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Two Sources for the Early Jesuit Mission to China: Matteo Ricci's *Commentari* and Michele Ruggieri's *Relazione*

The early days of the Jesuit mission to China could be known in early modern Europe through three major sources composed by three members of its order: Michele Ruggieri's *Relazione*, composed in vulgar in the 1590s and remaining unpublished, Matteo Ricci's *Commentari*, completed in Italian around 1609, and the translation into Latin of the latter by Nicholas Trigault dated 1615.

Composed between 1598 and 1599,¹ Michele Ruggieri's *Relazione del successo della missione della Cina* is today preserved in the Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu,² shelf mark Jap. Sin. 101/I.³ Responding to a request from the then Superior General of the Jesuit Order, Claudio Acquaviva, the document chronicles Ruggieri's travels across China from 1577 to 1591. The *Relazione* details Ruggieri's early attempts to gain entry into China and to establish a lasting Jesuit presence. It offers a detailed account of his initial experiences and endeavors, preceding the arrival of Matteo Ricci.⁴ Notably, it provides the most comprehensive account of his journey with the Jesuit father Antonio de Almeida to the city of Shaoxing in the southeastern province of Zhejiang commenced on November 20, 1585.⁵ Ruggieri's text also contains a valuable account of his journey to Rome, undertaken at Alessandro Valignano's behest, in November 1588, to advocate for a papal embassy to China. While Ruggieri was expecting to return to China before long, the travel to Rome would mark the end of his Chinese mission, as he would never be allowed by his superiors in the Society to return to the country to which he wanted to dedicate his life. The *Relazione* concludes with various episodes that occurred in both China and Europe, as experienced by its author.

1 Gisoni (1999) 152.

2 From here on shortened as ARSI.

3 The manuscript was first discovered and attributed to Ruggieri by Tacchi-Venturi (1911) II 395.

4 Ruggieri (1598–1599) 29v (28v).

5 Ruggieri (1598–1599) 40r (39r). An in-depth study on Ruggieri's travel is presented in Song Liming 宋黎明 (2016).

Note: Notwithstanding the fact that this essay derives from a close collaboration between the two authors, pages 91–97 can be attributed to Francesco Borghesi, pages 98–105 to Valentina Bottanelli. Both authors are thankful to Daniel Canaris, who read a draft version and provided very valuable suggestions.

Completed in 1609, Matteo Ricci's diaries were brought back to Rome by Nicholas Trigault after Ricci's death in 1610.⁶ The manuscript, titled *Della entrata della Compagnia di Giesù e Christianità nella China*, is preserved at the ARSI, shelf mark Jap. Sin. 106a. It consists of four fascicles totalling 132 folia on Chinese paper, written in Italian, as well as a fifth fascicle, in Latin, written by a different hand. It can be broadly categorized into two distinct sections: 1) the first book is an introduction to the civilization of the Chinese empire; 2) the second to fifth books feature a chronological history of the Jesuit mission in China, spanning from its origins to 1609–1611. Within the second book, the first chapter details the mission's history from its nascent stages in 1552 through Ricci's arrival in Macao in 1582.⁷ The second half of this chapter up to the eleventh chapter overlaps with Ruggieri's *Relatione*. The third, fourth and fifth books then proceed to narrate the events of the mission until September 8, 1609. The ARSI manuscript also contains further additions by different hands, in Portuguese and in Latin, covering events up to 1611. These additions are located in the fourth book (part of Chapter 17 and Chapter 18) and the fifth book (Chapters 18 to 22).⁸ The manuscript was initially published in 1911 by Pietro Tacchi Venturi as *Commentari della Cina*,⁹ and later, in 1942, by Pasquale D'Elia in his *Fonti Ricciane*.¹⁰

Based on Ricci's diaries, revised and translated from Italian into Latin, Nicholas Trigault published in 1615 the *De Christiana Expeditione apud Sinas*, which soon became the undisputed source on the early years of the Jesuit Mission to China.¹¹ The editorial success of Trigault's work, along with its numerous translations, facilitated the rapid dissemination of its contents, establishing it as the primary reference and a landmark in the historiography of the mission. In the ten years following its first publication, Trigault's *De Christiana expeditione* was made available in six languages. The 1615 Latin edition was followed by four further editions in the 17th century, published in 1616, 1617, 1623, and 1684. Additionally, three French editions were produced in 1616 and 1617, translated by Riquebourg Trigault and David Floric, and in 1618, along with one each in German (Augsburg, 1617), Castilian (Seville, 1621) and Italian, by Antonio Sozzini (Naples, 1622).¹² Extracts from Trigault's text were subsequently translated into English

