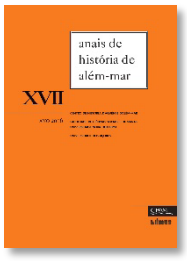

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Liam Matthew Brockey*

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Resumo

Este artigo analisa o debate sobre o uso da seda pelos missionários jesuítas no Leste Asiático entre 1551 e 1630. Dá-se destaque à tensão entre o voto de pobreza e o compromisso com uma estratégia missionária de adaptação às culturas indígenas. Recorrendo a fontes de arquivo pouco utilizadas, este estudo demonstra como os missionários adoptaram o uso de seda de modo a alcançarem autoridade no Japão e na China e como os seus superiores insistiram na sua proibição. Numa reflexão mais abrangente, considera-se a imagem do missionário vestido de seda, veiculada em publicações europeias, e a tentativa de controlo do seu significado pela Companhia de Jesus.

Palavras-chave: jesuíta, missionário, seda, China, Japão, estratégia de adaptação

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Abstract

This essay examines the debates surrounding the use of silk by Jesuit missionaries in East Asia between 1551 and 1630. The focus is on the tension between the Jesuits' vow of poverty and their commitment to a missionary strategy of accommodation to indigenous cultures. Relying on little-used archival sources, this discussion demonstrates how missionaries adopted used silk to gain authority in Japan and China, and how their superiors twice insisted on its prohibition. A broader consideration is of the image of the missionary in silk in European publications and how the Society of Jesus attempted to control its meaning.

Keywords: Jesuit, Missionary, Silk, China, Japan, Accommodation Strategy

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Introduction: Images and Audiences

Images have surprising power over the imagination. Entire books of textual descriptions are no match for a single depiction; no amount of words, not even a thousand, can challenge the hold of a picture on the mind. How might that adage apply to the topic of this essay, the image of the Jesuit missionary in China? Owing to a small number of drawings, engravings, and paintings, our mind's eye sees this man cloaked in the flowing robes of a Chinese scholar and wearing a curious rectangular hat. That particular image, thanks to its frequent reproduction, has become an icon. It stands in stark contrast to our mental image of a Jesuit in India, in Brazil, or in Europe, always that of a man dressed in a black robe. The clearest difference between these images is found in the clothes they wear; while the others evoke simplicity, the China Jesuit's clothing is ornate.[1]

The engraving reproduced here will suffice to conjure up the image of the China Jesuit. It comes from the frontispiece of the first official history of the China mission, and depicts Matteo Ricci. [Figure 1] This Italian priest (b. 1552), one of the founders of the Jesuit enterprise in the Ming Empire, is a man whose name has become practically synonymous with his mission's history and legacy. This depiction, the first image of Ricci to circulate widely in Europe, was based on a half-length portrait painted in China during his lifetime. That original painting, seen during the early modern period only by those who visited the Professed House of the Society of Jesus in Rome, was far less known than the engraving. Yet the recent spate of publications about Matteo Ricci that coincided with the four hundredth anniversary of his death at Beijing in 1610 has rescued the colorful painting from obscurity. A renewed interest in the China Jesuits has like-

[1] I would like to thank Cristina Pinto Basto, J.S.A. Elisonas, Noël Golvers, Valentina Maddalena, António Vasconcelos de Saldanha, Mónica Leal da Silva, and John Vollmer for their assistance with this article.

1 Wolfgang Kilian, depiction of Matteo Ricci. Detail from the frontispiece of Matteo Ricci and Nicolas Trigault, *De Christiana Expeditione apud Sinas* (Augsburg: Christoph. Mangium, 1615).
Image courtesy: Jesuitica Collection, John J. Burns Library, Boston College.

wise contributed to fixing it in the imagination not only of scholars but also of a wider reading public.[2]

On casting an eye on those Chinese robes, many a viewer today sees genius. The fact that a priest from four hundred years ago adopted the clothing of his hosts, along with the language and customs of another culture, is proof of his advanced level of sensitivity. Ricci's image speaks to our own values and desires for intercultural peace. Considered as part of a strategy for communicating with others, his use of Chinese robes was a masterstroke that has gained him deserved renown. Ruminating on the

[2] See, for example, the cover of R. Po-Chia Hsia, *A Jesuit in the Forbidden City: Matteo Ricci, 1552-1610*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010. Earlier examples are the covers to Jonanthan Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci*, New York, Viking, 1984; and Vincent Cronin, *Wise Man from the West*, London, Harvill Press, 1999, previous editions had different covers. Another version of the same Ricci portrait, more closely based on the figure seen on frontispiece to Athanasius Kircher, *China Illustrata* (Amsterdam, Johannes Janssonius, 1667), appears on the covers of Mary Laven, *Mission to China: Matteo Ricci and the Jesuit Encounter with the East,* London, Faber and Faber, 2011; and Michela Fontana, *Matteo Ricci: Un Gesuita alla corte dei Ming*, [3rd printing] Milan, Mondadori, 2008.

Italian Jesuit's image, one recent popular biographer confirms his iconic status, declaring: "It is Ricci's adaptability, his receptiveness to foreign mores, his embrace of difference, his determination to enter into conversation with another world, that have won the sixteenth-century missionary a sort of cult status among promoters of global harmony and cultural exchange."[3]

We have one man to thank for the image of Ricci: Nicolas Trigault (1577-1628), a member of the Jesuit mission in China who traveled to Europe in 1613 to seek men, privileges, and money for continuing Ricci's enterprise. Trigault never met Ricci – he arrived at Macau in the same year Ricci died in Beijing – but the Italian Jesuit's reputation in Europe was entrusted to his Flemish confrere. Since the images that continue to be evoked by Ricci's name were originally produced under Trigault's supervision, we can say that he acquitted himself well of the task. Trigault translated and augmented Ricci's writings about China and the Jesuit mission, publishing them as *De Christiana Expeditione apud Sinas* at Augsburg in 1615. That book, as well as a subsequent edition published at Lyon in 1616, included the frontispiece reproduced here, which was based on the painted portrait and a set of robes that Trigault had brought from China. It is likely that Trigault himself modeled the robes for the engraver Wolfgang Kilian (1581-1662), but it is certain that he donned them for Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640) during a visit to the Southern Netherlands in January 1617.[4] During that stopover, Rubens made three sketches of Trigault and a companion in those same robes, models for a Chinese official seen in his painting of the miracles of Francis Xavier.[5]

So we have a series of enduring images of the China Jesuits, but is their meaning fully understood? Are they simple depictions of missionaries ingeniously adapting themselves to Asian ways, or is there something dubious about this masquerade? Despite the appeal of these images to

[3] Laven, op. cit., p. 20.

[4] Edmond Lamalle, "La Propagande de Nicolas Trigault en Faveur des Missions de Chine (1616)", *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu*, vol. 9 (1940), pp. 49-120 at p. 62.

[5] On the portraits of Trigault and Johann Schreck Terrentius (1576-1630), see Anne-Marie Logan and Liam Matthew Brockey, "Nicolas Trigault, SJ: A Portrait by Peter Paul Rubens", *The Journal of the Metropolitan Museum of Art,* vol. 38 (2003), pp. 157-160; and Liam Matthew Brockey, *The Visitor: André Palmeiro and the Jesuits in Asia*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2014, p. 304. The great painting by Peter Paul Rubens, *The Miracles of St. Francis Xavier* (1617-1618), Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, may best be seen on the Internet at <https://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/u/0/asset-viewer/the-miracles-of-st-francis-xavier/mAG-VIH-g-_RNA?projectId=art-project>. The robes appear in yellow there.

today's viewer, they are evidence of a forgotten scandal. Whereas the modern observer takes it for granted that Ricci's Chinese robes were made of silk, a seventeenth-century viewer would not necessarily have known which fabric was depicted in the engraving he saw. Had he known it was silk, he would have been shocked. Early moderns knew that within the context of contemporary religious life, a Jesuit clad in silk was scandalous. It would be yet another embarrassment to add to the list of controversies lamented by many both inside and outside the order.[6]

The Jesuits of Ricci's time were men who had joined a religious order at the height of the Catholic Reformation in order to renounce the world. When they were accepted into the Society of Jesus, Ricci and Trigault swore vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. As part of the yearly routines that they would have performed at the Jesuit colleges in Europe or Asia, they would have read the *Constitutions* of the Society of Jesus. These were the rules that had been composed by Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556) and his companions in the mid-sixteenth century to shape Jesuit life. Clothing is mentioned at several reprises in this foundational document, although "no specified habit" is mandated for all Jesuits – in contrast to the prescriptions for the cut of cowls for monks, or for the specific colors for friars' habits.[7] One rule nevertheless gives guidance about how Jesuit clothing should be understood and what fabrics are prohibited:

> Clothing … should have three characteristics: first it should be proper; second, conformed to the usage of region where one is living; and third, not contradictory to the poverty we profess, as would happen through the wearing of silk or expensive cloths. These ought not to be used, in order that in everything humility and proper lowliness may be preserved, *ad maiorem Dei gloriam*.[8]

For the first Jesuits who wrote these rules, and for their successors who confirmed them, outward appearance needed to reflect inward disposition.

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[6] One such scandal was that of the Memorialists, whose agitation threatened to split the order; see, for example, Robert Maryks, *The Jesuit Order as a Synagogue of Jews: Jesuits of Jewish Ancestry and Purity-of-Blood Laws in the Early Society of Jesus*, Leiden, Brill, 2010, pp. 117-156.

[7] Ignatius Loyola, *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, ed. and trans. George Ganss, St. Louis, Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1970, p. 84. A recent, general discussion of the link between Jesuit dress and the order's identity is found in Evonne Levy, "Jesuit Identity, Identifiable Jesuits? Jesuit dress in theory and in image" in Elisabeth Oy-Marra, Volker Remmert, and Kristina Müller-Bongard, eds., *Le Monde est une Peinture: Jesuitische Identität und die Rolle der Bilder*, Berlin, Akademie Verlag, 2011, pp. 127-152.

[8] Loyola, op. cit., p. 258.

Theirs was not the world of cardinals, bishops, and canons with lucrative benefices. The secular clergy, living as they did in the *saeculum*, might cloak themselves in the world's clothing; Jesuits, however, were reminded that there should be "concern for the humility, poverty, and spiritual edification which we ought to keep always in view."[9] Nothing could be more contrary to those values than silk, the stuff of princes. Yet the images of the China Jesuits are indeed depictions of men wearing rich robes and tall hats, both made of silk, as their writings testify. As such, they were blatant transgressions of the Society's "Institute," its basic rules and spirit, as well as signs of *luxuria*, one of the deadly sins of the medieval tradition.

Surely Matteo Ricci did not intend to flaunt his order's rules without reason. He conceived of the Chinese silk robes as part of his mission strategy in the Ming Empire, and his attitude was rooted in the ambiguity found in the *Constitutions*. Ignatius insisted that the dress for his companions be "proper," and there is no doubt that the silk robe the China Jesuits wore was cut for modesty. Moreover, the second caveat that Jesuit dress be "conformed to the usage of the region where one is living" – a point clarified by a note that "at least, it should not be altogether different" – permitted missionaries to adapt their dress after the fashion of the Ming Empire.[10] So the use of Chinese robes was a way for entering into dialogue with those he considered to be his peers. Much has been said about how the Jesuits, and Ricci in particular, pursued a policy of cultural accommodation in their East Asian missions, and his image demonstrates that policy.[11] The early Jesuits in China – as well as those in the Mughal Empire, in Japan, and in Vietnam – hoped that their interactions with Asian nobles, rulers, and officials would occasion spiritual change throughout these societies in the same way that Constantine's conversion had worked among the Romans.[12] By adapting their clothing, they could heed Paul's injunction to be "all things to all men," a sentiment echoed by Ignatius. But there was no avoiding the fact that the *Constitutions* made explicit reference to silk, banning its use.

