"The Observations We Made in the Indies and in China": The Shaping of the Jesuits’ Knowledge of China by Other Parts of the Non-Western World

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Abstract: The Jesuits’ experience in China is usually analysed within the framework of Sino-Western relations. However, Jesuits’ writings often evoked their experience in and knowledge about China in association with other parts of the non-European world, including India, South-East Asia, the Middle East, Africa and America. Based on a prosopographical analysis of China Jesuits’ biographical data, we first demonstrate that the encounter with other non-European regions was an integral part of the China Jesuits’ itineraries; for they all travelled through intermediate areas on their way to

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China, and some also did so on their way back to Europe. Secondly, relying mainly on examples drawn from French Jesuits’ scholarship between the 1680s and the 1750s, we demonstrate how encounters with other non-European regions and the overseas interests of their home country shaped the Jesuits’ scientific agenda as well as the way they understood things Chinese. Lastly, we illustrate how Jesuits keenly studied historical and contemporaneous accounts in Chinese and Manchu on the neighbouring regions of the Qing empire. We argue that the body of knowledge produced by the China Jesuits should be studied in a spatial framework that goes beyond the China-Europe dichotomy since it was, on one hand, filtered by the Jesuits’ knowledge about other non-European regions and, on the other hand, concerned with a geographical area larger than the territory of China under the Ming and even the Qing dynasty. We also argue that, in the eighteenth century in particular, the China Jesuits’ scholarship was configured by the spatial dynamics shaping the Society of Jesus, Bourbon France and Qing China; thereby, we contribute to a better understanding of both the French Jesuit and Qing networks, and the interconnections between them.

1. Introduction

Upon arriving in China in 1687, the five French Jesuit missionaries sent by the French King Louis XVI (often known as the ‘King’s Mathematicians’) learned that a revolt had led to the destruction of the observatory they had just built in Siam, where they had spent one year waiting for an opportunity to sail to China. One of them, Louis Le Comte (1655-1728), narrating the events in a letter published in Paris in 1696 entitled ‘The observations we made in the Indies and in China’, minimized the misfortune in these terms:

> These accidents, although very unfortunate, did not however discourage us. We plan to lay down in China the groundwork for a second observatory, even more magnificent than the one in Siam. It would not be difficult to then build several at Isfahan in Persia, at Agra in the Mogul’s lands, on the Borneo Island under the [equatorial] line, in Tartary and several other places, the situation of which will facilitate the execution of our plan...

¹ “Ces accidents, quoique très fâcheux, ne nous avaient pas néanmoins rebutés ; nous songeons à jeter à la Chine les fondements d’un second observatoire, encore plus magnifique que celui de Siam. Il n’eût pas été difficile d’en bâtir ensuite
Two decades earlier, in 1668, when solicited by the young Kangxi emperor to report on the ‘natural conditions and national traditions of Western countries’ (xiguo fengtu guosu 西國風土國俗), the aging missionaries Ludovico Buglio (1606-1682), Gabriel Magalhães (1610-1677) and Ferdinand Verbiest (1623-1688) presented their reply in a small volume entitled Xifang yaoji 西方要記 (A Record of the Essentials of the West). The second entry reads:

From the Far West to China, it takes most people two or three years by sea before they arrive, with a stopover in the Country of Tianzhu (India) in the Minor West. Between the Minor West and the Great West there are more than 60,000 li. In general, travelling day and night by sea with a favorable wind, it takes half a year to reach one’s destination. [However], some are unable to reach the Minor West once past the Mountain of Great Waves (i.e. Cape of Good Hope): then they must pass the winter in the Country of the Blacks (i.e. Mozambique), before eventually reaching Tianzhu in the Minor West the following year. Then, one must [wait] an extra half year in the Minor West, board another ship and sail for two or three months before arriving in China. In sum, for those living in the interior lands of the Great West, if they set off this year, they can only reach the Minor West one year later, and arrive in China still another year later. Those living in the coastal countries can complete the journey in two years.


2 Buglio et al. (1668), f°2a-2b. The Xifang yaoji has also been published in a number of Chinese collectanea between the seventeenth and the nineteenth century (see Dudink and Standaert, CCT Database), but the copy in the Bibliothèque nationale de France is the only one, to my knowledge, to contain a short preface, explaining the genesis of the book as a query from Kangxi. The last sentence of the original text is slightly inconsistent, as it seems to give the length of the journey from coastal regions of Europe as identical to that from inland areas. There may have been a scribal or printing mistake.
These two unrelated writings by different China Jesuits, one reporting the progress of their scientific work to their home institution, and the other presented to the Kangxi emperor by court missionaries, both brim with names of places lying in between and beyond China and Europe—in the Americas, Africa, Middle East, India or South-East Asia. Many similar records can be found scattered in the massive body of sources left by the China Jesuits. How should historians account for these references to locations falling outside the standard dual framework of Sino-European relations? Are these disparate and apparently incidental hints to the world beyond the China-Europe dichotomy relevant for our understanding of Jesuit science in China?

These questions have never been tackled as such in the scholarship on the China Jesuits’ scientific work. There is some historical justification for this, since Jesuit publications on foreign lands and peoples themselves often adopted an area-specific scope. However, in this article, we will argue that in order to fully contextualize the knowledge about China produced by Jesuits, it is necessary to take these records seriously. They suggest the substantial connections that China Jesuits maintained with other non-European regions, and these hitherto neglected transregional connections did affect the content of the knowledge that they produced. Reconstructing them can shed new light on the dynamics that shaped the cultural and scientific relations between Europe and China in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries through the mediation of the Jesuits.

In fact, the China Jesuits have appeared in three bodies of scholarship for which the China-Europe relationship is not the sole framework of analysis: our study draws on their insights. First and foremost, studies on the Society of Jesus (and more generally on early modern Catholic missions overseas) have long since explored the global dimension of the ‘corporate geography’, and of the many political, commercial or scientific structures with which the China Jesuits were associated, although these works, often written from the perspective of the mission’s European headquarters, tend to treat each mission separately, solely in terms of its relationship with Europe. They generally leave unexplored the ways in which the individual missionary’s approach to his field was shaped by his being part of such transregional networks. Secondly, countless biographical studies of...
missionaries have followed their trajectories across different regions, from Goa to Japan and from the Spanish Americas to the Philippines. Both these bodies of scholarship have on occasion revealed the mutual transfer of intelligence, practices and concerns between different overseas missions. Given these now well-established connections in the realm of evangelization, it is legitimate for historians of science to raise similar questions. Lastly, an increasing number of studies on polities neighbouring the Qing Empire also propose the illuminating, sometimes surprising perspectives of a third party on the China Jesuits and the sciences they championed: these include studies on Russian intelligence gathering on the Qing, and on the reception of Jesuits’ Chinese language works in Korea and in Tibet. These studies together help us gain a more comprehensive understanding of the networks in which the China Jesuits were involved; it is in this multilateral rather than bilateral framework that this article proposes to analyse the spatial dynamics that underlie some aspects of the knowledge produced by the China Jesuits.

Our discussion is divided into three parts. First, we conduct a prosopographical survey of the China Jesuits’ itineraries, and highlight their commonly shared experiences of travelling in ‘the Indies’ prior to their arrival in China. In the second part, we shift our attention to the contents of their scientific work, and demonstrate how the Indies shaped not only their agenda of inquiry but also the criteria according to which they judged the utility and trustworthiness of Chinese knowledge. While these first two parts are concerned mainly with travel opportunities and sources of knowledge channelled by European networks, in the third part we turn to Chinese (and Manchu) sources concerning the neighbouring regions of the Qing empire, most importantly Inner Eurasia, which were made available to the Jesuits through the intelligence gathering activities of separate chapter. In the chapter on China, there is only one fleeting reference to a piece of Mexican feather work brought to China.

5 Apart from those cited throughout this article, see in particular Cummins (1962), and Brockey (2014).

6 Corsi (2008) emphasizes the exchanges between America and China; Clossey (2011) also ostensibly takes a position against the diffusionist model of writing global history of the Jesuit overseas mission, which takes the missionaries as executants of a centrally defined program.

7 The most recent work on the Russian intelligence network in English is Afinogenov (2016).

8 See, in English, various articles by Lim Jongtae, such as Lim (2014).


10 In eighteenth century sources, ‘the Western Indies’ usually refers to the Americas, and ‘the Eastern Indies’ includes India, the Islands of the Indian Ocean, South-East Asia, sometimes Persia, the Levant, Japan and China. Here we are using the term loosely to refer to the regions between Europe and China.
the Qing court. Jesuit missionaries navigated across different long-distance networks, and their work was accordingly oriented in various directions.