6 Ricci's *Commentari* will be referred to as "diaries" from here on.

7 Titled *Di come si diede principio all'impresa della entrata de' nostri nella Cina*, Ricci (2010) 109–116.

8 For the attribution of these additions, please refer to D'Elia (1942) and Ricci (2010).

9 Tacchi Venturi (1911).

10 D'Elia (1942).

11 Trigault (1615).

12 Trigault (1616a), (1616b), (1617a), (1617b), (1617c), (1618), (1621), (1622), (1623), and (1684).

and incorporated into Purchas' *Haklvytvs posthumus* (1625).¹³ The popularity of Trigault's text quickly overshadowed earlier accounts of the Jesuit mission to China, which lacked a similar editorial fortune. These included, among others, the work by Luis de Guzman, written in Spanish and published as early as 1601,¹⁴ the history of the Asian missions, composed in French by Pierre du Jarric (1608–1614),¹⁵ as well as the letter by Valentin Carvalho, rector of the Jesuit college in Macao, to the Superior General Acquaviva, dated 1601 and published two years later.¹⁶

Among the early Latin texts that include significant information about China is also Giovanni Pietro Maffei's *Historiarum Indicarum Libri XVI* (1589). While Maffei's work primarily focuses on ethnographic observations, it remains relevant due to the author's correspondence with missionaries in Asia, including Matteo Ricci himself, and for similarities it shares with the initial sections of Ricci and Trigault's *De Christiana Expeditione*.¹⁷

The past century has witnessed a surge in historical research on the Jesuit mission in China, fuelled by a renewed focus on primary sources. This trend has been driven by the publication of crucial materials like Ricci's letters and diaries, sparking further interest in archival exploration. The rediscovery of Ricci's original diaries in the early-20th century marked a pivotal moment. These diaries provided a fresh perspective, acting as a counterpoint to Trigault's influential account. Notably, while Trigault's *De Christiana Expeditione* drew upon Ricci's diaries, it wasn't always a faithful translation. Trigault revised and rephrased certain topics, particularly sensitive ones like those regarding Confucian rites, foreshadowing later controversies surrounding these practices.¹⁸ Despite these differences between Ricci's diaries and Trigault's *De Christiana Expeditione*, both offer a cohesive narrative of the early mission.

The rediscovery of Michele Ruggieri's *Relatione* marks another turning point in Jesuit missionary history. Prior to this, Trigault's *De Christiana Expeditione* and, later on, Ricci's diaries served as the primary — and often sole — sources for reconstructing the early years of the Jesuit China mission, including details of Ruggieri's biographical trajectory during this period. This is also the case for Pfis-

¹³ Purchas (1625). Specifically, the excerpts are found in the second book, fifth chapter, together with the account of the Jesuit missions in Japan and Cochinchina.

¹⁴ de Guzman (1601), vol. I, Book 4.

¹⁵ du Jarric (1608–1614).

¹⁶ Carvalho (1603).

¹⁷ See in this volume Fregosi, Section 4: *La Scrittura in Cina* pp. 79–84.

¹⁸ Gernet (2003) 67.

ter's *Notices biographiques et bibliographiques*, widely recognized as the most comprehensive biographical and bibliographical resource on this mission.¹⁹

Based on Ricci's diaries and Trigault's *De christiana expeditione*, Ruggieri was often portrayed as a mere precursor to Ricci, relegated to a secondary position.²⁰ However, the *Relatione* offers a firsthand perspective, allowing for a re-evaluation of Ruggieri's point of view, which has been largely neglected thus far. More recent scholarship, empowered by this and other unearthed writings such as Ruggieri's Chinese poems and translations of the Confucian classics, now recognizes his linguistic expertise and cultural competence as essential to understanding the mission's early success.²¹

The aim of this chapter is to provide a preliminary comparison of the two reports by Ricci, from his diaries and as published by Trigault, and by Ruggieri, comparing commonalities and dissimilarities within their accounts and highlighting their respective strategies and perspectives.

The approaches of Matteo Ricci and Michele Ruggieri in their respective reports paint a nuanced picture of the late-16th and early-17th century China. While Ricci's account leans towards the exotic, echoing the medieval tropes found in his maps and emphasizing the disparities between China and Europe, Ruggieri highlights the familiar aspects of Chinese society.²² As Ruggieri's *Relatione* has had close to no diffusion, the way in which the early years of the China Jesuit mission are described is strongly dependent on Ricci's narrative.

In their accounts, the different descriptions and lexicons are evident from the outset. Referring to the origins of the mission itself, Ricci writes:

Against this Monster of Chinese Idolatry, of which we spoke at the end of the other book, more fierce with its three heads than the Lernean Hydra, which for so many thousands of years had peacefully tyrannized and sent thirty million souls to the abyss of Hell, our Soci-

19 Pfister, despite acknowledging Ruggieri's contributions, primarily relied on Ricci's diaries and Trigault's *De Christiana expeditione*, which unintentionally perpetuated some of their views about Ruggieri's inabilities and old age. For example, Pfister states that Ruggieri, "exhausted by his labors and travel, retired to Salerno, where he died in 1607".

20 Different is the case of Daniello Bartoli's book on China, part of a broader project to describe the Jesuit missions of Asia and titled *La Cina: Terza parte dell'Asia*, which, printed in Rome in 1663, had at that stage a lesser diffusion. In fact, as opposed to the case of Ricci and Trigault, Bartoli's book was not reprinted or translated.