While useful as mission strategy, the reliance on physical signs of prestige in China was fraught with moral problems for the early modern Jesuits.

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[9] Ibid., p. 259.

[10] Ibid., p. 258.

[11] For a discussion of accommodation, see Brockey, *The Visitor*, pp. 215-220, and 282-324.

[12] They made this parallel in their contemporary writings, see Liam Matthew Brockey, "Surpassing Sylvester: Jesuit Missionaries and Asian Rulers in the Early Modern Period" in Jay Levenson, ed., *Encompassing the Globe: Portugal and the World in the 16th and 17th Centuries*, 3 vols., Washington, D.C., Smithsonian Institution/Freer Gallery of Art & Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, 2008, vol. 2, pp. 150-167.

There was no shortage of critics within and without the Society of Jesus who thought poorly of the China Jesuits for using silk, even if it was out of pious motivations. The tension between apostolic poverty and mission policy is the crux of this essay. So let us consider the Jesuits' use of silk in East Asia chronologically, examining the issue first within the context of the Japan mission and then in that of the China mission, and concentrating on the moral dimensions of the missionaries' use of silk as understood by the Jesuits themselves. Cataloguing condemnations by the early modern enemies of the Society will not detain us. Instead, we will examine documents written by the missionaries as well as by their superiors, in order to understand how they confronted the moral quandary that silk represented – and how they managed to turn the scandalous image of a silk-clad Jesuit in Asia into a vision of skillfully executed strategy in Europe.

The Murmurs of the Portuguese: Japan in the late 1560s

The story of the Jesuits' use of silk in East Asia started with Francis Xavier (1506-1552), the man who founded the Society's first missions in the region. As is well known, Xavier reached India in 1542, spent the ten years shuttling around Maritime Asia, and died on an island off the China coast. In the course of these travels, Xavier laid the foundations for the different Jesuit endeavors in India, Insular Southeast Asia, Japan, and China. The missionary enterprises that he created nevertheless shared more than a common founder: The institutional links between these three regions would be very important for determining the outcome of the Jesuit debates over silk that occurred after Xavier's death. And the close connection between the Japan mission and its offshoot in China would also influence the evolution of Jesuit attitudes towards that polemical fabric in the century after 1552. Since the question of silk was first raised in Japan, it is important to start any examination of the topic by a consideration of Xavier's pioneering experiments in that country.

It was only toward the end of Francis Xavier's Asian travels that he came to consider clothing as part of his missionary strategy. Prior to the early 1550s, Xavier wore the same simple black robe that he had used during the heady formative years of the Society of Jesus. Such was his charisma and reputation for sanctity that he needed little else to convince the Portuguese traders, soldiers, and prelates – not to mention prospective converts from India and the Moluccas – of his spiritual authority. But things were more difficult for Xavier when he tried to project the same

type of gravitas to the peoples of East Asia. His plain black cotton robe apparently did not translate well over these farther cultural boundaries.

After a series of reverses during his early encounters with Japanese authorities, Xavier made a change in 1551 during his stay in Japan. According to some of the earliest Jesuit chronicles, he switched his clothes before he met Ōtomo Yoshishige (later called Sōrin, 1530-1587), the daimyo of Bungo on Kyushu.[13] Xavier was reportedly convinced by the Portuguese merchants who accompanied him on this visit to exchange his usual robe for something more befitting his status as a revered churchman. And so he donned resplendent ecclesiastical vestments for his audience with this potentate, in spite of his scorn for such ostentation. The incipient mission benefited from the cordial welcome he received, as well as from the permission that he gained for his companions to reside in Bungo. In the eyes of some of his successors, there was a lesson to be learned from this encounter: Clothing should be part of their mission strategy.[14]

It was how Xavier's successors in Japan chose to put this lesson into practice that led to the first controversies among the Jesuits over silk. Their mission grew slowly in the decade after his death, but its rhythm of expansion increased when the missionaries attracted a new recruit to their ranks, Luís de Almeida (c. 1525-1584). This prosperous young merchant and sometime physician joined the Society in the late 1550s as a lay brother, at

[13] These encounters are discussed in J.S.A. Elisonas, "Christianity and the Daimyo", in John Whitney Hall and James McClain, eds. *The Cambridge History of Japan*, vol. 4, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, pp. 301-372 at pp. 310-318.

[14] In his correspondence, Xavier himself made no mention of changing his clothes. The first history of the Japan mission, written by Luís Fróis, likewise omits this detail about Xavier's encounter with Ōtomo. The story about Xavier's robes appears to have originated in the writings of Alessandro Valignano, the author of the first history of the Jesuits in Asia. Yet as will be described later on, Valignano's comments are restricted to a note that Xavier changed his clothes, a comment which is echoed in Book 16 of Giovanni Pietro Maffei's *Historiarum Indicarum libri XVI* (first edition Florence, 1588). Fernão Mendes Pinto (d. 1583), the sometime Jesuit, merchant, and adventurer, included a far more detailed description in his famous *Peregrinaçam* (first ed. Lisbon, 1614), a text written in the 1570s. Mendes Pinto's descriptions match those which are found in several of the lives of Xavier, such as the ones by Orazio Torsellino and João de Lucena, both which appeared before the *Peregrinaçam*. In his 1600 *Vida*, Lucena describes how Xavier was convinced by the Portuguese captain to use a mode of presentation reminiscent of the pomp of the Buddhist clergy. He therefore chose to go as "if in a solemn procession," wearing a surplice, a black chasuble made of *chamalote* (camel hair or wool), and an embroidered green velvet stole. The authoritative modern biography of Xavier makes the claim for Xavier changing his clothes on the basis of Valignano's account. Nevertheless, the history of the Japan mission produced by João Rodrigues in the early seventeenth century which still remains unpublished in the original Portuguese places Xavier's change of clothing at the moment of his return to Yamaguchi from Kyoto. Rodrigues has it that upon his encounter with Ōuchi Yoshitaka,

the moment when a new link was forged between his old trading partners, his new brethren, and some of the lords of Kyushu, who were offered an exchange: Portuguese traders would bring their cargoes, which included highly prized Chinese silk, to a lord's port, if he submitted to baptism. In 1563 one of these local potentates, Ōmura Sumitada (1533-1587) of the Sonogi area of Kyushu, accepted the deal and was baptized Bartolomeu. Their success with this member of the provincial gentry encouraged them to cast their nets more widely in the circles of the island's military aristocracy, where other potential converts and patrons might be found. As part of this strategy, the Jesuits sought to blend into their surroundings among the elite as fully as possible.

The *padres* had ready capital to help them with this ascent of the social ladder when the time came. When Almeida joined the Society, he offered his personal fortune – estimated at over three thousand cruzados – to the order.[15] Most likely at his suggestion, the Jesuits invested the lion's share in the silk trade, an exchange that brought them revenue for their upkeep, something that they could not otherwise secure in East Asia. This investment came at the beginning of the boom in this trade across the China

a visit which took place prior to Xavier's meeting with Ōtomo, the missionary pioneer decided to change his threadbare clothes for something more impressive – although precisely what he wore is not indicated. See Xavier to his Companions in Europe, Cochin, 29 January 1552, in *Monumenta Xaveriana*, 2 vols., Madrid, Augustin Avrial, 1899-1912, vol. 1, pp. 691-692; Luís Fróis, *História de Japam*, ed. Josef Wicki, 5 vols., Lisbon, Biblioteca Nacional, 1976, vol. 1, p. 45; Alessandro Valignano, *Historia del Principio y Progresso de la Compañia de Jesús en las Indias Orientales (1542-64)*, ed. Josef Wicki, 2 vols., Rome: Insitutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1944, vol. 2, p. 176; Giovanni Pietro Maffei, *Le Istorie delle Indie Orientale*, Florence, Filippo Giunti, 1589, pp. 604-605; Fernão Mendes Pinto, *Peregrinaçam*, Lisbon, Pedro Crasbeeck, 1614, chapter 209, fol. 275 or Fernão Mendes Pinto, *The Travels of Mendes Pinto*, ed. and trans. Rebecca Catz, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1989, pp. 473-474 (although Catz translates *chamalote* as camlet, which would be a fine fabric); Orazio Torsellino, *De Vita Francisci Xaverii*, Rome, Aloysii Zannetti, 1596, p. 171; João de Lucena, *Historia da Vida do Padre Francisco Xavier e do que fizerão na India os mais Religiosos da Companhia de Iesu*, Lisbon, Pedro Crasbeeck, 1600, pp. 689-693, esp. p. 691; Georg Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier: His Life, His Times*, trans. M. Joseph Costelloe, 4 vols., Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1973-1982, vol. 4, p. 216; and Joan Rodorīgesu (João Rodrigues), *Nihon kyōkaishi* (Ecclesiastical History of Japan), ed. Ikegami Mineo et al., *Dai Kōkai Jidai Sōsho* IX-X, 2 vols., Tokyo, Iwanami, 1970, vol. 2, pp. 447-448; or BIBLIOTECA DA AJUDA, *Jesuítas na* Ásia collection, 49-IV-53: fols. 226v-227r, João Rodrigues, *História da Igreja do Japão*, Macau, 1634.

[15] Fróis says "a little more or less than three thousand cruzados," while Valignano states that it was "like four thousand ducats," a considerable sum in either case. See Fróis, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 59; and Valignano, "Apologia en la qual se responde a diversas calumnias q*ue* se escrivieron contra los PP. de la Compañia de Japón y de la China; Chapter 16", Macau, 9 October 1598, cited in Josef Franz Schütte, *Valignanos Missionsgrundsätze für Japan*, 2 vols., Rome: Edizione di Storia e Letteratura, 1958, vol. 2, pp. 455-460 at p. 455.

Sea, and brought significant returns to the expanding mission. According to a later report, it was in the mid-1560s that the Jesuits began to acquire better lodgings and clothing.[16] Contemporary sources are unclear about how the missionaries came into possession of the latter – it is possible that they obtained at least part of their silk robes as gifts from their patrons; such garments were often given as presents in Japanese aristocratic circles. They do state plainly, however, that the use of silk robes was intended to make them more acceptable to prospective converts, that is, to the likes of Ōtomo Yoshishige.

How successful was this gamble in appearances? It is hard to say, since the numbers of converts in Japan did not increase dramatically in the late 1560s. But it was undeniable that the path for future expansion opened with the tightening of the alliances between the regional potentates, the Portuguese traders, and the Jesuits.[17] News of this symbiosis made its way to cities of Portuguese India, where the heart of the Society's enterprises in Asia lay, and onward to Europe. While word of elite conversions was greeted with joy, the rumors of missionaries behaving or dressing like silk traders were not. The debates over Jesuit participation in the silk trade – another moral dilemma for the Society of Jesus, since religious were generally forbidden to engage in commerce – are matters outside of the scope of the present essay, although they often involved the link between dealing in silk and wearing it.[18] To the Jesuit superiors in India, whose writ at that time extended to the mission in Japan, it seemed that their confreres in East Asia had forgotten their vows of poverty.

In 1569, the Society's provincial officer in India sent a trusted priest to Japan to root out the abuses related to silk. Francisco Cabral (1528-1609), a former college rector and novice master who was one of the senior Jesuits in India, was sent to Kyushu to remind his brethren in Japan of their duty to God and to their order. He was further entrusted with the chore of exchanging all of the silk from the mission's residences for sim-

[16] Francisco Cabral to Francisco de Borja, Nagasaki, 5 September 1571, cited ibid., p. 465.

[17] Elison, "Christianity and the Daimyo", pp. 321-326; and Valignano, *Historia del Principio y Progresso*, vol. 2, p. 444.

