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**The Jesuits as Knowledge Brokers
Between Europe and China (1582-1773):
Shaping European Views of the
Middle Kingdom**

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Abstract

Europe in the sixteenth and most of the seventeenth century was engulfed in a wave of Sinophilia. However, by the eighteenth century a dramatic shift in the popular view of China in Europe occurred and Sinophobic writings began to dominate. The primary scholarly argument about the causes behind this shift in perceptions maintains the transformation stemmed predominantly from changes in European history, particularly, economic growth and political consolidation. This paper asks how the motives, the roles and the consequences of the Jesuits as agents of information regarding China affected the European perception of the Middle Kingdom and contributed to the evolution of Orientalism. It examines the evolution of the Jesuit mission in China, the role of personal motivation and problems surrounding conceptual and practical barriers to the construction and transmission of information. It finds that economic progress and political consolidation in Europe did result in a changing of perspectives on the nature of the Empire of China. However, this shift did not occur solely due to endogenous changes in Europe, but was also a result of the creation of the one-dimensional image of China by the Jesuits according to their personal motivations and unique context.

Introduction

"If, as a philosopher, one wishes to instruct oneself about what has taken place on the globe, one must first of all turn one's eyes towards the East, the cradle of all arts, to which the West owes everything".¹ — Voltaire.

Voltaire's admiration of the East, and in particular China, was shared by many of his contemporaries and predecessors between the late sixteenth

¹ Voltaire as quoted in Ho-Fung Hung, 'Orientalist Knowledge and Social Theories: China and the European Conceptions of East-West Differences from 1600 to 1900', *Sociological Theory*, Vol 21, No 3 (September 2003), p. 261.

and early eighteenth centuries. During the beginning of this period China was idealized in many European minds as evinced by the prominence of *chinoiserie*, Sinomania and Sinophilic writings.² However, in the eighteenth century there began a dramatic shift in the popular view of China in Europe. John Hobson describes the shift in European perceptions of the Middle Kingdom from admiration to disdain as revealing the “schizophrenic aspect of the Enlightenment”.³ Though overlap did occur there opened a dramatic gulf between intellectuals such as Voltaire who viewed China as the place to which the “West owes everything” and Sinophobic writings that began to dominate European literature. This rise of Sinophobia is exemplified in Jean Jacques Rousseau’s vehement criticism of the Empire of China and his conviction that the jump from absolutism to tyranny was not that far.⁴ The speed with which the change in perceptions of China in Europe took place is also astonishing and is evinced by Montesquieu’s switch from admiration to disdain of China after 1717 when he began to view China as simple despotism rather than his idealized “mixed and balanced polity composed of democratic, aristocratic and monarchical elements, maintained through a judicious separation of powers”.⁵ This paradigm shift was critical to the development of Eurocentric reductionism of other cultures and the crystallization of the West’s notion of itself and ultimately to the belief in their innate superiority and subsequent arguments such as the White Man’s Burden that evolved in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Taking the

² It should be noted that for the purposes of this paper, Europe and the West refers to only Western Europe.

³ John M. Hobson, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 2004), p. 197.

⁴ Basil Guy, *The French image of China before and after Voltaire* (Geneve: Institut et Musée Voltaire, 1963), p. 340. Louis Dermigny, *La Chine et L’Occident: Le Commerce a Canton au XVIIIe Siècle 1719-1833*. Tome I (Paris: S.E.V.P.E.N., 1964), pp. 27 and 29.

⁵ David Martin Jones, *The Image of China in Western Social and Political Thought* (New York: Palgrave, 2001, p. 30.

critical nature of this epoch for shaping Europe's self perception into account, it is important to develop a deeper understanding of the causes of this paradigm shift.

The primary scholarly argument about the causes behind this shift in paradigm made by those such as Raymond Dawson (1967), David Jones (2001), Ho-Fung Hung (2003) Joanne Waley-Cohen (1999), Geoffrey Hudson (1965), and Edwin Pulleyblank (1954), is that the changes in European conceptions stemmed solely from changes in European history. Accordingly, the focus of academic inquiry has been on changes endogenous to Europe such as colonial expansion, economic growth and political consolidation. But with recent literature suggesting that Europe and China were much closer in material standards until 1750 than previously thought, are we confident that European economic growth and political consolidation, two very slow processes, are sufficient as an explanatory factors in the rise of this much more rapid Eurocentric view?⁶

Consequently, is the study of what Dawson calls the "history of the observer rather than of the observed" sufficient to explain this shift?⁷ As it is the nature of global history to question endogenous theories and search for global interconnections, this paper seeks to follow the type of prospectus called for in the mission of the Global Economic History Network, one that "might avoid the condescension of cultures, the myopia of foreshortened time spans and the arrogance of nations, implicit in dominant styles of writing, studying and communicating historical knowledge".⁸ It attempts to

⁶ For arguments on the relative material standards of China and Europe see Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

⁷ Raymond Dawson, *The Chinese Chameleon: an analysis of European conceptions of Chinese civilization* (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 8.

⁸ Description of Global History by the Global Economic History Network: <http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/economicHistory/GEHN/GEHNGlobalHistory.htm>

do this by recognising that a complete consideration of the “observer” must critically examine the eyes through which Europe looked upon the East, namely those of the Jesuits, who were considered by much of Europe to be the most reliable and informed knowledge brokers between China and Europe.⁹

In their unique position as the group that could understand (linguistically and culturally) Europe as well as China, the Jesuits’ transmission of knowledge was central to the evolution of the global connection between the two most advanced civilizations of the time. When the role of the Jesuits as monopolistic conduits of knowledge between Europe and China is thus contextualised their significance in this period of global history begins to emerge. The question then becomes how did the motives, the roles and the consequences of the Jesuits as agents of information regarding China shift the European perception of the Middle Kingdom and affect the evolution of Orientalism? This paper will argue that the Jesuits as intellectual brokers affected the shift in European perceptions, partly as a reflection of changes in Europe as well as China, therefore the endogenous argument for the evolvement of the European world-view falls short of a complete explanation.

Part I of this study addresses the concept of Orientalism and questions its origins in European history. It elucidates the predominant arguments in the literature explaining the shift from Sinophilism to Sinophobia and argues they are not only limited, but also anachronistic and Eurocentric, in their neglect of the Jesuit shaping of information. Part II

⁹ Until Sinology was established in European universities beginning in Paris in 1814, the Jesuits were the most respected authorities on Chinese civilization. D.E. Mungello, *The Great Encounter of China and the West 1500-1800* (Lanham: 2nd ed., Rowman and Littlefield Publishers Inc, 2005), p. 122; Joanna Waley-Cohen, *The Sextants of Beijing: Global Currents in Chinese History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999), p. 128.

examines how the evolution of the Jesuit mission in China, the role of personal motivation and problems surrounding conceptual and practical barriers to observation and transmission of knowledge shaped the information the Jesuits transmitted to Europe. Part III examines the transmission of information with particular focus on examples of how the shaping of that information was in part responsible for the typecasting of China. The conclusion expounds the pivotal role played by the Jesuits as intellectual brokers contributing to the shift of European perceptions.

1. Reviewing the Literature on the Change in European Perceptions

1.1 Orientalism

Orientalism is an important concept to this study as it reflects the elements of reducing other cultures and the consequences of European perceptions shaped in the period examined. Though it is claimed to have risen with the consolidation of Europe's global dominance in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the arguments of this paper demonstrate the keys to Orientalism existed in the Jesuit portrayal of China and are in part a consequence of global influences apart from European expansion. Similar to Eurocentrism, Orientalism can be described as a "culturalist phenomenon in the sense that it assumes the existence of irreducibly distinct cultural invariants that shape the historical paths of different peoples".¹⁰ The start of this aspect of the definition began with the Jesuits.

Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) initiated a shift in analysis of colonial discourse towards "discursive operations, showing the intimate connection between the language and forms of knowledge developed for the

¹⁰ Samir Amin, *Eurocentrism*. Translated by Russell Moore (London: Zed Books, 1989), p. vii.

study of cultures”¹¹ His work “unmasked a long established European penchant for representing non-western civilizations as the ‘other’ of Western values and practices whilst rendering those so ‘othered’ practically as well as metaphorically speechless”.¹² BS Turner, agreeing with Said, maintains:

the Orientalist paradigm was a persistent feature of social science which constructs the Orient (as stagnant, irrational and backward) as a contrast case to explain the Occident (as changeful, rational and progressive). These Orientalist components generate an essentialist concept of ‘Oriental society’, which become the object of colonial discourses of knowledge and power.¹³

Although Said’s work is ultimately about Islam and the Middle East and his later connections to colonial power structures and East Asian civilizations have been criticized and are beyond the scope of this paper, the core issues surrounding the use of concepts of the Other as models to assist in Western Europe’s solidification is pertinent to this study. China was reduced and used as a model of ethics, government, economy and society, a creation that later allowed it to be manipulated. This points to a deeper argument about Orientalism: whether views rendered are positive or negative, they express a reduced, essentialist form of the Other to act as a reflection on the self. Said emphasises how the “real” Orient was “irrelevant to the thrust of the movement to create a composite fictional character for the Orient”.¹⁴ While Said points to the importance of understanding perceptions of the Other and self in European history, he neglects the history behind the evolution. Michael Richardson points out Said’s denial of the

¹¹ Jones (2001) p. 2.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ B.S. Turner as quoted in Jones (2001) p. 4.

