵⁶

On the one hand, proto-Sinology had a limited influence and catered to a limited audience in Portugal and its empire. On the other hand, printing in Portugal was always expensive, and the small market for printed works in Portuguese made it difficult to absorb the production outside the country. This had dramatic consequences for the writings of the Portuguese Jesuits working in China, and no figure was more tragic than Fr. António de Gouveia (1592–1677). A prolific writer,⁵⁷ Gouveia authored two works that represented the pinnacle of Portuguese knowledge of China: *Asia extrema* (Farthest Asia) (concluded in 1640 and updated in 1649) and *Monarchia da China* (Monarchy of China) (completed in 1654). The two works were conceived as a diptych. While *Asia extrema* dealt with the evangelization of China, the *Monarchia da China* was the first work authored by a European that covered China's history from its mythical beginnings up to the Qing dynasty, with Gouveia using Chinese materials in his writings. Unfortunately, neither of the two works was ever printed, despite several attempts made to do so, though both manuscripts were known, read, and circulated among Gouveia's fellow Jesuits of the China mission. If *Asia extrema* was eventually published in the twentieth century,⁵⁸ Gouveia's *opus magnum*—*Monarchia da China*⁵⁹—remains unpublished to this day, notwithstanding efforts to print it in the 1680s and its continued cultural relevance in the present day. In the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Portugal's printers preferred to translate and print books on China already printed in Europe and then to publish new texts written in Portuguese by their countrymen working in the Padroado. Commercial motives trumped originality.

European printing activity on the China mission, however, started impacting negatively on the Jesuits, damaging their reputation from the late seventeenth century. The most damaging book was, perhaps, written by the Spanish Dominican Fr. Domingo Fernández de Navarrete (1618–89). Fernández de Navarrete's *Tratados históricos*

55. Fr. José Monteiro, *Vera et unica praxis breviter ediscendi*, Library of the Academia de Ciências (Lisbon), *Série Azul*, cod. 421.

56. João Teles e Cunha, "'Dares e tomares' no Orientalismo português," *Estudos orientais: Volume comemorativo do primeiro decénio do Instituto de Estudos Orientais (2002–2012)*, ed. Eva-Maria von Kemnitz (Lisbon: Universidade Católica Editora, 2012), 135–63, here 140–49.

57. Cristina Costa Gomes and João Teles e Cunha, "O corpus epistolar de António de Gouveia," in Espírito Santo et al., *Res Sinicae*, 115–16.

58. António de Gouveia, *Asia Extrema: Entra nella a Fé, promulga-se a Ley de Deos pelos padres da Companhia de Jesus*, ed. Horácio P. Araújo, 4 vols. (Lisbon: Fundação Oriente, 1995–2018).

59. Cristina Costa Gomes, "Writing on Chinese History: António de Gouveia and the Monarchia da China (1654)," *Orientis aura* 3 (2018): 17–32.

(Historical treatises [1676])⁶⁰ was a blow for the Society of Jesus and opened a debate that weakened its position in China as well as in the Roman curia. The nucleus of the project related to Gouveia's documentation reveals in some detail the evolution of this toxic relationship in the Captivity of Canton (1666–71), with Fernández de Navarrete debating several issues connected with the Society's accommodation in China and even inventing a theological assembly between missionaries of the Propaganda Fide and Jesuits on the subject. Fernández de Navarrete also delved into subjects dear to Gouveia, namely world chronology, as the Portuguese Jesuit had tried to integrate China's historical timeline with the biblical tradition.⁶¹ Gouveia never trusted Fernández de Navarrete, and when he slipped away to Macau without warning in 1670, the Portuguese Jesuit cautioned Superior General Oliva that "he will give Your Paternity a lot of trouble, as he takes his papers, presumptuousness, and ruse with him."⁶²

Gouveia hoped Jesuit reasoning and documentation would soon undo all of Fernández de Navarrete's arguments in Rome, but he was mistaken. The debate continued until the eighteenth century, as seen in a xylographic pamphlet of their correspondence printed at Beijing in 1704, a copy of which would end up in the library of Charles Ralph Boxer in the twentieth century,⁶³ attesting to this long-standing confrontation between the Jesuits and the Propaganda Fide missionaries. The date of its publication (1704) coincided with the eve of the arrival of Monsignor Maillard de Tournon in China, as the Jesuits were still defending their position from the attacks made by the Propaganda Fide in Asia and Rome to no avail, as the final decision suppressing the Chinese Rites had already been taken in Europe.