To examine the impact of the Jesuits’ overlapping regional networks on the content of their science, we have chosen to draw most of our case studies from the 1680s on, from works of the French Jesuits who became chief purveyors of European knowledge about China during this century. This period was the heyday of Ancien Régime France’s overseas ambitions and state-sponsored sciences: the French Jesuit mission in China, with its funding from the Crown and linkage to the learned world in France, was born from this dual dynamic.11 The outlook the missionaries developed and the interests they served in this context differed to some degree from their seventeenth-century predecessors working under Iberian patronage, for whom Lisbon, Madrid, Rome, and even Goa and Mexico, had mattered more than Paris for the making of Europe’s China.12 In addition, the eighteenth century also saw the intensification of Qing empire-building beyond the territories where Chinese culture dominated. State-sponsored scholarship followed in the footsteps of troops and diplomats, significantly enlarging the geographical scope of learning compared to what had been available to the Jesuits in the late Ming period. By focusing on the perspective of a relatively tight-knit group, we aim to construct a more precise narrative about the shaping of a body of knowledge. This being said, it is not our intention to argue for the uniqueness of the eighteenth century or of the French, quite the contrary: in the first part of the article, which discusses the itineraries of all Jesuits sent to China between 1552 and 1800, we highlight the continuity of the institutional and material conditions that underlay the two centuries of Jesuit presence in China, as well as the continuous presence of the Indies in the China Jesuits’ lives. There were differences, but no radical distinction, between the seventeenth and the eighteenth century and between the French, the Portuguese, the Spaniards and other national groups. The questions posed by the experience of a representative few can pave the way to a broader enquiry of the truly global aspects of China Jesuits’ science.

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12 The Iberian globalization behind the formation of European knowledge of China during the 17th century, including the contributions of both Jesuits and the mendicant orders, has been recently examined in Romano (2014) and Romano (2016). Romano draws particular attention to the role of Mexico in the process.
2. Meeting the Indies on the Way to China

As members of the educated elite of early modern Catholic Europe, a Jesuit did not lack opportunity to come into contact with knowledge of the Indies well before his selection for the China mission. Within the cloistered world of Jesuit colleges, young members of the Society could approach the vast regions stretching from the Mediterranean to the Indus Valley through the works of Greek and Latin geographers, whose writings were explained in the humanities curriculum. And as François de Dainville has shown, lectures on the works of a Roman geographer such as Pomponius Mela (fl. 43 CE) could also include recent knowledge of the Americas brought back by Portuguese and Spanish navigators. Newsletters written by Jesuits in overseas missions were edited and circulated at home so that “each region [could] learn from the others whatever promoted mutual consolation and edification in our Lord,” and in order to ignite the missionary vocation in the Society’s younger members. The book market overflowed with travelogues, and scholarly journals, since their invention in the late seventeenth century, circulated news from outside Europe to learned readers. Exotic plants and animals were collected and displayed in cabinets of curiosities and botanical gardens. For example, before he became a Jesuit and was sent to China, Johann Schreck (1576-1630) took part in editing Francisco Hernandez’s (1514-1587) natural history of Mexico, published in Rome in 1648.

We also need to point out that there were no clear-cut boundaries between the career tracks of missionaries bound for China and those destined for other overseas missions. There are many examples of those who aspired to join a mission in the Americas or India but ended up being assigned to China, and vice versa. Among the most famous China Jesuits, Giulio Aleni (1582-1649) applied in 1603 to be a missionary in Peru after the Provincial of the Paraguay mission had visited the college of Parma where

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15 On reading of the Jesuit newsletters by the Society’s young members, see Brockey (2009), pp. 225-233.
16 Lach and Van Kley (1998), especially chapters devoted to the “printed sources.”
17 Findlen (2008).
Aleni was a student. 19 Philippe Couplet (1623?–1693), François de Rougemont (1624–1676) and Ferdinant Verbiest (1623–1688), together with other novices of their college of Mechelen, all signed a letter asking to be sent to Chile as missionaries. Couplet and Verbiest effectively set off for Cadiz: it was only after passage to the Americas was refused to them that they returned to Belgium, after which the opportunity to go to China arose. 20 It is worthy of note that among missionaries in the Americas and Asia, so many had ‘ardently desired the China mission’ that Joseph Dehergne, compiler of the Répertoire des Jésuites en Chine, could only include one of them, the Tyrolean Eusebio Kino (1645–1711)—incidentally also a relative of the China Jesuit Martino Martini (1614–1661)—best known as the cartographer of California. 21 Some China Jesuits had already worked in another overseas mission before heading for the Middle Kingdom. One of the ‘King’s mathematicians’, Guy Tachard (1651–1721), was just back in Paris in 1685 after having spent four years in South America as a chaplain of the French Atlantic fleet, and his experience with long-distance sea journeys was probably one of the reasons why he was selected for the China mission. 22 Adrien Greslon (1618–1696, in China after 1656), author of Histoire de la Chine (1671, Paris), spent three years in Canada, among the Huron people (1647–1650). 23 And so did Pierre Chéron d’Incarville (1706–1757, in China after 1740), the best-trained botanist among the eighteenth century China Jesuits, who lived in Québec from 1730 to 1739. 24 If these individuals who had worked in the ‘Indies’ before heading for China were the exception rather than the rule, the journey from Europe to China would infallibly take every missionary through these intermediate lands and seas, thus substantiating the mediated knowledge acquired in books and cabinets with first-hand experience. Dehergne’s Répertoire, which includes 920 entries of individuals, is crowded with archival traces the missionaries left in these intermediate locations. Overall, they can be grouped into three possible routes, in ascending order of difficulty and danger. 25 The most commonly used was the eastbound maritime route. It

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20 Dehergne (1973), p. 288; Gordts (1990), p. 29. I thank Noël Golvers for the information on Verbiest’s early career.
25 Noël Golvers has proposed a more details inventory of six overseas routes and two overland routes, in his study on China Jesuits’ correspondence network with Europe: Via Goa (or Carreira das Indias), Via Gallia, Via Batavica, Via Anglica(na), Via Ostenda, Via Mexicana, Via Siberica (or Moscovitica) and the old Silk Road through Central Asia. The first five eastbound maritime routes geographically overlapped with each other, but were operated by different countries or companies.
consisted of circumventing the Cape of Good Hope, reaching one of the European trading posts on the Indian coast, and sailing through the Strait of Malacca (or directly to the Strait of Sunda after the Cape), to reach the ports of China (Macao, Guangzhou [Canton], occasionally Xiamen [Amoy] or Ningbo). The carreira da India, or Via Goana was the route taken by most China Jesuits working under the Portuguese Padroulo. Many completed their training in theology in the college at Goa, which could entail months to years of stay in the Indian coastal town before reaching China through Macao. Later, French ships that took the Cape route generally avoided the Portuguese possessions of Goa and Macao, though many still made stopovers at the French outposts in India, Chandernagor and Pondicherry.

The second possible, yet considerably more difficult route went the opposite direction, through the Spanish possessions in the Americas. Travellers passed either through Mexico or around the southern tip of the continent to disembark in Buenos Aires or in Concepcion in Chile, thereafter travelling by land to Lima, from where ships regularly sailed to Asia. Both routes then involved stopovers in the Mariana Islands and Manila before reaching China. Because of the patronage Portugal exercised over the China mission, only a handful of Jesuits were able to make it to China this way during the seventeenth century—mostly Spaniards or Spanish subjects, such as the Flemish Pieter Van Hamme (1651-1727, in China after 1689), who lived for five years in the Tarahumaran mission in North-Western Mexico (1684-1689) before embarking on the trans-Pacific route. Nevertheless, for the members of the French Mission, which after 1701 became independent from Portuguese patronage, this route did become a more tempting option in the wake of the War of the Spanish Succession (1701-1713), which resulted in a member of the French

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26 A detailed description of this route can be found in Duteil (1994), pp. 50-54; see also Brockey (2009), pp. 233-242. For Matteo Ricci’s four-year stay in Goa between 1578 and 1582, see R. P.-C. Hsia (2010), pp. 26-50.