¹⁴ Michael Richardson, ‘Enough Said: Reflections on Orientalism’, *Anthropology Today* Vol. 6, No. 4 (August 1990), p. 17.

reciprocity between the subject and object of study and his lack of analysis of the European subject that has created Orientalism through their observation.¹⁵ This reveals the need to connect the broader formulation of European perceptions to the Jesuit role in creating the first clear image of China. Therefore while Said's Orientalism is argued to have risen in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, aspects of this conceptualisation, such as reductionism and use of the Other to define the self, emerged along with the Jesuit missions and the period of their dominance of information should be studied with this future influence in mind.

1.2 Jesuit Transmission of Information on China to Europe

Academic scholarship on the Jesuits in China has frequently included heated debate on the type of information the Jesuits provided to Europeans. Early to mid-twentieth century writings on this topic were often strongly influenced by religious affiliation and represented a dichotomy between two prejudiced sides; one supporting and the other attacking Jesuit missionary activity. This type of "mission history" is evinced in works by C.R. Boxer (1951), J. Brodrick, S.J. (1934) and Arnold Rowbotham (1942). Rowbotham, for example, describes the Jesuit information as "Sinophile propaganda" based on "...the simplification, to suit their own needs, of an ancient, complex and effective system of religion, ethics, and social philosophy".¹⁶ Later in the 1960s and 1970s, the view of this epoch was expanded in much of the literature to place it within the context of the world-system and to begin scholarship on the mission detached from religious affiliations, although to be sure, it did still exist in many cases but the bias was not as strong.

¹⁵ Richardson (1990) p. 17 and 18.

¹⁶ Arnold H. Rowbotham, 'The Impact of Confucianism on Seventeenth Century Europe', *The Far Eastern Quarterly*. Vol. 4, No. 3 (May, 1945), p. 224.

Authors such as George Dunne (1962), Raymond Dawson (1967) and S. Adshead (1988) focused on the role of the changes occurring in Europe relative to the world-system and how this affected views on China. Wolfgang Franke (1967), although focusing primarily on Chinese perceptions, did introduce an account combining “the objective knowledge and subjective ideas which people in China and the West had of each other. [Recognising] it was this on which their attitude to each other was mainly based, and which even today are of decisive importance in their relationship with each other”.¹⁷

Recent scholarship on these issues has sought to demonstrate the Sinophilic period as reflecting an inherent European fascination with and acceptance of China while arguing that the period of Sinophobia between 1800 and the end of the twentieth century was the anomaly in the relationship. Authors such as David Mungello (2005) and Joanne Waley-Cohen (1999) are examples of this type of scholarship that addresses the evolution of the relationship between China and Europe throughout history up to contemporary society. Another trend has been to deconstruct various pieces of this episode through a modern lens. This scholarship is typified in Dauril Alden’s (1996) examination of the Jesuits as the first global enterprise and Lionel Jensen’s (1997) discussion of the manufacturing of Confucianism as a concept.

Over the history of the scholarship on the Jesuits in China, little has been written assessing the impact that the transmission of information by the Jesuits had on shifting European perceptions of China. The predominant theory on the cause of the shift is what is here called the endogenous argument. According to the endogenous view the shift in perceptions was ultimately a result of the strengthening of European economics and politics

¹⁷ Wolfgang Franke, *China and the West*. Translated by R.A. Wilson (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967), p. vii.

domestically and internationally that shifted public perceptions of China's value vis-à-vis Europe.¹⁸ It contends that the birth in Europe of the idea of progress in turn highlighted in European minds the perceived difference between the east and west:

what Westerners call progress is for Orientals nothing but change and instability; and the need for change, so characteristic of modern times, is in their eyes a mark of manifest inferiority: he that has reached a state of equilibrium no longer feels this need, just as he that has found no longer seeks.¹⁹

The demise of the Jesuits, culminating in the dissolution of their Society in 1773 by Pope Clement XIV, reflects the changes in Europe and the shift in the global balance. No longer did Europe feel the need to understand and adapt to a land that they now believed was greatly inferior; the era where Europe chose to dominate using force had begun.

Jones argues that there are two primary endogenous causes behind this reversal from positive to negative perceptions. First, he maintains that the rise in trade created a growing need to bring China into the global trading system, thereby exposing traders and protestant missionaries to a different view of China so that by 1794, the end of the Macartney Mission, they were producing a "more captious assessment of China". The second cause stems from broader changes, particularly that the American and French Revolutions radically revised European self-understanding, and engendered

¹⁸ Hung (2003) p. 262; Waley-Cohen (1999) p. 128; Geoffrey Hudson, 'The Historical Context of Encounters between Asia and Europe: as seen by a European', ed. Raghavan Iyer, *The Glass Curtain Between Asia and Europe: A symposium on the historical encounters and the changing attitudes of the peoples of the East and the West* (London: Oxford University Press, 1965) p. 60; Edwin G. Pulleyblank, 'China', ed. Denis Sinor. *Orientalism and History* (Cambridge: W. Heffer and Sons Ltd., 1954) p. 72.

¹⁹ René Guénon, *East and West*. Translated by William Massey (London: Luzac and Co, 1941), p. 45.

a new concern for “history, self-determination and progress at the end of the eighteenth century [therefore promoting] a generally negative assessment of Chinese civilization and government”.²⁰ Therefore he is arguing the shift occurred because of European economic expansion as well as a change in self-perception stemming from political changes.

Hung (See Appendix A), using the theory of intellectual change in conjuncture with world-systems theory is an exponent of the endogenous argument. Hung bases his theory on the economic shift described above and adds the dimension of how this shift led to the resolution of the tension between the state and the aristocrats in France. As the bourgeoisie gained economic prominence and the French revolution overthrew the king, China as an intellectual tool to support the role of the bourgeoisie class, or the literati, outlived its usefulness. Similarly, Louis Dermigny (1964) embraces a social history explanation that surrounds changes in the domestic political environment in France, but Gregory Blue (1999) disagrees, pointing out the unequal lags in impact in different countries, with swings occurring first in the Netherlands and England, then in France and Germany.²¹

Donald Lach (1965) articulates an expansion to this argument that gives precedence to intellectual change stemming from the growth of the Romantic movement after the French Revolution: “Disillusionment with rationalism as the key to universal understanding also precipitated a reaction in Europe against China as the rational model of political and social organization”.²² What Lach and other authors leave out is a detailed explanation of the process through which the image of China became a

²⁰ Jones (2001) p. 11; Waley-Cohen (1999) p. 128.

²¹ Gregory Blue, ‘China and Western Social Thought’, *China and Historical Capitalism: genealogies of sinological knowledge*. Eds. Timothy Brook and Gregory Blue Eds. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 72.

²² Donald F. Lach, *Asia in the making of Europe*, Volume 1, Book 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965-), p. xiii.

rational model, and how the outcome of this process enabled Europe's perceptions to change as rapidly as they did.

Another endogenous change in Europe that is used as a reason for the growing disdain for China is based on societal norms. Waley-Cohen argues part of the explanation is due to a comparison between "the relatively class-bound societies of traditional Asia and Africa with the dynamic social changes of Europe's own post-revolutionary, industrializing societies".²³ Blue discusses other arguments made for the radical and rapid reversal of opinion in Europe in the second half of the seventeenth-century. The first is art-historical, where *chinoiserie* became unpopular due to the nature of fashion, but Blue concludes this is too vague.²⁴ Next, he points to arguments that focus on the growing disenchantment merchants had with the limits on trade put in place by the Manchu government, disenchantment that engendered broader anger once they diffused to the rising bourgeoisie in Europe.²⁵ Finally, there is an argument based on qualitative information on China with new accounts moving it from myth to knowledge. Though Blue points out the amount of information after the Jesuits actually declined, this argument does at least point out that it is anachronistic if we neglect to consider the actual information received and prioritised in Europe at the time.

Blue himself concludes in the long run, the great expansion of Western Europe reinforced ideas of European superiority and notes that negative stereotypes played an "instrumental role" in legitimating Western imperialistic expansion in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.²⁶ However, Blue realises that subtle complexities affected the image of China and maintains authors who point to the "dissemination of universalistic models

²³ Waley-Cohen (1999) p. 128.

²⁴ Blue (1999), p. 70-72; Hudson (1965) p. 62.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Blue (2000) p. 38.

of progress” as the explanation for growing sense of European superiority overlook the role of the Romantic movement in “feeding European chauvinism”.²⁷ The view of the “Orient” as a passive function, as a set of symbols open to manipulation of changing Western interests, Blue maintains is too simplistic.²⁸ It is much easier to view this as simplistic if the history of structuring the Orient as passive is not considered. Though he falls short of connecting Jesuit transmission of information as part of the cause in the shift in the perception, he does note that an interaction took place, not merely a change in Europe.

1.3 Explicating the Jesuit Role in the Shift from Sinophilia to Sinophobia

It is not controversial to say Jesuit publications, especially after the Rites Controversy began in the 1680s, were biased towards the self-preserving motivations of the mission. However, fewer are the scholars such as Dermigny and Basil Guy (1963) who underscore the need to understand the Jesuit construction of information and how this fits into Europe’s broader view of China. Dermigny, in a chapter entitled ‘Mythe et Réalité de la Chine’ discusses how the Jesuits revealed “their” China to the Occident.²⁹ However, he does not enter into detail as to exactly why and how the Jesuits altered their information, nor does he connect the idealized image in his discussion of the shift to Sinophobism.

In the three steps of transmitting information, namely the observation, the portrayal and the reception, we can see how the Jesuits shaped the image of China. First, the Jesuits had an incomplete understanding of China themselves due to necessity and circumstance, including their focus on

²⁷ Ibid., p. 7.

²⁸ Blue (1999) p. 69.

