

Wanted: an eighteenth-century Chinese Catholic priest in China, Italy, India, and Southeast Asia¹

Eugenio Menegon

Boston University, Boston

Abstract

This essay explores the life of Cai Ruoxiang (1739–1806), alias Pietro Zai, a native of southern Fujian, China, who was trained as a priest in the Chinese College of Naples in Italy. After returning to China, Cai quietly worked there for over a decade as an underground missionary, but in 1784 became the ‘number one’ on the list of wanted criminals in an empire-wide anti-Christian campaign launched by the Qianlong emperor and his governors. Cai was able to avoid the imperial wrath by sailing to Goa (India). From there he travelled back to southern China under a new name, Giovanni Maria Ly, passing through Siam, Malaysia, Batavia and Tonkin, and spent the rest of his life working again in central China. Cai’s sixty letters in Italian archives reveal how a native priest born in China, transplanted for his education in Italy, and then again back in his home country, interpreted his own evangelical work, communicated with his superiors in Naples and Rome, and participated in a global network extending from Italy to China.

Keywords

Chinese–Italian relations, Catholic missions, global networks, Naples, Southeast Asia, India.

Introduction

Today, many Italians and Chinese have familiarity with at least the names of two men from the Italian peninsula who travelled and lived in China, and have become symbols of early European–Chinese relations: the Venetian merchant and chronicler of the Mongol empires, Marco Polo (1254–1324), and the Jesuit missionary and scientist in late-Ming China, Matteo Ricci from Macerata (1552–1610). Many other Italian missionaries followed in the footsteps of Ricci in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and several of them have garnered increasing interest in the past few decades (Giulio Aleni and Martino Martini are two good examples).

The story of several Chinese who travelled in the opposite direction and obtained an education in Italy before the mid-nineteenth-century Opium Wars, however, is an almost forgotten chapter that only very recently has started to receive the attention it deserves. These Chinese were mostly male

commoners who converted to Catholicism and were sent to the Neapolitan ‘Chinese College’ (Collegio de’ Cinesi) to obtain a basic education in Italian, Latin, Chinese, and theology, be ordained as priests, and return to their native country as missionaries.² A good number of letters penned by these Chinese priests have left us traces of their life experience and of their view of themselves *vis-à-vis* the church and their European superiors. Some of these documents (e.g. the Italian-language letters of Filippo Huang to his superiors in the Chinese College) have been published not long ago, but most of their correspondence is still in the archives awaiting closer inspection.³

Based on unpublished letters, my essay will sketch the biography of a pupil of the ancient Chinese College of Naples, Pietro Zai (Cai Ruoxiang, 1739–1806). His life was emblematic of this extraordinary group of culturally hybrid individuals, perched between Italy and China, whose experience has so far been largely neglected. Only the wave of globalization enveloping the world today has made them newly relevant to our historical narratives. To listen to their voices muffled by time, and to follow their peregrinations in two continents, allow us to better understand not only their self-perception as individuals between distant and yet connected worlds, but also to shed light on the history of the complex Asian–European networks they participated in, themes I will return to in my conclusion.

A Chinese priest on the most wanted list

On 30 April 1785, the most powerful man in the world, the Qianlong Emperor of the Qing dynasty (reign 1735–96), together with his trusted councilors in the Grand Council issued an edict to the provincial authorities of the Chinese empire. Since the autumn of the preceding year, the government had been engaged in a campaign against the Catholic Church in China, an organization that had been forbidden by imperial decree in 1724. In spite of good success in arresting foreign priests, including several Italian Franciscans, and Chinese Christians, however, some of the criminals remained at large. In particular the number one in the most wanted list, Cai Bo-duo-lu, was still unaccounted for:

The Westerners involved in this case who entered the various provinces to propagate their religion have been captured one after the other by the governors-general and governors and have been sent to Beijing. They have been tried and sentenced, and their entire case has been settled. Yet, the fugitive Cai Bo-duo-lu, though certainly the most important criminal, has up to the present not been caught. This culprit was the man who went to Guangdong and first conceived the idea of inviting and escorting [westerners into the country]. We have repeatedly issued decrees to the governors-general and governors zealously to push the arrest of this man, but more than half a year has passed and the case has been concluded, yet

this important culprit has been allowed to escape, evidence enough that the case was handled in a careless manner.⁴