27 A very detailed description of this route is offered by the French Capucin Florentin de Bourge, whose travelogue had been sent by the French Jesuit Bouchet in Pondichéry in 1716 and published by Du Halde in the Lettres édifiantes et curieuses. Bouchet to J. B. D. H., Pondicherry, 14th February 1716, Aimé-Martin (1839), vol. 2, pp. 147-153.

ruling house of Bourbon ascending the throne in Madrid. Jean-Armand Nyel (1670-1737, in China 1712-1715), later procurator of the French Jesuit mission in China, whose name figured among the contributors to Duhaldé’s encyclopedic Description de l’Empire de la Chine (Paris, 1735), rambled on this road for eight years with two younger confrères, during which time his colleagues in China repeatedly reported news of his imminent arrival and their repeated disillusionment.29 Joseph Labbe (1677-1745, in China after 1712), superior of the French mission from 1736 to 1740, was luckier: he completed this South American trip within two years (1710-1712).30 In addition, in an age when there was no reliable method for measuring longitude on the high seas, some sailing on the eastbound route ended up on the Brazilian coast when their ship missed the Island of St. Helena, a major reference point for sailors in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. Jean-François Foucquet (1665-1741, in China between 1699 and 1721), thus stayed in Brazil for two weeks on his way back to Europe in 1722;31 and Jean Testard (1663-1718, in China since 1703) stayed there for six months on his way to China in 1702.32

The last, and perhaps the most arduous route was the overland one, which in theory had two possible itineraries, passing either through the Ottoman territories, Persia, then Central Asia or Northern India, or further north, through Central Europe and Russian controlled Siberia. To my knowledge, no missionary ever reached the heartland of China alive by an overland route. Bento Gois (1563-1607), a contemporary of Matteo Ricci, died of exhaustion shortly after reaching Suzhou 肃州 in Gansu with an Armenian caravan.33 One century later, Philippe Avril’s (1654-1698) travelogues bare testimony to his fruitless attempts to obtain a Russian travel permit for Siberia, after having first in 1689 made his way to Moscow via Poland, and a second time in 1698 to Syria and Astrakhan near the Caspian Sea.34 The only successful attempt to connect China and Europe by land during this period was the return journey of Johan Grueber (1653-1680) between 1661 and 1664, who crossed Tibet and passed through Agra and

30 Dehergne (1973), pp. 138-139. Labbe’s account of his journey to America, Labbe to Labbe, 8th January 1712, Concepcion, Aimé-Martin (1839), vol. 2, pp. 91-95.
32 Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (ARSI), Jap Sin 167, f°102-103, Testard to Guibert, 19th December 1702, Bay of All Saints.
33 Gois’s journey confirmed the identity between the Cathay of Marco Polo and Ming China. See Bishop (1988).
34 Love (2003).
Isfahan before reaching Rome. Nonetheless, many Jesuits who finally reached China by sea, had first arrived at an Indian port by land. Antoine de Beauvollier (1657-1708) and the mathematician Claudio Filippo Grimaldi (1638-1712) are the best known among these. A companion of Avril on his second trip, Beauvollier spent nearly ten years in Armenia and Persia (1689-1698), before boarding at Surat, in Gujarat, to reach Canton in 1698. Grimaldi, sent by the Kangxi emperor to Europe in 1686, having been refused entry to Russia on his way back to China, took the Middle Eastern route from Izmir to Ormuz to sail to China via India, a two year journey (1691-1693) during which he lost a considerable number of both his recruits and his scientific instruments. Dehergne’s Répertoire records a dozen more names who followed a similar itinerary.

It is important to bear in mind the ‘tyranny of distance’, as Noël Golvers has termed it, and the terrible material and human cost involved. In recent decades, the growing scholarship on the ‘first globalization’ in the early modern period has emphasized the drastic reduction of distance between Europe and the rest of the world that facilitated the circulation of people, goods and information, and the literature on the Jesuits as agents of globalization has done much to highlight the Society’s ‘effectiveness and growth in projective power’ through ‘devices, drilled people and documents’. However, no ‘long-distance networks’ could annihilate the distance that lay between Europe and other continents. We might even argue that it was precisely due to the relative contraction of distances that a greater number of people could take to the high seas and to the roads, and experience first-hand the dramatic diversity of nature and cultures. The average duration of a single trip from Europe to China on the best reconnoitred eastbound route was two years in the early seventeenth century, and eight months in the early eighteenth century. The length of the journey entailed great uncertainty and danger. Some changed vocation

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36 Lebon (1936); Dehergne (1973), p. 29.
38 They include Louis Archambaud (1662-1694), Charles François Brévedent (1659-1699), Aimé Chézaud (1604-1664), Antoine Chomel (1668-1702), Paul Gobert (1620-1655), Jacques Le Faure (1613-1675), Antonio de Magalhaes (1677-1735) and Guillaume Melon (1666-1710).
42 Harris (1996).
at this stage, such as Pierre Martin (1665-1716), a key figure of the Madurai mission in India, who gave up his vocation for China during his overland journey with Beauvollier through Persia and the Indian sub-continent. A large number of them perished on the journey: some historians have estimated that up to 50% of recruits for the China mission between 1581 and 1712 died on the way. Any mishap, from bad weather to rampant piracy, could interrupt a trip, often fatally. If we consider the journeys back to Europe of the two Jesuits sent by the Kangxi emperor as envoys to European courts, Grimaldi’s itinerary has been discussed above, while Joachim Bouvet’s return trip to France took almost four years (1693-1697), including an exasperating two years during which he was held up between Surat and Socotra off the shores of Yemen. Among the five Jesuits sent in 1707 to Rome to represent Beijing’s position in the Chinese Rites Controversy, two were shipwrecked and died before reaching Rome (Beauvollier and Barros), and one succumbed to illness (Provana) on his way back to China. The letter written by the Pope to the Kangxi emperor in 1707 following the diplomatic disaster of the Tournon legation only arrived in 1713.

The role of the difficulty of long-distance communication in the outcome of the Chinese Rites Controversy—and more generally in the early modern history of Christianity in China—still awaits better assessment.

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45 Brockey (2009), p. 234. Frederick Vermote has proposed a slightly lower estimation, suggesting that 40% of Jesuits on their way to China died at sea or were redirected. Vermote (2013).

46 On the Chinese Rites Controversy, see Mungello (1994), in particular p. 229-230 for those Jesuits sent by Kangxi as his envoys.

47 Han (2005).
Figure 1. Major Routes taken by Jesuits to China (17th-18th centuries)
3. Looking at China through the Indies

Why does all this matter for our understanding of the Jesuits’ scholarly work in China? To answer this question, one that ultimately concerns the relationship between knowledge and the knower, we shall mention that the human experience of ‘sailing across ninety thousand li’ (航海九萬里) was one shared by all China Jesuits, just like their humanistic training in European colleges and their missionary agenda. In the Jesuits’ self-representation vis-à-vis their Chinese interlocutors, the image of the seasoned traveller was as important as that of the ‘Western literati (西儒)’, as illustrated by the passage in Xifang yaoji quoted at the beginning of this article. Therefore, if we accept a priori the importance of the Jesuits’ humanistic training in shaping their scholarship on China, we should equally acknowledge the heuristic interest of taking into account their experiences as travellers. The question, then, is to assess the impact of such experiences and knowledge on their scholarship.

We may, above all, think of these months and years on the road and at sea as a continuation of their training, when new skills were acquired and knowledge learnt back home was put to the trial of an unfamiliar and arduous setting for the first time. From the perspective of evangelization, Liam Brockey has discussed the China Jesuits’ sea journey as a ‘classroom’—on a par with their learning of pastoral and other skills in their home college—since “[on] each carrack lay numerous occasions for preaching, teaching doctrine, caring for the sick, hearing confessions, performing humble chores, and begging for alms.”48 In a study not limited to China, Delphine Tempère has similarly called for greater attention to be paid to the missionaries’ sea journeys as a special kind of mission space, different from the overseas mission among non-European peoples, yet not disconnected from it. Preaching to sailors—bad Christians cut off from parish life—was, as she argues, “a sketch of work ahead on the continent.”49 This comment holds true for Jesuits’ scientific work as well. To take the example of the ‘King’s mathematicians’, they started making astronomical observations as soon as they set sail. Indeed, the first instalment of their scientific work to be published concerned their journey from Brest to Siam.50 Languages constituted another set of skills Jesuits regularly learnt during the journey to China. The King’s mathematicians learnt Portuguese while at sea, the lingua franca of the East Asian mission, crucial for their survival in China.51 During his second trip to China in 1697,

49 Tempère (2010), pp. 165-166 and 176.
Bouvet taught Manchu and Chinese to the new recruits who accompanied him. Some also acquired proficiency in other Asian languages, although it is yet unclear whether and how such knowledge was put to use once they arrived in China: Beauvollier could read Arabic and speak Turkish, while Pierre Martin, his travel companion, had a working knowledge of Persian. Bouvet, while held up in the Persian Gulf area between 1694 and 1696, acquired enough Turkish to communicate without an interpreter, and recommended that all missionaries destined for China be taught Turkish prior to their departure.