21 Together with the isolated cases of Chan (1993) and Gisondi (1999), the more recent volumes of Meynard/Villasante (2018) and Canaris (2023) have set the benchmark for future studies on Ruggieri. Hsia (2010), however, still adheres to the older vulgate: see footnote 41. On Ruggieri's translations of the Confucian classics, see in this volume Brancato, pp. 107–124.

22 On the so-called "Ricci Maps", see Hostetler (2001) and the more recent Caboara (2022) 30–35 and Cattaneo (2022) 91–101, as well as, more generally, Cams and Papelitzky (2024).

ety of Jesus was moved, according to its institute, to wage war in such distant lands, passing through so many kingdoms and so many seas to free these miserable souls from eternal perdition.²³

In this quote Ricci refers to the Society of Jesus as an instrument of liberation for the Chinese population, penetrating China to save the souls of the Chinese from eternal damnation. In doing so, he refers to the Chinese religious sects (“sette”, as he defines them) as culpable of “monstrous” idolatry and more vicious than the Hydra of Greek mythology, a multi-headed snake-like monster,²⁴ whose killing was considered the second of Hercules’ twelve labors. The three heads each represent Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism.

It is quite significant that Trigault, in *De Christiana Expeditione*, omits this paragraph. Instead, he begins the second book with Ricci’s second paragraph, introducing Francesco Xavier as the founder of the Chinese mission.

Ruggieri, on the other hand, presents the origin of the Jesuit mission to China in a more practical and positive light:

The origin and beginning of the entry of our Fathers into China was in this way, when Father Alexandro Valignano, Visitor of the Society in those lands, being in India, having news of the affairs of China and considering the great service that could be done to our Lord with the conversion of so many thousands of souls if he could set foot in that kingdom, began to think of the way in which he could have and lay the foundations.²⁵

Ricci frequently paints the Chinese people as hostile towards the missionaries, often in contrast with Ruggieri, who attributes belligerence toward the missionaries to the influence of the devil rather than local sentiment and who hardly ever addresses the issue of Chinese religiosity. A particularly revealing example of these opposing attitudes can be found in their accounts surrounding the accusations (followed by a trial) made against Ricci in 1584, when the Jesuit father, living

23 Ricci (2010) 109: “Contra questo Mostro dell’Idolatria sinica, di che parlassimo nel fine dell’altro libro, più fiero con i suoi tre capi che quello del Hidra Lirnea, che tanti migliaia de anni pacificamente tirannizzava e mandava sotterra nell’abisso dell’Inferno tanti milioni di anime, si mosse la nostra Compagnia di Giesù, conforme al suo instituto, a far guerra da parti sì lontane, passando tanti regni e tanti mari per liberare le misere anime dalla perdizione eterna”. Unless otherwise noted, all translations throughout the essay are our own.

24 Hydra was reported to have from three to nine heads, according to differing traditions. Ricci recalls the three-headed version, which befit the target of his criticism.

25 Ruggieri (1598–1599) 19r (18r): “L’origine et principio d’entrar gli Padri nostri nella Cina fù in questo modo, essendo nell’India il Padre Alexandro Valignano visitator della Compagnia in quelle parti avendo notizia delle cose della Cina, et considerando il gran servizio che si poteva farà nostro Signore con la conversione di tanta migliaia d’anime, si se potesse per metter’ il piede in quel regno cominciò pensar il modo che perciò potesse aver et buttar i fondamenti”.

at the time in Zhaoqing's residence, was accused of kidnapping a child and planning to take him to Macao.

In contrast to the previous case, Trigault faithfully reports the text by Ricci.²⁶ Two neighbors who strongly dislike the Jesuit fathers saw an opportunity to cause them trouble. This opportunity arose when a servant of the fathers brought a child who was throwing stones at the roof into their home to reprimand him and scare him into confessing. However, instead of the child being punished, Ricci intervened and convinced the servant to let the child go.

"Taking advantage of this situation, two neighbors, staunch adversaries of the Fathers, conspired to harm them . . .".²⁷ Ricci was thus accused of having kidnapped the child. Following the accusation against Ricci it is said that his accusers believed "that by doing so they were earning favor with the entire city, due to the hate they harbored towards the Fathers."²⁸ In Ricci's account, the passages before this accusation explicitly describe the population's hostility towards the Jesuits, influencing the reader's perception of subsequent events: "The people of Sciaochino had already begun to harbor intense hatred towards us [. . .]"²⁹ and "They all desired to expel them from there, subjecting them to much rudeness and many insults".³⁰ Ricci's recourse to a passionate vocabulary should be emphasized: he uses words, among others, such as *odio* (hatred) and *ingiurie* (insults) to convey what he must have felt as a strong opposition to the mission.