This decree continued with a clear threat against the officials in charge of the case in the provinces of Guangdong, Fujian and Huguang: 'If they should gradually look upon this order as a general and perfunctory one, because their case has been drawn out over so long a time, such conduct would be looked upon as deliberate negligence on the part of those officials, and we are afraid that this is a responsibility which they cannot bear.'⁵

In other words, the emperor was promising retribution in case the fugitive had not been quickly arrested. In response to the decree, local officials in Guangdong apparently put a reward of 3,000 silver *taels* on Cai's head, later raised to 4,000 *taels*, but this was only the last act in a manhunt that had been lasting for some months, and that had involved the governors of several provinces, created a diplomatic case with the Portuguese of Macao and the Canton foreign merchants, and brought grave financial losses to the Chinese merchants of the so-called Hong system governing Sino-Western commerce.

Pietro Maria Cai Ruoxiang

Who was Cai Bo-duo-lu? Bo-duo-lu is the Chinese phonetization of the Portuguese and Spanish 'Pedro,' the two languages most used in the mission at the time, corresponding to the Italian 'Pietro,' and the Latin 'Petrus.' Thus, this was the baptismal name of the fugitive, the Chinese priest known in western sources as Pietro/Pedro/Petrus Zai (also Chay, Z'ai, or Zay). Cai Ruoxiang (1739–1806) – his Chinese name at birth – lived and studied in the Chinese College ('Collegio de' Cinesi') of Naples from 1761 to 1767, and his life reflects the opportunities and risks that the education in the College offered to its pupils. He was not the first member of his family to undertake the long journey from his native China to Naples: his brother Paolo (Cai Wenan, 1720–82) had completed his studies at the college already in 1750, after almost eleven years in Naples.⁶

Pietro Maria Cai Ruoxiang was born in June 1739 in Longqi county, in the Chinese southern province of Fujian, at a time when Catholicism was already an illegal sect in China. His family had probably converted at the beginning of the Qing period, in a territory belonging to the ancient prefecture and present city of Zhangzhou, not far from Xiamen (Amoy). Zhangzhou had been a Jesuit mission in the late Ming period, and had been assigned in the late seventeenth century to the Spanish Dominicans as part of the Apostolic Vicariate of Fujian. We only know that Pietro's parents, 'Giovanni Battista' Cai and 'Maria Siu' (Xu?), were indeed Catholic. Pietro received his baptism in 1742 'in the territory of Lintung [Lingdong] of the city of Lunghi hien [Longqi xian, i.e. county]' from the hands of Mattia Fu of Xinghua (Fujian), Chinese secular priest educated by the Missions Étrangères de Paris in their seminary in Siam.⁷

In Naples

His brother Paolo had been sent to Naples by the Vicar Apostolic Pedro Sanz OP (1680–1747), and it is likely that also Pietro reached Italy at age 21 for similar orders of the Vicar at the time, Francisco Pallás OP.⁸ Pietro arrived in Naples on 19 May 1761, and did his vestition at the College on 26 July. On 26 March 1762, he received his confirmation in the church of the College from Monsignor Nicolò Borgia (1700–79), Bishop of Cava dei Tirreni. After giving his vows on 3 February 1765, he received the tonsure and the minor orders on 21 April 1765 in the same church from Mgr. Borgia, who had become Bishop of Aversa.⁹