[18] Discussion the moral and financial issues regarding Jesuit participation in trade in East Asia can be found in George Elison, *Deus Destroyed: The Image of Christianity in Early Modern Japan*, [3rd printing, 1991] Cambridge, Mass., Council on East Asian Studies and Harvard University Press, 1973, pp. 101-106; J.F. Moran, *The Japanese and the Jesuits: Alessandro Valignano in sixteenth-century Japan*, London, Routledge, 1993, pp. 115-128; C.R. Boxer, *The Christian Century in Japan, 1549-1640*, [2nd edition] London: Carcanet, 1993, pp. 104-121; and Brockey, *The Visitor*, pp. 326-333.

pler fabrics. Since the Japan missionaries saw their clothing as an integral part of their strategy, it is no surprise that Cabral met with resistance in Japan. His long rivalry with the strongest early proponent of cultural accommodation, Alessandro Valignano (1539-1606), about whom more will be said below, meant that Cabral has not be remembered kindly by historians, either.[19]

In 1571, two years after his arrival in Japan, Francisco Cabral wrote a pair of letters to Europe to summarize his progress. One letter was addressed to the Superior General of the Society of Jesus, Francisco de Borja (1510-1572); the other to the Visitor (inspector) of the Province of Portugal, Diego Mirón (1516-1590).[20] In the second letter, Cabral begins by mentioning that he had read a letter intended for a deceased colleague in which Mirón wrote that the Superior General knew "that the *padres* here went about dressed in silk but did not know the reason." As Cabral understood it, Borja had declared that "it was against the humility and poverty that the Society professed, and against the way that Christ Our Lord taught."[21] In both letters Cabral discusses the moral issues involved in the missionaries' use of silk in Japan and describes his personal efforts to come to grips with the excesses perceived by him. But there is a crucial difference of tone in the two letters: To the Superior General, Cabral wrote in broad terms about how silk came to be used and why it was not necessary for the Jesuits' mission strategy; to the Visitor, he wrote about the specific men who flaunted the order's rules and named those who resisted his reforms. Read together, the two letters reveal the dimensions of the scandal over silk that was seen to be brewing in Japan.

If the use of silk was a part of the Jesuits' mission strategy, its prohibition demanded a consideration of the reasons why it had been employed in the first place. Cabral's starting point was the priests' desire to fit into the Japanese religious context. He therefore presented General Borja with a brief panorama of religious life in that country, a description that was at the

[19] The primary reason for this legacy was Cabral's reluctance to integrate Japanese members into the Society of Jesus, a policy that Valignano favored. See, for example, Boxer, op. cit., pp. 73, 85-87, and 211; Schütte, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 239-284 or J.F. Schütte, *Valignano's Mission Principles for Japan*, trans. John J. Coyne, 2 vols., St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1980-1985, vol. 1, pp. 187-224; and Elison, op. cit., pp. 15-21, and 54-56.

[20] Francisco Cabral to Francisco de Borja, Nagasaki, 5 September 1571, in Schütte, *Valignanos Missionsgrundsätze*, vol. 2, pp. 461-468; and ARCHIVUM ROMANUM SOCIETATIS IESU [=ARSI], *Japonica-Sinica* Collection [=*Jap-Sin*] 7-I, fols. 23r-24v., Francisco Cabral to Diego Mirón, Nagasaki, 6 September 1571.

[21] Ibid., fol. 23r.

same time a gloss on the effectiveness of the mission policies employed over the previous two decades. Among the principal themes addressed by Cabral was whether his brethren should attempt to mimic the ways of the indigenous clergy in order to achieve a social standing parallel to theirs. In Japan, by contrast to what will be said below about Jesuit estimations of the repute of the indigenous clergy in China, the "bonzes" enjoyed great respect from secular lords. Cabral pondered whether outward appearances determined prestige among these Buddhist clerics, and he was certain that they did not. He declared that their "ordinary dress is silk," but that there were "some among them whose orders prohibit them from wearing silk, so they wear nothing but black or white cotton or linen cloth." Most importantly, Cabral claimed, "it is not for this reason that they are revered any less than those who go about loaded with silk, indeed, they are held in even greater esteem."[22]

Accordingly, in Cabral's understanding there was no correlation between social prestige and silk robes in Japan. As a result, the notions of apostolic poverty that the Jesuits brought with them from Europe – concepts that were codified in the Society's rules – could exist in Japan without prejudice to their mission. This position was in direct contrast to that of his subordinates, who saw their silks as the necessary means for communicating their religious authority to the Japanese. Cabral's retelling of the mission's early years thus displayed the priests of his day in a poor light. In both letters to Europe, he sketched a history of the mission that underscored the conditions in which Xavier's first successors lived in Japan – a manner reflecting "the accustomed poverty and humility of the *Companhia*."[23] As a result of their observance of their vows, Cabral asserted, "Our Lord gave them many blessings, and through it many souls were converted."[24]

Seeking then to explain how silk came to be used by other Jesuits in Japan, Cabral pointed the finger at Luís de Almeida's fortune. To the Superior General, he asserted that once the donated funds arrived,

> the business dealings began, both here in Japan and in China; and as the trade grew, so grew the laxity in the residences. About 7 or 8 years ago, silk began to be introduced, both in beds as well as in gowns; and in this way everything else had to fall into line, such as an abundance of food, a

[22] Schütte, *Valignanos Missionsgrundsätze*, vol. 2, p. 463.

[23] Arsi *Jap-Sin* 7-I: fol. 23r.

[24] Schütte, *Valignanos Missionsgrundsätze*, vol. 2, p. 465.

> number of servants, little work and prayer, etc. Little by little things grew to the point where, in Japan, a priest was more like a lord than a priest of the Society, from whence came the murmurs of the Portuguese who came here, as much about this as about their excessive loose behavior in dealings and trade.[25]

Cabral added more details in his letter to Mirón. Not just silk, but "colorful gowns," and "even some of their pillows and bolsters were made of silk, and I saw that one priest's mattress was made of damask." But what really started the murmurs of the Portuguese, Cabral claimed, was when they saw Balthasar da Costa (b. c.1538-1580) visit their carrack with a crowd of servants and dressed in "purple silk." *Fausto e vaidade*, ostentation and vanity, with "little edification," was what these merchants saw and what they made known to others outside Japan.[26]

The remedies that Cabral imposed on his brethren were twofold: The first was to reduce their involvement in the silk trade in so much as possible – "to moderate it in such a way that it only produced what we need to support ourselves well," in his words – and the second was to prohibit all use of silk.[27] Invoking the vow of obedience, he insisted that the missionaries surrender any silk they had in exchange for cotton cloth, and reprimanded those who failed to do so. Despite the vaunted spirit of union among the early Jesuits, Cabral faced strong resistance: "I do not know how to speak to Your Paternity of the labors and temptations that I endured in this task," he wrote to General Borja. Only two of the eight priests (not to mention the four lay brothers) thought it a good idea.[28] "The rest of them were against it," Cabral asserted,

> they told me that if I took away the silks it would slam the door to the conversion of these lands, since the Japanese see nothing beyond external appearances, and if we did not wear silk and just went about in black, not only would not any lord, but not even the Christians, receive us.[29]

This comment confirms that the Jesuits saw their robes as an integral part of their proselytizing strategy. But Cabral did not agree. He explained to his superiors how he had countered by exposing the foundation of the

[25] Ibid.

[26] ARSI *Jap-Sin* 7-I: fol. 23r.

[27] Ibid., fol. 23v.

[28] Schütte, *Valignanos Missionsgrundsätze*, vol. 2, pp. 465-466. In his letter to Mirón, he says that only one priest, Cosme de Torres, agreed with him. See ARSI *Jap-Sin* 7-I: fol. 23v.

[29] Schütte, *Valignanos Missionsgrundsätze*, vol. 2, p. 466.

missionaries' resistance; it was rooted in *amor próprio*, self-regard. He insisted that they trust in the obedience they had sworn, confiding that "God, who bears the hearts of men in His hands, would change them and make it so that with the gowns that we were commanded to wear we would produce more fruit than with all of the silks and display that we had used until then."[30] In his letter to the General, Cabral wrote that he also played the trump card of the example of Christ and the Apostles. Jesus's commands had been straightforward, Cabral argued to his subordinates, and there was the proof of "the thousands of Christians that the Apostles and other saints had not made with silk, but threadbare and in the most extreme poverty." His opponents riposted that God had not yet given them the same spiritual arms that He had given to Christ's first disciples, saying that "the Apostles worked many miracles and that was why they converted people, etc." Lacking such *force majeure*, the Jesuits had to work within the social and cultural constraints of Japanese society – or at least those which they considered most congenial to their efforts.[31]

Dismissing these arguments, Cabral demanded the missionaries' silks. "I ordered gowns of black cotton to be made, of the kind that we normally use," he reported to the Superior General, "and gathered from them all of the silk gowns that I could find."[32] Still chafing at this imposition, the missionaries turned his search into a game of cat and mouse. Cabral mentioned to Mirón that he knew how some kept their silks secretly, like Baltasar da Costa, and told of how he discovered Melchior Figueiredo (1528-1597) with "some silk pillows" as well as a "robe like they use here made of green Chinese damask in which he slept at night." More shocking for Cabral was to find Organtino Gnecchi-Soldi (1530-1609), the priest who had brought him strict orders about missionary dress from India, willing to exchange his black robe for "a gown of colored silk" while on his way to Kyoto. There, this missionary joined his companion Luís Fróis (1532-1597) in "leaving aside the other gowns," a move that prompted Cabral to issue a sharply worded rebuke, one which produced the desired effect.[33]

What resulted from this change in strategy with regard to silk? It does not appear that it was either as beneficial or as catastrophic as the two sides predicted – historians have identified other factors responsible for

[30] ARSI *Jap-Sin* 7-I: fol. 23v.

[31] Schütte, *Valignanos Missionsgrundsätze*, vol. 2, p. 466.

[32] Ibid.

[33] ARSI *Jap-Sin* 7-I: fol. 23v.

2 Jesuits in Japan, depicted in *Arrival of a Portuguese ship* (detail), one of a pair of so-called Nanban screens, 1620-1640. Japan. Ink, colors, and gold on paper.
Courtesy of Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, The Avery Brundage Collection, B60D78+. Photograph © Asian Art Museum of San Francisco.

the boom and bust of the Japan mission. But Cabral was convinced that the change he introduced had been the crucial factor. Already in his letter to Mirón, he asserted that the daimyo of Bungo was relieved with their change of habit, thereby proving the wisdom of his actions. In Cabral's words, Ōtomo remarked that the Jesuits now "appeared to be religious where before we seemed to be merchants." Furthermore, he spoke to Cabral while kneeling and with both hands touching the floor, "which is the greatest courtesy done here." So the use of cotton meant no loss of respect by Japanese lords, Cabral asserted. [Figure 2] As proof, he declared in 1571 that more converts had been made since he removed "the deceit and falsity of believing that silks made Christians," a total of "five thousand souls among whose numbers are many lords."[34]

Authority and results would not suffer without silk, Cabral wagered, and in subsequent years he further sought to prove this contention at his own risk. Writing the following year to an unnamed correspondent, he

[34] Ibid.

described a round trip from Kyushu to Kyoto in which he traveled through the heart of war-torn Japan. Fear counseled Cabral to "change his clothes and to travel unknown in silk robes," but he claimed to trust more "in God and in obedience" and so journeyed with his customary black cassock and rosary. Not only did he travel safely in both directions, Cabral claimed, but the supreme warlords "and all the other lords of those parts gave me such honors and favors, dressed poorly as I was."[35] Among these figures was Oda Nobunaga (1534-1582), the military hegemon who began the process of unifying Japan after a century of political fragmentation and civil war. In the company of Luís Fróis, Cabral was received at Gifu Castle in April 1572, where Nobunaga reportedly served him a meal with his own hands. When pondering what gift to offer the priests, Fróis recorded, the hegemon said "I wanted to give the *padres* some silk gowns, but since they dress in black cloth, it does not seem fitting." More fitting and more pleasing to Cabral – yet still in keeping with Japanese seigneurial munificence – were the eighty reams of paper that they received instead.[36]

As time wore on and the missionaries experienced greater success in numbers of converts from both elite and plebeian milieux, Francisco Cabral grew further convinced of the virtue of his policy with regard to silk. Writing to Rome in 1593, seven years after his return to India, he argued that the Jesuits' return to poverty and humility had been the best strategy. Seeking a parallel to the events that had transpired in Japan, he found the story of the Byzantine emperor Heraclius (r. 610-641) at the gates of Jerusalem in 630, a tale known to readers of Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda Aurea*: Attempting to return the True Cross to its place of origin with royal pomp, the emperor found the city's gates miraculously filled with bricks and mortar.[37] Only after Heraclius removed his crown and cloak, Cabral paraphrased, "when he was unshod and dressed in lowly and humble robes, conforming himself to the humility of Christ, do the stones again move and open a clear passage for him to enter." To make

[35] Francisco Cabral to "hum homem secular," Kuchinotsu, 29 September 1572, in *Cartas que os Padres e Irmãos da Companhia de Jesus escreverão dos Reynos de Japão & China*, 2 vols., [first ed. Évora, Manuel de Lyra, 1598], fac-simile Maia, Castroliva, 1997, vol. 1, p. 338r.