²⁹ Dermigny (1964) p. 30.

elites, location, and small observation window in comparison to the long history of China, discussed below. Next, they edited themselves and were edited in order to portray an image of China that was useful for their mission and for their editors in Europe. This meant rationality was over-emphasised, public fantasy was played upon to engender support, and the Rites Controversy had a dramatic impact on what was portrayed. Finally, Europe received a watered-down version of China that meant that they were able to shift quickly from admiration to contempt as it suited the personal philosophy of the observer. The shift was especially inevitable after Europe began to recognise that the Sinophile image did not correspond to reality and though the Sinophiles tried to clarify their position many had already turned away, “disillusioned by the fundamentally unknowable nature of much that had been offered as Truth itself”.³⁰

Guy claims

[The Jesuits’] proselytising preoccupation forced them to maintain an equivocal attitude both in China and in Europe. In France, this duplicity provoked at least two divergent reactions, one favourable, the other sceptical; both continued to the end of the eighteenth century.³¹

Although this is correct, it can be extended further. While undoubtedly the Jesuits did provoke this dual reaction through their focus on the “curious and edifying” rather than an interest or ability in genuinely “presenting a complete picture of China”, their influence in shaping Europe’s first attempt at truly understanding another civilization had a profound impact on the

³⁰ Guy (1963) p. 12.

³¹ Guy (1963) p. 396.

future of all such endeavours, and consequently to the rise of Orientalism and Eurocentric arguments for global domination and exploitation. Although the Jesuits tried to fight against this narrow perspective, they unintentionally contributed to the reductionist perspective that enabled its rise.

2. Construction of Information

Now we must turn to the construction of information and the limitations and personal motivations of the Jesuits that engendered the one-dimensional view of China. Contemporary authors largely maintain that Jesuit sources were more or less accurate, especially considering the era of language barriers and slow communication in which they wrote.³² Lach stresses that an “interpretive bias need not necessarily produce inaccurate history” and “no better information became available...for the next two and one-half centuries” so if the reader was “reasonably diligent” they could have learned as much as schoolboys in China then and more than most “twentieth-century university graduates in the West”.³³ While these points are accurate, and Jesuit information is something to which even modern Sinologists owe a debt of gratitude, it nonetheless served to create a one-dimensional view of China. This section explores the historical, personal and practical issues surrounding the construction of Jesuit information.

³² Otto Berkelbach van der Sprenkel, ‘Western Sources’, *Essays on the Sources for Chinese History*. Eds. Donald D. Leslie, Colin Mackerras, and Wang Gungwu (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1973), p. 157; Hobson claimed their reports on China were “surprisingly balanced”. Hobson (2004) p. 199; Lach and Van Kley point out that “their biases were sometimes more apparent than real” using Jesuit writings on the Manchu Conquest as evidence and believes they were “reasonably accurate” Donald F. Lach and Edwin J. van Kley, *Asia in the making of Europe Volume 3* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) Volume 3, Book 1, p. 1579; Guy (1963) p. 56.

³³ Lach and van Kley (1993) Volume 3, Book4, p. 1730.

2.1 Historical Context

The Society of Jesus was founded in 1534 and officially confirmed by Pope Paul III six years later. Matteo Ricci, S.J. (b.1552-d.1610) established the first Jesuit mission in China in 1583. The Jesuits recognized upon their arrival in China that it, as George Dunne describes, "...was more than a state. She was a world unto herself, and a closed world".³⁴ They were, however, able to pry their way in through use of their wide-ranging diplomatic skills, religious understanding and scientific knowledge. Those who perfected the art of politics such as Adam Schall S.J. (b.1591-d.1666), managed to reach positions of power in the highest ranks of the Chinese government and dominated a government bureau, an unprecedented achievement for a group of foreigners and one never repeated since.

As filters of information we must consider the consequences and externalities, intended or otherwise, of the Jesuits' motivations and actions. Contemporary scholarship on the Jesuits in China constantly reminds us of the primacy of religious motivation for their actions. However, the practical nature of their mission forced them to adopt the principle of cultural relativism so we must be cautious in overestimating ideational influences and underestimating the role of necessity from changes in Europe as well as China in shaping their information.³⁵

First, the Jesuit mission was affected by a dramatic change in China in the middle of the seventeenth century. When the Jesuits arrived in China their initial writings were primarily superficial accounts of China's apparent order and prosperity. The work of Jesuits such as Ricci enabled a stronger

³⁴ George H. Dunne, *Generation of Giants: The Story of the Jesuits in China in the Last Decades of the Ming Dynasty* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame, 1962), p. 10.

³⁵ For arguments of religious motivation see Tsuen-hsuei Tsien, 'Western Impact on China through Translation', *Far Eastern Quarterly* 18 (1954), p. 306; Paul A. Rule, *K'ung-tzu or Confucius? The Jesuit Interpretation of Confucianism*. (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1986), p. 183.

hold to be maintained in China so that by the seventeenth century they could attempt to understand China's "inner spirit", looking at moral and political issues.³⁶ After this initial deepening of information from decreasing the language barrier and earning the trust of the imperial court and literati, the first major shift in Jesuit information was a result of a change endogenous to China, namely, the Manchu Conquest. The Jesuit experience in China during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) was dominated by fraternisation with the Chinese elite literati. During this period China was "marked by openness and creativity" and was full of new syncretism. Jesuits such as Matteo Ricci, Alvaro Semedo (b.1586-d.1658) and Martino Martini (b.1614-d.1661) could therefore appropriate Confucianism to complement Christianity in their policy of cultural accommodation.

In contrast, after the 1644 Manchu Conquest and the advent of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912), the syncretic atmosphere fundamentally altered. The Chinese literati blamed the conquest on the imperial eunuchs and the aforementioned open spirit was viewed as straying from orthodox Confucianism leaving China vulnerable. This led the literati to embrace Sung Neo-Confucian orthodoxy and, as usually occurred after a dramatic period in Chinese history, a return to the core principles and values of Chinese government.³⁷ The new literati position made incorporating ancient Confucianism into Christianity less practically feasible and worthwhile.³⁸ The Jesuits responded to this shift by adapting their policy of accommodation, particularly away from the literati, as they were no longer easy to convert, and towards the Chinese imperial court. At the same time, the Jesuits were

³⁶ Dawson (1967) p. 35; Lach (1965) Volume 1, Book 1, p. 794.

³⁷ D.E. Mungello, *Curious Land: Jesuit Accommodation and the Origins of Sinology* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GMBH, 1985), p. 18.

³⁸ Ibid; See Ronan and Oh on shifting tactics to focus on the emperor Charles E. Ronan and Bonnie BC Oh, *East Meets West: The Jesuits in China, 1582-1773* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1988), p. xxi.

also responding to restrictive changes in China, stemming from the return to core values in government and increasing rejection of everything foreign. This hindered their ability to act openly in public works such as building hospitals thus leaving them with more time for writings and publications, also changing the nature of information.³⁹

This change in China affected European perceptions through the differences in the transmission of information it engendered. For instance, it gave rise to the Figurist movement, which included Jesuits such as Joachim Bouvet S.J. (b.?-d.1732) who searched for keys to unlock China's past based on the belief that Christian and Chinese histories are connected in the distant past and that this can be uncovered by examining ancient texts and discovering certain common codes. This work was supported by the shift from the literati to the imperial court. For instance, Bouvet promoted the K'ang-hsi Emperor (r.1661-1722) over Confucius as the Chinese figure to exalt in Europe, writing a glowing biography of the emperor. The Four Books of Confucius were originally the ancient Chinese texts of primary interest to Europe because of Ricci's accommodation strategy but when in the late seventeenth-century this shift occurred, praise for the more imperially oriented *I Ching* dominated.⁴⁰ Figurism, though disliked by the Catholic Church and having never really reached the European public, did greatly influence European intellectuals, most notably, Leibniz and reflects the changes in China.

Of course, Jesuit missionaries' relations with European authorities also had a profound impact on how the former group expressed and

³⁹ Rule (1986) p. 183.

⁴⁰ Mungello (1985) p. 17. Bouvet elevated the K'ang-hsi emperor in his *Portrait historique* (1697). See D. Mungello, 'The Seventeenth-Century Jesuit Translation Project of the Confucian Four Books', eds. Charles Ronan, S.J., and Bonnie B.C. Oh, *East Meets West: The Jesuits in China, 1582-1773* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1988), p. 266.

formulated their views of the Chinese Empire. The next major change to the mission occurred at the end of the seventeenth century due to a shift in the Society of Jesus, namely the orientation of the Society away from the Iberian states and towards France. The growing influence of the French state under Louis XIV (r.1643-1715) greatly altered the mission and transmission of knowledge from China to Europe. The French state enjoyed very close ties to Jesuit missionary activity and subsidized the French Jesuit mission in China. The reason for this relationship is twofold. First, under Louis XIV “a spiritual renaissance was in progress” and second, at that time France was under the financial control of Jean-Baptiste Colbert (b.1619-d.1683) and therefore had heightened interest in increasing commercial knowledge and prowess internationally.⁴¹ Beginning in 1685, when Louis XIV sent six Jesuits to China (including the aforementioned Bouvet) and continuing on into the early eighteenth century, the French Jesuits were responsible for increasing documentation, as well as encouraging the shift from missiological to sinological reporting as their influence dwindled in China due to the reasons discussed above.⁴² The French missionaries increased public interest in Europe as their publications on China accounted for almost one-third of the volume of literature published in France at the close of the seventeenth century.⁴³

The final change in the mission took place in the beginning of the eighteenth century. The transmission of information on China accelerated

⁴¹ Columba Cary-Elwes, *China and the Cross: Studies in Missionary History* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1975), pp. 130 and 139.

⁴² Rule (1986) p. 72; Mungello (1985) p. 299.