During his education at the College, besides receiving theological and philosophical education, Pietro also studied Latin, strove to keep his knowledge of Chinese, and learned about the problems of the Chinese Rites Controversy and the orthodox position to keep in China through the writings of the College's founder, Matteo Ripa.¹⁰ Life at the College in the 1760s, however, was far from being pleasant. After the death of Ripa in 1746, the discipline among the Italian members of the Congregation of the Holy Family he had established to run the College quickly deteriorated. These priests hoarded space within the building for personal use, and confined the young foreign seminarians in two humid large rooms, where some became ill with respiratory diseases, and eventually died. The refectory became 'a tavern for the acquaintances and relatives of the Congregati', where they banqueted at the expense of the College, while serving meagre meals to their students, who were also lacking in all kinds of daily necessities.¹¹ Whether Pietro was one of those who suffered at the hands of the College's teachers is not revealed in his extant correspondence, which in general reflects a quiet spirit of obedience. His attachment to the mission and his faithfulness to the superiors in Naples and Rome displayed during his years in China seem to confirm that he accepted the harshness of priestly life as a member of the indigenous clergy without chafing too much. This was not the case for his older brother Paolo, whose letters are instead replete with complaints to the Propaganda Fide procurators for lack of financial support, assignments in undesirable locations and health issues.

Pietro was ordained a priest in 1767, and in that same year, on Sunday 10 May, he was examined with excellent results together with three companions by a commission in Rome presided by Pope Clement XIII himself, and composed by the Prefect of Propaganda Cardinal Giuseppe Maria Castelli, by the secretary of the Congregation Mario Marefusco, by some external examiners, and by Gennaro Fatigati and Giuseppe Jaccarino of the College in Naples. We read in a note written soon afterwards that he already was on his way to China: 'Don Pietro Zai, 28 years-old, of the province of Fochien [Fujian], of the city of Ciancu [Zhangzhou], for seven years in the College, has already been examined, approved and sent to China as an Apostolic Missionary with the license of the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda Fide.'¹² All the

The encounter between Italy and China

years of study and formation in Italy culminated in a long return journey and a series of missionary assignments in his native China, recounted in a good number of Cai's letters preserved in several archives.

Pietro Cai's letters

Cai's letters are all written in Latin, and cover the period between his departure from Naples in 1767 and the last phase of his life (1785–1804), when he took the new name of Giovanni Maria Ly to avoid further problems with the Chinese imperial authorities pursuing him. In the historical archives of the University of Naples 'L'Orientale,' folder no. 15 contains twenty-six letters written by Cai to the superiors of the College between 1767 and 1803, three years before his death. Among the papers of the Procure of Canton–Macao–Hong Kong in the Propaganda Fide Archives in Rome we find another twenty-five letters by Pietro Cai, and nine signed as Giovanni Maria Ly, addressed to the procurators of the Propaganda mission in China from different locales. Some of his original reports can also be found in the ordinary correspondence of Propaganda (for example in the series 'Scritture Originali della Congregazione Particolare delle Indie Orientali e Cina'; Original Papers of the Particular Congregation for the East Indies and China). In the General Archives of the Franciscan Order in Rome, finally, we find five nineteenth-century copies of his letters (codex *Missioni*, no. 53), and there are in all likelihood other letters by him scattered in ecclesiastical and state archives elsewhere. The only Chinese-language document by Pietro Cai that I was able to track down is a clerical copy of an original letter seized by the imperial police during the anti-Christian campaign of 1784–85. It is now preserved in the archives of the Forbidden City in Beijing (First Historical Archives of China, *Zhongguo diyi lishi dang'anguan*), and it has been recently published.¹³ A careful examination of this little corpus would no doubt offer fascinating details on the daily life in the mission, and on the financial troubles that plagued Propaganda's native priests. Here, however, I will confine myself to use the letters to reconstruct the movements of Pietro Cai in his peregrinations between Italy and China. Only in the conclusion I will offer a comparative context, employing the rich research of Giacomo di Fiore, Michele Fatica and Francesco D'Arelli to position Pietro Cai within the group of indigenous priests formed in Naples in those same years, and to comment on the self-perception of Chinese priests in the eighteenth century.