[36] Fróis, op. cit., vol. 2: pp. 359-364, esp. p. 362. Japanese sources concur that in the 1570s Nobunaga gave kimonos and other robes as gifts, as well as other luxury goods including rolls of textiles, works of art, and gold and silver pieces. See Ota Gyuichi, *The Chronicle of Lord Nobunaga*, trans. J.S.A. Elisonas and J.P. Lamers, Leiden, Brill, 2011, pp. 173, 228, 252, and 291.

[37] Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Granger RYAN, 2 vols., Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1993, vol. 2, pp. 169-170.

the comparison clearer, Cabral recalled that upon his arrival in Japan there were "no more than 2000 Christians, and no noblemen among their number except Dom Bartolomeu" (and a handful of others). But when Cabral stripped his subordinates of their silk, God saw fit to assist them, "in such a way that His law became respected and the priests, with black cotton cassocks, were more honored and esteemed by the kings and lords of Japan than they were before, when they had silk and other flourishes."[38] And so, by the mid-1580s, the mission church claimed many tens of thousands more members – even if the great expansion of conversions owed more to the aggressive tactics of the newly Christian lords in eradicating Buddhism and Shinto from their lands than to any change in missionary clothing.[39]

In the Beginning: Valignano, Ricci, and the Mandarins

By the mid-1570s, it appeared as though the debate over Jesuits wearing silk in East Asia was finished. The missionaries in Japan had relinquished their silk and their enterprise was flourishing. Yet as the decade drew to a close, a towering figure arrived to oversee the mission and to impose his strategic vision on the Jesuits in East Asia. This man was Alessandro Valignano, the personal representative of the Superior General, who was appointed as Visitor (inspector) of the Jesuits' missions in Asia in 1573. Before arriving in Japan in 1579, Valignano had spent four years in Western India and some months on the China coast in Macau. If there is one name associated with the famed Jesuit concept of cultural accommodation in Japan, it is that of Alessandro Valignano. Through his compendia of rules and orders, he structured the Japan mission, as well as its offshoot in China, in the unique way that has become renowned in scholarship on early modernity.[40] It is therefore important to focus on Valignano's policies with regard to silk, since they led to the paradox that we see in the engraving of Matteo Ricci.

Visitor Valignano's famous contribution to the Jesuits' mission strategy in East Asia became evident soon after his arrival in Kyushu. Among his first initiatives was the calling of a series of consultations in the various mission

[38] Francisco Cabral to Claudio Aquaviva, Cochin, 15 December 1593, in Schütte, *Valignanos Missionsgrundsätze*, vol. 2, pp. 469-476 at p. 472.

[39] Elisonas, "Christianity and the Daimyo", pp. 328-335.

[40] A sketch of Valignano's character and writings is M. Antoni J. Üçerler, "Alessandro Valignano: man, missionary, and writer", *Renaissance Studies*, vol. 17, no. 3 (2003), pp. 337-366. A discussion of his policies in Japan is in Schütte, *Valignano's Mission Principles*, trans. Coyne vol. 1, pp. 248-382; and vol. 2, pp. 3-90.

regions in Japan. Issues of strategy ranging from clothing to behavior were therefore discussed between October 1580 and December 1581, including the question of silk, but there was general agreement among the mission's men for maintaining the ban. In 1583, Valignano drew up rules which confirmed this decision, recognizing that the Jesuits' silks had been replaced with "the same cloth that our men use in India."[41] Valignano's decisions were confirmed by Superior General Claudio Aquaviva (1543-1615), who responded in 1585 that the Jesuits in Japan should be ever vigilant about avoiding "silk and all superfluities."[42]

It is therefore surprising that Valignano had a completely different attitude with regard to the use of silk by the Jesuits in China. Unlike in Japan, where the die was cast before he arrived, Valignano was the driving force behind the creation of the China mission. He was the man who selected the first priests for language study and the primary source of encouragement for Ricci and his first companions in Guangdong Province. There is no doubt that Valignano knew how complicated it would be for him to convince his superiors in Rome to open an exception to the rules on silk for the incipient China mission. But for him, the only way to put this new endeavor on a firm foundation was through silk.

Why was Visitor Valignano willing to ignore for China what he had confirmed for Japan? To answer this question, it is necessary to revisit his understanding of the policy of cultural accommodation in Japan. Modern scholars have long posited that there was something gentle in Valignano's insistence on the *modo soave* in Japan; and, in contrast to the violence of some missionary encounters elsewhere, there certainly was. Yet it is a mistake to equate its suavity with meekness or self-effacement: Valignano's policy was political. Its aim was authority; that is, spiritual and personal authority of the sort that the physically imposing and noble-born Valignano enjoyed among other Europeans. Following his plans, the Jesuits would gain authority in East Asian eyes without having to rely on others to win it for them by force of arms. Accommodation to the customs of Japan was therefore a means to permit the Jesuits to be seen by their Japanese interlocutors as the authority figures that they considered themselves to

[41] Alessandro Valignano, *Sumario de las Cosas de Japon (1583); Adiciones del Sumario de Japon (1592)*, ed. José Luis Alvarez-Taladriz, 2 vols., Tokyo, Sophia University, 1954-, vol. 1, pp. 161*-163* (on the consultations), pp. 231-233 (Valignano's rule), and p. 247 (consultation results and Valignano's comments on them).

[42] Claudio Aquaviva to Alessandro Valignano, Rome, 24 December 1585, in Alessandro Valignano, *Il Ceremoniale per i Missionari del Giappone*, ed. and trans. Joseph Schütte, Rome, Storia e Letteratura, 1946, pp. 315-324 at p. 317.

be. Valignano's orders for the Jesuits to dress in Japanese style (without silk, of course), to speak Japanese, and to behave according to Japanese norms were parts of a strategy to yield in what was indifferent in order to preserve what was essential – Jesuit authority. Once this crucial element was obtained, and the Jesuits ceased to be dismissed out of hand as foreigners, more and more Japanese lords would see the missionaries as worthy spiritual guides and the pace of conversions would accelerate.[43]

There was also another way to secure the authority that Valignano sought for the Jesuits. In his understanding, one method had the greatest potential for success: The Jesuits could present themselves directly to the rulers of Asian lands, preferably as ambassadors from Lisbon, Goa, or Rome. In Japan, instead of concentrating their energies on low-level figures such as Ōmura, he would have them appeal to the highest levels of the Japanese elite. In this way they could legitimately show their authority in the courts of the great, since the language of diplomacy was universal. Although such ventures might come at considerable expense to the Society of Jesus, their cost would be justified by the image of authority that they would project, a show of status that would cascade down the social ladder from the top.[44] To this end, Valignano took advantage of the good rapport between Luís Fróis and Oda Nobunaga to arrange for his own visit to the military hegemon in 1581.[45] Valignano would repeat this attempt at diplomacy a decade later when he went to call upon Nobunaga's successor, Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537-1598), this time as the emissary of the Viceroy of Portuguese India.[46] And, beginning in 1588, he appealed to the Superior General in Rome to coordinate a papal embassy to the Wanli Emperor (r.1573-1620) in Beijing, a proposal directly linked to the permission he granted for the China Jesuits to use silk.[47]

While Valignano waited for approval for his ambassadorial plans, he made changes to Jesuit usage with the aim of mitigating excessive adher-

[43] George Elison indicates this aspect in his overview of Valignano's consultations and policies in Japan. See ELISON, op. cit., pp. 54-84 at p. 57.

[44] Valignano knew that embassies would demonstrate authority in Europe, too, and so he mounted an "embassy from the Kings of Japan" (in the form of four Japanese boys purporting to be princes) to their counterparts in Europe in the early 1580s. See J.S.A. ELISONAS, "Journey to the West", *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies*, vol. 34, no. 1 (2007), pp. 27-66.

[45] MORAN, op. cit., p. 20.

[46] J.S.A. ELISONAS, "The Evangelic Furnace", in W.T. de Bary et al., eds., *Sources of Japanese Tradition*, 2 vols. [2nd edition], New York, Columbia University Press, 2001-2002, vol. 2, pp. 143-184 at pp. 168-171.

[47] ARSI *Jap-Sin* 11-I: fols. 1r-8v, Alessandro Valignano to Claudio Aquaviva, Macau, 10 November 1588.

ence to European notions of apostolic poverty. Authority, as Valignano understood it, involved display; and, in Japan, display involved decorum – if it could not involve silk. Since his hands were tied on that score, he took a two-pronged approach to the issue of missionary dress: He mandated cleanliness, and he wrote a history of the missions which highlighted the role of appropriate dress at important points. The notion of apostolic poverty, so essential to Jesuit identity, could indeed be preserved in Japan, so long as it did not slide into dishonor in Japanese eyes. Valignano's 1583 rules therefore included a chapter on "acquiring and conserving authority when dealing with the Japanese" which included references to the importance of clean clothing. It was crucial, he insisted, that the Jesuits not be seen outside their residences "threadbare and badly dressed as if they were poor, both because of the danger they can incur and because in this way they destroy and knock down the reputation of the religion among the Japanese."[48]

Valignano also shaped the Jesuits' memory of past mission strategies. His pioneering chronicle of the Society of Jesus in the *Indias Orientales* from 1542 until 1564, written between the late 1570s and the early 1580s, set down a version of the story of Xavier's encounter with Ōtomo, the "King of Bungo." In Valignano's retelling, Xavier exchanged his customary black robe for something more appropriate for projecting authority. Although Valignano does not mention silk or vestments, he does declare that in 1551 Xavier "had found by experience that going about badly dressed and threadbare and treating himself with such disdain not only did not help but also impeded that which he intended to do in Japan for the glory of God." And so, in order to impress Ōtomo, Xavier "determined to dress and behave in another manner from that time forward."[49] Valignano further inserted this version of his understanding of Xavier's encounter in Bungo into his general rules for Jesuit life in Japan. His 1583 *Sumario de las Cosas de Japón* declares the high degree of cleanliness that the Japanese expected and asserts:

> And for this, in the beginning, our men dressed in silk in order to gain some entry among the Japanese, but afterwards they left that completely behind and now dress in cassock and with a *dōbuku* as a cloak, … all black, without any silk, although it is necessary that all these things be clean and well cared for.[50]

[48] Valignano, *Il Ceremoniale*, pp. 155-156.

[49] Valignano, *Historia del Principio y Progresso*, p. 176.

[50] Valignano, *Sumario*, pp. 231-232.