⁴³ Guy (1963) p. 155; Isabelle Landry-Deron, ‘Early Translations of Chinese Texts in French Jesuit Publications in Historiography’, *Encounters and Dialogues: Changing Perspectives on Chinese-Western Exchanges from the Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries*. Ed. Xiixin Wu (Sankt Augustin: Monumenta Serica Institute and The Ricci Institute of Chinese-Western Cultural history at the University of San Francisco, 2005), p. 265.

due to the growth of the Rites Controversy in Europe that made it a necessity for the Jesuits. Though it was not the initial aim of the mission to provide the European public with information on China it evolved out of the need to first stimulate moral and financial provisions and ultimately to cultivate support for their position in this controversy.⁴⁴ The Rites Controversy was a debate over whether or not certain Confucian and Taoist practices, or Rites such as worshiping ancestors, were civic rather than religious ceremonies. If they were considered the former, as the Jesuits maintained, they would be compatible with Catholicism, but if they were deemed religious, as other missionary orders such as the Franciscans claimed, they would need to be banned by the Church and ultimately any converted Christian would not be able to practice them. However, the issues extended to concerns such as what the appropriate term for God was, the use of tablets, sacrifices to Confucius, and other Confucian ceremonies. The Jesuits attempted to manipulate the information the Church received with regards to Chinese rites and cosmology, even using their position to subvert missions sent by the Pope to investigate the issue.⁴⁵ Ultimately, however, their efforts failed and the Rites were banned in the 1715 papal Bull *Ex Illa Dei* and this was confirmed in a 1742 Bull *Ex Quo Singulari*. It was in this period that the Europe broadly began to view China differently.

During the height of this controversy the Jesuits had to increasingly defend themselves on several fronts within the Catholic Church from the Jansenists and the *Société des Missions Étrangères*, other missionary orders such as the Franciscans and Propaganda, as well as the Libertines

⁴⁴ Mungello (1985) p. 207; Dawson discusses the changes in the Society even though the organisation and central tenants remained the same. Dawson (1967) pp. 38-9; Franke (1967) p. 64.

⁴⁵ See Lionel M. Jensen, *Manufacturing Confucianism: Chinese Traditions and Universal Civilization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

who argued against the political position of the Church in Europe. All sides of this conflict used Jesuit material to further their arguments, and the transmission of information therefore became increasingly pertinent and sensitive to the European context. Louis Le Comte's, SJ (b.1655-d.1728) *Nouveaux Mémoires sur l'état present de la Chine* (1696) and Charles Le Gobien's, SJ (b.1671-d.1708) *Histoire de l'edit de l'empereur de la Chine* (1698) are examples of such propagandist literature and were widely received in Europe.⁴⁶ With the growth of the Rites Controversy in the second half of seventeenth century the volume of writings increased but genuine information did not as publications and letters became increasingly defensive and adulatory of China.⁴⁷

Another important historically determined factor affecting the transmission of information is the role of editing. Howard Rienstra distinguishes between the type of editing done in this context: eliminating administrative details, deletion of material that may not be understood by the public such as aspects on the structure of Chinese society, deleting material the editor cannot understand and finally censorship.⁴⁸ All of these types were used by Jesuit editors and are equally as important in understanding the formation of the concept of China in European minds.

Initially, in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the Jesuits had difficulty sharing their information because of the censorship practiced by the Catholic Church and the Iberian states. The Portuguese state feared sharing their knowledge of the East thus exposing information on the Orient and destabilizing their trade route.⁴⁹ The Jesuit shift in the mid-seventeenth

⁴⁶ Mungello (1985) p. 354.

⁴⁷ Lach and van Kley (1993) Volume 3, Book 4, p. 1676.

⁴⁸ M. Howard Rienstra, ed. and translator. *Jesuit Letters from China 1583-84* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), p. 7.

⁴⁹ Hung (2003) p. 257.

century towards France was in part to benefit from the increased tolerance of the state with regards to their publications, as well as the increase in support (financially and administratively).⁵⁰ In 1673 Pope Clement X prohibited publication of books or writings by members of religious orders without approval by the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, which is incidentally the origin of the term “propaganda”. In 1680 Louis XIV wanted the Jesuits to resume their publications, and in 1702 they began again with the publication of their *Lettres Édifiantes et Curieuses*, which began as a vehicle for recruitment, but evolved as demand by the “eager reading public” increased, evinced by its quick translation into German and English.⁵¹ The *Lettres Édifiantes* had 34 issues between 1702 and 1776 and 91 concerning China, approximately one-quarter of the total.⁵² Jean Baptiste du Halde (b.1674-d.1743) was responsible for editing out negative pictures of China in French Jesuit material for forty years, and edited volumes IX to XXVI of *Lettres Édifiantes* (1709-43).⁵³ His work editing *Description* (1735) can be seen as it “was often drastic, both on style and contents”, cutting out information on calculations and predictions needed to perform certain Chinese rites.⁵⁴

The escalation of the Rites Controversy, as discussed earlier, also had an effect on editing. After the Sorbonne’s Faculty of Theology censure of the Jesuits on 18 October 1700 for breaking the bond between morality and revealed religion, editing increased which “fostered propaganda at the expense of content”.⁵⁵ Rule describes how a “party line” emerged after the Rites Controversy with the European Jesuit editors working to be careful to

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Guy (1963) pp. 52 and 53.

⁵² Landry-Deron (2005) p. 271.

⁵³ Franke (1967) p. 64; Rule (1986) p.186.

⁵⁴ Landy-Deron (2005) p. 271.

⁵⁵ Mungello (1985) p. 19.

further rein in information coming from the Jesuits in China. The European editors oversimplified to defend Ricci's original view of Confucius, especially over the aforementioned new Figurist interpretation coming from Jesuits like Bouvet in China.⁵⁶ Due to this increased editing, much of the information at the end of the seventeenth century was not transmitted through public mediums but rather through alternative methods such as the private correspondence between Bouvet and Leibniz.⁵⁷

2.2 Personal Motivations

The personal motivations of the Jesuits and especially their unique position as knowledge brokers between China and Europe, fundamentally shaped the manner in which they transmitted information. They had to move in two different worlds, at two disparate tempos with unique demands and varying reactions:

They were desynchronized, China conscious of the past, Europe conscious of the future; China living from hand to mouth, Europe building for the long term. The pattern of exchanges in the Enlightenment was shaped by these differences of temporal orientation.⁵⁸

The Jesuits, whether selfish or altruistic, were religiously motivated, nationally affiliated, political and economic actors as well as esteemed scholars, existing in a precarious position as the juncture between the growing stream of knowledge and interaction between the East and West. Whereas Marco Polo's work focused on merchandise, as he was a merchant, the Jesuits, who were learned and religious would focus on

⁵⁶ Rule (1986) pp. xiii and 71.

⁵⁷ Mungello (1986) p. 20.

⁵⁸ S.A.M. Adshead, *China in World History* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1988), p. 280.

learning and morality.⁵⁹

The transmission of information by the Jesuit was shaped by the circumstances of their own position in Europe and their desired role. Gregory Blue points out how the example of meritocracy in China “served to legitimate a greater role for the intellectual elite within European state structures” and the Jesuits themselves

purported to be such an elite within the Church. Their accounts of China lent ideological support not only to the consolidation of absolutism generally, but also to the political roles they themselves were playing in Bourbon France and the Hapsburg domains.⁶⁰

Accordingly, the Jesuits in their extensive descriptions of the Chinese government primarily emphasised the role of the literati in the earlier period and the benevolent emperor in the latter, though they did realise that the theoretically all-powerful emperor was checked by more than the bureaucracy including the censorate and the eunuchs, and “they sensed frequently a disparity between the Confucian ideal of government and its less admirable practices”.⁶¹ Reducing the complex nature of the Chinese administrative system led to characterisations that allowed the shift from seeing it as absolutist to despotic.

Apart from their role in Europe, the Jesuits were also defensive of their position in China. They enjoyed their status as monopolists of European information on the Middle Kingdom. This is evinced by their efforts to sabotage several trade missions as well as a Russian attempt to establish an embassy in Peking in 1720 when the Ismaïloff mission was quickly cut off from Jesuit assistance because “the Jesuits felt that it was above all

⁵⁹ Dawson (1967) p. 36.

⁶⁰ Blue (1999) p. 61.

⁶¹ Lach and van Kley (1993) Volume 3, Book 4, p. 1905.

things necessary that they should retain their hegemony in international relations at the court of China” to ensure their indispensability to the emperor, leaving their role as interpreters to European powers “dominated by this fear of potential rivals”.⁶² Donald Lach maintains that although Leibniz encouraged the Jesuits to provide practical, useful information to questions of European governments and social institutions, they were reticent as they jealously guarded their “newly won freedom in China”. The Jesuit feared endangering their position if they revealed too much information on China due to concerns that they might upset the Chinese authorities or even give European authorities and merchants too much information thus leaving their place as monopolists at great risk.⁶³

Appendix B documents the complexities involved in understanding the Jesuits’ incentives and roles as intermediaries between Europe and China. They occupied three major positions: The first being the brokers for the Chinese explaining information on European religion and science; the second as individuals acting in their own interests based on their own beliefs and motivations; and the third acting as brokers for Europe. In their role for the Europeans, their responsibilities and involvement can be further divided. The first being agents for European state commercial interest in China, predominantly as translators. The second being agents of the Christian religion and the Catholic Church. And third, promoters of Chinese culture to the European public. These numerous positions must be considered when examining their transmission of knowledge of China to Europe and consequently adding to the reality of how laden with interests the information transmitted was, thus prompting a revaluation of the degree to which a shift

⁶² Rowbotham (1945) p. 234.