Ruggieri's account of the same event diverges in its depiction of specific details, such as Ruggieri's referring to multiple children,³¹ whereas Ricci only mentions a single child.³² In Ruggieri's *Relatione*, the vocabulary Ricci uses for describing the sentiment of the Chinese population is attributed to the enemy, the devil, who stirs only a handful of people against the missionaries:

26 Trigault (1615) 175: *Absente P. Michaelae Ruggierio gravi calumnia P. Mattheus Riccius liberatur.*

27 Ricci (2010) 140–141: "Con questa occasione pigliorno consiglio doi vicini, molto contrarij de' Padri, di fargli qualche male . . .".

28 Ricci (2010) 141: "E pensando che con questo faceva gratia a tutta la Città, per l'odio che ai Padri tenevano".

29 Ricci (2010) 139: "Già quella gente di Sciaochino avevano cominciato ad avere grande odio ai nostri [. . .]". Sciaochino is nowadays known as Zhaoqing, a city located West of Canton in the Guangdong province.

30 Ricci (2010) 140: "E così desideravano tutti cacciarli fuori di là, facendogli molte scortesie e ingiurie".

31 Ruggieri (1598–1599) 33v (32v): "certi figliuoli".

32 Ricci (2010) 140: "un Putto"

But the odious enemy of this mission, intent on removing it from their hands to thwart its progress, spared no effort to scheme against it from the outset, aiming to bring it into disrepute, as judged by the sanctity of this noble work.³³

and

It so happened that a neighbor, incited by the Devil, made a complaint with the governor.³⁴

Ruggieri's disposition is further exemplified by an additional incident, omitted in both Ricci's and Trigault's accounts. Early in Ruggieri's *Relatione*, an instance is described in which a Chinese man in Canton repeatedly hit his head with an oyster shell, subsequently attempting to falsely attribute these injuries to Ruggieri and implicate him in the matter. Once more, the damaging action of the man and the public fury that followed derived, according to Ruggieri, not from human animosity, but from the devil's malevolent influence:

All this happened because the devil wanted an opportunity to more easily incite the people against me, as he did a few days later [. . .]³⁵

and

When the devil incited a Chinese man, after he had drunk well and placed himself in front of the altar, because the Chapel was the first one he encountered and the door was open, he struck himself on the head with three large sharp oyster shells and made three wounds.³⁶

Similar passages recur in the entirety of Ruggieri's text. For instance, one could point to a preceding and a following one:

It happened at that time that, after mass was celebrated for some days in the above-mentioned chapel, a Chinese man was instigated by the devil, who was concerned that the souls [of those who were at mass] could escape him.³⁷

33 Ruggieri (1598–1599) 33r (32r): “Ma il nemico odioso di questa opra che vada diretto per levargli i suoi dalle mani per impedirla, no' lasciò di macchinar” in quel princ[ip]io cosa perché venisse in dishonor' et per giudizio di questa S.ta opra”.

34 Ruggieri (1598–1599) 33v (32v): “accade che un vicino incitato dal Demonio fè querela al governatore”.

35 Ruggieri (1598–1599) 13r-13v (12r-12v): “et tutto questo succedeva perché il demonio avesse occasione [13v] di più facilmente eccitar' il popolo contra di me, come poco giorni dopo fece [. . .]”.

36 Ruggieri (1598–1599) 13v (12v): “quando il demonio eccitò un Chinese dopo' d'aver' bevuto bene et postosi avanti l'altar perché la Cappella era la prima che s'incontrava et stava aperta la porta, con tre grandi scorze d'ostriche pungenti si percosse sù la testa et si fé tre ferite”.

37 Ruggieri (1598–1599) 22r (21r): “Successe in questo tempo ch'avendosi per alcuni giorni celebrato nella suddetta cappella mosso un Chinese dal demonio che vedeva la perdita di tante anime ch'erano per scappar dalle sue mani”.

In this case, Ruggieri retells the episode of the Chinese man hitting his head with an oyster shell to show how he was acting on the devil's advice. In a following passage, Ruggieri resorts to the same example once again:

Father Ruggieri was freed from the fury of the people of Canton after having been accused by a Chinese man of causing him three head wounds in his own church. But the wounds were caused by the man himself, who hit three times big sharp oyster shells on his head at the devil's incitement.³⁸

Although it is difficult to surmise what Ruggieri's strategy in retelling the same story might have been, it is interesting to note that this episode is absent from Ricci's and, as a result, Trigault's accounts.

It could be pointed out that, unlike Ruggieri's *Relatione*, Ricci's diaries appear to have been conceived for a much wider circulation and that, in a sense, Ricci might have had more time compared to Ruggieri — whom, it should be recalled, was removed from the China mission rather hastily — to prepare them as the official chronicles of the early Jesuit mission to China that they have become over time.

