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Patterns of Localization

*Nadine Amsler, Andreea Badea, Bernard Heyberger and Christian Windler*

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**Catholic Missionaries in Early  
Modern Asia**  
Patterns of Localization

Edited by **Nadine Amsler, Andreea Badea,  
Bernard Heyberger, and  
Christian Windler**

 **Routledge**  
Taylor & Francis Group  
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2020  
by Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge  
52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

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*British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data*

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

A catalog record for this book has been requested

ISBN: 978-0-367-02881-7 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-0-429-00124-6 (ebk)

Typeset in Sabon  
by Apex CoVantage, LLC

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## Catholic Missionaries in Early Modern Asia

Over recent decades, historians have become increasingly interested in early modern Catholic missions in Asia as laboratories of cultural contact. This book builds on recent groundbreaking research on early modern Catholic missions, which has shown that missionaries in Asia cooperated with and accommodated the needs of local agents rather than being uncompromising promoters of post-Tridentine doctrine and devotion.

Bringing together some of the most renowned and innovative researchers from Anglophone countries and continental Europe, this volume investigates how missionaries' entanglements with local societies across Asia contributed to processes of localization within the early modern Catholic church. The focus of the volume is on missionaries' adaptation to four ideal-typical social settings that played an eminent role in early modern Asian missions: (1) the symbolically loaded princely court; (2) the city as a space of especially dense communication; (3) the countryside, where missionary presence was only rarely permanent; (4) and the household – a central arena of conversion in early modern Asian societies.

Shining a fresh light onto the history of early modern Catholic missions and the early modern Eurasian cultural exchange, this will be an important book for any scholar of religious history, history of cultural contact, global history and early modern history in Asia.

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## 2 "The habit that hides the monk"

### Missionary fashion strategies in late imperial Chinese society and court culture

*Eugenio Menegon*

On 3 June 1711, Matteo Ripa, a young Italian Catholic missionary and artist at the Chinese imperial court in Beijing, took up his pen to write a report to his superiors in Rome. Unlike most missionary-artists in China at the time, who were Jesuits, Ripa was an "apostolic missionary" of the papal Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (*Propaganda Fide*). Ripa was no friend of the Jesuits. In his letter to Cardinal Giuseppe Sacripante, Prefect of *Propaganda Fide* in Rome, he reported details about his recent arrival in Beijing and his experience of inserting himself at court as a painter and print-maker. This was a common way for Catholic priests at the time to remain in China and try to obtain state patronage in the imperial capital for their confrères across the provinces of the empire. Ripa offered a scathing review of the lifestyle of the court Jesuits, criticizing them for their lavish Chinese-style clothes and comfortable life, in these terms:

They say that poverty cannot be practiced [here], but that a missionary who wants to come here has to dress richly, and similar arguments. They say that otherwise the [Chinese] will despise the missionaries and hold them in no esteem. To this I reply: 'Are we here to be held in high esteem and to be honored by the Chinese?' . . . In fact, my experience has been quite the opposite. In Canton I was dressed with cotton cloth, and no gentile among the many I met was scandalized. Actually, once they learned why [I was dressed in that manner], they felt edified.<sup>1</sup>

In his ascetic yearning, and very much in the Catholic tradition prizing the clerical habit, Ripa saw clothing as one of the central markers of religious life. "Dressing richly" with silk gowns and owning multiple sets of robes for official purposes and for use at home, as the Jesuits did in Beijing, seemed to him to completely undermine the very essence of priestly and missionary vocation, and the vow of poverty.

Yet his zeal was soon tempered by the intervention of his own superiors. Even before he set foot at court, Ripa's spiritual director in Macao had commanded him to wear silk robes according to Chinese custom.<sup>2</sup> This was

excessive for Ripa's sense of religious poverty, so much so that he commented that "clothes here are of so many kinds that they provoke much confusion."<sup>3</sup> He felt pressure to conform, a pressure that came not just from the Jesuits but also from members of the imperial court, and, most significantly, from the Bishop of Beijing and Vicar Apostolic of *Propaganda Fide*, the Italian Reformed Franciscan Bernardino della Chiesa. In 1715, four years after Ripa's arrival at court, Della Chiesa scolded him for his stubborn sartorial resistance:

I say to Your Lordship that in dressing you should comply with the others not only because of your singularity among so many Europeans, but also for the lack of respect that you show His Majesty and his courtiers, going to his presence and being with each other without the propriety [= *decenza*] in dressing required by the place and status. It would also be unusual in Europe if the prelates and domestics of His Holiness did not go dressed according to their statuses. The same would be the case in any court of European princes, if one of his courtiers were to dress as a plebeian. *We are here as if on a stage*. Your Lordship holds the position of courtier, and thus should comply with courtly dress. . . . It is my will that you dress in silk and comply with the others the best way you can.<sup>4</sup>

This conflict reveals in the clearest possible terms the importance of clothing not only in religious life, where the use of the habit to proclaim an order's identity, as well as the social boundaries surrounding consecrated individuals, was so prominent; it also demonstrates clothing's importance in society at large and at the court in particular. Clothes were a tangible way to construct a hierarchy, to mark distinctions, and to affirm social status, in early modern Europe and late imperial China alike. Sumptuary laws prescribed what one could and could not wear or consume, precisely to maintain social order, and rising classes often challenged that order through their sartorial choices. China had a system of sumptuary laws and rituals that was even more intricate and stringent than those established across Europe, and it is not surprising that Ripa found the complexity of Chinese clothing bewildering.<sup>5</sup> By the late Ming, when missionaries arrived in China, a veritable "confusion of pleasure" had scrambled the clothing hierarchy, and urban rich merchants in particular challenged dress and consumption legal restrictions at every turn.<sup>6</sup>

For the Jesuits the matter was complicated by their religious status, which required yet another set of clerical dress rules. Reports and letters, lists of accounts, inventories, and similar materials reveal that clothing was one of the first concerns that missionaries encountered in China, and it was not a trivial one. Clothing and bodily practices can be viewed as a gauge of broader issues in the history of the encounter between China and the West, and in the history of Jesuit and Christian presence there and demonstrate how "going local" was an inevitable outcome in China.