⁶³ Donald Lach, *The Preface to Leibniz’ Novissima Sinica: Commentary, Translation, Text* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1957), p. 27.

in European perceptions was solely due to growth in Europe.

2.3 The Limits to Observation: Scale, Location, Timing and Conceptualisation

Sidney Gulick describes the East and West as “two vast psychological continents.” He claims that this chasm constituted “a stimulating challenge to inquiring minds.”⁶⁴ While the Jesuits undoubtedly were inquiring minds, they naturally suffered from certain limitations as observers. That is what this section seeks to explicate.

The impact the Jesuits had in their position as knowledge brokers between East and West is all the more remarkable when we consider how relatively small the number of missionaries in China, a very large empire, was over this period. Between 1552 (the time of St. Francis Xavier’s death on Shangchuan Island) and 1800 there were 926 Jesuits in China.⁶⁵ Dunne maintains that at no time were there more than twenty-four missionaries in China.⁶⁶ Between 1700 and 1759, sixty-one Jesuits were sent from Europe to China, with some decades seeing only four leave, while others saw twenty-one make the journey.⁶⁷ The Jesuit mission began in Macao in 1581 and relative to the traders there, the missionaries were drastically outnumbered. As early as 1563 there were 700 Portuguese on Macao.⁶⁸ In the first years of Portuguese settlement of the island, traders already

⁶⁴ Sidney Lewis Gulick, *The East and the West: A Study of their Psychic and cultural characteristics* (Rutland, Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1963), p. 17.

⁶⁵ Mungello (2005) p. 34; Waley-Cohen (1999) p. 63; See Standaert for a closer analysis of the number of Jesuits over time. For instance, the recorded peak was in 1701. Nicolas Standaert, ed. *Handbook of Christianity in China* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 306

⁶⁶ George H. Dunne, *Generation of Giants: The Story of the Jesuits in China in the Last Decades of the Ming Dynasty* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame, 1962), p. 359.

⁶⁷ Dauril Alden, *The Making of an Enterprise: The Society of Jesus in Portugal, Its Empire, and Beyond 1540-1750* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 582.

⁶⁸ Rowbotham (1945) p. 50.

numbered near the total of all Jesuit missionaries ever to reach China in two centuries. As opposed to the successes of conversions in Japan, the Jesuits in China converted only approximately 200 000 over the entire two centuries they operated in China, making their unique influence all the more interesting.⁶⁹

A primary method the Jesuits used to increase their influence despite the small scale on which they operated leads us to another distortion, namely, the Jesuits focus on the elite of China and their lack of interaction with truly provincial lower classes. To deal with their small scale relative to the massive Empire of China, the Jesuits developed a strategy of converting China from the top-down, with the ultimate goal being to convert the Chinese emperor. Appendix C reveals the administrative structure of Chinese society and the reality that about ninety percent of the population is composed of village administrators, neighbourhood networks and households; exactly the level of society the Jesuits had the least contact with.⁷⁰ The necessarily disproportionate emphasis the Jesuits placed on the literati, besides being explicitly stated, is evinced by their conversion rates. Of the 38 000 reportedly converted in 1636, about 300 were men of letters, over 140 were relatives of the imperial family and more than 40 were palace eunuchs and several were palace women.⁷¹ This means that in the period before the Manchu Conquest, which featured an even greater focus on the elites of China, 1.26 percent of conversions were part of the small elite class. While this number may not seem large it should be noted that the elites were

⁶⁹ Harriet T. Zurndorfer, 'Science Without Modernization: China's First Encounter With Useful and Reliable Knowledge from Europe' from *Global Economic History Network*, Conference 4 (Leiden: 16-18 September, 2004), p. 11.

⁷⁰ Kent Deng, *The Premodern Chinese Economy: Structural Equilibrium and Capitalist Sterility* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 98.

⁷¹ I say reportedly converted because Jesuit statistics on number of conversions were often inflated. Lach and van Kley (1993) Volume 3, Book 1, p. 190.

notoriously a difficult group to convert, as they were intellectually challenging and often reluctant to give up Chinese practices such as having a concubine.

Key to their success in persuading the Chinese elite to give them such relative freedom and influence, was their unique policy of cultural accommodation. Cultural accommodation was the Jesuit practice of allowing Christianity to be flexible enough to accommodate Chinese culture. The Jesuits based this policy on ancient Christian philosophy that allowed Christianity to adapt and absorb Hellenistic culture. The Jesuit principle of cultural accommodation, while virtuous in its ambition, necessitates a stripping away of complexities in order to produce a form that makes two disparate civilizations compatible. David Mungello maintains this policy and Confucian-Christian blending was the framework through which most information from the Jesuits about China flowed and influenced the selection, presentation and interpretation of information.⁷²

The elitist focus and the Jesuit strategy of converting from the top-down caused them to ignore or neglect fundamental subjects such as the family dynamic. Lach argues that family was the “most characteristic and fundamental institution of Chinese society” especially when compared to Europe, as it represents three out of the five core Confucian ethics as well as the model for government and empire, but notes that none of the seventeenth century European sources discuss it and its importance at any length.⁷³ Additionally, the focus on religion as mentioned earlier with Confucianism leaves out the role that Buddhism and Taoism played, especially in the lives of the average and majority of Chinese. Confucianism was popular because it supported the Jesuit position in the Rites

⁷² Mungello (1985) p. 14.

⁷³ Lach and van Kley (1993) Volume 3, Book 4, p. 1623.

Controversy but also for a less conniving reason. As Guy properly points out, Confucianism was what the Jesuits knew most about as they observed more of its use for elite governing morality than religion.⁷⁴

European merchants and seamen also wrote about their interaction with another level of Chinese society namely, traders and the lower level bureaucracy. These accounts gave a more nuanced addition to the Jesuit interpretation of China. Though less influential, more than fifty independent eyewitness accounts of China or parts of them were published in Europe during the seventeenth century apart from Jesuit letterbooks, derivative accounts, and general descriptions of Asia.⁷⁵ Jesuit fathers such as Semedo admitted this different element drew their idealized vision of China into question, but qualified that readers should not form general opinions of the Chinese based on merchants.⁷⁶ Though the Jesuits did show the darker side of Chinese society such as castration, child slavery, prostitution, infanticide, and suicide amongst poor it was not as apparent in their broad statements of the Empire of China and required more detailed reading.⁷⁷

Another limitation to Jesuit observation is the time-specific nature of their experience in China. The Empire of China, existing for a millennia and a half did not have a static history and operated in a cyclical pattern with upturns and downturns.⁷⁸ Late Ming China appeared to be thriving, with a population of 150 million as the land benefited from “unprecedented agricultural prosperity”.⁷⁹ Concomitant commercial growth contributed

⁷⁴ Guy (1963) p. 89.

⁷⁵ Lach and van Kley (1993) Volume 3, Book 4, p. 1904.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 1622.

⁷⁷ Lach (1965) Volume 2, Book 4, p. 1622 and Volume 3, Book 4, p. 1721.

⁷⁸ Deng (1999) p. 301.

⁷⁹ Waley-Cohen (1999) p. 57; Note, the population of China fluctuated dramatically, doubling from the beginning to end of the Ming dynasty and reaching 300 million in the early Qing Dynast. Zurndorfer (2004) p. 11

towards urbanization and ultimately higher literacy rates.⁸⁰ However, despite the apparent prosperity, periods of the Ming Dynasty suffered from human neglect and severe weather, often creating poor living conditions. Herein lies a large problem with the Jesuit role as brokers: the information they had was merely a snapshot of an empire over a millennium old. For instance, when Ricci arrived the steady decline of the Ming dynasty was only briefly halted by the decade-long reform of Grand Secretary Chang Chü-cheng, who is described as exceptionally talented.⁸¹ After Ricci, the corrupt behaviour of the emperor meant a downturn in the Chinese position. John Wills maintains he has found “no evidence that [the Jesuits] had much historical perspective on Ming elite culture or appreciated just how unusual the sense of crisis and openness to new departures these decades were”.⁸²

The exact time a Jesuit lived in China also dramatically affected their particular writings and views on the Empire as emperors varied greatly. Schall and Ferdinand Verbiest (b.1623-d.1588) tutored the Kang-hsi Emperor and “...praised his sense of justice, his personal abstemiousness, the economy of his government, its freedom from corruption, his simple mode of life, and his tirelessness in matters of state”.⁸³ This however was one of the exceptional emperors of China. Between 1553 and 1783, the Empire of China had ten emperors and before the arrival of the Jesuits they had numerous more who all differed greatly. For instance, Lach points out

⁸⁰ Waley-Cohen (1999) p. 58.

⁸¹ Albert Chan, ‘Late Ming Society and the Jesuit Missionaries’, eds. Charles Ronan, S.J., and Bonnie B.C. Oh *East Meets West: The Jesuits in China, 1582-1773* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1988), pp. 153-173.

⁸² John E. Wills, ‘Brief Intersection: Changing Contexts and Prospects of the Chinese-Christian Encounter from Matteo Ricci to Ferdinand Verbiest’ ed. John W. Witek, S.J. *Ferdinand Verbiest (1623-1688): Jesuit Missionary, Scientist, Engineer and Diplomat* (Steyler Verlag, Institut Monumenta Serica, Sankt Augustin and Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation, Leuven, 1994), p. 385.