Ruggieri's *Relatione*, on the other hand, despite its repetitions and stylistic infelicities, strikes the reader as much more direct in its approach to the subject matter. Possibly, the fact that Alessandro Valignano had decided to send an unknowing Ruggieri back to Rome, making sure he would never return to China, signaled a turning point in the early history of the Jesuit mission to China. If one adds Ricci's attitude towards Ruggieri to the picture, the impression grows stronger. Ricci, as a matter of fact, was not only fully aware of Valignano's plan, but had become increasingly weary and critical of Ruggieri's presence within the China mission.

At the beginning of the ninth chapter of his diaries, Ricci recalls the expedient that Valignano adopted to send Ruggieri back to Rome. Valignano, just returned to Macao from Rome in July 1588, realized that the Jesuit fathers were not safe to advance their mission in China, as they lacked a formal permission of the Emperor of China, Wanli (1563–1620). In order to resolve the issue, Valignano writes several letters to the Superior General Claudio Acquaviva to explain the difficult situation and to suggest that a delegation be sent to Rome to ask Pope Sixtus V to come to the rescue of the Jesuit fathers with a present (“un buon presente”) for the Emperor, so that the authority of the mission could be established formally.

³⁸ Ruggieri (1598–1599) 95v (94v): “Fu liberato una volta il Padre Ruggieri dall'ira del popolo a Cantone per esser accusato d'un Cinese ch'io in mia chiesa l'aveva dato tre ferite in testa, avendo egli stesso ad istigazione del demonio fattosi tre ferite di sangue nella testa co' tre percosse di scorze grandi d'ostriche et pungenti”.

And, coming to his confrère Ruggieri, Ricci notes:

And because Father Ruggieri was already old and could not learn the Chinese language, he took this opportunity to send him back to Europe. Because he long remained in these lands, in addition to what was written in the letters to the pope, to the Father General and to others to promote this mission, he could tell as an eyewitness everything necessary.³⁹

and

Father Ruggieri arrived well and soon in Europe, but he was shipwrecked on the Terceira Island and, with what he managed to save of the things he was carrying, he disembarked in Lisbon. And, visiting King Philip II in Madrid, he was warmly received, and he was promised to be helped in the negotiation with the Pope regarding the Chinese mission. But, arriving in Rome, he witnessed the death and succession of two or three popes in a short time; therefore, the Father General could not suggest this arrangement to the Pope, nor accomplish what was expected, all his efforts being in vain. Father Ruggieri ended up living the rest of his days in the city of Salerno in the Kingdom of Naples.⁴⁰

Ricci's attitude became the undisputed model for Jesuit historians and, more generally, later scholarship on the Jesuit Chinese mission.⁴¹ Ricci's claims regarding Ruggieri's old age and incompetence can be explained by his and Valignano's suc-

39 Ricci (2010) 170–171: “E perché il P. Ruggero era già vecchio e non poteva imparare la lingua Cinese, pigliò questa buona occasione di mandarlo a Europa; percioché, essendo stato tanti anni in queste parti, oltre che quello che nelle lettere si scriveva al papa [sic], al P. Generale et altri per promuovere questa opra, poteva, come testimonio di vista, raccontare altre cose che venissero a proposito”.

40 Ricci (2010) 171: “Il Padre Roggero arrivò bene e assai presto a Europa, ma fece naufragio nel porto delle Insole Terzere, e con quel puoco che potè salvare di quello che portava uscite in terra in Lisbona. Et, visitando in Madride il Re Filippo secondo, gli fu fatto da sua magestà molta accoglienza, promettendo di agiutare il negocio che aveva da trattare con il Papa e la Impresa della Cina. Ma, arrivato a Roma, incontrò la morte e creationi di doi o tre Papi in breve tempo; e così non potette il Padre Generale trattar questo negotio con il papa [sic], né conseguire quello che si pretendeva, restando indarno tutta la fatica che in questo si era pigliata. Il P. Ruggero se ne fu a finire sua vita nella Città di Salerno nel Regno di Napoli.” The Terceira Island is part of the Azores archipelago in the North Atlantic Ocean.

41 This is also the case with Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia's *A Jesuit in the Forbidden City*, a biography of Matteo Ricci, published in 2010, in which Ruggieri's difficulties with spoken Chinese are frequently emphasized: “The Jesuit's social success failed to translate into making converts. One reason was Ruggieri's mediocre spoken Chinese. [. . .] Ruggieri never acquired fluency in the spoken language; be it tone deafness or natural reticence, he was the first of many students of Chinese more expert in text than in speech” (Hsia [2010] 101); “Ricci dismissed the interlude (the stay in Zhejiang) as a failure due to the linguistic deficiencies of his fellow Fathers” (Hsia [2010] 102); “In spite of his Chinese publications, Ruggieri could not shake off the reputation of being a bad linguist” (Hsia [2010] 107). Moreover, Hsia deemed Ruggieri's use of Buddhist terms in his catechism inferior to Ricci's translation (Hsia [2010] 94), he defined the early conversions of Buddhist people

cessful attempt to marginalize Ruggieri, but are not justified by historical records. Ruggieri, after all, was only nine years older than Ricci and four years younger than Valignano. No classical or medieval theory on *senectus*, from Cicero to Petrarch, could support Ruggieri's classification among old men. In terms of scholarly achievements, Ruggieri could hardly be considered incompetent. As noted by Daniel Canaris in his groundbreaking edition of the first Chinese-language catechism, which was authored by Ruggieri:

[H]e was the first Jesuit missionary to obtain official permission to reside in China and thus should be regarded as one of the founding fathers of the Jesuit China mission. He was one of the first Europeans to gain command of the Chinese language, daring even to express himself in verse like a Confucian literatus. His pioneering studies of the Chinese language laid the groundwork for future missionaries through the dictionaries and romanizations that he derived in collaboration with his confrère Matteo Ricci . . . After his return to Europe in 1589, he completed the first European translations of the Confucian classics and the first detailed geographic description of China based on Chinese sources.⁴²

In light of this new evaluation of Ruggieri's work and scholarship, the progressive marginalization that he suffers within the China mission at the hands of Ricci and Valignano becomes suspicious. As early as 1615, Trigault translates Ricci's diaries, which were completed only a few years earlier, omitting these damning judgments — perhaps sensing their unfairness — and including in his translation only a dry description of Ruggieri's travel:

For this, he [Valignano] nominated Ruggieri, because he had been one of the first members of the expedition and he had seen numerous things with his own eyes. [. . .] He started his journey, and quickly reached Europe. However, in the isle called Tercera, as he was nearing the port, he was shipwrecked. He recovered as much as he could, and, disembarking in Lisbon, went to Madrid to visit Philip II, King of Spain, by whom he was received with exceptional benevolence. The King also pledged to support Ruggieri's legation to the Pope with his authority, and to promote the Chinese affair with appropriate aid. Afterwards he arrived in Rome, where his mission was delayed by the death of two or three popes. Father Ruggieri, fatigued by so many tribulations, spent the remainder of his life in Salerno in the Kingdom of Naples.⁴³

less significant (Hsia [2010] 96), and remarked that “[c]ompared to Ricci, who made a brilliant first impression, Ruggieri did not cut a good figure” (Hsia [2010] 108).

⁴² Canaris (2023) 1.

⁴³ Trigault (1615) 213–214: *Ad ea procuranda P. Ruggerium ideo nominavit, quod is eam expeditionem primus inchoasset et pleraque oculis lustrasset. [. . .] Soluit igitur, et expedita in primis navigatione, pervenit in Europam, sed in Insulis, quas Terceras vocant, ptope [read: prope] in portu naufragium fecit, et quo naufragio ereptis, ut maxime potuit, quae ferebat Olyssipone excedit, et Madritum ad Philippum secundum, Hispaniae regem visendum se contulit, ab quo exceptus est in usitatis tanto principi humanitatis officijs; recepit etiam in se, Legationem illam apud Pontificem*

All subsequent vernacular translations of the *De Christiana expeditione* reiterate the same version, following Trigault and omitting, once more, Ricci's mentions of Ruggieri's old age and linguistic incompetence.

Opposition to Ruggieri's presence in the Chinese mission and doubts about his abilities to learn Chinese are also evident in a number of letter exchanges between China and Rome. When Ruggieri was considered for the role of Superior of the Chinese mission, Francisco Cabral described him as too simple-minded and overall unfit for the role in a November 1583 letter to Acquaviva.⁴⁴ Even after his return to Europe, when Acquaviva was considering printing Ruggieri's translation of the Classics, Valignano, in a letter dated 16 December 1596, strongly opposed it on the grounds of Ruggieri's lack of proficiency in both written and oral Chinese.⁴⁵ This becomes increasingly significant when we consider that at the time Ruggieri was already collaborating with Antonio Possevino on printing his translations of the Confucian classics. Notably, Possevino included the first paragraph of Ruggieri's *Daxue*⁴⁶ translation in his influential work, *Bibliotheca selecta*, which was printed in 1593. Possevino's *Bibliotheca selecta* includes a summary of Ruggieri's catechism, titled *Tianzhu shilu*, with the promise of publication to complement Valignano's catechism, but it was never printed.⁴⁷

Pasquale D'Elia, in his *Fonti Ricciane*, recalls another occasion in which Valignano expresses his low esteem of Ruggieri in a letter to Acquaviva dated 23 November 1588. In this letter, Valignano justifies to Acquaviva the reasons for not recalling Ruggieri to China after his return to Europe:

Father Michele Ruggieri has worked very hard on this mission, and, now that he is arriving in Rome, it seems only fair to give him some rest. All the more so because he is getting old and quite worn out, and, with this long journey, he will be even more exhausted. And, beyond this, he does not have a good pronunciation of the language; and, for this reason, it seems that you [V.P.: Vostra Paternità] should excuse him from coming here again, given

maximum sua auctoritate, et rem Sinicam opportunis auxilijs promoturum. Posteaquam vero Romam pervenit. Nogotium interventu duorum triumve Pontificum retardatur. Pater vero Ruggierius tot laboris fractus, vita reliquum Salerni in Regno Neapolitano peregit.