When Valignano wrote these words, the China mission that he had created in 1579 was still in its infancy. In 1582, Michele Ruggieri (1543-1607) and Matteo Ricci had secured permission to remain in Canton beyond the end of that city's biennial trade fairs, but the results of their efforts were hardly a success story. While the men that he had selected for the task had indeed gotten farther inside the Ming Empire than any previous missionaries, the terms of their stay were uncertain. To make matters worse, they had managed to make precious few converts. As the first decade of the China enterprise came to a close, it appeared that little would be gained without a radical change in strategy. Not only were the Jesuits faced with challenges inside China, but there were other problems for them amassing on Chinese shores – friars from Manila who also wanted to spread Christianity in the Ming Empire. These Franciscans, Dominicans, or Augustinians were sure to employ their own strategies, methods potentially hazardous to the Jesuits' efforts to win converts or to curry favor with Chinese officials. In short, the China Jesuits needed a new beginning, one akin to that which enabled their confreres' success in Japan.[51]

In 1588, Valignano wrote from Macau to General Aquaviva to propose solutions to these problems, as well as to urge a reconsideration of the ban on silk. The Visitor's solutions stemmed from a central insight. In his understanding, the Jesuits had to gain authority in the eyes of the individuals who governed the Ming Empire, that is, the emperor, or at least his officials and the literati who aspired to join the ranks of officials. Valignano's report presents an overview of the nature of authority in China. He insists that the men who held power, the mandarins and literati, were immediately recognizable due to their *insignias y vestidos*, garments made of silk.[52] The main problem that this fact presented for the Jesuits was that the missionaries had chosen to wear robes associated with Chinese clergy rather than with Chinese officialdom. In Valignano's estimation, the Jesuits had chosen poorly: Such robes were "very low and vile" in Chinese eyes, he argued, and so the Jesuits bore with them the social stigma associated

[51] On the early years of the Jesuit mission to China, see Liam Matthew Brockey, *Journey to the East: The Jesuit Mission to China, 1579-1724*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 2007, pp. 25-41.

[52] Valignano had already touched upon this theme in his history of the Jesuits in Asia, in the section where he recounts the death of Francis Xavier on Shangchuan Island. In a section of the text about the Chinese officials that he wrote nearly a decade before the 1588 letter, he claimed that the "mandarins are like gods in China, because they are so feared and esteemed by all the rest of the people that, in truth, nothing is lacking for them to be adored." See Valignano, *Historia del Principio y Progresso*, p. 235.

with the Buddhist clergy. He complained that the Jesuits who were then at Zhaoqing in Guangdong Province could not address themselves to any mandarins except "when upon their knees," and so "until now there has been almost no kind of conversation or familiar dealings." In this submissive pose, the Jesuits did not have "any authority nor any way of being able to speak." In other words, no officials would condescend to deal with the Jesuits as equals, dressed as they were.[53]

What was to be done? Apostolic poverty was not the answer, Valignano argued. In an echo of the points raised against Cabral in Japan, he dismissed the example of the Apostles themselves and St. Paul, saying that they relied on "supernatural means." In China, Valignano declared, little could be done *sin tener ningun don de milagros*, without the gift of miracles.[54] Human effort, however, could perhaps work if the Jesuits played according to what he imagined to be Chinese rules. Valignano proposed two efforts that required Rome's assistance, and a further one to be undertaken in China. From Rome, he needed help to ensure that the friars did not return to the Ming Empire to check the meager advances that the Jesuits had made.[55] Valignano also had great hopes for a papal embassy to the "King of China," an effort that he was certain would gain the necessary *autoridad* for the Jesuits to converse with the mandarins. So important was this matter of the embassy that Valignano sent Michele Ruggieri, the oldest and longest serving member of the China mission, to Europe to discuss it.[56] Ruggieri bore with him templates for the diplomatic correspondence from pope to emperor, as well as instructions for the type of

[53] ARSI *Jap-Sin* 11-I: fols. 1r-8v at 1v, 2r, and 7r, Alessandro Valignano to Claudio Aquaviva, Macau, 10 November 1588.

[54] Ibid., fols. 2v-3r. Valignano cites 1 Corinthians 4:13, "We are made as the refuse of the world, the offscouring of all even until now," to contrast the outcomes of Paul's work with that of the Jesuits in China. Unlike the missionaries, the Apostles "performed great miracles, and had the gift of tongues and sanctity which was well known, with which things they had greater authority than that which can be wished for or attained now."

[55] The Jesuits had already gained a regime of exclusivity in Japan in 1585, but the friars were seen as a menace to the China mission, too. On the papal bulls about Japan, see Donald Lach and Edwin Van Kley, *Asia in the Making of Europe*. 3 vols. in 9 bks., Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1965-1993, vol. 1, book 2, pp. 705-706 and 718-719.

[56] On Ruggieri's mission to Europe in 1589, which may have been motivated by Valignano's animus against Ruggieri among other concerns, see António Vasconcelos de Saldanha, "A Man for Two Seasons: After China – Michele Ruggieri in Europe", in Yao Jingming 姚京明 and Hao Yufan 郝雨凡 eds., *Luo Mingjian 'Zhongguo dituji' xueshu yantaohui lunwenji* 羅 明堅《中國地圖集》學術研討會論文集 [Proceedings of the Symposium on Michele Ruggieri's Chinese Atlas], (Macau: Aomen tebie xingzhengqu zhengfu wenhuaju, 2014), pp. 62-77. In the November 1588 letter being discussed here, Valignano dismisses any notion of the viability of the conquest of China by a colonial army from the Philippines,

impressive document that was to be carried by the hoped-for ambassadors, "written on vellum with golden letters and with some very well drawn paintings around the border…, not with a lead seal like His Holiness usually employs but with a seal of gold and the cords of gold and silver."[57]

The complementary step that Valignano advised for securing Jesuits authority in China was to have them change their mode of dress. Towards the end of his missive to Claudio Aquaviva about the embassy, he asks for guidance about what to do in the event that the ambassadors are accorded *insignias y vestidos* from the emperor. In Valignano's understanding, the emperor was the one who distributed such privileges to his subjects, and it would not be strange if he decided to give them to the Chinese-speaking Jesuits who would surely be entrusted with the envisioned papal embassy. If they received this clothing, the Jesuits would be taken for "virtuous and lettered men," and as a result, owing to their new insignia, they would "be able to deal with the Mandarins with authority and familiarity, and be greatly venerated by the people." The Superior General need not fear, Valignano counseled, that the Jesuits would always use those garments and emblems, for they would only use them when they go "to visit the Mandarins and want to be treated according to that degree of dignity." Once the Jesuits secured entry into Mandarin circles, he added, "perchance they might never have to wear them again, because it is sufficient to know that they have those emblems for them to be honored by all."[58]

Here Valignano reveals his secret to General Aquaviva. He asserts that the use of these *insignias* y *vestidos* "might appear as something very inconvenient in Europe, and about which the friars here will never cease to murmur." After his belabored discussion about embassies and strategies for gaining authority, Valignano declares the reason for potential scandal: If the China Jesuits "are to have any form of religious authority, it seems necessary for them now to dress in some piece of Chinese silk."[59] So sensitive

a figment that was raised by some of Philip II's councilors, including some Jesuits. See ARSI *Jap-Sin* 11-I: fol. 3r.

57 Ibid., fol. 5r. Valignano makes reference to the documents that were given to the members of the Japanese embassy in Rome, intending them to be similar. One imagines a letter like the document sent by the Portuguese Viceroy Duarte de Menezes to Toyotomi Hideyoshi in April 1588, now considered a Japanese national treasure. A reproduction of the Viceroy's letter is in *Kyōto-fu bunkazai zuroku* [*A pictorial record of the cultural treasures of Kyoto Prefecture*], ed. Kyōto-fu Kyōiku Iinkai, [Kyoto Prefecture Committee on Education], 2 vols., Kyoto, Benridō, 1968, vol. 1, *Shoseki* [*Calligraphy*], number 192.

58 ARSI *Jap-Sin* 11-I: fol. 7r.

59 Ibid., fol. 7v.

was the question of silk being used by the Jesuits that Valignano had to bury its mention under a mountain of other considerations. Recall that Valignano had already heard and confirmed prohibitions against Jesuits wearing silk several times by 1588; he was well aware of the problems that silk robes would cause, regardless of how well they served other Jesuit aims. His reluctance to float the issue was not rooted in fear of what might happen if his policy for China reached Japan; there were individuals closer at hand who could cause him problems over this issue. Already in 1584, Alonso Sánchez (1547-1593), a Jesuit who visited Southern China from the Philippines, wrote to Aquaviva to denounce the lax observance of the prohibition against silk among his fellow Jesuits at Macau. Sánchez's complaints amounted to a censure of Valignano's role as guardian of the Society's principles. Among other breaches of the rules, he pointed to the use of silk buttons, buttonholes, and embroidery on Jesuit cassocks.[60] So much greater would the scandal of such outsiders be if they learned the priests in China intended to go about in full silk robes.[61]

Valignano admitted to Aquaviva in 1588 that he had already instructed his subordinates in China to exchange their Buddhist clerical robes for something different. Historians have traditionally dated this move to 1595, when Matteo Ricci declared in a well-known letter to the Superior General that he had made the switch to robes in the style and cloth of the Chinese literati.[62] But Valignano had permitted the China Jesuits to start this transformation eight years earlier, albeit making the change in slow steps. He reported that at Zhaoqing, where the missionaries had a residence, they had begun to use a form of literati dress. In order for them not to dress "in the common style of the people, nor in the style of the bonzes, they

[60] Alonso Sánchez to Claudio Aquaviva, Macau, 22 June 1584, in J. L. Alvarez-Taladriz, "Censura del Visitador Padre Alessandro Valignano, S.J. por el Visitante Padre Alonso Sánchez, S.J. (1584)", *Sapientia: The Eichi University Review*, vol. 13 (1979), pp. 147-165 at p. 152.

[61] As early as 1598, before Matteo Ricci had arrived at Beijing, Valignano had to defend the China Jesuits' use of Chinese clothing against critical friars. In response to publicly-aired denunciations about Jesuit practices in Japan and China, he wrote an *Apologia* in which he countered the assertion made by Fray Martin Ignacio de Loyola (c. 1550-1606) that the Jesuits went about "dressed in Chinese clothes." This friar visited China in 1587, and so did not see the results of Valignano's plans. See Alejandro [sic] Valignano, *Apologia de la Compañia de Jesus de Japon y China (1598)*, ed. José Luis Alvarez-Taladriz, Osaka: Eikodo, 1998, pp. 85-89.