However, the experience of travel, formative as it can be, differed from the training in a college, which followed a predefined curriculum. In this respect, we may usefully refer to Daniel Carey’s analysis on the centrality of travel in the work of the early Royal Society of London. Travel and the information brought back by travellers, Carey argues, were “episodic and miscellaneous rather than ordered and predictable;” this lent seventeenth-century inquiry an element of arbitrariness and serendipity, “alien to our own understanding of science as planned activity grounded in prediction, experiment, and rational expectation.” Similarly for China Jesuits who were travellers themselves, the journey across the ‘Indies’ was riddled with unpredictable encounters. Most importantly for our argument, these included encounters with Chinese animals, plants, language and beliefs (or at least, what were taken to be such), as none of these were confined to the political boundaries of the empire of China. The Indies also offered opportunities to encounter other European travellers and to share their knowledge of China. This happened to the King’s Mathematicians during their stay in Cape Town, where they were invited to the Dutch governor’s residence. There they saw two goldfish, which, as they were told by the friendly governor, “came from China,” and were “extremely esteemed” by “people of quality in this country [i.e. China] and the Japanese” — information later confirmed as they “have since then seen some in the Palace of the Batavia governor, & in Siam... & in several Chinese Mandarin’s places.” They also met in Cape Town a Silesian botanist named Claudius, who, having “seen some [ginseng] in China, asserted that

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52 This point is known to us thanks to the log of François Froger, second in command of the ship Bouvet was travelling on. Froger (1859), p. 6.
53 Aimé-Martin (1839), vol. 2, p. 258, Pierre Martin to de la Villette, 30th January 1699: “[In Persia] we always spoke Turkish and Father Beauvollier only read Arabic books and I Persian books.” (... nous parlions toujours turc et le père Beauvollier ne lisait que des livres arabes et moi des livres persans)
56 Tachard (1686), p. 84. On the reception of Tachard’s travelogues, see F. C. Hsia (2009), chap. 5.
he found two plants at Cape Town, and let us see the entire figure he has painted after life.” Thanks to this conversation, Guy Tachard—who did not enter China in the end—conjectured that “a certain herb they [the Nama people of South Africa] call Kanna… is apparently the same famous plant as what the Chinese call ginseng.” 57 Another example is the nine “boring” months Antoine Gaubil and Jean-Baptiste Jacques were forced to spend on Poulo Condor (Côn Son Island, Vietnam) in 1722, while waiting for favourable wind to complete their journey to China. Apart from making astronomical observations and depicting exotic species such as “flying squirrels” and “flying lizards,” they crossed paths with Foucquet, who was returning to Europe for good, and with whom they shared astronomical data and exchanged opinions on the state of the China mission. 58 Jacques also noted that the Cochinchinese, alongside worshiping other deities, “regard Confucius as the first doctor of the Universe,” while Gaubil observed that the inhabitants of the island “know the Chinese characters,” and thought it “remarkable” that “peoples of different provinces of China, those of Tonkin and of Cochinchina, who do not comprehend each other by speech, understand mutually very well in writing.” 59 All these observations later appeared in print as Observations… faites aux Indes et à la Chine [Observations… made in the Indies and in China] in 1729. A further interesting case is Bouvet’s return journey to Europe from 1694 to 1697. On 16th April 1694, when the ship dropped anchor at the Indian port of Karwar, the captain offered him as a gift two seahorses his crew had caught. Bouvet’s diary entry on that day reads, alongside a detailed description of the creatures: “we will provide an extract of what the Chinese naturalists have written on this fish.” 60 Indeed, Bouvet’s highly selective translation of Li Shizhen’s Bencao gangmu 本草綱目 (Systematic Materia Medica, 1596), which he completed during his sea journey, includes an article on the seahorse. 61 The encounter with an animal in the Indian Ocean thus informed the Jesuit’s choices in translating a monumental work of Chinese materia medica literature.

57 Tachard (1686), p. 101. Apparently, Tachard’s reckless publishing of some observations Claudius disclosed to him cost the latter his position. Raj (2007), pp. 39-40. As Tachard did not reach China in the end, the information on goldfish in China is likely to come from Le Comte. See Lecomte (1990), pp. 158-159.
59 See also Jacques to Raphaëlis, 1st November 1722, Aimé-Martin (1843), vol. 3, p. 321; Souciet (1729), p. 107ff (text dated 23rd February 1722); Gaubil to Souciet, 23rd February 1723, Poulo Condor, Souciet (1729), pp. 204-207. This volume was harshly criticized by Gaubil himself for the numerous mistakes in the astronomical data. See Gaubil (1970), pp. 282-288; Hsia (2009), pp. 121-122.
If a stay in the ‘Indies’ could offer a pre-taste of China, experience and knowledge acquired in and about these lands were not left behind once the journey had come to an end. Personal experience in other non-European regions was shared in daily conversations among China Jesuits. Antoine Gaubil recorded a conversation he had in Beijing with d’Incarville, “who [had] been a schoolmaster (régent) in Québec in the lower classes, [and who] told us about the voyages made to the North and quite afar.”62 Many China Jesuits are known to have corresponded with their confrères in other overseas missions, often due to personal ties built during the trip, although far fewer of these letters were preserved than of reports sent back to Europe, making it impossible to assess the scale of these exchanges. Pieter Van Hamme’s sizable correspondence includes two letters to Father Bouvrens on the Marianna Islands.63 Tomás Pereira (1646-1708) sent a Life of Buddha based on Chinese sources to Fernão de Queiros, his former teacher in the college of Goa, who inserted it in a grand narrative on Buddhism in Asia in his Conquista temporal, e spiritual de Ceylão (Temporal and spiritual conquest of Ceylan, manuscript completed in 1688); however we do not know what information on Indian Buddhism Pereira received in return.64 Gaubil wrote, shortly after his arrival at Beijing in 1723 and the start of his work on Chinese astronomical records, that he and Jacques had befriended a Jesuit mathematician during their stay on Côn Son Island, from whom they were expecting an observation made in Cochinchina.65 He was later in regular contact with Claude Stanislas Boudier (1685-1757) and Xavier Duchamp (1682-1761), Jesuit astronomers at the Mogul court, who sent him observational data and a treatise on Hindu astronomy.66 The chinchona that Jean de Fontaney (1643-1710) and Claude de Visdelou (1656-1737) famously presented to the Kangxi emperor in 1693 had been sent to the from Pondicherry by Charles-François Dolu (1651-1740):67 the three Jesuits were connected not only by their training in the same Jesuit college in Paris, but also by their having taken part in French embassies to Siam (Fontaney and Visdelou in 1685, and Dolu in 1687).68

64 Županov (2010). Županov thinks that Queiro’s work is the best historical account on Buddhism by a Jesuit author.
65 Gaubil to Souciet, Beijing, 20th October 1723, Gaubil (1970), p. 64.
In addition, European books and journals available in Jesuits’ libraries in China—at least in the largest and most up-to-date ones in Beijing—also enabled missionaries to keep abreast of news from both within and outside Europe. These included frequent reports from others in the ‘Indies’ on their supposed discoveries there of plants regarded as emblematic of China. The 1702 issue of *Histoire de l’Académie royale des Sciences* credits a certain Jesuit brother Yon with locating tea plants in Martinique, while the *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses* include reports on the existence of tea plants in Saint-Domingue and on attempts to transplant tea in Guyana. After entering China, learning about the Indies continued, and it informed the missionaries’ work on Chinese soil.