## 1 The Jesuits and their approach to clothing: The foundational years in Europe

Over a century before Ripa had to face his sartorial choices in Beijing, the first Jesuit missionaries arrived in China on Portuguese ships. Europeans in East Asia had to play by the rules of native powers, and that included the adoption of local diplomatic ceremonial, and respect for the social and cultural order of those countries.

By the time the Jesuits were founded in the mid-sixteenth century, ecclesiastical clothing had already accumulated over a millennium of historical development, from the simple tunics of the first monks in the Middle Eastern deserts, to the variety of male and female habits of the medieval and early modern monastic and mendicant orders.<sup>7</sup> The Protestant Reformation, however, provoked a deep reflection on religious life within Catholicism, and one of the consequences was the emergence of a new category of religious men, the “Clerics Regular.”<sup>8</sup> The Jesuits belonged to this new wave of priests, who followed rules adapted to more intense social interactions, entailing freedom of movement and inconspicuous appearance for the purpose of apostolic work. Their habit had to be functional for works of charity, education, and religious duties among the laity, and while clearly inspired to “ecclesiastical dress,” it had no strict requirements. Like other Clerics Regular, Jesuits dressed in a generic cassock, which simply imitated that of “reputable priests,” as mentioned in the founding Formulas of the Society of Jesus.<sup>9</sup> The Latin word used there for “reputable” was *honestus*, a word that appears again in the original Spanish text of the Jesuit constitutions drafted by Ignatius of Loyola and his early Jesuit companions.<sup>10</sup> The habit had to be locally “accommodated” to the place where one lived, following church tradition. Last, the habit had to be modest and inexpensive, in compliance with the vow of poverty. Generally speaking, the vagueness of Loyola’s prescriptions encouraged some variety in clothing in the early history of the Society, and even produced some controversy.<sup>11</sup>

Even after uniformity was reached, the habit continued to remain a signifier of internal hierarchy between the priests and the lay brothers (“temporal coadjutors”). The brothers were Jesuits as well, but received limited education, so that they would remain humble and within their professional niche as manual laborers.<sup>12</sup> Their difference in rank also took visual form in their clothing, with their cassocks and cloaks shorter than those of the priests. They were also encouraged to wear a round hat instead of the square biretta, a symbol of the priestly educational and spiritual position. The brothers, however, fought for almost a century to maintain the use of the biretta, resorting to petitioning more than one pope, and finally losing that privilege in 1645. These apparently cosmetic sartorial choices had, in fact, important consequences, and some brothers lost their vocation and left the Society after feeling humiliated by the changes.<sup>13</sup>

This situation seems to reveal a contradiction: on the one hand, clothing was “indifferent” and adaptable. On the other hand, however, it also

was increasingly uniform, subtly hierarchical, and thus laden with power and meaning. The habit had to conceal the shape of the body, conferring a second protective skin, even a halo of supernatural aloofness, while avoiding any sexual innuendo. It also represented poverty and penance, and thus often had the shape of sackcloth. Yet its main function was to distinguish the priests and nuns from the laity, and to affirm an established societal and spiritual order.

## 2 Missionary clothes and bodily practices in Ming China

European expansion in the sixteenth century confronted the church with non-Christian societies and their customs and clothing across the globe, including in East Asia.<sup>14</sup> After their arrival in Japan in the late 1540s, the Jesuits wore the silk robes of the Buddhist monks, to earn the same kind of respect they enjoyed in local society.<sup>15</sup> Following some soul searching and controversy within the Japan mission, the famous Jesuit Visitor Alessandro Valignano then initiated the policy of accommodation that was also applied in China in the 1580s, when Michele Ruggieri and Matteo Ricci started their efforts to settle within the Ming empire.<sup>16</sup> At first, local officials in Guangdong province asked Ruggieri to adopt the identity and the clothes of Buddhist monks.<sup>17</sup> Valignano swiftly approved the move. This entailed shaving any facial hair, wearing very short hair, and donning Buddhist robes. Ricci characterized this attire, adopted by the fathers and all their servants between 1582 and 1595, as *honesta* – the same word used by Loyola – specifying that the robe was “modest and long, with long sleeves, not very different from our [Jesuit robe].”<sup>18</sup> At the suggestion of the Chinese literatus Qu Taisu 瞿太素, Ricci and his companions started shedding the identity of Buddhist monks, considered a disreputable group by many in the Confucian elite. Soon Valignano approved the use of “proper silk garments for visiting magistrates and other important persons who, on visits, wear ceremonial dress and hats.”<sup>19</sup> Ricci and his companion Lazzaro Cattaneo grew long beards and hair in the second half of 1594, and in May 1595 Ricci paid a visit to an official dressed for the first time as a Chinese scholar.<sup>20</sup> Ricci described his new wardrobe as including at least two silk gowns, one for public visits, and the other to wear at home.<sup>21</sup> The earliest known oil portrait of Ricci, still kept in Rome, only gives us an idea of the robe worn at home.<sup>22</sup> The one used for visits, sketched in an early xylograph of Ricci, was far richer and not for practical use, and was known as a “ceremonial robe” or *lifu* (禮服) (see Figure 2.1). Actually, Ricci’s robe differed from those authorized by Ming sumptuary laws for degree-holders and officials, as he said himself: “Those who have neither office nor grade but are persons of importance also have appropriate visiting-dress, different from that of the ordinary people, and which we have adopted in this kingdom.”<sup>23</sup> From then on, this became the accepted wardrobe for Jesuits in Ming China.