⁸³ Rowbotham (1945) p. 224.

the Jesuits “Pantoka, Trigault, Semedo and their colleagues are not as uncritical in their admiration for China as were later seventeenth-century Jesuits but they still emphasize China’s uniqueness and describe Chinese government as it was supposed to work,” adding the footnote “this may also reflect the fact that the government of the K’ang-hsi era was less arbitrary and tyrannical than that of the late Ming period”.⁸⁴ Mungello also points out how the Wan-li Emperor during Ricci’s time was far less predictable and reliable than the K’ang-hsi Emperor in the later Manchu era.⁸⁵ Similarly, Basil Guy notes that the French missionaries had the advantage of visiting China at the height of glory and popularity of the Manchus.⁸⁶ The Chinese system had its own equilibrium that in the moment did not always reveal itself thus the Jesuits’ descriptions of the workings of the system are very context specific.

Another problem of observation that affects the transmission of information are the practical issues surrounding conceptualization and categorization for the Jesuits, and their European audience. The actually existing Empire of China, with a long history and unique socio-political system dramatically differed from Europe and would be understandably difficult to comprehend for a newly arrived Jesuit. The trinary structure of Chinese society, described by Deng and seen in Appendix D, involves the complex interaction and balance involving the agricultural system based on a crop whose properties were entirely different from those in Europe, a free peasantry and a physiocratic government.⁸⁷ The complex interaction of the elements of Chinese society is a topic highly debated today by Sinologists. For the Jesuits then, cognitively, ideas, translations, customs and

⁸⁴ Lach and van Kley (1993) Volume 3, Book 4, p. 1592.

⁸⁵ Mungello (1985) p. 19.

⁸⁶ Guy (1963) p. 259.

⁸⁷ Deng (1999) p. 123

perspective were also difficult to grasp.

Although the Jesuits made quick progress on this front (for instance, changing their dress from Buddhist to literati and learning the language before their arrival on mainland China) it is impossible to expect that reading ancient Chinese texts and living within a particular context of the Empire enabled them to grasp the complexities of the broader Chinese system. Additionally, they carried their own uniquely European contexts with them. This is what Gulick describes as “the unconscious world-concept”.⁸⁸ The Jesuits did use European categories to explain aspects of Chinese civilisation to their European audience, but at the same time, they undoubtedly used them to assist in their own conceptualisation of China. Blue maintains one of the major problems with Western analysis of Chinese society over the past three hundred years has been “principles and categories stemming from the Western tradition of social theory have often distorted that which they were meant to clarify”.⁸⁹ Donald Lach notes that while Semedo realized the different categories of learning in China, he and other Jesuits still used “Western categories — the traditional liberal arts and sciences — with which to discuss and evaluate Chinese achievements”.⁹⁰ Bernard Luk analyses ground-level interaction between Jesuits and literati, and concludes that while “hearts did meet in mutual appreciation” especially with regards to moral self-cultivation, minds were often kept apart by “high conceptual barriers”, particularly between the Hellenized formulations of

⁸⁸ Gulick (1963) p. 55.

⁸⁹ Blue (1999) p. 109; Jacques Gernet, *China and the Christian Impact: A Conflict of Cultures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 6. Gernet repeats a similar argument about how European education shaped their perception.

⁹⁰ Lach and van Kley (1993) Volume 3, Book 4, p. 1642.

Christian dogma and Neo-Confucian minds.⁹¹ A final example of the deep impact on the Jesuits of the issue of categorization is expounded by Rule who addresses the difficulty of the applicability of the secular and sacred categories to China, and how to the Jesuits “this was a personal dilemma, affecting as it did their self-image and their whole lifestyle”.⁹²

Practical concerns about the ability of a European audience to comprehend and contextualise Jesuit accounts of the Middle Kingdom led to the editing of these sources. For instance, Mungello elucidates the various changes in translation made between the same sentence in *Sapientia Sinica* (1662) to *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* (1687), that changed to emphasize the rational nature of Confucianism over more spiritually-oriented passages in the earlier text. He attributes this to a desire of the Jesuits to think on their European audiences’ behalves and not giving them the credit to be able to distinguish between natural religion that could be complementary to Christianity and Chinese rites.⁹³ In this section we have seen how the construction of information should be problematised on several fronts. Next we will turn to examine how the transmission of this information enabled the shift from Sinophilism to Sinophobia in Europe.

3. The Jesuit Portrayal of China to Europe

3.1 Types of Jesuit Publications

The knowledge the Jesuits gained in China was not restricted to, what is known in global history as “useful and reliable knowledge”, it in fact went

⁹¹ Bernard Luk, ‘A Serious Matter of Life and Death: Learned Conversations at Foochow in 1627’, eds. Charles Ronan, S.J., and Bonnie B.C. Oh, *East Meets West: The Jesuits in China, 1582-1773* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1988), pp. 200 and 198.

⁹² Rule (1986) p. 196.

⁹³ Mungello (1988) pp. 261-262.

far beyond this, encouraging the intellectual and commercial curiosity of Europeans. As Patrick O'Brien points out: "Jesuits provided Europeans with an impressive ethnographical mirror into all aspects of Chinese civilization, while they resided mainly in Beijing under the protection of Ming and Qing emperors".⁹⁴ Jesuit publications, as mentioned earlier, evolved into more Sinological works in the closing days of the Society. Antoine Gaubil's, SJ (b.1689-d.1759) *Mémoires concernant...les chinois* (published 1814) is an example of such Sinological work. Its opening phrase: "only China can make China known," articulates the shift that occurred in many European scholarly perceptions of China in this period.⁹⁵ That his attitude was that of a scientific Sinologist is made clear in a letter written in 1752: "It is indeed really difficult to take the just medium between those who too highly extol, and those who too much despise the Chinese literature".⁹⁶ In another letter written by Gaubil on 28 August 1752, he expresses surprise that good translations of the *I Ching* and the histories were not originally top priority, as they would have "cut short many useless disputes. It is one thing to see some truncated fragments of the *I Ching* and the histories, and another to see them as a whole".⁹⁷ This argument articulating the difficulties of transmitting an accurate image of the *I Ching* in secondary sources should be extrapolated to represent the entire body of information produced on China and the difficulties the Jesuits had in presenting it to Europe. The information they did present was highly laden with the context of their personal experiences in Europe and China, as discussed earlier.

⁹⁴ Patrick O'Brien, 'Regimes for the Production of Useful and Reliable Knowledge in Europe and China from the Accession of the Ming to the First Opium War', From *GEHN Conference* (Konstanz, 3-5 June 2004), p. 47.

⁹⁵ Rule (1986) p. 192.

⁹⁶ Gaubil letter to Dr. Cromwell Mortimer, Secretary of the Royal Society, 2 November 1752 published in *Philosophical Transactions*, XL VIII, 1753 in Rule (1986) p. 183.

⁹⁷ Rule (1986) p. 189.

The information they portrayed to suit their own beliefs therefore created a China reduced so as to be vulnerable to manipulation. Voltaire, a well-known Sinophile, represents how opinion on China needed not accurate detail but could be employed by the observer to fit their point of view. Voltaire could not find his *philosophe* in Europe so he turned to China, “where it was impossible to separate truth from fiction, desire from reality”.⁹⁸ Now we must turn to the types of publications these intellects relied on as sources of information.

The Jesuits published works of many varieties. Some were popularly oriented general accounts of China⁹⁹ while others were scholarly works aimed at a particular audience¹⁰⁰. The type of tool used to transmit information had a large impact on how it was received. For instance, Jesuits’ published books were more influential than their letterbooks, and while they were

better organized, these general descriptions produced a more static image of China than that based on the more haphazard reports of events and characteristics contained in the Jesuit letters. Readers who depended on the ethnohistories and on Mendoza’s sixteenth-century description would probably see China as relatively changeless and seemingly devoid of living dynamic leaders and changing events.¹⁰¹

The differences were also reflective of the varying locations of their publication. Most of the seventeenth century printed reports came from Low

⁹⁸ Guy (1963) p. 260.

⁹⁹ Trigault’s *De Christaina expeditione apud Sinas* (1615), Semedo’s *Imperio de la China* (1642), and Magalhaes-Bernou’s *Nouvelle relationh de la Chine* (1690), Martini’s *De bello tartarico in Sinis historia* (1655) aimed at a specific event to spark public interest, *Confuius Sinarum Philosophus* (1687) was decades in progress from Mungello (1985) p. 44.

¹⁰⁰ Martini’s *Novus atlas Sinensis* (1655) and *Sinicae historiae decas prima* (1658) Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Lach and van Kley (1993) Volume 3, Book 4, p. 1566. Juan González de Mendoza, S.J. wrote a best-selling description of China in 1585 entitled *Historia...del gran Reyno de la China*

Countries, particularly Holland, whereas the Jesuit letters and letterbooks and other mission reports came from Rome and other Catholic publishing centres, particularly the Iberian states.¹⁰² The latter were printed in Catholic areas because this is ultimately where the Jesuits were accountable therefore needed to describe their mission in detail. The Low Countries could serve as more popular publishing centres for Jesuit material. However, this division became less clear once France took over as the dominant publishing centre and private correspondence, as discussed earlier, should not be neglected.

It should not be neglected that the Jesuits affected European perceptions apart from their writings. *Chinoiserie* represented the idealized vision of Chinese Empire that began with the publication of *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* in 1687. *Chinoiserie* is an elucidating comparison of the Jesuit influence for, in reality, most of these *objets d'art* were typically European design with a slight Chinese flavour.¹⁰³ Father Couplet incited the rage for everything Chinese by presenting a Chinese companion to Pope Alexander VII and Louis XIV on his 1682 to 1692 visit to Europe.¹⁰⁴ To further demonstrate the connection between the Jesuits and Sinomania we need only look as far as the role of the procurator. The Jesuit procurator of the China mission was a position designed to stimulate favourable publicity in Europe to elicit material and popular support as well as inspire new recruits. The decade before Verbiest wrote the letter disseminated in Europe asking for more people in 1678, there were only seven Jesuits entering

¹⁰² Lach and van Kley (1993) Volume 3, Book 1, p. xli

¹⁰³ Standaert (2001) p. 889. Despite the massive importation of Chinese porcelain, the majority of the products from the *chinoiserie* rage were made in Europe. Guy (1963) p. 163-4 and Standaert (2001) p. 889.