From Naples to China: 1767–84

The first letter of Pietro to the superior of the Chinese College dates to September 1767, from Madrid, where he was getting ready for his transatlantic journey to the Philippines through the port of Cadiz. Another letter of early December reveals that he was still in Madrid. The next letter from Macau dates

two years later, and reports some travel expenses and debts incurred during a stop of his journey in Batavia, the Dutch colonial entrepôt in Indonesia. His other contemporary letters mention the passage through Manila, after a difficult 18-month-long sail from Spain, and the arrival in Macau in October 1769.¹⁴

Unlike his travel companions from the Chinese College, who travelled on to their mission in Huguang (an ancient province formed by the present provinces of Hubei and Hunan), Pietro received the order to reach his native Fujian. According to a report of the Propaganda procurator Emiliano Palladini, Pietro left the Portuguese colony for Fujian on 12 October 1769. He would return to Macau only one year later on 18 October 1770.¹⁵

During that year in Fujian, besides visiting his family, he dealt with a delicate matter on behalf of Propaganda in the northern county of Fuan, seat of an ancient Dominican mission and of the Vicar Apostolic of Fujian. In 1753, Rome named as new Vicar Apostolic Francisco Pallás (1706–78), a member of the Dominican Province of the Most Holy Rosary of the Philippines. A professor of canon law in the College of Santo Tomás in Manila, Pallás reached the China mission in 1757, already in his fifties, too advanced in age to learn the local language well. A rigid and legalistic man, without any experience of Chinese life, Pallás brought much unrest to his Vicariate.¹⁶ His harsh positions in matters of rituals, usury, and pastoral assignments lead to a 'schism' between a group of experienced Spanish and Chinese Dominicans, and the Vicar and some newly arrived missionaries. The local Christians side with the schismatic priests. Some sexual scandals further complicated the picture: Pallás and his collaborators learned during confession from local women that some of the 'schismatics' had sexually abused them, committing the crime of *solicitatio ad turpia* (solicitation to turpitude). In this war of calumnies and secret interrogations, the 'schismatics' and even some neutral parties soon brought similar accusations against the Vicar Apostolic himself all the way to Rome. In 1770, a large dossier had piled up in the archives of Propaganda, containing libels and letters from both parties, including petitions in Chinese signed by hundreds of local Christians in defense of the 'schismatics'.

On 9 February 1770, Pietro Cai reached the village of Muyang, in Fuan county. In the house of the Christian Raymundo Fung [= Feng] Ngi, he read aloud to the Chinese Dominican Pedro Ngien [= Yan] a letter from the Master General of the Order, Juan Thomas de Boxadors OP (reign 1756–77), dated 27 October 1768. The letter intimated to the schismatic priest to leave immediately for Manila and to await further instructions there.¹⁷ Yan objected to the order, remarking that the local Christians would never let him leave, and that in all likelihood his memorials to Rome had been ignored. Later on, Cai transmitted the same letter to another schismatic, Pedro Meu [= Miao] de Santa Rosa OP (?–1797).¹⁸

Once he had concluded his mission, Cai returned to Macao, and from there he travelled to the mission of Huguang, where his brother Paolo was waiting for him. The letters of the procurator Palladini often reported the problematic

behavior of Paolo. Unhappy with living in a poor and mountainous area, inhabited by a few uncouth Christians who spoke another dialect, and far away from his native Fujian, Paolo often requested to be transferred to his native place. Palladini, rather, would have liked to send him to the mission of Shaanxi and Shanxi, promising in exchange to support his family with '15 *pezze* a year in charitable assistance'.¹⁹ Pietro seemed to be a more docile subject, from the point of view of the procurator. In a 1771 letter, we learn that Pietro was then with Paolo, who had been charged with 'instructing his brother ... in the apostolic ministry'.²⁰

The first extant letter to his Neapolitan superiors from Huguang, his new base of operations, dates to 1777. During those years, Pietro took care of the small number of Christians of his area, in a precarious economic situation, depending on the scarce funds received from Macau. In 1781, Pietro observed that 'the mission assigned to me enjoys a state of peace' (*missio mihi signata gaudet statu pacis*), although 'ancient and modern' apostates disturbed from time to time the local community.²¹

Most wanted

This state of relative peace was finally interrupted by the events of 1784, which initiated an adventurous phase in Cai's life. Our missionary was recalled to Canton by the new procurator of Propaganda, Monsignor Francesco Giuseppe della Torre (?–1785), to whom the emperor had allowed in 1781 to reside in the capital of Guangdong province, rather than in Macau as customary.²²