Figure 2.1 Portrait of Matteo Ricci in *Life of Master Li Xitai from the Great West* (Daxi Xitai Li xiansheng xingji 大西西泰利先生行蹟). Manuscript copy made in 1636 [original printed edition 1630]

Source: Courtesy of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, Chinois 996

One of the great masters of European painting, Rubens, drew an almost photographic reproduction of a Jesuit *lifū*. That famous image portrays the Procurator of the China mission Nicolas Trigault, who returned from China with important business in 1616–17.<sup>24</sup> One remarkable feature in the new garb was the hat, which in the early portraits of Ricci appears, as he put it, “somewhat like a bishop’s miter.”<sup>25</sup> This was called a “Dongpo hat,” from the name of the famous Song-dynasty poet and scholar Su Shi 蘇軾, also known as Su Dongpo 蘇東坡, who allegedly popularized it. In the late Ming, this hat, prized for its association with antiquity, was worn by literati who had not attained an official degree, by those who were no longer in an official position, or by officials who did not wear their insignia of rank in private life.<sup>26</sup> Trigault’s portrait, however, reproduced a different kind of hat, as did the portrait of another procurator to Europe, Álvaro Semedo, 30 years later (see Figure 2.2). This was a “square hat” (*fangjin* 方巾) worn by students and literati without a degree but also by officials of lower rank whenever they were not wearing insignia.

Last, the China Jesuits followed a new bodily practice, adopting a long beard and growing their hair long, as was the norm in Ming China. Their hair was collected in a knot and hidden under a hat. Long beards, however, were difficult to grow for most Chinese, and they were usually an attribute of old age that symbolized wisdom. Ricci observed that “the men have sparse beards or none at all; what little facial hair they have is completely straight and it is so late in growing that a man of thirty might be taken among us for twenty.”<sup>27</sup> He also mentioned that men, except for children and Buddhist monks, would let their hair and beards grow without ever shaving during their lifetime. The decision of the missionaries to adopt the persona of the literatus and to abandon that of the Buddhist monk by growing their beards to the longest possible length, was made together with Valignano. Ricci wrote in 1595 that he let his facial hair grow “because in China a long beard is a rare thing [*è cosa rara*].”<sup>28</sup> A seventeenth-century Chinese source described Ricci’s physical appearance in this way: “A curly beard, green eyes, and a voice like a great bell.”<sup>29</sup> The curly, long beard was obviously one of the physical traits that stood out in Chinese eyes. Long hair and beards signaled age, and age in China meant authority and gravitas. Another possible reason for the Jesuits’ adoption of long beards was that they were attempting to put a greater distance between themselves and women, who had contacts with priests for confession, holy mass, and other sacraments. The mature and distinguished looks of long-bearded and robed Jesuits, together with the presence of male chaperons from the women’s families, made such encounters even more detached, establishing a clear gender demarcation.<sup>30</sup>

The apparently uncontroversial adoption of the literati robes during Ricci’s lifetime, with the blessing of Visitor Valignano, however, did not completely silence criticism on the use of silk, both within the Society and from other missionary orders, as it was considered a breach of the poverty vow and was a decision that directly contravened the constitutions and Loyola’s opinion.



Figure 2.2 Álvaro Semedo's portrait, published in his *Historica relatione del Gran Regno della Cina* (Rome 1653)

Source: Public domain, CC BY-SA 4.0

During the late 1620s, another Jesuit Visitor, André Palmeiro (1569–1635), had to face some tensions over the use of the silk robe between the members of the Japanese Province, by then mostly exiled to Macao after the prohibition of Christianity in Japan, and the members of the inland Chinese mission. In his final report on the visitation to the General in Rome, he regarded this matter as one of the most important reasons for the inspection, dedicating a separate report to clothing alone.<sup>31</sup>

Palmeiro also made an important statement on the meaning of the religious habit, and its relationship to the special identity of the Jesuits as a new order of men working in the world:

There is no doubt that it is not yet the time nor the timely conjunction for our men residing within China to wear a particular habit or an identifiable mark on their external attire by which to be recognized by all as a specific family or congregation. We must all be one, but without being known as such. Nor should we declare this fact to the simple folks, but we do explain it to those who are more intelligent, who understand it perfectly.<sup>32</sup>

Here the Visitor formulated the Jesuit strategic intention of maintaining a hidden identity and using the garments of the Chinese literati to blend into society, while hiding – at least to the non-initiated – their true religious identity. After consultation with veterans of the mission, however, the Visitor also ordered members of the Chinese vice-province to discontinue the use of silk gowns for daily use, as he had noted excesses. For example, Trigault alone owned five sets of personal silk garments. In more established Christian communities, the abolition of silk robes in daily use was a feasible expectation, as Chinese elites had become familiar with the Jesuits' emphasis on the austerity of religious life, and would understand their modesty, especially if some members of the local gentry had converted. However, Palmeiro also gave special powers to the vice-provincial to grant exemptions and still allow silk for courtesy robes to meet officials. Given this latitude, there were still silken domestic robes depicted in portraits, such as that of Semedo in 1642.

More research is needed to clarify what truly happened beyond prescriptive regulations. The 1630s and 1640s were times of great upheaval in China. The Ming dynasty had plunged into a great internal crisis, beset by famine, peasant rebellions, and military collapse, while the rising power of the Manchus in the north represented a challenge that would eventually engulf the empire and lead to dynastic change. Starting in the 1630s, the number of high members of the elites interested in Jesuit teachings in matters of science as well as morality and religion dramatically decreased, while the solidity of grassroots Christian communities increased. The need for contacts with elites and especially with officials to obtain patronage diminished as well.