But accommodation, as revealed by the *Res Sinicae* project, had different flavors, as even the Propaganda Fide missionaries were prone to make use of it when it suited them. It is known that the Jesuits had been providing help to the Propaganda missionaries in China since the 1670s following orders received from Rome to appease minds and to smooth relations locally and in Europe. This was done despite the resistance shown by some Jesuits, as was the case with Fr. Tomás Pereira. Given his position in the court of the Kangxi Emperor, Pereira was pestered with endless requests asking for letters of introduction to local magistrates and seeking the protection of Qing officials for Propaganda Fide missionaries. The fifty-plus letters addressed to Pereira include correspondence exchanged with some of the Propaganda missionaries that the Portu-

60. Fr. Domingo Fernández de Navarrete, *Tratados historicos, politicos, ethicos, y religiosos de la Monarchia de China: Descripcion breue de aquel imperio, y exemplos raros de emperadores, y magistrados del; Con narracion difusa de varios sucessos, y cosas singulares de otros reynos, y diferentes nauvegaciones* (Madrid: En la Imprenta Real por Iuan Garcia Infançon: A costa de Florian Anisson, 1678).

61. Gomes and Teles e Cunha, "O corpus epistolar," 125, 128–34; Cristina Costa Gomes and João Teles e Cunha, "The Age of the World: António de Gouveia and the Debate around Chronologies in Early Modern Asia," *Res Sinicae II: Missions, Missionaries, and Their Materials (16th–18th Centuries)*, ed. Arnaldo do Espírito Santo et al. (Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 2026).

62. Letter of Fr. António de Gouveia to Fr. Giovanni Paolo Oliva, Canton, March 6, 1670. ARSI, *Jap.Sin.* 162, fol. 297^v.

63. "Exemplar epistolae R.F. Fr. Dominici Nauarrete sacri Ordinis Praedicatorum data Cantone 29 Septembris anni 1669: Ad R.P. Antonium de Govuea Societatis Iesu; V. Prouincialem V. Prouinciae Sinensis; Juxta originale quod asseruiatur Pekini in Collegio eiusdem," kept in Lilly Library (Bloomington, IN), former C. R. Boxer Library.

guese Jesuit thought were the most dangerous adversaries of the Society of Jesus in China: Fathers Nicolai da Leonessa and Bernardino della Chiesa (1644–1721).

Indeed, paradoxically, despite criticizing the compromise made by the Jesuits in China, the Propaganda Fide missionaries even created their own version of accommodation. These letters also reveal that a *modus vivendi* was established between the Jesuits and the Propaganda Fide Franciscans and Dominicans evangelizing in China. Relations seem to have been easier with certain nationalities than with others, with Pereira preferring to deal with Spaniards and with the Chinese bishop Fr. Gregorio López/Luo Wenzao (1617–91) than with Italian missionaries. The correspondence also sheds light on the daily routine of missionaries in China, particularly their relationship with local magistrates, and the tensions and hostility involved in Christians' acceptance by Chinese society. In a letter dated 1690, for example, Fr. Pedro de la Piñuela (1650–1704) reported the havoc caused in Nan'an (Jiangxi) when the wall of the local church fell during a storm, damaging neighboring houses and causing an uproar in the vicinity. This opportunity was seized by the neighbors and Nan'an's magistrates to make life difficult for Fr. Piñuela. The letter details a Kafkaesque bureaucracy at work, with all the officials and jurisdictions involved in this affair, which included the Tianshu (典術), who had jurisdiction over fortune-tellers, street performers, women dentists, midwives, and so on (showing the Qing officials' contempt for missionaries). As everyone tried to obtain a hefty indemnity from Piñuela, the Spanish Franciscan hoped Pereira could assist him in settling things peacefully.⁶⁴

Pereira grudgingly satisfied the requests made by the Propaganda missionaries in order to please his superiors in China and Rome, but the letters addressed to him asking for help ended after 1691. There is no evidence to explain this outcome, but it is possible that the Propaganda missionaries found alternative people to curry favor at the imperial court. Instead of the Padroado Jesuits, the Propaganda fathers probably asked for the assistance of other Jesuits, like the French fathers of the Missions Étrangères de Fontaney and Claude Visdelou (1656–1737). These individuals were keen to please the Propaganda missionaries and display their goodwill while spurning an adversary like Pereira.