Ten Propaganda missionaries had secretly gathered in the residence of the procurator, ready to reach their inland missions. The task of Pietro, as a native priest, was to prepare the itinerary of four Italian Franciscans to the provinces of Shanxi and Shaanxi, and assure their safe arrival. After abandoning the idea to travel through Shandong, due to lack of trusted boatmen, Pietro decided to send the missionaries through Huguang, under the escort of some Chinese Catholics. He first travelled inland to organize the trip, and returns to Canton, where he remained after the secret departure of the priests and their native guides. Unfortunately, the four Italians were discovered and arrested on 27 August 1784 in Hubei, and transferred to Beijing for trial. In October, the emperor in person demanded an investigation on the possible connections between these westerners and a Muslim revolt recently started in the Northwest. The matter was becoming serious.

The interrogations of the arrested Chinese Christians reveal that the organizer of the journey was one Cai Bo-do-lu. The Manchu governor-general of Huguang, Te-cheng-e became convinced that this individual was the *trait-d'union* with the Muslim rebels. Guangdong authorities immediately issued orders to arrest Cai, and the manhunt started in the province, with several arrests of local Christians. Pietro escaped capture almost by miracle, taking refuge in the house of a Christian pharmacist in Canton, and he reached

the safety of Macau on 26 September 1784, where he found hospitality in the Franciscan convent.

The Chinese authorities suspected that Cai was in Macau and sent two officials to the colony's Senate with a request for immediate surrender. The Portuguese, still unaware of Cai's whereabouts, denied his presence in the city. A few days later, the Chinese authorities renewed their pressure, after capturing the boatman who transported Cai to Macau, but meanwhile, dressed as a European, Cai had moved to the residence of the procurator of the Missions Étrangères de Paris and then to the Augustinians' convent.

The governor of Guangdong threatened an embargo on the city. The Senate replied that they had no jurisdiction on Chinese subjects, but this did not placate the Chinese officials. The embargo started, and soon the city suffered from lack of food. Many Chinese laborers became afraid and left Macau. The judiciary commissioner of Canton announced at the end of October a visit to Macau, and demanded a special session of the Senate to meet him. All senators had to stand in his presence during this visit, studied to teach a lesson to the colonial government. The Portuguese rejected these conditions and the commissar decided to lodge in a temple outside Macau and ordered again the extradition of the fugitive within twenty-four hours. In the meantime, after a cursory inspection of the city's monasteries undertaken to satisfy the Chinese officials, the Portuguese employed strong means to break the embargo. They seized a shipment of rice and shelled a boat suspected of transporting away cereals. The shelling convinced the commissar that the matter could explode into a larger diplomatic case, and he returned to Canton to report to his superiors.

The situation became embarrassing for the local Chinese authorities. In spite of the hefty reward put on Cai's head and the fact that his portrait had been circulated in the region, there was no trace of him. The emperor, unaware like his officials that Cai was in fact a priest, became impatient, and thundered in the edict of 14 November 1784:

Cai Bo-duo-lu ... is an important culprit in this case. Why has he not yet been arrested? This man was well acquainted with the foreigners. When he saw that the arrests were being pushed very vigorously, he must have escaped to Guangdong and actually be hiding in Macau. ... [F]ind effective ways to search for him [so] that he be arrested and sent to Beijing for trial and punishment. Do not procrastinate and be negligent so that he can escape far away.²³

At the end of November, new emissaries of the governor of Guangdong visited Macau, and inspected the monastery of the Augustinians, with no result. The Chinese merchants of Macau, scared by the events, beseeched the Senate to surrender Cai. Rather than giving in, the Portuguese finally decide to embark Cai and the wanted catechist Bartolomeo Xie on the royal ship 'Fidelissima',

which was ready to sail to Goa. The fugitives left China on the night of 30 November 1784. Apparently, this decision was taken on the advice of Alexandre de Gouvea (1751–1808), the new Portuguese bishop of Beijing, then in Canton on his way to the capital.