The growth of native Christian communities allowed for the dispensing with personal silk gowns but also for the acceptance of sumptuous liturgical



Figure 2.3 Portrait of Giulio Aleni wearing the *jijin*, from *Life of Master Ai Siji from the Great West* (Taixi Siji Ai xiansheng xingshu 泰西思及艾先生行述). Manuscript copy made in 1689 [originally composed ca. 1650]

Source: Courtesy of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, Chinois 1017

vestments for communitarian worship. A late Ming Chinese text on the mass by the Italian Jesuit Giulio Aleni explains that the garments must be magnificent in order to offer sacrifice to God. The most peculiar vestment he described was a special hat invented for the celebration of the mass in China, called a "sacrificial hat" (*jijin* 祭巾) (see Figure 2.3).<sup>33</sup> This bonnet became necessary because, unlike in Europe, in China meeting a superior with a bare head was considered extremely disrespectful.

### 3 Missionary clothes and bodily practices in Qing China

The Ming-Qing transition was an immensely traumatic event. Untold numbers of people died in fighting, famines, and sieges between the mid-1640s and the 1650s. Many men committed suicide to avoid serving the Manchu invaders, who were the founders of the new Qing dynasty, and many women did the same to avoid rape and family disgrace. One of the new Manchu laws that traumatized Ming men like no other was the infamous order to cut their hair according to Manchu fashion, and to change their style of clothing. This shows how central hairstyles and clothing were to Ming Chinese masculinity.<sup>34</sup> The explosive issue of men's hair led to rebellions in 1645 in the lower Yangzi regions. The Chinese believed that the crown of the head was medically sensitive, that it was unfilial to shave one's hair, and that doing so signaled a renunciation of sexuality. Most significantly, the new hairdo represented submission to the barbarians.<sup>35</sup>

The Jesuits, who had chosen to be seen as members of the literati elite, rather than as Buddhist or Daoist clergy – the only subjects exempted from the hair cutting decrees – had no choice but to follow the Manchu directives. They also did so because their loyalty was not to a specific dynasty – or even to an ethnic or cultural order – but rather to a timeless divine plan for the conversion of the Chinese empire. Most missionaries became instant turn-coats once the triumphant Manchu troops reached their locales.

The new Manchu rulers immediately coopted the Jesuits for their technical knowledge, and after occupying Beijing in 1644 they named the Jesuit Adam Schall von Bell as co-director of the Imperial Astronomical Directorate, a post that Catholic missionaries kept almost without interruption until 1838. Schall did not describe in detail his adoption of the Manchu hairstyle or clothing at the time of the Manchu entry into the capital. He only mentioned that when he surrendered wearing commoner's clothes (probably still in Ming style), he petitioned the Manchu authorities on his knees to allow him to remain in his residence in the "Tartar City" – thus avoiding forced eviction with the Han population, all transferred outside the walls into the new and makeshift "Chinese City." In his later reports, Schall mentioned that, once he received a bureaucratic appointment, he agreed to wear Qing official robes with insignia corresponding to his rank (see Figure 2.4).<sup>36</sup>



Figure 2.4 Adam Schall in Qing official robe, from Athanasius Kircher, *China monumentis illustrata* (Amsterdam 1670)

Source: Courtesy of the Universitätsbibliothek Bern

The surrender of Schall's confrère Martino Martini in Southern China is described in much greater detail. During the summer of 1646 in Yanping, Fujian, Martini first accepted the orders of the Southern Ming Longwu Emperor to wear Ming official robes, after apparently turning down a position offered to him to facilitate a military alliance with the Portuguese in Macao against the Manchus. Within four months, however, Martini submitted to the triumphant Qing troops in the region of Wenzhou, in southern Zhejiang province.<sup>37</sup> In his best-seller "On the Tartar War" (*De bello Tartarico*, Antwerp, 1654), Martini described his shift in dynastic loyalty in the presence of a Manchu military commander. The highly symbolic act of surrender and declaration of allegiance pivoted around the shaving of his hair and the shifting of his clothes to the new style:

The Tartar commander . . . asked me if I was ready to change by my own accord *my hair style and Chinese clothes*. I agreed, and he ordered me to shave my hair in his presence. I then gestured to him that that kind of shaven head did not fit with Chinese clothes any longer, and he took off his leggings, gave them to me to wear, and put his Tartar hat on my head.<sup>38</sup>

Martini commended the new Manchu hat as "a comfortable and elegant ornament," and this positive reaction contrasted with his assessment of the care shown by Ming men for their long hair, in a language that implied a condemnation of the practice, which he probably deemed unmanly.<sup>39</sup> He added elsewhere a commentary on the beauty, straightforwardness, and human touch of the Manchus, which left no doubt as to his preference for them over the "effete" Han Chinese.<sup>40</sup> He ridiculed the Chinese for putting up a mighty resistance to the hair-cutting edict, "preoccupied more with their own hair than their own native land."<sup>41</sup>

Under Manchu rule the diatribes on the use of silk continued to simmer, especially because members of the newly arrived Dominican and Franciscan orders started to criticize the ways of the Jesuits.<sup>42</sup> Martini, therefore, while in Rome as Procurator in 1655, wrote a memorial to the General, mentioning the need for the China Jesuits to wear common (*suté*, i.e., *sude*, simple 素的) kinds of silk, reiterating as well that silk was not a particularly prestigious fabric in China, and that even farmers used it.<sup>43</sup> By this time, it appears, the Jesuits had developed a protocol that simply followed a general principle of adapting to the clothing of the literati, whatever the style was in accordance with dynastic sumptuary laws and current practices. New regime, new clothes: no big deal.