We can further observe that China Jesuits’ experience of the Indies can be meaningful for our understanding of their scholarship, not merely in terms of what they happened to see and where they saw it, but also in terms of how they assessed the value of an observation or a piece of information at various stages of their careers. Following again Tempère’s observation that it was during the journey that missionaries “crossed the first material and emotional barrier that separated them from Europe,” we can likewise argue that it was during the journey that missionaries bound for China first experienced the foreignness of exotic species, unseen phenomena and alien societies. They thus broadened their knowledge of natural wonders and human diversity, and reassessed what counted as trustworthy information. Reminiscence of past travel experience, as well as mediated knowledge about the world beyond Europe, could prove to be decisive when it came to assessing the credibility of a Chinese source. We have argued elsewhere that the influential report on the Chinese method of smallpox inoculation by the French Jesuit François-Xavier Dentrecolles (1664-1741) in 1726 was decisively triggered by news of a similar ‘Turkish’ practice introduced from the Ottoman empire to England in 1722: Dentrecolles had in fact observed the practice of smallpox inoculation in rural Jiangxi as early as 1715—and had rejected it as a folk superstition. It was owing to the positive reception that greeted Ottoman knowledge in England (about which he read in the Jesuit journal *Mémoires de Trévoux*) that Dentrecolles overcame his initial prejudice against a comparable Chinese technique. Another example from Dentrecolles, less outstanding yet equally revealing, illustrates the role

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72 Fauque to de la Neuville, Kourou (Guyana), 15th January 1729, Aimé-Martin (1839), vol. 2, p. 18.
played by the ‘Indies’ in shaping Jesuits’ approaches to things Chinese. Dentrecolles’s trip to China from 1698 to 1699 included a stopover in Chandernagor, then an outpost of the French East India Company. From there he travelled overland to Madras to board a ship to China—a one-year-and-five-month trip, not particularly eventful, about which he left no account of his own. Yet twenty years later, while translating a Chinese description of a spectacular locust attack, he commented, in a translator’s note:

> I have spoken of locusts which sometimes overwhelm certain provinces: it is a terrible scourge, judging from what is reported by the [Chinese] author I now translate: “people see, he says, a stunning multitude which covers the whole sky. They are so compressed that their wings seem to touch one another. They are of such a great number, that raising one’s eyes one believes to see above his head mountains high and green (this was his own expression); the noise they make while flying resembles the noise made by a drum.” What I saw myself in the Indies, in Bengal, convinces me that this description is not too exaggerated.  

An earlier experience in India thus lent credibility to a Chinese text which might have otherwise appeared dubious to the Jesuit.

Finally, direct or mediated knowledge missionaries possessed about the ‘Indies’ and European interest there to a large extent shaped the Jesuits’ agenda of inquiry in China. This is particularly true for the French Jesuits’ work on natural history. Many of them took care to highlight the utility of their findings on economically valuable plants and artisanal know-how, not so much for France per se, as for French colonial interests overseas—Canada, Guadeloupe, Antilles, Madagascar, Île Bourbon (today’s Réunion), Île de France (today’s Mauritius), etc. The omnipresence of these places in the China Jesuits’ writings is a reminder that, in the absence of European colonization in East Asia, colonialism still played a significant role in the making of European knowledge about China during the eighteenth century—by way of the China Jesuits’ readiness to serve the colonies that their home countries possessed in the ‘Indies’.

Pierre Jartoux’s 1711 report on Manchu ginseng is the best known success story of this kind: it was following his advice on the possible

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75 Dentrecolles to Du Halde, 19th October, 1720, Aimé-Martin (1843), vol. 3, p. 306.  
76 Île de France indeed became home to acclimatized Chinese plants; seeds of “Chinese plants” collected there were sent to France in the late 18th century. See Dumoulin-Genest (1994), 286ff.
habitat location of the plant that Canadian ginseng was found. Dentrecelles was an equally strong advocate for the usefulness of certain Chinese plants in a French colonial context. His works on Chinese plants in the 1730s frequently evoked the perspective of their acclimatization in French colonial plantations, or their comparability with other non-European plants known in France. The Chinese huaishu 檜樹 (pagoda tree) was worthy of interest since its pharmacological uses in China may also apply to acacia, which had recently been introduced into France from the Americas. Likewise, Chinese knowledge on bamboo deserved a lengthy study, since bamboo grew untamed in the French Antilles, and could constitute a ‘gift’ (présent) of the colonies to France if it could be imported and put to effective use. His fellow missionaries in French Guyana, ‘so devoid of the commodities of life,’ could therein ‘find some sweetness’ (douceur) by learning from the Chinese to appreciate the culinary value of bamboo shoots.

Colonial interests also underlay d’Incarville’s botanical work. In his correspondence with the Royal Society, he requested books on the natural history of the American colonies, including Mark Catesby’s Natural History of Carolina and the Bahama Islands (1731, 1744) and Hans Sloane’s Catalogus Plantarum quae in Insula Jamaica (1696). Like Dentrecelles, he made explicit reference to the colonial economy: for instance, speaking of Chinese varnish, he wrote to Bernard de Jussieu:

I prided myself that with the memoir I sent and detailed models, one could carry out varnishing in the way of China, all the more as one has varnish trees in Mississippi.

Mississippi is again associated with a Chinese plant, five years later, in d’Incarville’s letter to Cromwell Mortimer, secretary of the Royal Society. In his description of the Chinese way of making candles out of oil drawn from the berries of the tallow trees, a footnote points out: “This is applicable to the green wax of Mississippi.”

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78 Aimé-Martin (1843), vol. 3, p. 716.
79 BnF Ms Fr. 17238, f°3-10, cited from Thomaz de Bossierre (1982), p. 148.
81 Bernard Maitre (1949), p. 46.
82 D’Incarville to Bernard de Jussieu, 22nd October 1747, cited in Bernard-Maitre (1949), p. 30. “Je me flattais qu’avec le mémoire que j’envoyais et des modèles détaillées, on pourrait exécuter en Europe la manière de vernisser de Chine, surtout ayant au Mississippi l’arbre du vernis.”
83 “A letter from Father d’Incarville, of the Society of Jesus, at Peking in China, to the late Cromwell Mortimer, M.D. R. S. Secr.,” Beijing, 15th November, 1751, Philosophical Transactions (1753), p. 256.
Rather than a pre-existing corpus, the Jesuits were constructing a new body of knowledge, based on Chinese sources but reassessed in terms of its usefulness for France’s overseas colonies. Chinese natural history knowledge was put to the service of European interests which, however, were not geographically located in Europe alone.

4. Knowing the Indies through Sources Available in China

As we have seen, there were many links between Jesuit missionaries in China and other non-European regions; their scholarship, even when it dealt with things Chinese and used Chinese sources, was sometimes shaped by these connections. So far, we have concentrated on connections that were mostly European, that is, conveyed through European religious congregations, commercial companies, scientific institutions, states and individuals, whose scope of activities did not overlap with the territorial boundaries of Europe, strictly speaking.

Yet the same can also be said about China and Chinese sources of knowledge to which the Jesuits had access. From the late seventeenth century, the expansion of the Qing Empire was accompanied by an in-flow of foreign people and objects, as well as knowledge concerning them. Being in China and having access to Chinese and Manchu sources, Jesuits were to a certain extent also integrated into the Qing network, which disclosed to them knowledge of certain regions that lay beyond the Great Wall. Several court Jesuits, including Verbiest, Grimaldi and Gerbillon, left famous accounts of their journeys beyond the Great Wall in the emperor’s retinue. In this perspective, we can also look back to some of the cases we have discussed earlier. Ginseng, for instance, was then the emblematic product of Manchuria, since ginseng reserves in northern China had approached exhaustion; Jartoux’s travel to Manchuria was only possible because he was taking part in an imperial cartographical mission. *Cordyceps sinensis* (冬蟲夏草, ‘worm in the winter, plant in the summer’) was a product of the Tibetan plateau that Parrenin reportedly received from the governor of Sichuan. His report to the Paris Academy of Sciences thus predates the earliest Chinese description of *dong chong xia cao* by several decades. Qing agency also played a role in Dentrecallois’s

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85 Du Halde’s *Description de l’Empire de la Chine et de la Tartarie chinoise* printed much of these materials in its volume 4, devoted to ‘Tartary’.
87 This first description in Chinese is found in the *Ben cao gang mu shi yi* 本草綱目拾遺 by Zhao Xuemin 趙學敏 (1765), pp. 138-139.
reassessment of smallpox inoculation. As the Manchu were more vulnerable than Chinese to smallpox, Kangxi actively promoted the Chinese practice of inoculation to immunize Manchu and Mongol bannermen; this imperial policy lent the technique an authority that it did not possess in the southern countryside.88