Fugitive in India, Malaysia and Indonesia

We learn from letters written by Cai and by the ecclesiastical authorities of Goa that after their arrival in India, the fugitives were hosted at the expense of the Portuguese Crown in the royal seminary of 'Rachiol' (today Rachol, in the region of Salcete, state of Goa). In exchange, the two promised in writing never to return to Macau. Obviously, the Portuguese authorities did not want any more trouble with the Chinese imperial government.²⁴ The consequences, in fact, had been also felt in the Chinese and foreign commercial circles of the 'Canton factories'. The powerful merchants of the Chinese state monopoly known as 'Hong', who were in charge of managing foreign commerce, had to disburse a fine of 120,000 taels of silver in February 1785 as a punishment for failing to control the movements of Cai and his accomplices, Chinese and foreign.²⁵ Thus, Pietro had no hope to return to China with the support of the Portuguese or other European powers. Also the Spanish forbade him passage through Manila. He had to find a way himself, challenging the governments of the Chinese, Portuguese and Spanish empires.

In the meantime, Chinese authorities, unaware of Cai's departure for India and pressed by stringent imperial commands, continued their search for the fugitive on Chinese territory. He was pursued in Hubei, where the Franciscans had been captured, and in his native Fujian, in particular in the counties of Longqi and Fuan. In response to the imperial decree of 30 April 1785 quoted at the beginning of this essay, the governor of Guangdong made a last attempt to find Cai in Macau, with a new embargo. Assured by the Portuguese that Bo-duo-lu was no longer in their city (this time, they did not lie!), the governor finally communicated to Beijing that Cai had disappeared. After November 1785, the imperial authorities lost interest in him and the manhunt was abandoned.

Soon Pietro grew impatient with his inactivity in Goa. The rector of the seminary, the archbishop of Goa and the governor asked him to become instructor of Chinese in Goa's seminary, or in that of Macau, but he was in no position to accept these jobs without permission from his superiors, and moreover he wished to return to his mission. Pietro continued to write to the procurators of Propaganda in Macau, to the Congregation in Rome and to his superiors in Naples, supplying information on his attempts to reach China again and asking for recommendations to travel to Manila and elsewhere.²⁶ However, now he signed his letters as 'Giovanni Maria Ly', the new name he used to confuse whoever might have intercepted his correspondence, be they Europeans or Chinese. Precisely as a result of this identity change, some

scholars lost track of him in Goa, and had thought that he died there: the *Elenchus Alumnorum* of the College of Naples edited by Giovanni Maria Kuo (1917), for example, simply reports his death and burial in India, without a precise date.²⁷ In the archives as well, the correspondence signed by Giovanni Maria Ly is catalogued separately from that of Pietro Cai, as if they were two individuals.

The motivations adduced by Goa's authorities to keep him there seem pretexts, and probably hide an institutional jealousy towards Propaganda, besides fears that the fugitive might cause problems for the Portuguese again in China. Fortunately, Cai met the new Vicar Apostolic of Siam, Monsignor Arnaud-Antoine Garnault MEP (1745?–1811), who was travelling to Pondicherry for his consecration.²⁸ Cai and the Vicar passed through Cochin (in Kerala, India, then a Dutch fortress). They left again on 12 May 1787 and reached Pondicherry on 4 June: the catechist Bartolomeo Xie continued to Manila, while a local French merchant, one Montignes, offered to Pietro Cai a passage on a small vessel heading to Canton. Afraid for the safety of the crew and anticipating a possible expulsion from Malacca (Melaka, today in Malaysia, then a Dutch entrepôt and necessary stop through the Straits), Cai preferred another option. He would continue the journey with the Vicar to the 'kingdom of Queda' (today's Malaysian state of Kedah), from where he hoped to reach a port on the eastern coast of the Malaysian peninsula, four or five days away by elephant ('per operam elephantis'). There he would embark on Siamese commercial ships directed to Tonkin, near the Chinese border. In the meantime, he would assist the Vicar in his ministry to the Chinese Catholic communities of the island of Penang.²⁹