#### 4 Missionaries at the Qing court

The Jesuits had no qualms about adopting the new attire and wearing official Qing robes when some of them attained positions within the Chinese bureaucracy. Once the German astronomer Adam Schall became an official,

and for some time a favorite of the young Shunzhi Emperor, he wore sumptuous official robes in the new style, including Qing official hats with rank buttons. In his 1661 apologetic *Historica Relatio*, Schall mentions how he tried to turn down bureaucratic posts, but finally had to give in and wear Qing official robes with insignia corresponding to his rank, obeying orders from Vice-Provincial Francisco Furtado.<sup>44</sup>

Schall soon became a controversial figure not only for his work in astronomy, which some in the church considered tainted by Chinese calendrical superstition, but also because of his extravagant lifestyle and arrogant behavior toward other Jesuits. His confrère in Beijing Gabriel de Magalhães started a veritable war against him, writing long reports to the Visitor of China and Japan, Manuel de Azevedo, in 1649, denouncing Schall's great expenses for an excessive number of personal fine clothes and hats, as well as for official robes decorated with dragons.<sup>45</sup> His best-known portrait in official garb shows the sumptuousness of his attire; the robe sports an embroidered "mandarin square" on his chest with a white crane, symbol of the first rank (see Figure 2.4).<sup>46</sup> The complaints against Schall required the creation of two special disciplinary commissions in Rome in the 1660s to decide whether he was guilty of superstitious practice and "excessive extravagance." He was finally exonerated because of the great advantages of his position for the church and the mission in China and the possible dangers had he refused his official position.<sup>47</sup> The early internal arguments among Jesuits on clothing, silk, and poverty in China increasingly became the weapons of enemies outside the Society of Jesus – Dominicans, Franciscans, Foreign Missions of Paris – to attack them for breaking the rules of religious life, especially at court.

Over the course of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the wardrobe for attending ceremonies at the palace or work in the imperial workshops became codified in sumptuary laws following court etiquette. After the attacks on Schall's extravagance and his high rank at court, his successor at the Directorate of Astronomy, Ferdinand Verbiest, also had to face opposition within the Society of Jesus concerning his acceptance of high office in the Qing administration.<sup>48</sup> In 1681, he defended the Jesuit policy of wearing Chinese silk robes according to the current literati fashion from the attacks of the Dominican Domingo Fernández Navarrete, simply noting that all successors of Ricci followed his wise policy of sartorial adaptation, avoiding splendor, and showing religious gravity in their dress.<sup>49</sup>

While the missionaries' daily wardrobe in the provinces also became standardized according to the new Qing fashion and was gradually accepted by all orders, requirements for those working at the palace were much more stringent.<sup>50</sup> Only very few missionaries who occupied official posts in the Astronomical Directorate wore special robes with embroidered chest squares according to their ranking, and only when called for ceremonial audiences at the palace. Their normal "work" attire was that of well-dressed elites. By the eighteenth century, a consensus had been reached and controversies over

the use of silk were no longer center-stage, but formal silk robes had become part and parcel of the identity of any China missionary, especially for those serving at the court.

However, due to the extreme continental climate of the capital, swinging from torrid summers to freezing and windy winters, the wardrobe had to be varied according to the season. Ripa observed that in Beijing in winter even commoners wore

over a long cotton shirt, a jacket padded with lambskin or other fur. On top, they wear an external shirt padded with cotton, long to the knees, and over that, the *paozi* (袍子), i.e., a robe reaching the feet, lined with fox or ermine. Over the *paozi*, they wear a *waitao* (外套), a kind of short tunic, also lined with fox or ermine. Moreover, when it snows they wear a mantel, long almost all the way to the ground, lined on the outside with otter skins (*cane marino*).<sup>51</sup>

In summer it was necessary to wear light garments: a refreshing shirt made of kudzu vine fiber (*gepu* 葛布), covered by a *paozi* of the same light fabric, and on top a *waitao* made of *sha* (沙) silk gauze. Ripa added that a great variety of other garments were necessary for the mid-seasons as well; these garments were increasingly lighter when nearing summer, and, inversely, heavier when progressing toward winter. Almost exasperated by this complexity, he concluded: "This is something that is not practiced anywhere in any other part of the world, no matter how cultivated and delicate such place might be."<sup>52</sup>

All these garments cost dearly. Teodorico Pedrini commented in 1742 about the high expenses for clothes to attend functions or simply work at the imperial palaces, especially since they had to be varied according to seasons and type of ceremony, "now of one kind of fur, now of another; now of a certain color, now of another." On one occasion, he even borrowed a robe from the Chief Eunuch, as his own *waitao* was black, a color forbidden at court that day.<sup>53</sup> The Discalced Augustinian Sigismondo Meinardi da San Nicola, a court clockmaker, in 1752 confirmed the high expense needed to appear at the palace, "where one has to be neatly dressed from head to toe. I spent in one year for such clothing more than in the twelve years I lived in Beijing before being called to the palace."<sup>54</sup> Elsewhere he added that he had to spend much in "proper, albeit ordinary, clothes, which have always to be according to propriety as we see the emperor every day."<sup>55</sup> His confrère Anselmo da Santa Margherita confirmed in 1793 that the Beijing missionaries needed a multi-seasonal "honest" wardrobe (*vestire onestamente*), especially because of their courtly roles. Even those who had no technical functions at the palace, in fact had to participate in ceremonies of greetings to the emperor four times a year: on the Chinese New Year; at the return of the emperor from the Yuanmingyuan suburban villa after winter; at his departure for the hunting resort of Chengde in the spring; and at his return from the hunts in the fall.<sup>56</sup>