Of course, Chinese written traditions on foreign countries dated back well before the advent of the Qing. Minerals, plants and animals dealt with in Chinese *materia medica* literature had, more often than not, transcontinental distribution—for some Jesuits, their relevance for the European audience lay precisely in their *not* being uniquely Chinese. This is also true of Chinese sources on geography and history. From individual travellers’ accounts to monographs on tributary countries in dynastic histories, China’s written traditions abound with records on its neighbours far and near, past and present, which several China Jesuits read with an interested eye. A letter from Antoine Gaubil to Joseph-Nicolas Delisle (1688-1768), his correspondent at the Academy in St Petersburg, offered an overview of the geographical scope covered by Chinese historical sources, and their interest for European studies of other ‘Orients’:

> At Petersburg you must undoubtedly have seen what I wrote to Mr. Bayer about what the Chinese have said concerning the Huns and Turcs. Dr. Mortimer has written to me, that he had received from a nephew of Monsieur Fourmont a small piece upon the origin of the Turcs and Huns, as drawn from the Chinese books. I shall speak again of that subject in the Memoirs, which I have of the History of the great Dynasty of Tang. There are a great number of very interesting things on what the Chinese have delivered at that time concerning the Persians, and its destruction by the Mahometans; concerning the Mahometans, and the assistance, which they gave to Chinese Emperors against the rebels; concerning the Christian religion of the Tatsin [Daqin, i.e. Byzantium], but in very obscure terms; concerning the sects and countries of the Indians, Japan, Coree [Korea], Tartary, and the countries between China and the Caspian Sea, Tybet, and its princes. All these particulars may be of considerable service to unravel the eastern history from the year 500 of Christ to the year 1000 after him, and even much higher.89

89 Gaubil to Delisle, 18th November 1751. Gaubil (1970), p. 655. The letter was originally written in French, but already translated into English in the eighteenth century for publication in the *Philosophical Transactions*. *Philosophical Transactions* (1753), pp. 315-316.
Gaubil’s extensive writings indeed contain many translations from Chinese concerning a wide array of peoples from East and Inner Asia: Korea,\textsuperscript{90} Ryukyu,\textsuperscript{91} the City-States on the Silk Road during the Tang dynasty,\textsuperscript{92} the Mongols of Genghis Khan’s time, etc...\textsuperscript{93} The Western language book collection he built up in Beijing on the Middle East and Inner Asia matched his own scholarly output on these subjects.\textsuperscript{94} These works have so far been largely neglected in the history of the China Jesuits and European sinology, though they far exceed the scope of this article. One text can nonetheless encapsulate the multi-directional dynamics that shaped this body of China Jesuit’s scholarship: Gaubil’s 1726 translation of Yiyulu 异域錄 [Records of Foreign Territories].

Yiyulu is the travelogue of the Manchu official Tulišen 土爾扈特 in Chinese, Kalmyk for the Russians), the Westernmost Mongol tribe who had been herders near the Caspian sea since the seventeenth century. The embassy lasted three years, from May 1712 to April 1715, covering three thousand kilometers through Russia-controlled Siberia via Lake Baikal and Tobolsk.\textsuperscript{95} Despite its minimal diplomatic achievements, Tulišen’s embassy was remarkable for its duration and the distances travelled; it also stands out in history for the extraordinary breadth of the circulation of the travelogue that stemmed from it. Yiyulu was written and published in both Chinese and Manchu in 1723 (though separately);\textsuperscript{96} by 1821, it had already been translated into four European languages: French, German, Russian (two translations), and English.\textsuperscript{97} Gaubil’s partial French translation, entitled “A Chinese Account Containing an Itinerary from Beijing to Tobolsk, and from Tobolsk to the Torghut Country [Relation chinoise contenant un Itinéraire de Péking à Tobol, &

\textsuperscript{90} Du Halde (1735), vol. 4, pp. 430-459, Histoire abrégée de la Corée.
\textsuperscript{91} Mémoires sur les îles que les Chinois appellent îles de Lieou-Kieou, Lettres édifiantes et curieuses 3, 503-519. This text is a partial translation of Xu Baoguang’s 徐葆光 (1671-1723) Zhongshan chuanxin lu 中山傳信錄, an account on his mission to Ryukyu in 1719-1720. See Szcześniak (1955), p. 143.
\textsuperscript{92} Gaubil (1791).
\textsuperscript{93} Gaubil (1739).
\textsuperscript{94} Golvers (2008).
\textsuperscript{95} On Tulišen, the context of his embassy and the Yiyulu, see Perdue (2007), and Perdue (2009), 213ff.
\textsuperscript{96} The Manchu title is Lakcaha jecen de takūrāha bābe ejele bithe [translation from Perdue (2009), p. 219: Jottings on the places where one sent me in the cut-off frontiers (outside the empire)]. There are two modern critical editions of the Yiyulu, both reproducing the bilingual text: Imanishi (1964); Chuang Chi-Fa (1983).
\textsuperscript{97} See Perdue (forthcoming). I thank Peter Perdue for sharing with me his forthcoming article.
de Tobol au pays des Tourgouts],” received in Paris in 1726 and published in 1729, was the earliest of all, an impressive speed by any standard.

It did not enjoy a high reputation, however. In his laudatory review of George Thomas Staunton’s complete English translation in 1821, Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat, the first scholar to hold the chair of sinology at the Collège de France, wrote: “This extract [by Gaubil] was in no way able to replace the entire work; it only made one feel its importance.” Abel-Rémusat was right. Tulišen’s text, which is a chronological diary, contains two sorts of information. On one hand, there is the ‘dry’ intelligence consisting of dates, locations where the embassy stopped, distances between locations, and the general state of the Russian settlements visited, such as whether they were fortified, the size of their garrisons and the number of their churches. On the other hand, Tulišen also took note of the unfamiliar minerals, plants, animals, impressive landscapes and customs of the local populations. For instance, on the town of Yeniseysk (visited on 21st June 1713, or Kangxi 52/05/29), Tulišen wrote:

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98 Souciet (1729), pp. 148-165. To my knowledge, the historian of Sino-Russian relations Gaston Cahen was the first to present Gaubil’s text as a translation from the Chinese version of Yiyulu (unspecified source cited by Imanishi 1964, p. 38). Internal evidence from Gaubil’s text supports this identification. Gaubil offers a transcription of the heavily vocalized Chinese rendering of Russian toponyms, and includes a long “Reflection” on how foreign proper names are “dressed up (trasvesti)” in Chinese (Souciet 1729, pp. 166-176). His transcription corresponds to the Chinese version of Yiyulu. For instance, Tobolsk—in Tulišen’s Chinese version Tobo’er 托波爾—was transcribed by Gaubil as “Topo-eul” (Souciet 1729, p. 155), whereas the Manchu version gives “Tobol” (Chuang 1983, p. 65). Similarly, the Russian name for France is transcribed by Gaubil as “Foulantsousse” (Souciet 1729, p. 165), corresponding to the Chinese version “Fulanchusi 付蘭楚斯” rather than to the Manchu “Furan cus” (Chuang 1983, p. 123). I owe these insights on the difference between Manchu and Chinese transcriptions of Russian names to Afinogenov (2017). However, it is unclear whether Gaubil, who knew Manchu, had access to the Manchu version of Yiyulu.

99 On Staunton’s translation, see Yu (2013).

The town of Yeniseik lies to the North West of Irkutsky. The distance by water is above 3000 lēe. By land it is one month’s journey. The channel of the river is here very broad, but it is on all sides surrounded by mountains. The river Yenisei runs from the south; it is a larger river than the Angara. The latter runs on a south-eastern direction, and about 10 lēe south of the town, falls into the former. The Enissei, after passing the town, runs north-eastward, and finally discharges itself into the Northern Ocean. The town of Yeniseik is without walls. Its population is entirely Russian, and comprises above a thousand families. There are here eight Christian churches, and there is also a public market. The town and district are under the government of an officer, whose name is Yu-se-to-ur-ni Ge-li-ke San-la-ur-se-min Na-tchee. This officer has a garrison of 800 soldiers under his command. The style of building, the produce of the earth, and the domesticated animals, are all the same here as at Irkutsky. The Sulim Tartars are called here by the Russians Ko-mu-ni-han, and sometimes Tong-gu-se (Tongusians). There is a species of deer here which is used both for riding and carrying burthens. It is called go-lun; its colour is white and brown; it has horns, and is about the size of an ass or mule. In the woods is found the

102 I indicate in the footnotes the two passages where it is imprecise.
103 The original reads more literally as “[The Sulim Tartars] all herd deer for driving carts and for carrying burdens.”
bird ho-kee. In the very coldest part of this northern country, a species of animal is found, which burrows under the earth, and which dies if it is at all exposed at any time to the sun and air. It is of great size, and weights ten thousand kin. Its bones are very white and shining, like ivory. It is not by nature a powerful animal, and is therefore not very dangerous or ferocious. It is found generally in the mud upon the banks of rivers. The Russians collect the bones of this animal, in order to make cups, saucers, combs, and other small articles. The flesh of the animal is of a very refrigerating quality, and is eaten as a remedy in fevers. The foreign name of this animal is Ma-men-tou-va. We call it Kee-shoo. From Yeniseik to the Northern Ocean is about a month's journey. In this country, the nights immediately before and after Midsummer are at no hour very dark. At the hour of greatest darkness, though the sun is down, there is still light enough to play at cards. An hour or two after this, the day dawns in the east, and the sun rises.