Clearly, these plans must have changed later on. In July 1787, Pietro was in 'Madrastra' (Madras, today's Chennai, north of Pondicherry), from where he would have liked to leave for Macau or the Philippines, but the captains refused him passage, fearful that the Portuguese or Spanish governments would punish them.³⁰ While he was in Madras he was treated well by the French Capuchin 'Fra' Ferdinando' and remained together with Monsignor Garnault. We learn from a letter to the new procurator of Propaganda in Macau, Giovan Battista Marchini, dated January, 1788, that Cai had gone with the Vicar to the island of Penang ('Pulopinang', today Pulau Penang). From there he left, alone, on 9 December 1787, to arrive in Malacca on 15 December. From Malacca he planned to reach Batavia, and then find a passage to Chaozhou (Guangdong), near his native Zhangzhou, or maybe sail directly to Xinghua (Fujian). These destinations reveal that Cai was conveniently planning to use the network of private transportation of people and merchandise that sustained the economy of southern China (in particular Guangdong and Fujian), and the overseas Chinese colonies in South-east Asia. To this day, the Chinese of Malaysia and Indonesia consider their ancestral homes to be the regions of Chaozhou and southern Fujian.³¹ On 16 June 1788, Cai wrote to the procurator Marchini with fresh news on his movements. After staying in Malacca until 12 February

as a guest of a local Siamese Catholic called 'Francisco de Lobo', Cai decided to leave the city, because of the suspicions that surrounded him following his flight from China. He thus went to the island of Java and he reached Batavia on 3 June 1788. There he got in touch with the local Fujianese immigrants and organized his return home for the end of July.³²

Again in China

The following letter to the procurator, dated 14 November 1788, came from China. Cai wrote accepting a new mission inland, in Hanzhong (province of Shaanxi), where he would go incognito through the provinces of Huguang and Sichuan.³³ Some years later we learned about his progress in the new job: he collaborated in Hanzhong with a confrere from the Naples College, Simone Ciao (i.e. Zhao, 1722–?), and was engaged in 'anti-superstition' campaigns among his Catholics. Things seemed to get better with time: in 1797, Cai reported that his mission counted around six thousand Christians and asked for new priests from Naples.³⁴

At the beginning of the new century, Cai's letters reflected hard times, both in Europe and China. Cai learned in 1801 of the Napoleonic occupation of Rome and of the state of war in Europe, and also reported about local rebellions and famines in China, contributing to the misery of the mission and sometimes to the violent death of his Christians.³⁵ His last letter to procurator Marchini, dated 13 June 1804, revealed that he was nearing his final years. He complained of frequent illness, but also thanked the procurator for sending some chocolate and a pocket watch.³⁶ In 1805, a new government anti-Christian campaign launched by the new emperor, Jiaqing, forced Cai to escape once again to Macau. This time, however, owing to his notoriety, he could not stay long. Death finally came to him in 1806, in Canton, where he was staying for affairs of the mission.³⁷

Conclusion: Pietro Cai in historical context

The life of Pietro Cai, pupil of the Chinese College of Naples, at first sight seems to be full of exceptional opportunities for a Chinese subject in the eighteenth century. Yet, it is also filled with hardships. The journey of Pietro and his sojourn in Naples, his education obtained through hard work in an alien country and far from ideal conditions, his long and arduous return by sea to China, his peripatetic life in the mission and his escape from the imperial police to India and South-East Asia, until his death in Canton: all this suggests a life in continuous flux, characterized by relative poverty, but also by an iron will to continue in the mission.

We might marvel at the moral fibre and physical stamina of Pietro Cai and certainly more research would uncover the psychological and personal dimensions of his life, that here I have hardly touched. In spite of the

limitations of my preliminary work, however, I can here offer a contextualization of the individual experience of Pietro within those of other contemporary Chinese priests, based on recent research by others. What we know of the conditions of life in the College of Naples and in the Propagandist mission during the second half of the eighteenth century can help us sketch some traits of the religious and personal self-representation of some of these native priests. Matteo Ripa, founder of the Neapolitan College and Congregation of the Holy Family, was a sworn enemy of the Jesuits and of their methods of ritual and cultural adaptation in China. In establishing the College in Naples, he tried to offer to Chinese young men a place that would be free of Jesuit influence, immersed in a Catholic milieu, close to Rome, the papal center of religious orthodoxy, and in good and continued relationship with the Congregation of Propaganda Fide. Since the late seventeenth century, Propaganda had been attempting, without much success, to compete in China against the influence of the Jesuits, and to limit the rights of missionary patronage of the Iberian Crowns in Asia, forging an uneasy alliance with Louis XIV of France. Ripa's efforts fit within that larger strategy.