Church authorities in Rome suggested that “that both in their clothing and their general outside appearance [missionaries] show a certain dignity and decency,” to make clear to their Chinese audience that they were serving the court not out of any economic need or personal greed, but only to support their religion.<sup>57</sup> While the Jesuits spent generously on their attire, the meager subsidies of *Propaganda Fide* could often reduce their men to a look that conjured “not religious poverty, but rather vile sordidness.”<sup>58</sup>

The imperial bestowal of silk bolts as payment for services, and the occasional free tailoring of robes and fur coats under imperial order for the missionaries, underlined the central preoccupation with clothing in courtly life in Beijing and how the gifting of clothes was considered a common form of compensation for court missionaries. In 1738, the Disalced Augustinian miniature painter Serafino da San Giovanni Battista, for example, reported that upon his and Meinardi’s arrival in the capital from Europe, the emperor had ordered that they “measure our sizes for a *waitao* and a *paozi*, one to be lined with ermine, and the other with sable” and that “the lining was of high quality, and the cloth on top quite beautiful.”<sup>59</sup> Practices changed with time, possibly also linked to the declining imperial favor toward the missionaries. In 1764, for example, the court artisan and Disalced Carmelite Arcangelo Maria di Sant’Anna observed that in the past the emperor had generously ordered the court tailors to take the Europeans’ measurements during the summer months and prepare a complete fur coat for the coming winter. That practice, however, had more recently been abandoned in favor of the cheaper bestowal of bolts of ordinary silk “barely sufficient to clothe us for a few years, [and, moreover, for robes to be worn] only at home.”<sup>60</sup> During the latter part of the eighteenth century, especially after the dissolution of the Society of Jesus in China in 1775, the Beijing mission entered into a long phase of decline, and the number of court missionaries dwindled. The last lone survivor, the Portuguese Lazarist Cayetano Pires Pereira, Apostolic Administrator of Beijing, died on the eve of the Opium Wars in 1838. He was still formally charged with the position of Co-Director of the Astronomical Directorate and thus wore and was portrayed with official robes.

## 5 Conclusion: Accommodation, dissimulation, or necessity?

On his way back to his Beijing mission, the French Jesuit Jean de Fontaney wrote from London in 1704 to a Jesuit correspondent in France on the matter of silk clothing. Referring to his recent tour of France as procurator of the China French Jesuit mission, he reported the criticism of someone who had asked him:

You go around dressed in silk in China and you do not walk about the cities, but you use sedan chairs. Did the apostles preach the Gospel in this manner? And how can one respect religious poverty while dressing with silken gowns?

He replied:

Our China missionaries are the brothers of those who go barefoot with penitential clothes and who fast austerely in the missions of Madurai [in India]; and of those who follow in the snow the savages of the forests of Canada, suffering cold and hunger. . . . Is it a relaxation of rules that the Jesuits in Canada can eat meat, while those in India never eat it? . . . *What is good and sufficient in one country to have the Gospel accepted, in some cases does not work at all or is insufficient in another country.*<sup>61</sup>

This was the ultimate rationale for proclaiming the Ignatian “indifference” to material accidents in the pursuit of souls and for defending the importance of a “habit that hid the monk,” allowing the missionaries to move stealthily in Chinese society, both in the provinces – especially after 1724 when they all became clandestine following the imperial prohibition of Christian proselytization – and in the capital, where they continued to occupy official and technical positions to protect the illegal activities of their confrères across the empire. The words by de Fontaney reflect a clear Jesuit strategy surrounding clothing and the body. As long as the aim of conversion and the religious message were kept central, the means remained indifferent. There were, however, limits in the adoption of extravagant or luxurious attires, and restraints had to be put in place to avoid the corrosion of ethical standards and religious discipline, which in turn would endanger the entire edifice of the mission.

Scholars have used various intellectual frameworks to understand missionary adaptability. Many have espoused the concept of accommodation, also called the *modo suave* (“soft method”), especially in non-European contexts. The word *accomodare* (“to accommodate”) is often found in primary sources in relation to missions.<sup>62</sup> Others have explored the culture of “dissimulation” so typical of the Baroque era, an age of religious conflicts and rhetorical masking, as a possible source of Jesuit flexibility. Contemporary critics, both Catholic and Protestant, actually accused the Jesuits of duplicity, travesty, and simulation, including in their Asian missions.<sup>63</sup>

Communication of Catholic and European ideas and practices occurred at different levels in China: through the “apostolate of the book” written in Chinese; through scientific propaganda; through the proxy of native catechists and their oral ministry; through priestly rituality enacted in the liturgy and the sacraments; and through the materiality of objects (pictures, amulets, luxury items for the court, etc.) that mediated concepts, channeled spiritual forces, and facilitated relationships. Clothes were yet another powerful way to communicate. In this case, Chinese-style apparel communicated to the Chinese public and the imperial court that the missionaries had been readily assimilated to the native culture of China, and that the alterity of the “Western Ocean men” (*Xiyang ren* 西洋人), as Europeans were called, had

been neutralized and domesticated, in the time-honored Confucian process of *jiaohua* 教化, i.e., “transformation through teaching” of Chinese ethics, language, literature, and customs.