[62] See, for example, Hsia, op. cit., p. 138; Laven, op. cit., p. 20; and Fontana, op. cit., p. 110. The original letter, Matteo Ricci to Claudio Aquaviva, Nanchang, 4 November 1595, in Matteo Ricci, *Lettere (1580-1609)*, ed. Piero Corradini, Macerata, Quodlibet, 2001, pp. 297-321 at pp. 308-309.

made a new composition that some literati are accustomed to using and which fits with our religious habit." Valignano notes that this new style was a kind of floor-length robe with very long sleeves "in the style that the sleeves made in Venice take," along with a four-cornered hat. "This is the habit with which our men go about in Xauquin," he declared, made of a "black cloth."[63]

Visitor Valignano nevertheless saw this shift as a half measure. He informed the Superior General that only the low-level attendants of the mandarins wore garments made of such fabric. Valignano was candid in his assessment: "All cloth in China is like linen cloth among us, although here it is cotton cloth; it is very lowly whatever color it may be, and may even be inconvenient for our men." As a result, he argued, the Jesuits needed silk. Thankfully, Valignano asserted, pieces of silk were easy to find in China "in the color black, or very dark purple that we in Rome call dark *Pavonaço* which is almost black, and so say the priests who know the customs of China."[64] Moreover, the investment in silk robes would be minimal: Not only were pieces of silk inexpensive, "a robe like this can be made for less than two cruzados." Yet considering the ban on silk and the General's insistence, he declared that he would "make no change" until he received orders from Rome.[65]

Rome's response was slow in coming, if it came at all. The incipient China mission was not the most pressing concern that the Jesuits in Asia confronted in the late 1580s – the concerns of a few priests deep inside the Ming Empire were greatly outweighed by the dramatic turn of events in Japan that followed Hideyoshi's invasion of Kyushu in 1586-87. The prohibition of Christianity in Japan that was proclaimed in 1587, for example, was of far greater importance. And so it was that Valignano's request for a papal embassy to the "King of China" was ignored. Valignano's personal embassy to Hideyoshi in 1591, moreover, certainly did not win support for his ideas in Rome. Indeed, in 1595 Superior General Aquaviva felt compelled to sent a rebuke, urging Valignano to *moderatione* in his dealings, especially those which came at great expense. Spreading the gospel, Aquaviva reminded him, required reliance on "humility and poverty." Accordingly, Valignano was told to refrain from embassies or from taking the "name of ambassador"; there were other ways of "assisting in the mat-

63 ARSI *Jap-Sin* 11-I: fol. 7v.

64 The Italian is *pavonazzo*, a dark purple color for textiles.

65 ARSI *Jap-Sin* 11-I: fol. 7v.

ters of our holy faith."[66] This was a sentiment shared by Francisco Cabral, the former Japan superior who at that time was in India, whence he had written to Rome to criticize Valignano's policies at length.[67]

The tone of this 1595 letter from Aquaviva suggests that the Superior General of the Society was not very likely to have sanctioned Valignano's idea of silk robes for the China Jesuits. No other letters that have been identified for this study mention specific permission from Rome, although such evidence may yet be discovered. Sources produced at the time when Matteo Ricci decided to don his silk robes nevertheless do mention orders from Valignano, making it quite likely that the Visitor acted on his own initiative in this matter.

Ricci's first surviving admission that he used silk robes instead of the improvised cotton habit came in the summer of 1595.[68] The sequence of events preceding Ricci's move suggests that he spoke with Valignano about this plan at Macau in late December 1592 or early January 1593.[69] Five years after Valignano's 1588 report, it was more than evident that the China Jesuits needed a change of strategy. They had left their first residence at Zhaoqing for Shaozhou, to the north of Canton, where they had made few converts, lost men to disease, and had been the target of physical violence.[70] Agreeing that something had to be done, Valignano wrote new orders before he left Macau for India in the autumn of 1594 – probably sometime in the summer of that year, since that was when the permission to use different robes made it to Ricci inside China by the hand of his new companion, Lazzaro Cattaneo (1560-1640). Valignano's written permission was nevertheless evasive on one key point: He instructed the superior of the China mission (at the time, the rector of the College of Macau) to permit the missionaries to grow their hair and beards long, and to "use some type of overcoat specifically for visits made of *loo* or something else appropriate for this, according to the clothing customs of the Chinese, which they will only use when they go to visit the mandarins

[66] Claudio Aquaviva to Alessandro Valignano, Rome, 16 January 1595, in Joseph Wicki, ed., *Documenta Indica*, 18 vols., Rome, Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1944-1988, vol. 17, p. 39-41 at p. 40.

[67] Francisco Cabral to João Alvares, Goa, 10 December 1596, in Wicki, op. cit., vol. 18, pp. 603-626.

[68] Matteo Ricci to Duarte de Sande in Macau, Nanchang, 29 August 1595, in Ricci, *Lettere*, pp. 197-267 at p. 217-218.

[69] Ricci to Aquaviva, Macau, 17 January 1593, ibid., pp. 179-180.

[70] A recent recounting of the attacks against the missionaries is in HSIA, op. cit., pp. 125 and 130-133.

or other important persons."[71] Remembering these instructions in a letter to Rome five years later, Cattaneo dispensed with the Chinese term for silk gauze, *luo*, calling them instead "courtesy gowns, *scilicet* made of silk, at the time for courtesies and mainly with the mandarins."[72]

Historians have celebrated Ricci's sartorial change, regardless of the moral issues involved, because it produced the results that the missionary desired.[73] Matteo Ricci decided to press northward into Jiangxi Province, hoping to eventually reach the imperial capital, precisely in the months after Lazzaro Cattaneo's arrival at Shaozhou. When Ricci wrote to his immediate superior, Duarte de Sande (1547-1599), from Nanchang in the late summer of 1595, he had already changed into his new silk robes. Like Valignano writing to the Superior General, Ricci couched his admission about using silk in the best possible terms, insisting on the success that the change had made. If familiarity with the Chinese elite was what Ricci sought, it was what he got. With his new robe, he gained entry to the presence of several officials to whom he could speak without kneeling. Describing a visit that he made in his new costume to an official from whom he hoped to secure permission to go to the imperial capital, Ricci observed with satisfaction that "this change was without a doubt a very wise thing, because we are now treated by all very differently than we were at first."[74]

Ricci describes his new robes at some length in this Portuguese letter to Sande. He mentions that he had changed his look "in accordance with the permission that Father Visitor had left for us" – growing his hair and beard, and using the robe "which is made of a dark purple piece and underneath and around the edges of the cloak has a trim made of a blue piece larger than half a palm wide." *Peça*, here translated as piece, implies

[71] Alessandro Valignano, Instructions for the China Mission, Macau, [1594], cited in Matteo Ricci, *Storia dell'Introduzione del Cristianesimo in Cina*, ed. Pasquale d'Elia, 3 vols., Rome, Libreria dello Stato, 1942-1949, vol. 1, p. 336, note 1; and in ARSI *Jap-Sin* 14: fols. 230ar-230dv at fol. 230cr.

[72] Lazzaro Cattaneo to Claudio Aquaviva, Macau, 12 October 1599, cited partially in Ricci, *Storia dell'Introduzione*, vol. 1, p. 336; and in ARSI *Jap-Sin* 13-II, fols. 319r-320v.

[73] No comment on the controversy over these robes is found in other analyses of this particular episode. Cf. Willard Peterson, "What to Wear?: Observation and participation by Jesuit Missionaries in late Ming society", in Stuart Schwartz, ed., *Implicit Understandings: Observing, Reporting, and Reflecting on the Encounters Between Europeans and Other Peoples in the Early Modern Era*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 403-421 at pp. 414-415 and 420; or George Dunne, *Generation of Giants: The Story of the Jesuits in China in the last Decades of the Ming Dynasty*, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1962, p. 33.

[74] Ricci, *Lettere*, pp. 217-218.

silk, although Ricci does not use the term. Yet he repeats Valignano's words from 1588, insisting that "the proper habit that the literati use in China is very similar to what the Venetians use in Venice."[75] In Ricci's autumn 1595 letter to General Aquaviva, he was frank in his native Italian, confident that he had acted with the blessing of his superiors. Ricci claimed that he had his *veste di seta per le visite solenni* made in Shaozhou before leaving on his way north. Instead of saying *peça*, he says *seta*, silk, several times; he declares that his new outfit is made of *seta paonazza*, purple silk, with trim made of *seta turchina molto chiara*, very light blue silk. Ricci also mentions his silk shoes and his hat, noting that Lazzaro Cattaneo had ordered the same type of garments to be made.[76]

It is uncertain what Rome's immediate response was to the news that arrived from China in Matteo Ricci's 1595 letter. Only one letter from Ricci has been identified for the period from December 1597 until September 1602, and it does not mention silk.[77] It is nevertheless likely that Aquaviva did not approve of the permission that Valignano gave to Ricci. Since a specific rebuke has not been identified for this study, it is necessary to look elsewhere for evidence of Rome's displeasure. One example can be seen in the letter that Cattaneo wrote to Aquaviva in 1599, in which he attempted to exculpate Ricci (not least by saying Ricci was at that moment "so far, *scilicet* in Nanjing, more than three hundred leagues from here in Macau, that he will not be able to write to Your Paternity as is fitting"). Cattaneo asserts – improbably so, since he only arrived in Macau a few months before he joined Ricci in 1594 – that it was he who had taken stock of the panorama of religious life in China and the low standing of the Buddhist clergy. Convinced of the need for a change in mission strategy (and while still in Macau, before he entered the Ming Empire), Cattaneo claimed that he begged Valignano for permission to grow his hair and beard, as well as to wear a silk robe like the ones used by the literati. "And the *Padre* conceded it," Cattaneo noted, claiming further that "it seemed thus necessary to *Padre* Matteo Ricci, who wished for nothing else but did not want to be the first one to ask for it."[78]

It is difficult to understand why Lazzaro Cattaneo would take the blame for a policy that was almost a decade in the making. It seems logical

[75] Ibid., p. 217.

[76] Ibid., pp. 297-321 at pp. 308-309.

[77] Matteo Ricci to Girolamo Costa, Nanjing, 14 August 1599, ibid., pp. 359-366.

[78] ARSI *Jap-Sin* 13-II: fol. 319r.

that he decided to defend Ricci's actions and Valignano's policy because it produced the desired results – and because he was aware that to censure Ricci, who had not yet settled in Beijing, would be disastrous for the China mission. Moreover, later sources suggest that Valignano had sought council from the (former Jesuit) Bishop of Japan, Luís Cerqueira (1552-1614), about his subordinates' silk robes.[79]

But a bishop's blessing and the evident success of this mission strategy did not end the scandal, it merely forced the missionaries to be very circumspect about their use of silk robes – or at least very cautious about mentioning it explicitly in their letters or publications. Valignano himself added comments about Jesuit dress in China in his 1598 *Apologia* for the Japan and China missions. Although he eschewed the term silk, he took refuge in a reading of the Society's rules. He insisted that the robes were "so honest and serious and not inconvenient for priests and religious like we are, because by our *Constitutions* we have no specific habit except what is commonly used among the native clergy who are considered virtuous in that land." Since the literati – and not the *bonzes* – were considered virtuous in China, the Jesuits' choice reflected "prudence and reason" which could be employed "according to our Institute."[80] Ricci himself opted to drown out the potential for scandal with news of success after success. His later letters to his correspondents in Rome therefore focused on his acceptance in mandarin circles.[81]

Valignano's permission and Ricci's new clothes confronted the Jesuits outside China with a dilemma. Ricci's successes made them want to celebrate, but they could not declare publicly that he and his confreres were openly ignoring their order's rules. So they chose to avoid the term silk. Just before his death in 1610, Ricci himself wrote a draft version of the history of the mission, in which he gave a description of his 1595 change of clothes. Writing in Italian, he uses the term *seta* only once.[82] But apparently this was one time too many. When Nicolas Trigault translated Ricci's draft into Latin and published the text as *De Christiana Expeditione apud Sinas* in 1615, he used the ambiguous term *byssus* instead of *sericum* to describe the

[79] Daniello Bartoli, *Dell'Historia della Compagnia de Giesu, La Cina, Terza Parte dell'Asia*, Rome, Stamperia del Varese, 1663, p. 265.

[80] Valignano, *Apologia*, pp. 88-89.

[81] See, for example, Matteo Ricci to Ludovico Maselli, Beijing, [May?] 1605, in Ricci, *Lettere*, pp. 371-380.

[82] Ricci, *Storia dell'Introduzione*, vol. 1, p. 337.

fabric of Ricci's robe.[83] *Byssus* signifies fine cloth, in ancient times typically of linen but also of cotton, or the precious "sea silk" found in the Mediterreanean.[84] What it does not mean is silk from silkworms, not plainly, at least. The choice of this term may have been Trigault's rendering of *luo*, gauze, which although finer than other silks, but is nevertheless still silk. And so the early modern reader, confronted with an image of Matteo Ricci in a long, exotic robe, did not know that he was seeing a Jesuit in a silk robe. Nowhere in the textual description was there any mention of such a thing, despite the fact that the robes that Trigault showed to the artists Kilian and Rubens – not to mention any others who saw them on his European tour – were the same silk robes that Ricci and his confreres used in China. And so an image was created in Europe that was different from the one known to Jesuit superiors in Europe and Asia, not to speak of missionaries themselves in the Ming Empire.