⁴⁴ Wang/Canaris (2023) 63, quoting from D'Elia (1942) I 222, n. 1: "he mais simplex de necessario e algun tanto pusillanimo". The letter is dated 20 November 1583 and can be found in ARSI, Jap. Sin. 9/II. Francisco Cabral was Superior of the mission between 1570 and 1579.

⁴⁵ Wang/Canaris (2023) 78, quoting from D'Elia (1942) I 250, n. 1: "porque no puede estar bien hecho, pues el Padre Miguel Rogerio sabia bien poco de las letras y lengua china" (ARSI, Jap. Sin. 13/I).

⁴⁶ The *Daxue* is the so-called "Great Learning", one of the four Confucian classics.

⁴⁷ Canaris (2020) 400.

that this mission is not for old and tired men, and he has done a lot for the good of this mission by arriving there.⁴⁸

However, Ruggieri was not without supporters. As early as 1581, Pedro Gomez, Rector of the college in Macao, praised Ruggieri's progress in the study of Chinese in a letter to Acquaviva dated 21 October 1581:

[F. Ruggieri] is well-disposed as when he first came here. He proceeds with much edification and shows the example that is expected of him. He has improved in the language: he knows, according to what he told me, some twelve thousand characters of the approximately eighty thousand that the Chinese have.

and

Father Ruggeri and I, during these months that he has been here, have been busy composing a brief history of the beginning of the world. It will also serve as Christian doctrine in the form of a dialogue, intended for translation into the Chinese language.⁴⁹

Ruggieri's return to China after his European travel was also eagerly awaited by other members of the mission, suggesting that not everyone shared Valignano and Ricci's ideas about Ruggieri's competence or his advanced age. In a letter to Acquaviva dated 1592, the Jesuit Francesco de Pretis specifically mentioned his anticipation of Ruggieri's return to China the following year.⁵⁰

48 D'Elia (1942) I 250, n. 2: "El Padre Miguel Rogerio tiene trabajado mucho en esta mission, y agora llegando a Roma parece, que en razon darle alcun descanso; quanto más que el se va haziendo ya viejo y mui cargado, y con esta jornada tan larga, lo quedará más; y, allende desto, no tiene buena pronunçiaçión en la lengua; y por esto parece que V.P. lo deve escusar de tornar a embiar aquí, pues esta mission no es para hombres viejos y cansados, y harto avra hecho para bien desta mission con llegar ahí" (ARSI, Jap. Sin. II/29).

49 Tacchi-Venturi (1911) 34–35: "[El P. Miguel Rugerio napolitano] Està buen despuesto como quando allà vino, procede con mucha edificaciòn y dà el exemplo que dél se espera. Està aprovechado en la lengua; sabe ja, segun me dixo, algunas doze mil letras, porque los Chinas tienen algunas ochenta mil"; "El P. Ruggerio y yo, estos meses que aquí està, nos ocupamos ed hazer huna breve historia del principio del mundo, que serva juntamente de doctrina christiana por mode de dialogo para tresladarla em lengua de China" (ARSI, *Epist. Miss. Jap. 1580–1589*). Ruggieri's claim to Gomez must have been an exaggeration, as learning so many characters in such a short period of time would have been highly unlikely. In the second quote, the reference to the collaboration between Gomez and Ruggieri is to the preparation of a Latin catechism, titled *Vera et Brevis Divinarum Rerum Expositio* (currently held in the Biblioteca Nazionale di Roma, Fondo Gesuitico, 1276), which Ruggieri used as a basis for his 1584 Chinese catechism, the *Tianzhu shilu*. See also Canaris (2023) 6.

50 Song Liming 宋黎明 (2016) 78.

The accounts by Ricci and Trigault strengthen the impression of a gloomy portrait of Ruggieri by glossing hastily over his journey to Rome, immortalizing an image that has lasted to this day. His struggles to meet with Philip II of Spain and the existing tensions between the Spanish crown and the papacy must have contributed to undermining Ruggieri's already feeble likelihood of successfully organizing a papal embassy to China, but they are barely mentioned. Daniello Bartoli partially rectifies this omission, dedicating a brief section of Book 2 of his Jesuit history's volume on China to Ruggieri's travel to Rome.

Michele Ruggieri's life after his return to Europe is similarly overlooked by Ricci – or it may have been unknown to him –, who mentions only in passing his death in Salerno. As far as can be ascertained from the *De Christiana expeditione*, Trigault made no attempt to amend such omissions.⁵¹

For four centuries the life and works of Ruggieri have been neglected. The analysis presented thus far intends to draw attention to and stimulate further research on the part played by Michele Ruggieri in the early years of the Jesuit China mission by addressing the *damnatio memoriae* that targeted him towards the end of the 1580s, eschewing the possibility of a reliable account of his contribution from the field of Jesuit and missionary studies and scholarship on the reception of Chinese culture in Europe until recently.