Correspondence like this shows the difficulties felt by the China mission in carrying out missionary work. Evangelization often led to threats of expulsion from China during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries until Catholic missionaries were restricted to living in Beijing after 1724. Letters and other documents also reveal that missionaries and Chinese Catholics were formally and informally persecuted, but it is difficult to establish precisely how many. Reliable figures are hard to come by, including the real number of Chinese converts and if conversion was an enduring phenomenon. Jesuit sources like the annual letters tend to embellish conversions and inflate their figures by describing massive baptisms due to some kind of miraculous event.

64. Letter of Fr. Pedro de la Piñuela to Fr. Tomás Pereira, Ganzhou, June 28, 1690. ARSI, *Jap.Sin.* 164, fols. 261^r–262^v.

Two nuclei of the project reflect this reality, those with the documentation authored by Fathers Manuel Dias Júnior⁶⁵ and Francisco Furtado (1587–1653).⁶⁶ The annual letters, as well as other Jesuit documentation, have several textual layers that must be sifted to disclose a more complex reality. On the one hand, the annual letters were written for an internal audience: to inspire Jesuits to emulate “great” missionaries to perform glorious deeds (even at the risk of their life), and to inform their superiors in Europe of the work they had achieved in China. On the other hand, the annual letters had a clear propagandistic objective in mind, namely to reach a Western public (not Chinese or Asian) and to disseminate the Society of Jesus’s work in China with the aim of recruiting more patrons, funds, and novices. This was a genre in itself, one the Jesuits thoroughly cultivated over a long period. Fathers Dias Júnior, Furtado, and Gouveia—who was also known for having written the annual letters of Fujian, the province where he worked in China⁶⁷—were among the Jesuits who wrote annual letters in elegant prose, either in Portuguese or in Latin. It was usual to write two versions, as was the case with the annual letter of 1616 authored by Dias Júnior,⁶⁸ as Latin was easier to translate in Europe than letters composed in Portuguese given Latin’s continued status as the European language of culture and science until 1800. Annual letters coming from East Asia written in Portuguese were sometimes translated to other European languages as late as 1646, and some of these were printed in Flanders, France, and Italy.⁶⁹ However, as established by the *Res Sinicae* project, the annual letters waned in number and quality after 1650, with this Jesuit genre subsequently declining in relevance.

Besides the well-known connection between China and Europe, the project discovered a flow of information on Chinese matters linking China with New Spain via the Philippines, putting the Padroado Jesuits in contact with missionaries in Manila and Mexico. Probably opened during the period of the Hispanic Monarchy (1580–1640), this new circuit survived the Portuguese Restoration in 1640, as shown in Gouveia’s correspondence with Fr. Francisco Colín (1592–1660) and Fr. Rafael Pereira. The three Jesuits had common intellectual interests and authored works on evangelization in

65. Paulo de Assunção (transcription), “Manuel Dias Júnior (1574–1659): Corpo epistolar,” Isabel Murta Pina and João Teles e Cunha (paleographic review), Arnaldo do Espírito Santo (Latin translation), https://www.ressinicae.letras.ulisboa.pt/_files/ugd/7f2e0c_f1a83fe823324883bd2b508d5ef10bff.pdf (accessed December 3, 2025).

66. Ana Cristina Pereira (transcription), “Francisco Furtado (1587–1653): Corpo epistolar,” Cristina Costa Gomes (paleographic review), https://www.ressinicae.letras.ulisboa.pt/_files/ugd/7f2e0c_32fc66900eb64183a4828e345d4c310a.pdf (accessed December 3, 2025).