Gaubil's translation, however, retained only the hard data, which are given in the passages I have underlined in the text above:

The borough of Yenisei on the river of the same name is North to the Irkut river. By waterway there is 3000 li from one to the other; by land it takes 30 days. The Yenisei River is larger than the Angara [River], and Angara larger than the Selenga. The borough of Yenisei has no wall. There are 1000 houses, 800 soldiers, 8 churches. The country is very cold, and in 30 days, one can travel thence to the Great Northern Sea.

He thus left out all that may have appealed to a curious Chinese reader: the description of the light at night in the North when it never gets completely dark in summer; and that there is a furry beast with elephant-like trunks, ten thousand jin in weight, which lives underground and perishes as soon as it emerges above ground, from the Russian-to-Chinese transliteration of

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104 The original can be read as a standalone sentence, as “The Northern lands are the coldest.”

105 Staunton (1821), pp. 68-71.

which, “Ma-men-tuo-wa,” we can recognize a mammoth.\textsuperscript{107} Abel-Rémusat was right that this translation does not do justice to Tulišen’s travelogue.

There is, however, another way to assess this translation, not in terms of what Gaubil omitted, but in terms of what he actually was seeking to do and actually achieved. From this point of view, Gaubil’s French translation comes across as an accurate and comprehensive reconstruction of an itinerary on Russian territory, systematically adding geodesic coordinates. His omission of the early stage of the journey, from Zhangjiakou to the Mongolian border, may well be explained by his own comment: “we already have a good survey map for the territory within the Chinese border.” \textsuperscript{108} In fact, Gaubil’s work consisted essentially of translating Tulišen’s prosaic travelogue into data that could be used for cartographical purposes.

The early 1720s was indeed a period of heightened cartographic interest in the area surrounding the Caspian Sea in Central Asia. In 1723, Guillaume Delisle (1675–1726), combining Russian, Ottoman and Persian sources, published his Carte des Pays voisins de la Mer Caspienne [Map of countries neighbouring the Caspian Sea].\textsuperscript{109} These maps reached Beijing quickly, apparently for Gaubil to correct them according to his Chinese sources. In late 1725, Gaubil wrote to Souciet concerning Delisle’s map: “The new map by Mr Delisle, on which he places the city of Astrakhan at 67 degrees to the East of Paris; this diverges somewhat from my ideas… I will not fail to send you next year the translation of the tartar itinerary for Mr Delisle.”\textsuperscript{110} This ‘tartar itinerary’ is likely to be the Yiyulu, which, according to the published version of Gaubil’s translation, was ‘sent in 1726.’\textsuperscript{111}

\textsuperscript{107} On Chinese knowledge concerning the Siberian mammoth more generally, see Laufer and Pelliot (1913), p. 329.

\textsuperscript{108} Souciet (1729), p. 149. Tulišen travelled via Zhangjiakou and through the Kalkha territory, which had been surveyed in 1698: see Mario Cams’s article in this same issue. Gaubil nonetheless retained Tulišen’s mention of “the place where Galdan was defeated,” and quoted Jartoux’s 1710 observation of the coordinates of the battlefield in a footnote. Souciet (1729), p. 150, note 5.

\textsuperscript{109} On the map of Guillaume Delisle in the Russian context and his sources, see Gorshenina (2007), pp. 283–286.

\textsuperscript{110} “La nouvelle carte de M. de l’Isle, où il place la ville d’Astracan à 67° à l’Orient de Paris, divarica (sic) un peu mes idées, et interrompit mon travail jusqu’à des nouveaux éclaircissements que je vous ai demandés. Avant votre réponse, je ne laisserai pas l’an prochain de vous envoyer pour M. de l’Isle la traduction de l’itinéraire tartare.” Gaubil to Souciet, 13\textsuperscript{th} November 1725, received on 20\textsuperscript{th} October 1726. Gaubil (1970), p. 117. Similar comments had already appeared in his letter to Souciet dated one week previously, on the 5\textsuperscript{th} November 1725, without mentioning the ‘tartar itinerary.’ Gaubil (1970), p. 96.

\textsuperscript{111} Souciet (1729), p. 148.
Another new European publication on Central Asia apparently sent to Gaubil for the same purpose was the Dutch traveller Cornelis de Bruijn’s (1652-1726/7) Voyages... par la Moscovie, en Perse et aux Indes orientales (1718), which Gaubil received in 1724. De Bruijn’s name, in its gallicized form ‘Le Brun,’ appeared in Gaubil’s translation of Yiyulu, in a footnote to the record on Yeniseysk: “if the distance from Irkuts to Yeniseysk & the rhumb are well marked, Yeniseysk should be further North than its location on the map of Siberia, in M. Le Brun’s Relation, Amsterdam edition, 1718.” The Qing source is again relied upon to correct a European map. These and other clues, in addition to a Manchu map of the Caspian Sea from the Yiyulu apparently sent by another missionary (not a Jesuit) to Paris, strongly connect Gaubil’s reading of the Yiyulu to the exchange of cartographical data between Paris cartographers and Beijing Jesuits concerning Central Asia.

Initiatives taken in Paris, however, were not the sole driving force behind this exchange. For the 1720s saw the production of the so-called Yongzheng Atlas, a revised version of the copperplate edition of the Kangxi Atlas. The revision consisted of the addition of new areas West and North of those covered in the Kangxi Atlas. Since direct survey was not possible in those areas, which were not directly under Qing control, cartographers had to rely on travel accounts and oral reports. There was thus at this time a concentration of cartographical data collected in Beijing for the project, mostly under the supervision of Prince Yunxiang (1686-1730, Kangxi’s 13th son, called ‘the 13th regulo’ in Jesuit sources), who had been put in charge of the revision of the atlas. In this context, Beijing missionaries, including Gaubil, were frequently solicited to check the accuracy of data and to draw maps based on these data. It is probable that Gaubil’s encounter with Yiyulu happened in this context; it was certainly as an associate of Yunxiang in the imperial cartographic project that Gaubil was able to actually supplement Tulišen’s text with some additional information.

The most substantial enrichment Gaubil made in his French translation was the geographic coordinates of towns, rivers and mountains: Tulišen’s original text, as we have seen, was entirely devoid of such data. Gaubil’s correspondence makes it clear that, as a sedentary scholar, he obtained

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112 Le Brun (1718).
115 Cams (2013).
116 See Mario Cams’ contribution in this issue.
such data from Inner Asian travellers received by the Qing court in Beijing. One group of informers Gaubil invoked both in his correspondence and in his footnotes to *Yiyulu* was the ‘Kalmyk Tartar’ (Torghut) envoys who were in Beijing in 1725, based on whose accounts the Jesuits were asked to “make a new map of the countries between the Caspian Sea and Shanxi.”

Cartographic data Gaubil processed on behalf of the Qing court was instantly relayed to French mapmakers: in the very same letter, he invokes the authority of these natives of the Caspian region to suggest a ‘considerable correction’ to Delisle’s map of the Caspian Sea.

The French translation of *Yiyulu* likewise benefited from these contacts: Gaubil was apparently referring to the same Torghut envoys, “who were here in 1725” and who “have been to Tobolsk,” when he adds in a translator’s note that the source of the Tobol River mentioned by Tulišen should be located at “latitude 53°40’, longitude 49° West of Beijing.”