Temptations to Vanity: Jesuit Silk after Ricci

The Jesuits' use of silk robes in China was originally conceived of as a means to an end. Valignano's permission had stipulated that silk should be used only for visits to Chinese officials, not as everyday clothing. His plan was for the silk to facilitate the Jesuits' acquisition of authority among the indigenous elite, whereupon the silk could be set aside. But who was to decide when they had reached that goal? The moment had not arrived by the time of Valignano's death in 1606, or Ricci's death in 1610, or even Aquaviva's death in 1615. And so the original permission for the use of silk robes continued in effect for the China mission, even though it was a tightly kept secret outside of the Ming Empire.

Yet even with Valignano's permission, the question of silk was not settled for the China mission. It would be revisited at several reprises until the early 1630s. The first of these presented itself shortly after Ricci's death, when his successor as mission superior sent a procurator to Europe to seek men, money, and independence from the Japan mission for the China enterprise. In a detailed report for his superiors outside the Ming Empire, Niccolò Longobardo (1565-1654) made clear his concern about the temptations created by even the occasional use of silk. In deference

[83] Matteo Ricci and Nicolas Trigault, *De Christiana Expeditione apud Sinas*, Augsburg: Christoph. Mangium, 1615, p. 283.

[84] Charlton Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1891, s.v. *byssus*.

to Valignano's permission and Ricci's legacy, Longobardo did not order his men to relinquish their courtesy robes. Rather, he sought to circumscribe any other use of silk. For example, "with the consent of all of the priests of this mission," he barred the use of a silk skullcap worn under the missionaries' hats when receiving visitors or making social calls. Longobardo also insisted that the Jesuits wear robes made of hemp in the summertime so as to "excuse the use of silk." *Nono*, from the Japanese *nuno*, was "a most respectable dress in China," he wrote, "and it is worn by all of the mandarins and the more noble people, in whose imitation we guide the rest of the clothing and style that we use in this kingdom."[85] Longobardo's impulse stemmed from the ambiguity about Jesuit dress found in the *Constitutions*, but he reached a conclusion different from Valignano's judgment of two decades before. Another example of this divergence is seen in Longobardo's request that all use of silk be denied to Chinese or Luso-Asian recruits to the mission. Although Valignano had permitted the Jesuits' indigenous recruits to wear light robes during their probation period, Longobardo remarked that "we have seen through experience that under the cloak of light silk, heavy silk enters."[86]

In spite of his stated intention to reduce the use of silk, Niccolò Longobardo decided in 1613 to send Nicolas Trigault to Europe with a set of silk robes. Yet while Trigault was away, a series of events transpired in East Asia that shifted attention to the China mission. The crisis of the Japan mission, which began with the expulsion of all Catholic priests in 1614 by order of the Tokugawa shogun and culminated in the brutal persecution of all Christians in Japan, had dramatic repercussions for the China Jesuits. Their disobedience of the Superior General's prohibitions against silk had passed largely unremarked until a wave of missionary exiles reached Macau. Calamity across the sea meant that the excesses of a few Jesuits deep inside the Ming Empire continued to be ignored, until the beleaguered missionaries at Macau learned, upon Trigault's return to East Asia in 1619, that Rome had granted the China Jesuits semi-independent status. They would have a Vice-Province and enjoy their own leadership apart from that of the Province of Japan.

Galled by what was considered a traitorous coup, the Jesuit exiles from Japan began to examine the mission strategies pursued in China. The

[85] ARSI *Jap-Sin* 113: fols. 265r-272r at fol. 269v-270r., Niccolò Longobardo to Francesco Pasio, Nanchang, 15 October 1612.

[86] Ibid., fols. 270r/v.

result was bitter discord between the two groups: those inside the Ming Empire who argued that they knew best how to conduct their affairs within the Chinese context, and those at Macau, who defended the policies of the Province of Japan, of which the China mission was a part. Of course, one of the strategies that drew most attention was the use of silk robes, something that the Japan Jesuits had abandoned half a century before during Francisco Cabral's tenure. And if their fellow Jesuits were willing to offer pointed rebukes on this score, one can imagine how the missionaries' competitors among the mendicant friars made hay of the rumors that circulated in Macau. But the issue would only be resolved a decade later, when the first outside inspector entered the China mission field.[87]

The man appointed to this task was André Palmeiro (1569-1635), a theology professor from Portugal who was sent to Goa in 1617 and onward to Macau in 1626. He held the same position of visitor that Valignano had held two decades previously, and thus enjoyed the same writ as his illustrious predecessor. Palmeiro's charge was to consider how closely the missionary methods employed by the Jesuits in Asia adhered to the Society's norms, that is, the way that the order's common rules were lived in Europe. While Palmeiro was aware that the Jesuits needed to adapt themselves to the cultural contexts in which they worked, he did not feel that such changes should come at the price of violating the rules of the order. After residing in Macau for nearly three years, in December 1628 Palmeiro found an opportunity to enter the Ming Empire. For the following ten months he traveled north to Beijing and returned south through the Jiangnan region back to Macau. Unlike the priests who intended to stay in China until their death, Palmeiro's meant to inspect as many mission stations as possible and return swiftly.[88]

In the opinion of Jesuit superiors from Macau to Goa to Rome, at that moment the China mission cried out for an inspection. To be sure, the question of silk was only one of the issues that Palmeiro investigated while in China, but it was an important one. The notion of apostolic poverty had a particular significance for the Visitor; his formative years had been spent in Europe where Jesuits only wore simple black robes, and his previous assignment had been in India, where climate and custom kept the Society's missionaries from the use of silk. While Palmeiro recognized that Mat-

[87] This period of the China mission is discussed in detail in Brockey, *Journey to the East*, pp. 63-83.

[88] On Palmeiro's trip through China, see Brockey, *The Visitor*, pp. 213-277.

teo Ricci had used his courtesy robes to good effect in the 1590s, he was not sure that it was still necessary for the Jesuits to go about dressed in that manner. The China mission had matured, he felt, and so the missionaries could dispense with their silk – the day had come when the Jesuits would be recognizable and would not have to disguise themselves in order to be understood in the Chinese cultural context.

If the Jesuits in China still relied on silk robes after half a century, Palmeiro thought, they could be rightly accused of flouting their vows of poverty, or, worse, of flaunting their vanity. Rumors heard at Macau fueled the speculation that some Jesuits were known to wear silks unnecessarily, reminding some of the robes, bedclothes, and pillows that had led to Cabral's inspection of the Japan mission in 1569. The question of necessity was important: Some of the China Jesuits lived in cities such as Beijing or Hangzhou, where they had nearly daily dealings with officials. If so, they might need to wear their courtesy robes constantly as opposed to wearing them on the rare occasions of formal visits. Perhaps the most damning rumor that reached Macau suggested that those men had multiple silk robes and that in effect, given their continual use, these constituted their habit. Palmeiro wrote to Rome on the eve of his trip into the Ming Empire about how he was intent on discovering if this was true, and if there were indeed men who had "three or four robes of this kind."[89]

André Palmeiro traveled into the heart of the Ming Empire to discover what he could of his subordinates' attire. During his trip, he conversed with senior and junior missionaries on the topic and collected his thoughts as he returned to the Portuguese colony. At Macau in late 1629, he wrote a detailed report about the use of silk by the China Jesuits. In addition to this account, he also drew up a compendium of rules regarding missionary policy that he circulated to all Jesuit residences. Although he could not speak Chinese and did not possess the wealth of knowledge about indigenous customs that his men did, Palmeiro devoted much time during his trip to learning about how clothing correlated with social status in the Ming Empire. Recall that this was the consideration made by Francisco Cabral about Japan and used by Alessandro Valignano as the cornerstone of his argument for the use of silk by the Jesuits in China. Palmeiro's letter

[89] ARSI *Jap-Sin* 161-II: fols. 109r-111v at fol. 109r., André Palmeiro to Muzio Vitelleschi, Macau, 20 December 1629 (Letter 1).

thus stands as one of the longest discussions of Chinese clothing produced by a European in the early modern period.[90]

Palmeiro laid out the issue for the Superior General in several stages. The first topic that he discussed was about the type of habit that the Jesuits should wear in China. Here was a basic question, but an essential one: All religious orders had prescribed forms of dress, and the Jesuits' robes were different from those worn by Dominicans, Franciscans, or Augustinians; a habit, as much as a rule, was an identifying mark of a religious order. So the question was whether uniformity should be applied in the Chinese mission field. Palmeiro's point of departure was that the missionaries had no standard form of dress, something that left the Jesuits exposed to the perils of individual judgment. But Palmeiro realized one thing in 1629: "There is no doubt that the time has not come … for all of our men in China to wear a particular habit or an identifiable mark on their external attire by which we will all be known as a specific family or congregation." That is to say, unlike in Europe, where, at least from a distance, the habit made the monk, in China, the Jesuits wore a variety of dress that made them appear as independent members of a learned society. For Palmeiro, too much uniformity would attract unwanted attention and potentially give rise to suspicions. "All must be one, but not known as one," he continued, "nor should we declare this fact to the simple folks, but those who are more intelligent understand it perfectly without us having to explain it."[91]

Despite the variety of colors they used instead of Jesuit black, Palmeiro claimed that there had long been doubts about the kind of fabric to use. "Until my arrival, all of them had silk *champaos*," he noted, referring to the outer robe as a *changpao*, long gown, but there had been debates about "the convenience or necessity of wearing them." To make matters clearer for Rome, he explained that there were different types of these floor-length robes. He explained the nature of the "courtesy *changpao*" by means of analogy to liturgical vestments: "It is an exterior dress called a courtesy dress, because it only serves that purpose (…) Imagine it like a dalmatic or a cope, which has its proper use in one place and for a particular ministry and is useless for others." The missionaries had to have such robes, Palmeiro confessed, because they were obligatory in social intercourse. But the substantial investment made in purchasing them was compensated by

[90] ARSI *Jap-Sin* 161-II: fols. 114r-115v., André Palmeiro to Muzio Vitelleschi, Macau, 20 December 1629, (Letter 3).

[91] Ibid., fol. 114r.

the fact that they were rarely used. A missionary would be obliged to wear a courtesy *changpao* when receiving or being received, but would remove it after the moment of encounter, meaning that these robes were used "few hours over the long years of one's life; in sum, they were only for being seen, not for being worn." Similar to the courtesy gown were other robes used for funerals or in times of mourning, made of white silk, items that were also indispensible.[92]

The focal point in Palmeiro's discussion was whether the missionaries should use silk as their daily attire, as some had apparently become accustomed to doing. For those who favored an everyday *changpao*, the robes conveyed an image of learned authority, precisely as Valignano and Ricci had intended. According to Palmeiro, however, "the reasons that were given for wearing them at the beginning, when we first entered the kingdom, were still being defended in order to not give them up." In other words, the Jesuits had won the battle for authority by the late 1620s. Palmeiro claimed that the senior missionaries and their mandarin friends thought that there was no need for them, and he had seen with his own eyes that there were important literati who wore modest fabrics. "If it is good enough for them and, what is more, since we profess poverty," he wrote, "why should we have to wear a type of dress that proclaims riches?" Worse still, the use of silk robes seemed to have a corrosive effect on the missionaries' morals. Palmeiro asserted that those who defended the practice based their arguments not on grounds of authority but on "vanity and self comfort," since several had "more than double" the typical number of gowns. In the most flagrant case of this unseemly vanity, the Visitor noted that upon Nicolas Trigault's death by suicide at Hangzhou in November 1628, "five robes of various different silks were found."[93]

The only way that Palmeiro saw to eliminate these problems was to ban the use of silk except on rare occasions. "Looking over the matter slowly, *in domino*," he wrote to Rome using a formulation reserved for grave matters, "it appeared to me that I should order that the use of silk should not be allowed in ordinary *champaos*." Not only would this move dismiss temptation, prohibiting silk would also serve to "shut the mouths of the friars and other adversaries who get tripped up over it."[94] Palmeiro's

[92] Ibid., fol. 114r/v.