¹⁰⁴ Mungello (1988) p. 262.

China thus the need was quite real and urgent.¹⁰⁵ Intorcetta held the position of procurator between 1669 and 1674 (Couplet later had the job), and was responsible for editing part of the translation of the Four Books. This typifies the manipulation and reduction of the Empire of China to certain elements designed to fulfil the Jesuit role of attracting support.

3.2 Examples: Education, Confucianism and the Manchu Conquest

Now we turn to a few examples of how all the aforementioned forces acted on the Jesuit transmission of information on certain aspects of China. First is the representation of education. While Lach maintains most Chinese never attempted the examinations and the vast majority of students went to school for only one or two years, “from the Jesuits, however, one gets the impression that almost everyone in the empire was an aspirant for the degrees or at least spent long years at traditional studies”.¹⁰⁶ Benjamin Elman’s work reveals that although the Chinese imperial state committed to finance and support an empire-wide school system seven centuries before Europe, mass education did not begin until the twentieth century as earlier the school system presupposed classical literacy.¹⁰⁷ While the Jesuits could have praised the theory of educating the masses and discussed the historical epoch where this was more prevalent in China, during the Song dynasty, their attempt at idealizing China and using it as a model created an over-exaggeration of its virtues. Quoting the Jesuit missionary Martini, Lach reveals the aforementioned detachment from the reality of the lower class:

¹⁰⁵ John W. Witek, S.J. ‘Understanding the Chinese: A Comparison of Matteo Ricci and the French Jesuit Mathematicians Sent by Louis XIV’, eds. Charles Ronan, S.J., and Bonnie B.C. Oh, *East Meets West: The Jesuits in China, 1582-1773* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1988), p. 72.

¹⁰⁶ Lach and van Kley (1993) Volume 3, Book 4, p. 1641.

¹⁰⁷ Benjamin A. Elman, ‘Political, Social, and Cultural Reproduction via Civil Service Examinations in Late Imperial China’, *The Journal of Asian Studies* (1991), pp. 10-11.

“there is almost no one among them, not even the peasants, who had not studied up to fifteen years”.¹⁰⁸ Lach proceeds to point out that a great deal of education was undertaken outside the traditional examination system in places such as Buddhist monasteries, trade guilds, elementary education by clan schools and free government schools, as well as informal education.¹⁰⁹ Thus the Jesuits did not paint an accurate picture of the actual education system, and their over-idealized image would have been more transparently false once accounts of the lower classes of Chinese, written by European merchants, became more popular.

The second example relates to the aforementioned controversial subject of the nature of Confucianism, which many authors believe was severely distorted by the Jesuits.¹¹⁰ The Jesuit portrayal of China featured an increasing emphasis on the rational side of Confucianism as the basis for the Chinese socio-political and economic structure to appeal to the growth of belief in reason in Europe, the same reason that Lach described as being attacked in the Romantic Movement and engendering a backlash against China. Such a civic portrayal of Confucianism was also necessary for the religious motivations of the Jesuits as it allowed room for Christianity. Appendix E shows how the illustration of Confucius that the Jesuits presented to Europe in 1687 in *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* depicted him as a “scholar-sage in a library rather than as a god or prophet in a temple”.¹¹¹ It also shows how this compares to the depiction of Erasmus, the learned European scholar, surrounded by books.¹¹² The translation of the

¹⁰⁸ Martini quoted in Lach and van Kley (1993) Volume 3, Book 4, p. 1641.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 1642.

¹¹⁰ Rule (1986) p. ix; Jensen (1997).

¹¹¹ Mungello (2005) p. 96; Hobson (2004) p. 194.

¹¹² Lisa Jardine, *Erasmus, Man of Letters: The Construction of Charisma in Print* (Princeton University Press, 1993; paperback December 1994). The analogy of Confucius

First Book, “Great Learning”, attributed medieval scholastic philosopher and theologian thoughts to Confucius.¹¹³ The Jesuits manipulated the image of Confucius so they could defend their policy of cultural accommodation and their position in the Rites Controversy. This position required the Jesuits to neglect and reject the more metaphysical interpretation of neo-Confucianism, a Chinese artefact from the Song period.¹¹⁴ They were criticized by contemporaries for blurring the distinction between Confucius’ writings and their additions as well as for ignoring neo-Confucian commentaries in their version of *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*. In December 1687 a lengthy review of *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* by the Protestant scholar Jean Le Clerc was published in *Bibliothèque Universelle et Historique* and in addition to their blurring of sources, he also criticised them for not using Chinese characters to distinguish Chinese concepts and problematize translation.¹¹⁵ Confucianism, transformed into such an oversimplified form could attract admiration from the Jesuits who praised its perfection and morality as well as the libertines who were searching for a cure for Europe’s woes.¹¹⁶ This in turn encouraged the identification of China with Confucianism, and ultimately to supporting a one-dimensional view of the Middle Kingdom, existing to support or contradict European beliefs.

The portrayal of the Manchu Conquest (1664) in Jesuit literature typifies the tension between stability and stagnation present in European perceptions of China and the Jesuit role in creating it. The Jesuits

and Erasmus was made by Professor Larry Epstein, Department of Economic History, London School of Economics.

¹¹³ Rule (1986) p. 120. Jones (2001) p. 19.

¹¹⁴ Mungello (1985) p. 17. The Rejection is demonstrated in the famous *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*.

¹¹⁵ Jonathan Spence, ‘What Confucius Said: Review of The Analects of Confucius, translation and notes by Simon Leys’, *New York Review of Books*. Volume 44, Number 6 (April 10, 1997)

¹¹⁶ Guy (1963) p. 144.

emphasised the durability of the Empire of China and the long history that made it appear indestructible despite the rise and fall of dynasties. The Manchu Conquest offered a disruption large enough to enable the Jesuits to portray a more dynamic, changing China and for a while this did occur: China became “a little more believable and more obviously a part of the world of those who read it” and it was believed for a moment that it could be “a China from which countless innovations and new personalities would soon emerge”.¹¹⁷ Martini’s *De bello tartarico* (1653) explicated the internal problems of the Ming dynasty including oppressive taxation, corruption, and the avarice of the Ch’ung-chen Emperor but emphasised the continuity between the Ming and Qing dynasties by describing the Sinicization of the Manchus before the conquest. This book was extremely popular, with at least 25 editions produced in 10 European languages before the end of the seventeenth century.¹¹⁸ By the end of the seventeenth century, the Jesuits stressed continuity over change in China’s governmental structures and practices and the Manchu Conquest was not viewed as demonstrating the dynamic, changing nature of China. Ultimately, until the demise of the Society, this was the view of China the Jesuits maintained.

“Chinese historical stagnation became a cliché over the following century, a cliché that European social theory mobilized to develop its understanding of capitalism”.¹¹⁹ In this, the Jesuit representation of China as stable, once turned to stagnation, served as the antithesis to Europe’s growing definition of itself as progressive. Bernier’s theory on stability stemming from private property formulated in 1671 was supported by Jesuit reports on the reasonably secure position of property in China, whereas

¹¹⁷ Lach and van Kley (1993) Volume 3, Book 4, pp. 1676 and 1653.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 1668.

¹¹⁹ Timothy Brook and Gregory Blue, eds. *China and Historical Capitalism: genealogies of Sinological knowledge* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 4.

Montesquieu several years later based his critique of China on the stability of its despotism thus lack of political liberties and impetus to change. The view that “customs govern China” and they “could never be changed” gave new life to the historical continuity stressed by the Jesuits.¹²⁰ Thus due to the Jesuit stereotyping of China to support the image of it they desired, the Middle Kingdom was reduced to a set of symbols and consequently open to manipulation by a changing Europe.

4. Conclusion

This investigation of the Jesuit role in shaping the shift in European perceptions of China finds that economic progress and political consolidation in Europe did result in a changing of perspectives on the nature of the Empire of China. However, this shift did not occur solely due to endogenous changes in Europe but also was a result of the creation of the image of China by the Jesuits who shaped it according to their personal motivations and unique context thus creating a one-dimensional view of a complex Empire. The Sinomania of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries represents the first phase of European reception of information on China. The over valuation of the Empire of China engendered a stronger and quicker backlash when European self-perception and consequently perception of the Other began to change.

It should also be remembered that China was not merely another civilization, to Western Europe China was a challenge to the Judeo-Christian interpretation of world history through the bible, for they asked, “if ‘Moses’ could not be found in ‘China’, were they not then pitted against each other as

¹²⁰ Blue (1999) p. 88. Jones (2001) p. 22.

alternative readings of human history?”¹²¹ Thus China is an excellent starting point for examining the shift in European views of the rest of the world. Further analysis comparing the Jesuit portrayal of the Ottoman Empire in comparison to China, is necessary to determine the uniqueness of the Chinese mission, but more importantly to understanding the how Europe’s view of the rest of the world shifted so dramatically and whether this happened endogenously due to European growth or whether it also had to do with the construction of the limited information received from other advanced regions of the world.

It was this manipulated information the Jesuits supplied that allowed European intellectuals to use China as a means to criticize the structure of their own system of knowledge production and economy through comparison of the two socio-economic systems. Mungello accurately points out: “using another culture to support a cultural program is not the most objective way to understand that culture and inevitably results in its distortion”.¹²²

Understanding the evolution of thought on other civilizations by a Europe on the brink of unprecedented growth is pivotal not only for a reformulation of an incomplete theory of shift in perceptions, but also for the understanding the role that China and global knowledge brokers played in the intellectual foundations of Orientalism that flourished in the nineteenth century.