Here I have approached the topic of clothing and bodily practices from the classic point of view of accommodation, and the European missionaries themselves have been the actors at the center of the historical stage, literally clothed in Chinese costumes. The Chinese evolving material circumstances in the Ming-Qing period, however, powerfully influenced missionary accommodation from the outside. Dressing like the natives was absolutely necessary for the survival of the missionary enterprise. It allowed the foreign missionaries to be inconspicuous and to become culturally acceptable, even before becoming culturally proficient. This was doubly important at the court, as missionaries were closely observed “as if on a stage” by the imperial family and the metropolitan bureaucracy. They needed to show respect for courtly etiquette and sumptuary laws, and visibly fit within the hierarchies of power; this included using their bodies and attire. Wearing European clothes was thus never a possibility. Selecting the best social image that certain local clothes conveyed – the attire of the literati elite rather than that of the Buddhist or Daoist clergy – was, to an extent, a choice. That choice, nevertheless, was not made independently but rather at the suggestion of Chinese interlocutors, both literati and officials. Indeed, a new path away from Buddhist clerical identity emerged only after native informants offered their crucial input, a fact that confirms how the actions of missionaries in China were shaped by the Chinese social and material context, as much as they were by the missionaries’ own spiritual tradition and *modus operandi*.<sup>64</sup> Li Zhizao 李之藻, one of the most prominent literati converts of the late Ming period, put it quite clearly: “After Ricci entered China, for several years he followed a confused path (*hunji* 混跡). Then he met Qu Taisu, who deemed that it was not appropriate to behave like a Buddhist monk. Following this, Ricci let his hair grow and started identifying himself as a Confucian who had come to China to admire its superior civilization.”<sup>65</sup> In this Chinese rendering of the story, Ricci hardly seems to have been the one in charge.

The tension within the missionary community between the uniformity of religious rules and attire, on the one hand, and the need to adapt to a diversity of places and cultures, on the other, never completely disappeared but certainly became attenuated over time. Our scholarly interpretation of how this tension played out depends on how we read the sources and what perspective, Chinese or missionary, we privilege in our reading of those sources. In this chapter we have mainly heard the words of the missionaries themselves, grappling with the repercussions of their “going local.” Yet, the voices of their Chinese counterparts – the Confucian literati, the provincial and court officials, the eunuchs, the emperor, and the common men and women of the Ming and Qing empires – were never too far off in the background to become inaudible.

## Notes

- 1 APF, SOCP Indie Orientali e Cina, vol. 26, fol. 313r.
- 2 APF, SOCP Indie Orientali e Cina, vol. 26, fol. 313r.
- 3 APF, SOCP Indie Orientali e Cina, vol. 26, fol. 313r.
- 4 Van den Wyngaert and Mensaert eds., *Sinica Franciscana*, vol. 5, 626. Italics mine.
- 5 “Sumptuary Laws and Changing Styles,” in Wilkinson, *Chinese History*, 182–183.
- 6 Brook, *The Confusions of Pleasure*, 130–136.
- 7 Rocca, *La sostanza dell’effimero*.
- 8 Rocca, *La sostanza dell’effimero*, 103.
- 9 Padberg, *The Constitutions*, 12; for a general discussion of clothing and identity among the early Jesuits, see Levy, “Jesuit Identity, Identifiable Jesuits?”
- 10 Spanish original in Loyola, *Constitutiones*, vol. 2, 543; English version in Padberg, *The Constitutions*, 12; compare “Kleidung,” in Koch, *Jesuiten-Lexikon*, 986–988.
- 11 On the discussions surrounding Jesuit clothing in Spain in the 1560s, see Borràs, “En torno a la indumentaria.”
- 12 Ganss, “Toward Understanding the Jesuit Brothers’ Vocation,” 35.
- 13 “Bonete de los Hermanos Coadiutores,” in Astrain, *Historia*, 289–290.
- 14 For a global treatment of missionary clothing, see, e.g., Sanfilippo, “Travestimento o tradimento?”; Sanfilippo, “L’abito fa il missionario?”; Sanfilippo, “Adattamento e travestimento.”
- 15 Valignano, *Il cerimoniale*, 152–153; compare Schütte, *Valignano’s Mission Principles*, vol. 2, 245.
- 16 Hoey, “Alessandro Valignano”; Zampol D’Ortia, “Purple Silk and Black Cotton.”
- 17 Ruggieri to Acquaviva, Zhaoqing, 7 February 1583, in OS, vol. 2, 416.
- 18 FR, vol. 1, 192. On Jesuit clothing in this phase, see also Bettray, *Die Akkommodationsmethode*, 4–10; Peterson, “What to Wear?”; Hsia, “From Buddhist Garb to Literati Silk”; Hsia, *A Jesuit in the Forbidden City*, 138.
- 19 FR, vol. 1, 337; compare Harris, “The Mission,” 89.
- 20 OS, vol. 2, 136.
- 21 OS, vol. 2, 199; translated in Harris, “The Mission,” 90.
- 22 On 24 August 1617, Girolamo Alaleoni SJ so described the famous portrait at the Professed House of the College of the Gesù in Rome: “The portrait of our Fr. Matteo has been hanging for several weeks in the entrance hall of this house with those of our other Blessed Jesuits. But the image does not depict the Father as he would go outside . . . but rather *as he dresses at home, without fan and solemn dress*”; see OS, vol. 2, p. 497 (italics mine). On this portrait see also Guillen-Nuñez, “The Portrait.”
- 23 Harris, “The Mission,” 90.
- 24 Logan and Brockey, “Nicolas Trigault,” 157; compare also Alsteens, “A Note.”
- 25 OS, vol. 2, 199; translated in Harris, “The Mission,” 90.
- 26 Cortes, *Le voyage en Chine*, 374; Ricci calls the hat *sutumpo*, see FR, vol. 1, 358.
- 27 FR, vol. I, 88; compare also OS, vol. 2, 157.
- 28 OS, vol. 2, 173.
- 29 *Kangxi Renhe xianzhi*, *juan* 22, 22–23.
- 30 Menegon, “Deliver Us from Evil,” 39–40; Menegon, *Ancestors, Virgins, and Friars*, 230–236; Amsler, *Jesuits and Matriarchs*, 26–27.
- 31 Brockey, *The Visitor*, 302–306.
- 32 Brockey, *The Visitor*, 303; original Portuguese in ARSI, JS 161-II, fol. 114r. Italics mine.
- 33 On the *jijin*, see Anonymous, “Une pratique liturgique propre à la Chine,” 376–377, 404–406; Dudink, “The Holy Mass,” 219; Philippi Collection Online