67. António de Gouveia, *Cartas ânuas da China (1636, 1643, 1649)*, ed. Horácio P. Araújo (Lisbon: Instituto Português do Oriente/Biblioteca Nacional de Portugal, 1998), 26–27.

68. Maria Cristina Pimentel, “Docere, mouere et delectare: The Use of Latin in the Annual Letters Sent from China: Father Manuel Dias Júnior and the Letter of December 30, 1616,” in *New Perspectives in Global Latin*, ed. Elisa Della Calce, Paola Mocella, and Simone Mollea, (Leiden: De Gruyter, 2025), 153–64.

69. As was the case with the annual letter on Japan written by António Francisco Cardim, which was translated into Italian by Fr. Giacomo Diaceti, entitled *Relatione de la provincia del Giappone* (Rome: Nella Stamperia di Andrea Fei, 1645). This book was then translated into French by Fr. François Lahier and printed in Flanders with the title *Relation de la province du Japon* (Tournai: Imprimerie de Adrien Quinque, 1645). Cardim’s letter was translated from the Portuguese to French with other Jesuit materials by Fr. Jacques de Machault in a book intitled *Relation de ce qui s’est passé depuis quelques siècles, jusques à l’an 1644, au Japon, à la Cochinchine, au Malabar, en l’isle de Ceilan et en plusieurs autres isles et royaumes de l’Orient compris sous le nom des provinces du Japon et du Malabar, de la Compagnie de Jésus* (Paris: M. et J. Hénault, 1645–46).

China and the Philippines, showing the forging of cultural exchanges between the two shores of the Pacific.⁷⁰

Another of the project's discoveries was the relative vitality shown by the Padroado Jesuits in the eighteenth century, a period traditionally associated with stagnation and decline. On the one hand, the Portuguese Jesuits became part of a large endeavor ordered by the Academia Real da História Portuguesa (Royal Academy of Portuguese History) in the 1720s to copy all the documents kept in Macau and in the China mission in order to produce a comprehensive religious history of Portugal and its empire. On the other hand, the Portuguese Jesuit assistancy was exhausted in the eighteenth century, with its actions becoming more reactive than proactive. To ensure its survival, the logic of the China mission had evolved from conversion to dealing with science, art, and technology from 1671. This shift revealed the Padroado Jesuits' dependence on external factors to continue working in China, which, ultimately, escaped their control and influence. A nucleus of the *Res Sinicae* project dealing with the Jesuits in Beijing discloses that astronomy, cartography, and mathematics were crucial for the continuity of the Padroado in China, as seen in the documents written by Fathers Domingos Pinheiro (1688–1748),⁷¹ André Pereira (1689–1743),⁷² and Félix da Rocha (1713–81).⁷³ Rocha even outlasted the Society of Jesus's expulsion from Portugal (1759), since he worked for the Qianlong Emperor (1735–96) until his death in 1781.

Epilogue

The fatal blow to the Padroado Jesuits came from the king of Portugal, José I (1714–77, r.1750–77), and not from Rome or Beijing, showing how dispensable they had become to their patron in the 1750s. They had tried to please Portuguese monarchs and aristocrats and the curia with Chinese exotica and commodities since the sixteenth century, as seen in Procurator Fr. Marcelo Leitão's gift to the queen of Portugal, Maria Anna of

70. Gomes and Teles e Cunha, "O *corpus* epistolar," 125–27.

71. Maria João Pereira Coutinho (transcription), "Domingos Pinheiro (1688–1748)," Cristina Costa Gomes (paleographic review), Arnaldo do Espírito Santo (Latin translation), https://www.ressinicae.lettras.ulisboa.pt/_files/ugd/7f2e0c_e0f51ba5104143a78f016b226710a9ad.pdf (accessed December 3, 2025).

72. Noël Golvers (transcription), "André Pereira (1689–1733)," Arnaldo do Espírito Santo (Latin translation), https://www.ressinicae.lettras.ulisboa.pt/_files/ugd/7f2e0c_ebabcab8542a4277bdfdaa5ffd37879c.pdf (accessed December 3, 2025).