The movement from Sinophilia to Sinophobia would seem to represent a distinct shift, but both extremes were fuelled by distortions on either side. Therefore in examining the shift we must consider how the original view

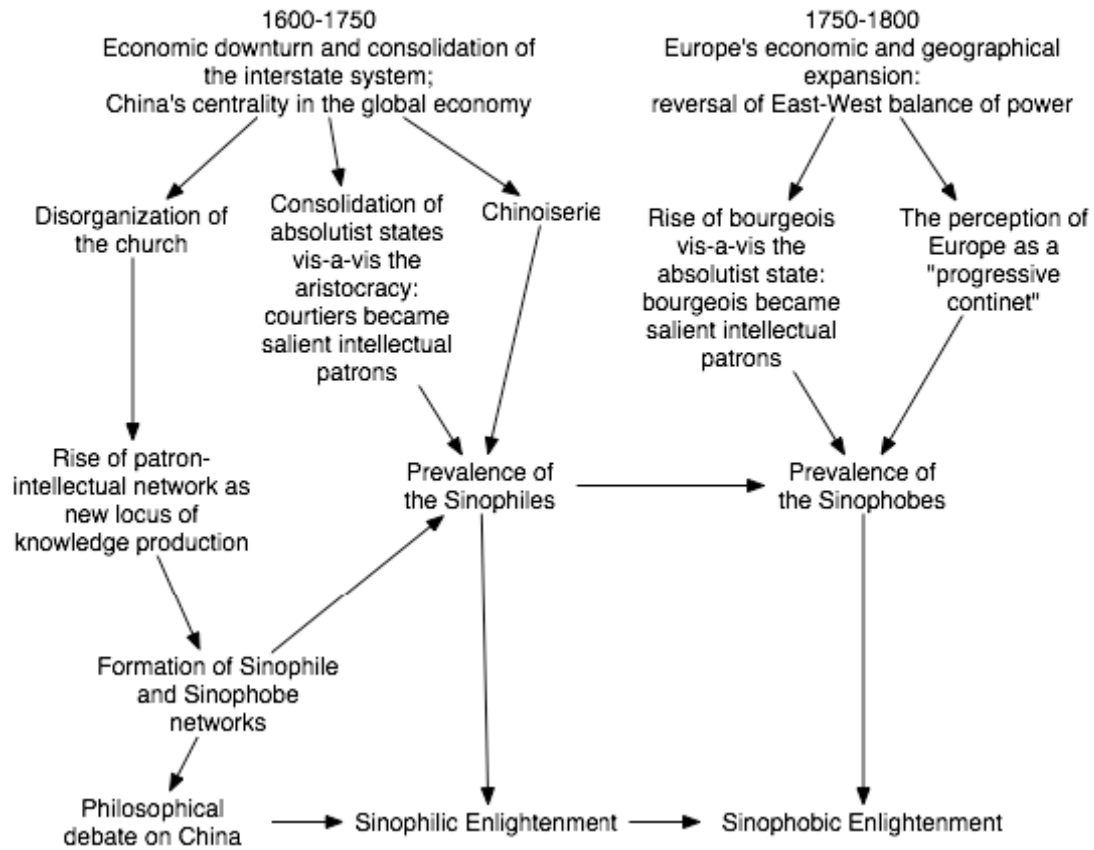
¹²¹ Rule (1986) p. 152; Landry-Deron makes the same argument about China’s model being a threat to the homogeneity of Christianity. Landry-Deron (2005) p. 268.

¹²² Mungello (2005) p. 121.

came to light, and did involve changes in China as well as Europe. It would be anachronistic to see that evolving changes in Europe would dramatically be able to change a view of China in such a short amount of time. Viewing the global relationship behind the creation of information allows us to see the impact that changes in China and in the Jesuits, as the predominant suppliers of information on China, and their relationship to China and Europe had in creating European perspectives. From this it is concluded that the endogenous argument is a Eurocentric argument for the rise of Orientalism.

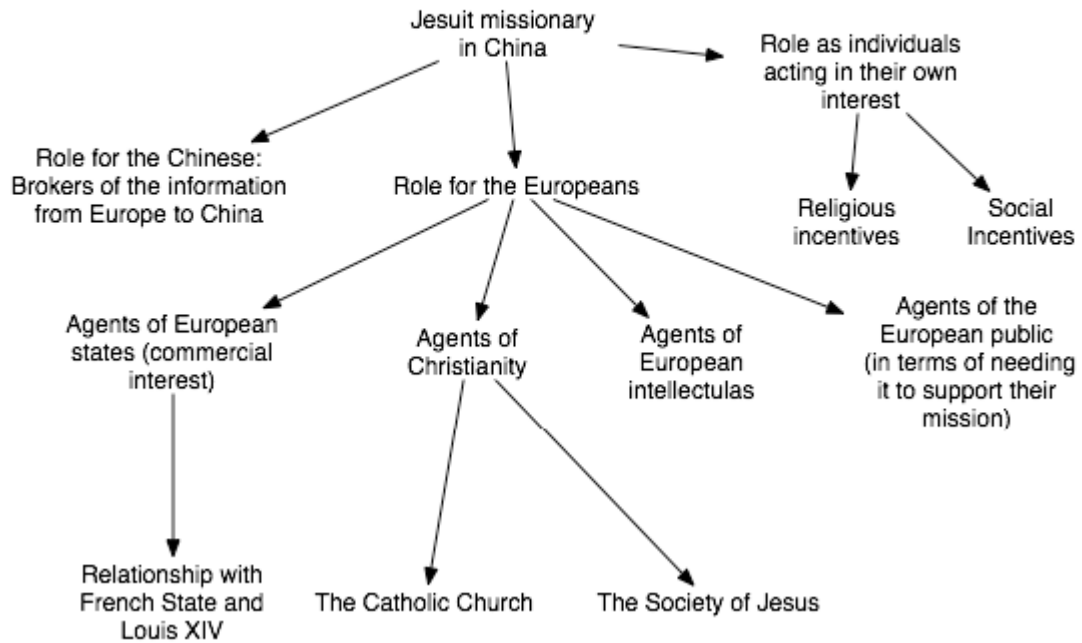
Appendix A: Taken From Hung.

Hung's Conception of the rise and fall
of Sinophilism, ca. 1600-1800

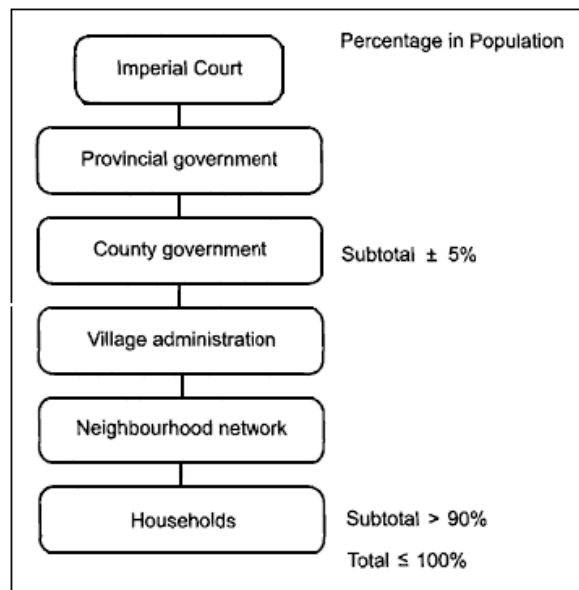


Appendix B:

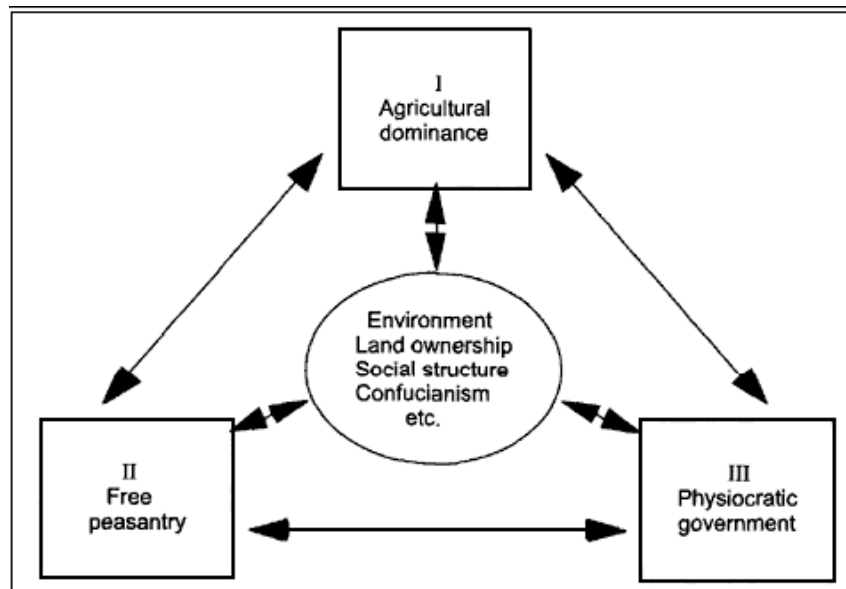
The Many Roles of the Jesuits: Revealing the realms to which knowledge of China was transmitted



Appendix C: China's Administrative Structure Taken from Deng (1999) p. 98.



Appendix D: China's Administrative Structure Taken from Deng (1999) p. 123.



Note: Arrows indicate mutual relationships.

Appendix E:



A. Portrait of Erasmus by Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528)



B. The Image of Confucius from *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*
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