- (private collection of religious hats, Kirkel, Saarland, Germany) <http://philippi-collection.blogspot.com/2011/07/chinese-jijin-tsikim-tsi-kim.html>. The Chinese text on the *jijin* is in Giulio Aleni's *Misa jiyi* 彌撒祭義 (The meaning of the sacrifice of the mass), *juan* 1, fol. 15a6–15b7, reprinted in CCT BNF, vol. 16, 513–514, compare Bontinck, *La lutte*, 58, note 122; for the 1615 request to Rome of permission to celebrate the Mass with the head covered, see *Ibid.*, 36–37, 40–41.
- 34 Wilkinson, *Chinese History*, 187; Spence, *The Search*, “Two edicts,” 26–28.
- 35 Wilkinson, *Chinese History*, 183, 187.
- 36 Schall, *Relation historique*, 157.
- 37 On the murky circumstances of Martini's whereabouts just before his surrender and his shifting loyalties, see Menegon, “I movimenti.” A description of the Ming robe bestowed on Martini in Biermann, “War Martin Martini,” 223; a 1654 portrait of Martini in Qing attire by Michaelina Woutiers is discussed in Golvers, “Note.”
- 38 Martini, *Opera Omnia*, vol. 5, 280 (Martini, *De bello*, 100) (italics mine).
- 39 Martini, 226–227 (Martini, *De bello*, 38–39).
- 40 Martini, 227 (Martini, *De bello*, 40).
- 41 Martini, 275 (Martini, *De bello*, 95).
- 42 Biermann, “War Martin Martini”; Menegon, “I movimenti.”
- 43 Martini, *Opera Omnia*, vol. 1, 309.
- 44 Schall, *Relation historique*, 157.
- 45 Passages from Magalhães, *Apontamentos do modo de viver e proceder do Padre João Adão nesta Corte . . .*, Letter to the Visitor and Vice-Provincial of China, 1649? (ARSI, JS 142, no. 32, fol. 3r), edited in Pih, *Le P. Gabriel de Magalhães*, 256, 328, 330.
- 46 Schall's color portrait was originally painted by his confrère Johannes Grueber in 1659–1660 in Beijing: see Pih, *Le P. Gabriel de Magalhães*, 362; Vāth, *Johann Adam Schall*, 238, 351–352; Chang, “Das Porträt von Johann Adam Schall.” On the insignia of rank, see Cammann, “The Development of the Mandarin Square.”
- 47 Pih, *Le P. Gabriel de Magalhães*; Romano, *Impressions de Chine*.
- 48 On the diatribes against Verbiest within the Society of Jesus, see Malatesta and Rouleau, “The ‘Excommunication’ of Ferdinand Verbiest,” 485–494; on his Qing ranks and his attempts to turn them down but also his politicking to obtain the position of Director, see Vande Walle, “Ferdinand Verbiest and the Chinese Bureaucracy,” 501.
- 49 Verbiest, *Correspondance*, 307; Golvers, *Letters*, 362.
- 50 Lucas Tomás, circular letter to the fathers of the Seraphic Mission, Canton, 21 January 1705, in *Simica Franciscana*, vol. 8, ed. Margiotti, 779–780.
- 51 Ripa, *Giornale*, vol. 2, 4–5.
- 52 Ripa, *Giornale*, vol. 2, 4–5.
- 53 Pedrini to Procurator Miralta, Beijing, 2 November 1742 (APF, Procura Cina, Box 1, fol. 1v).
- 54 Meinardi to Procurator Guglielmi, Beijing, 10 September 1752 (APF, Procura Cina, Box 15, fol. 1r).
- 55 Meinardi to Prefect of Propaganda, 30 November 1752 (APF, SOCP Indie Orientali e Cina, vol. 50, fol. 207v).
- 56 Anselmo da Santa Margherita to Prefect of Propaganda, Beijing, 25 October 1793 (APF, SOCP Indie Orientali e Cina, vol. 68, fol. 647r–653r).
- 57 Ex-Jesuits Ventavon and Poirot to Propaganda, 1779 (APF, Acta CP Indie Orientali e Cina, vol. 14, fol. 45v).
- 58 Ex-Jesuits Ventavon and Poirot to Propaganda, 1779 (APF, Acta CP Indie Orientali e Cina, vol. 14, fol. 45v).

- 59 Serafino da San Giovanni Battista to Procurator Miralta, Beijing, 11 May 1738 (APF, Procura Cina, Box 30, fol. 3r).
- 60 Arcangelo Maria di Santa Anna to Procurator Palladini, Haidian, 30 September 1764 (APF, Procura Cina, Box 14, fol. 1r).
- 61 LEC, vol. 3, 136 and 138. Italics mine.
- 62 Muller, “The Jesuit Strategy of Accommodation.”
- 63 See, e.g., Hsia, “From Buddhist Garb”; Levy, “Jesuit Identity”; Sabina Pavone, “Spie, mandarini, bramini.”
- 64 Standaert, “Jesuit Corporate Culture.”
- 65 FR, vol. 1, 336, note 1; Chinese original text in Li, *Tianxue*, *juan* 1, 13a.

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