[93] Ibid., fol. 114v. On Trigault's suicide, see Liam Brockey, "The Death and Disappearance of Nicolas Trigault, S.J.", *The Journal of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, vol. 38 (2003), pp. 161-167.

[94] ARSI *Jap-Sin* 161-II: fol. 114v.

rules left little room for debate: "Since today we are known as men who have no regard for external ostentation (…) such pomp and display can be dispensed with, and consequently the use of all types of silk, whether in shoes or robes, should be abandoned." He charged the mission superior with gathering all such robes from his men (and prohibited him from conceding dispensations), permitting their use only on the infrequent occasions when Jesuits were sent to new provinces.[95] Palmeiro further stipulated the types of cloth to be used for robes, indicating heavier or lighter fabrics for the different seasons, as well as their brown or black color.[96] In his letter to Rome, Palmeiro laid to rest the lingering doubts that these prohibitions would somehow affect the Jesuits' standing in China. He pointed to the Japan mission, where the use of silk had been banned "and it was not for that reason that our men sacrificed their due respect and courtesy." The matter was therefore clear: "Adequate dress, composure, modesty, and mature customs, add the respect that is due and summon as much authority as is not only useful, but indeed all that is necessary, for the conversion of the world."[97]

And so in the early 1630s, yet another prohibition against Jesuits using silk was issued in East Asia. And as in Cabral's time in Japan, there was much fretting among the missionaries about the consequences of this decision. But in China, as in Japan, the shift to simpler dress did not cause calamity. It was clear that by Palmeiro's time, the Jesuits were already secure in terms of social standing within the Ming Empire and that the use of hemp or cotton would not damage their reputation. This notion was put to the test as soon as 1632, when one Jesuit took plain robes all the way to the imperial court. When João Rodrigues (c.1561-1633), the famed veteran of the Japan mission and interpreter to Hideyoshi, accompanied a detachment of Portuguese soldiers from Macau into China in 1630, he went in the Jesuits' customary black cotton garb.[98] Forced by a mutiny at

[95] He begrudgingly granted a further permission for the use of a *changpao* "as light as wind" when the summer heat reached its peak. Here Palmeiro acted against his better judgment, since he thought the use of such robes "would open the door for some to use on many more occasions what is only permitted on one." Ibid., fol. 115r.

[96] ARSI *Jap-Sin* 100: fols. 20r-39v at fols. 21v-22r., André Palmeiro, "Ordens que o P.e Andre Palmeiro V.tor de Japão e China deixou a Vicep.a da China vizitandoa no anno de 1629 aos 15 de Agosto", Macau, 15 January 1631.

[97] ARSI *Jap-Sin* 161-II: fol. 115r. Further considerations on Palmeiro's decisions are found in Brockey, *The Visitor*, pp. 302-306.

[98] A somewhat dated discussion of Rodrigues can be found in Michael Cooper, *Rodrigues the Interpreter: An Early Jesuit in Japan and China*, New York and Tokyo, Weatherhill, 1974.

a Ming garrison in Shandong Province to flee to Beijing with the remnants of his military embassy in 1632, Rodrigues went directly to the Ministry of War where he offered his excuses to the highest ranks of court officialdom. There, Rodrigues declared himself to be a Jesuit like his illustrious confrere, with his humble dress on display for all to see. Not only did the Portuguese soldiers receive a commendation from the Ming officials, but Rodrigues himself was showered with praise for his valor and loyalty to the emperor. Authority and prestige were duly conferred, with not a thread of silk on the Jesuit emissary's body.[99]

Black Cloth in Whitewash: Unraveling Jesuit Silk

The question of Jesuit silk, twice settled in East Asia, was still not settled in Europe after André Palmeiro issued his final rules. After all, the vision of the Jesuit in Chinese robes was a compelling one in early modern eyes. As the seventeenth century wore on, renewed attempts to drum up support for the China mission demanded further publicity endeavors in Europe, and the temptation to employ the exotic image was strong. But the Society's publicists were still faced with the same problem of how to promote the image of a Jesuit in silk robes without mentioning the fact that the image was of a Jesuit in silk robes. For several decades, they tried to divorce the image from the text until the other scandals concerning the China Jesuits grew too numerous to sustain the deception.

The first such individual to attempt this feat was Álvaro Semedo (1585-1658), who traveled to Europe from China in the late 1630s as mission procurator. Like his predecessor Trigault, Semedo sought men, money, and recognition for the China Jesuits. He, too, published a widely read description of the Ming Empire and history of the China mission. Indeed, his book was so popular that the first edition, published in Castilian at Madrid in 1642, was translated into Italian with substantial changes and printed at Rome in the following year.[100] Other translations followed in French (Paris, 1645) and English (London, 1655), making this text the most important European publication about the China mission since the Ricci-Trigault text from 1615.

[99] Brockey, *The Visitor*, pp. 323-325.

[100] Álvaro Semedo, *Imperio de la China i Cultura Evangelica en èl, por los Religios de la Compañia de IESVS*, trans. Manuel de Faria e Sousa, Madrid, Juan Sánchez, 1642; and Álvaro Semedo, *Relatione della Grande Monarchia della Cina*, Rome, Herman Scheus, 1643.

3 After Massimo Stanzione (c. 1586-c.1656), depiction of Álvaro Semedo. Engraving included in Álvaro Semedo, *Relatione della Grande Monarchia della Cina* (Rome: Herman Scheus, 1643).
Image courtesy: Jesuitica Collection, John J. Burns Library, Boston College.

The initial Castilian edition of Semedo's text revisited the early history of the mission, dwelling on Ricci's decision to exchange his Buddhist robes for literati ones in 1595. Semedo asserts that Ricci chose to use *una vestidura de una delgada tela*, a dress of a fine fabric, when he went calling on the powerful.[101] His scrupulous avoidance of the term "silk" also appears in the Italian version, where Semedo simply refers to *veste di cortesia & habito di Letterato*.[102] These "courtesy robes and literati habit" were the same ones in which Semedo, like Ricci, was depicted in an engraving that accompanied the 1643 Italian edition, and which is reproduced here. [Figure 3] And so the image of the China Jesuit in exotic robes was again spread across Europe, cleansed of any explicit mention of what fabric they might be made of.

This simultaneous erasure of textual mention of the Jesuits' use of silk in East Asia and publication of images of Jesuits in Chinese robes continued through the middle of the seventeenth century. One the one hand,

[101] Semedo, *Imperio*, p. 242.

[102] Semedo, *Relatione*, p. 220.

4 Johannes Blaeu (1596-1673), detail of a map of the Jiangnan Region showing a Jesuit in Chinese robes. Engraving in Martino Martini, *Novus Atlas Sinensis* (Amsterdam: 1655).
Image courtesy: Geography and Map Division, Library of Congress, call number G2305. M3 1655.

images of Jesuits such as Ricci, Semedo, and Johann Adam Schall von Bell (1592-1666) appeared in books that circulated widely in learned and ecclesiastical circles. Martino Martini's *Novus Atlas Sinensis* (Amsterdam, 1655) included the image seen here in the corner of a map of the Jiangnan Region of the Ming Empire, while Athanasius Kircher's *China Illustrata* (Amsterdam, 1667) contained folio-size representations of China Jesuits. [Figure 4] Both men were Jesuits themselves: Martini (1614-1661) was a procurator for the mission, and Kircher (1602-1680) a polymath who was one of the most prolific Jesuit authors of the day.

On the other hand, the story of the Jesuits was rewritten to make Trigault's original deception stick. His use of the term *byssus* was updated by Semedo's *delgada tela*. In the descriptive portion of Martini's Latin-language atlas, the author revisits this choice. Martini includes discussion of the great quantities of *byssus* that are produced in Zhejiang Province, clearly distinguishing that material from *sericum*, the more recognizable silk which grew elsewhere.[103] So of course the China Jesuits would have

[103] Martino Martini, *Novus Atlas Sinensis*, Amsterdam, Johannes Blaeu, 1655, p. 4.

been able to procure robes made of that other fabric and to steer clear of the polemical one.

This effort at effacement was pursued further by Daniello Bartoli (1608-1685), the author of a massive multi-volume history of the Society of Jesus that greatly shaped the master narrative of the Asian missions. Like Trigault, Bartoli exercised a firm editorial hand on his sources. His volume on Japan (Rome, 1660), expanded the previous century's account of Francis Xavier before the "King of Bungo" with further references to the disgust that Xavier felt at having to dress in silk ecclesiastical vestments (not Asian robes made of silk).[104] And in Bartoli's discussion of Ricci, in which the China Jesuits' letter to Superior General Claudio Aquaviva is cited, the numerous references to *seta* from the original are omitted. In describing the *habito proprio de'Letterati*, Bartoli's Ricci speaks of colors (*paonazza*, *turchin chiaro*) but not of fabrics. The only mention of silk comes in a reference to Ricci's shoes – *i calzari sono di seta* – one of the items that André Palmeiro had banned after his inspection. Bartoli adds a final note to his readers who might have raised qualms about Ricci's robes: He cites the pronouncement of the Bishop of Japan, Luís Cerqueira, who saw the garments and declared them "in no ways inconvenient" for either priests or religious.[105]

Daniello Bartoli's history of the China mission appeared in the early 1660s, just before the storm of the Chinese Rites Controversy exploded in Europe. It was in the context of that debate, one which roiled Catholic theological circles for decades and eventually contributed to the collapse of the China mission, that the image of a Jesuit in silk finally became the image of a Jesuit in silk. Intent on exposing the China Jesuits, the Dominican Fray Domingo Fernández Navarrete (1610-1689) published citations from missionaries in which they spoke of wearing silk robes.[106] And at the beginning of the eighteenth century, members of the French mission to China wrote letters to their Parisian colleagues in which they declared in print that they used the same – yet only while visiting mandarins, as Valignano's intention and Palmeiro's confirmation had permitted them to do.[107]

[104] Daniello Bartoli, *Dell'Historia della Compagnia di Giesv, Il Giappone, Seconda Parte dell'Asia*, Rome, Ignatio de'Lazzeri, 1660, p. 103.

[105] Bartoli, *Cina*, p. 266.

[106] Domingo Fernández Navarrete, *Tratados Historicos, Politicos, Ethicos, y Religosos de la Monarchia de China*, Madrid, Florian Anisson, 1676, p. 440.

[107] Jean de Fontaney to François de la Chaise, London, 15 January 1704, in *Lettres Edifiantes et Curieuses écrites des Missions Etrangères par quelques Missionaires de la Compagnie de Jesus*, 34 vols., Paris, Nicolas le Clerc, 1702-1776, vol. 8 (published 1708), pp. 51-243 at pp. 227-230.

Yet beyond the scandal that silk continued to represent for the Jesuits' rivals, unease about the use of silk lingered within the Society of Jesus. As late as the 1940s, Pasquale d'Elia, the eminent Jesuit sinologist who published Matteo Ricci's draft history of the China mission, felt compelled to reassure his readers about the purity of the mission founder's intentions when he donned silk robes.[108] The rapid changes that have occurred since that time have made us forget how ill at ease the Jesuits were in their silk finery. For all of their commitment to accommodation, they encountered great difficulty fitting in to the image that they had created for themselves. But with long use and much wear, silk, the most comfortable of fabrics, finally sits at ease on Matteo Ricci's shoulders.

[108] Ricci, *Storia dell'Introduzione*, vol. 1, p. 337, note 4.

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