73. Maria João Pereira Coutinho (transcription), "Félix da Rocha (1713–1781)," Cristina Costa Gomes (paleographic review), Arnaldo do Espírito Santo (Latin translation), https://www.ressinicae.lettras.ulisboa.pt/_files/ugd/7f2e0c_cf1ca57c756d4a11904d5c6afc383d48.pdf (accessed December 3, 2025).

Habsburg (1683–1754), of a set of porcelain teacups with her coat of arms.⁷⁴ But the Jesuits ultimately failed to maintain the royal favor.

The procurators is another nucleus of the project relevant to understand the nit-y-gritty of the China mission and how it managed to survive for so long. This office provided the basic and luxury products needed for missionary work in China. The procurators distributed presents to the lay and ecclesiastic elite in Europe and catered for scientific and musical instruments, art, and books, as well as recruiting Jesuits trained as astronomers, mathematicians, mechanics, and painters in the European colleges. Leitão, for example, tried to find in Lisbon a successor to the aging Brother Giuseppe Castiglione (1688–1766).⁷⁵ Cultural, scientific, and artistic procurement came at a price, as some Jesuits refused to become or renounced the office of procurator given the accusations leveled against them for corruption, robbery, or embezzlement. Fr. Francesco Folleri (1699–1777), for example, accused someone of mishandling wine caskets destined for Macau that vanished without a trace while in transit through Goa.⁷⁶

To conclude, let us return to the crucible year of 1707, when the very notion of mission in China was at stake. In the record of those turbulent days kept by Fr. Kilian Stumpf (1655–1720) in the pages of *Acta Pekinensia*, there are echoes of a world turned upside-down as described in a letter addressed to Tomás Pereira by the Franciscan vice-commissioner of Canton Fr. Jaime Tarin (1642/44–1719):

We appealed to the patriarch [Maillard de Tournon], and he listened with displeasure, rejecting our appeal for being frivolous and full of innumerable flaws, as he did to all others who appealed to him. [...] His Lordship takes things this way, without compassion for this poor [China] mission, and banishment of its ministers, putting in motion means for its end, without providing a way for its preservation.⁷⁷

It is doubtful the two men shared the same notion of mission, but their China mission was about to change once again.

74. Carta de António Ferreira para Marcelo Leitão, Goa, February 5, 1740, ANTT, *Jesuítas*, MS 98, no. 26 and 27 (copy); published by Maria João Pereira Coutinho, “Marcelo Leitão (1679–1755),” in *Res Sinicae: Enciclopédia de autores*, ed. Arnaldo do Espírito Santo, Cristina Costa Gomes, and Isabel Murta Pina (Lisbon: Centro de Estudos Clássicos da Faculdade de Letras da Universidade de Lisboa, 2021), <https://www.ressinicae.letras.ulisboa.pt/marcelo-leitao-1680-1755> (accessed January 31, 2026). For further information see Maria João Pereira Coutinho, “Hidden Treasures: Papers of the Last Two Mission Procurators-General of the Vice-Province of China in Portugal,” in Espírito Santo et al., *Res Sinicae II*.

75. Letter of Fr. António Gomes to Fr. Marcelo Leitão, Beijing, November 11, 1750, ANTT, *Jesuítas*, MS 98, no. 37. See Maria João Pereira Coutinho, “Hidden Treasures,” in Espírito Santo, *Res Sinicae II*.

76. Letter of Fr. Francesco Folleri to Fr. Marcelo Leitão, Macau, December 12, 1750, ANTT, *Jesuítas*, MS 98, no. 45 (miscellaneous). Published by Maria João Pereira Coutinho, “Marcelo Leitão (1679–1755): Correspondência activa e passiva,” Cristina Costa Gomes (paleographic review), Arnaldo do Espírito Santo (Latin translation), <https://www.ressinicae.letras.ulisboa.pt/correspondencia-passiva> (accessed December 3, 2025). See also Coutinho, “Homem de prendas e talentos,” 203.

77. Letter of Fr. Jaime Tarin to Fr. Tomás Pereira, Guangzhou, October 11, 1708, ARSI, *Jap.Sin.* 138, fol. 1051.