Another group of informers who proved effective helpers in Gaubil’s interpretation of *Yiyulu* were members of a Russian embassy. They arrived in Beijing on the 1st November 1726, following the caravan road “from Moscow to Kaigorot, thence to Tobolsk, capital of Siberia, to Yeniseysk, to Lake Baikal, to Selenginsk.” Their itinerary appears to have overlapped with Tulišen’s, and they appear to have been acquainted with personalities the latter met on the way. For instance, Tulišen mentions that at Makofsky he encounters a ‘captive Western general’ (beilu xiyang jiangjun 被擄西洋將軍), named Yana’er 牙那爾 in Chinese, and Yanar in Manchu. In Gaubil’s French translation, the captive is identified as “the Swedish General Ganaris, very esteemed even by the Muscovites.” Such an identification would not have been possible without Russian informers present in Beijing.

Unsurprisingly, Gaubil also enriched his translation with Western European reports on the current situation of Central Asia available in the Beitang Library. In a footnote on Ayuki Khan (1669-1724), the leader of the Torghuts, Gaubil notes that he was none other than “Ayuka-han [sic.] or

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119 Ibid.


121 “Un ambassadeur muscovite arriva icy le 1er de ce mois; il vient de Pétersbourg, et il a fait le chemin par terre, de Moscou à Kaigorot, de là à Tobol, capitale de Sibérie, à Jenisia, au Paical, à Silinga…” Gaubil to Magnam, 6th November 1726, Gaubil (1970), p. 132.


Khan of Tartares, who in 1722 saluted the Czar near Astrakhan. The *Gazette de France* gave his age as 103 years old.”

What Gaubil called the ‘*Gazette de France*’ was the French journal *Le Mercure*, which supplied wide-ranging courtly news from Lisbon to St Petersburg: the report mentioned by him can be found in its issue of September 1722. This information could have been of interest to European readers. But Gaubil’s correspondence also suggests another reason for the attention he gave to such news: court Jesuits needed to provide a regular press review for Yunxiang, whose interest in European intelligence concerning the inland neighbours of the Qing Empire appeared insatiable. In a letter written to Souciet in 1729, Gaubil lists the topics about which Yunxiang questioned him most frequently:

... revolution in Persia, the interests of the Turks with the Russians, the wars of the Swedes, the great number of Europeans who are in Russia in the army, and those who went there for the sciences and arts, and especially on the relationship of the Muscovites with the other Europeans. They also want to be informed about the ancient history of Russia, the attempts of Europeans to reach China and Japan by the Ice Sea (Arctic Ocean), and about the means the Russians have employed to move gradually to the East Sea and towards the North of Japan, as they are sure of and as people here believe and fear.

At the time he was writing in 1729, Gaubil explains, a Qing embassy was setting off to the Torghuts, and the Qing court was expecting news of it to appear in the European press. “It is not necessary to emphasize to you how important it is that we should be informed from Paris, on what people know about this embassy, and I beg instantly Your Reverence to do us this favour,” urged Gaubil. Like the cartographic data provided by Torghut and Russian travellers, these European news reports that Gaubil appended to his translation of *Yiyulu* seem to have had two target audiences—

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124 Souciet (1729), p. 159, n°8.
127 Souciet (1729), p. 236.
Gaubil’s French correspondents and Francophone readers, of course, but primarily and more importantly, the Qing court, whose intelligence gathering activities Gaubil and other Beijing Jesuits were also made to contribute to.

In sum, disappointing as it may be to a modern reader who is aware of the exceptional richness of *Yiyulu*, Gaubil’s translation perhaps reflected the way it was actually read in Yunxiang’s entourage, in Beijing of the 1720s, that is, primarily as cartographic raw data, the accuracy of which needed to be cross-checked with other sources, both textual and oral, whether Chinese, Western European, Russian or Torghut. The translation may be in a sense faithful to the role *Yiyulu* played in the contexts of both Beijing and Paris. As a historical document, it testifies to the heightened and converging cartographic interests and practices between Beijing and Paris concerning a region lying between them. By pursuing the clues in Gaubil’s translation, we can hope to reach a better understanding of the position of the Beijing Jesuits in the French scientific network and of the agendas their expertise in Chinese sources served; but we can also hope to gain new insights into the world of court-sponsored science in Beijing of the 1720s, a multilingual and multipolar world underlying both Tulisen’s travelogue and Gaubil’s French translation of it. More systematic studies of the China Jesuits’ scholarship concerning the broad Asian world remain to be conducted. They should further reveal the complex overlapping of interests and transregional networks that surrounded them.

5. Conclusion

By examining the China Jesuits’ sources relating to other non-European regions, we seek to question the Europe-China dichotomy, and to reach a more comprehensive understanding of the geographies that underpinned their scholarship. We have thus delineated several interwoven geographies that were at work in the China Jesuits’ careers and scholarship. Their configurations and significance differ, but none is confined to China and Europe. There is, first of all, the geography of the itineraries of individual missionaries, which stretch as a continuous line across the vast lands and seas between the two ends of Eurasia. It is along this arduous route that the missionary cum traveller faced the first challenge of the natural and cultural diversity of the world beyond his home country: China only forms part of this broader landscape. Then, drawing these individual itineraries together, we may also sketch out a second, more institutional geography, that of the European presence overseas in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which involves the competing colonial-commercial networks of the Portuguese, Spanish, French, Dutch and British, the ‘corporate geography’
of Jesuit missions, as well as long-distance trading networks, such as the trans-Siberian or the Middle-Eastern caravan routes.

Parallel to these geographies in which people and goods moved physically, we also perceive a third geography, that of the European world of knowledge, in which the ‘Indies’ had occupied an important place since antiquity. Circulated in books and journals, exchanged in conversation or in correspondence between fellow missionaries, or acquired through first-hand experience, ideas about the world in-between China and Europe shaped the China Jesuits’ personae and intellectual outlook in important ways, redefining their criteria for the credible and the useful. All these ideas proved to be at play in the Jesuits’ selecting and processing of Chinese knowledge. Their scholarship on China did not consist simply in utilising pre-existing and objectivised bodies of essentially ‘Chinese’ knowledge by men imbued with a predefined ‘European’ culture. It rather consisted in producing new knowledge to serve new purposes, based on available sources which they selected and refashioned according to their own standards. To account for these purposes and standards requires that we shift our focus away from only China or Europe.

However, the mobility of the Jesuits and the dynamics of the European networks they operated within can only account for one side of their connection with the ‘Indies’. From an Asian perspective, we can further point out other transregional geographies at work in the shaping of the China Jesuits’ scholarly output. To start with, there is a natural geography, in which the distributions of particular animals or plants extend beyond the political borders of the Qing empire. This continuity of nature enabled missionaries to encounter Chinese fauna and flora before, sometimes without entering China; it also underwrote the usefulness China Jesuits perceived in, say, Chinese knowledge of bamboo, as bamboo also grew in the French Caribbean colonies. There is, moreover, a geography of learning, namely that covered by the Chinese scholarly tradition and the intelligence-gathering network of the Qing court, which stretched from Byzantium to South-East Asia, Siberia and Mongolia. Thus, linguistic abilities in Chinese and Manchu, acquired through apostolic work in China, opened doors to both historical and contemporaneous sources of information concerning the heartland of Eurasia.

By distinguishing these layers of geographies, our aim is to achieve a more nuanced narrative of the China-Europe encounter through the mediation of the Jesuits. The location of this encounter, it appears, is not self-evident, and it varied as one moves from one geographical layer to another. The maritime route via South Asia (Cape Town, the Indian coast, Côn Son Island) appears to be a prominent site for encountering Chinese animals and plants, while the interests of Qing and French mapmakers converged towards the Caspian Sea in Central Asia. If we consider the
physical availability of intelligence in the form of books and human informers, it was in Beijing, between Yunxiang’s cabinet and the French Jesuits’ library, that the Qing and French cartographic networks actually intersected in the person of Antoine Gaubil. Looking at spatial dynamics that channelled people, objects and intelligence in and out of both Europe and China, we can conclude that the story of knowledge circulation between China and Europe via the Jesuits’ mediation in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was not that of a smooth flow on a flattened Earth’s surface; it is more realistic to think of this circulation as occurring across a diverse and rugged landscape formed of countless locations and actors, facilities as well as hurdles, a complex space that we sometimes call ‘the globe’.
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Abbreviations
ARSI: Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu
BnF: Bibliothèque nationale de France


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