Appendix

A List of 17th-Century Editions of Nicholas Trigault's De christiana expeditione

Nicholas Trigault, *De Christiana expeditione apud sinas suscepta ab Societate Jesu. Ex P. Matthaei Riccii eiusdem Societatis commentariis Libri V: Ad S.D.N. Paulum V. In Quibus Sinensis Regni mores, leges, atque instituta, & novae illius Ecclesiae difficillima primordia accurate & summa fide describuntur auctore P. Nicolao Trigautio, Belga, ex eadem Societate*, Augsburg, 1615.

Nicholas Trigault, *De christiana expeditione apud Sinas suscepta ab Societate Iesu ex P. Matthaei Riccii eiusdem Societatis commentariis, libri 5. in quibus Sinensis regni mores, leges atque instituta, describuntur auctore p. Nicolao Trigautio Belga ex eadem Societate*, Lyon, Horace Cardon, 1616.

⁵¹ It should be noted, however, that the documentation currently available on Ruggieri's biography after his return from China in 1589 is scant. To the best of our knowledge, Mauro Brunello is working on this understudied period of Ruggieri's life.

Nicholas Trigault, *Histoire de l'expedition chrestienne au royaume de la Chine entreprinse par les PP. de la Compagnie de Iesus: comprinse en cinq liures, esquels est traicté fort exactement et fidelement des moeurs, loix et coustumes du pays, et des commencemens tres difficiles de l'eglise naissante en ce royaume*, Lyon, Horace Cardon, 1616.

Nicholas Trigault, *De Christiana expeditione apud sinas suscepta ab Societate Jesu. Ex P. Matthaei Riccii eiusdem Societatis commentariis Libri V: Ad S.D.N. Paulum V. In Quibus Sinensis Regni mores, leges, atque instituta, & novae illius Ecclesiae difficillima primordia accurate & summa fide describuntur auctore P. Nicolao Trigautio, Belga, ex eadem Societate, Coloniae, Bernardi Gualtieri, 1617.*

Nicholas Trigault, *Histoire de l'expedition chrestienne au royaume de la Chine entreprinse par les PP. de la Compagnie de Iesus: comprinse en cinq liures, esquels est traicté fort exactement et fidelement des moeurs, loix et coustumes du pays, et des commencemens tres difficiles de l'eglise naissante en ce royaume*, Lille, De l'Imprimerie de Pierre de Rache, 1617.

Nicholas Trigault, *Historia Von Einführung der Christlichen Religion, in daß grosse Königreich China durch die Societet Jesu: Sambt wolgegründten bericht von beschaffenhait deß Landts und volcks, auch desselbigen gesetzen, Sitten, unnd gewonhaitten, [Matthaeus Riccius], Augsburg, in Verlag Anton Hierat (the Elder), 1617.*

Nicholas Trigault, *Histoire de l'expedition chrestienne au royaume de la Chine entreprinse par les PP. de la Compagnie de Iesus: comprinse en cinq liures, esquels est traicté fort exactement et fidelement des moeurs, loix et coustumes du pays, et des commencemens tres difficiles de l'eglise naissante en ce royaume*, Paris, Pierre le Mur, 1618.

Nicholas Trigault, *Istoria de la China i cristiana empresa hecha en ella, por la Compañia de Iesus que, de los escritos del Padre Mateo Richo, compuso el Padre Nicolas Trigault ambos de la misma Compañia; traduzida de lengua latina por el Licenciado Duarte, Sevilla, Gabriel Ramos Veiarano, 1621.*

Nicholas Trigault, *Entrata nella China de' Padri della Compagnia del Gesu. Tolta dai Commentarij del P. Matteo Ricci di detta Compagnia. Doue si contengono i costumi, le leggi, & ordini di quel Regno, e i principij difficilissimi della nascente Chiesa. Opera del P. Nicolao Trigaucci padre di detta Compagnia, Napoli, Lazzaro Scoriggio, 1622.*

Nicholas Trigault, *De Christiana expeditione apud Sinas suscepta ab Societate Iesu ex Patris Matthaei Riccii eiusdem Societatis commentariis. Libri V. Ad Sanctissimum Dominum Nostrum Paulum V in quibus Sinensis Regni mores, leges atque instituta, et novae illius Ecclesiae difficillima primordia accurate et summa fide describuntur Auctore Patre Nicolao Trigautio Belga ex eiusdem Societate, Lisboa, 1623.*

Nicholas Trigault, *De Christiana Expeditione Apud Sinas Suscepta Ab Societate Jesu. Ex P. Matthaei Riccii eiusdem Societatis Commentariis, Libri V: Ad S.D.N. Paulum V. In Quibus Sinensis Regni mores, leges, atque instituta, & nova illius Ecclesiae difficillima primordia accurate & summa fide describuntur: Editio recens ab eodem Auctore multis in locis aucta & recognita*, Köln, Wiedenfelt, Berges, 1684.