The experience of the Chinese seminarians in Naples turned out to be a rather mixed success from the point of view of the Church. This was mostly due to the conditions of life at the College, rather than to the 'flaws of character' of the Chinese seminarians, as the Italian superiors tended to think. Ripa was an inflexible and dissimulating man, and discipline in the college could be brutal. Customarily, seminarians had to flog themselves in the refectory, eat meagre meals and subject themselves to humiliating punishments whenever they infringed upon the rules, including eating on the ground from the bowls used for the dogs. The biographies of some early pupils of Ripa serve as illustrations of the pitfalls in the College's formative model. Ripa, after residing at the imperial court of China for several years, returned to Naples with five boys and a language instructor in 1724. Among the boys, two – Lucio Wu (1714–63) and Filippo Huang (1712–76) – turned out to be great 'disappointments' for Ripa and his successors. Lucio, in particular, who had been ceded to the Italian ecclesiastic by a violent and unloving father at age six in 1720, became the object of the founder's persecutory rage when the youngster rocked the College by engaging in a homosexual liaison with his companion Filippo. After repeated flights from the prison-like conditions of the College, Lucio ended his days in the fortress of Castel Sant'Angelo in Rome, victim of the hatred of his former 'benefactor'. Ripa's own repressed homosexual desires probably played a role in fueling his ferocity towards the Chinese subordinate – who was a veritable mirror of his own psychological demons – up to the point of wishing his death or at least his life-long imprisonment as a felon and insane rebel in the Pontifical jails.³⁸ Filippo Huang was luckier, as he finally, in his fifties, after almost three decades in Italy, was sent back to China to engage in the ministry he had long prepared for. Unlike Lucio, he has left a trail of letters that reveal the tensions between Italian and

Chinese priests within the Congregation of the Holy Family and the Propagandist mission. Chinese seminarians were ill-treated, especially if they became recalcitrant to discipline as Lucio and Filippo had. Once back in China, they received only a fraction of the stipend granted to European missionaries and were at the mercy of an inefficient, far-flung bureaucratic machinery stretched between Rome and Macau, that dispensed anemic funds with years of delay. The Propaganda procurators in Macau or Canton, moreover, often did not have a good opinion of Chinese priests working underground in the interior of the vast empire and purposefully delayed the release of money to them. Undercurrents of racism were not extraneous to these tensions.³⁹

As is often the case, we have much more material on and by individuals who experienced troubles, rather than by others who instead acted within the norms. Pietro Cai appears to belong to this second category: in the extant correspondence I could use he shows his qualities as an earnest priest, concerned about the survival of the mission, and, even when critical of the decisions of superiors, always careful and diplomatic. In a letter written in 1781 from Huguang, for example, he delicately lamented a decision of the superiors in Italy to reject the application of a few young students he had trained in Latin in his mission in preparation for a possible journey to Naples. In particular, he underlined the disappointment of local families, who had sacrificed the time and labour of their sons to study, only to see them deprived of the possibility to continue their formal training for the priesthood.⁴⁰ Like his European counterparts in the propagandist mission in China, Pietro must have been unhappy about the neglect and isolation experienced in his assignments. While other more vocal members of the mission often complained with their superiors in Rome about this sense of decline and abandonment, however, Pietro preferred to engage in his missionary activities without much fuss. His determination to continue his work under the most taxing conditions while in China and to return to his home mission after his forced exile in India and South-east Asia, are clear indications that he was fully committed to his role as 'apostolic missionary'. He also passionately advocated the formation of more numerous native clergy in Naples, repeatedly requesting his superiors to accept young candidates whose initial formation he tried to assure in China and defended the right of Chinese men to be priests of their own church.

Pietro was one among a handful of eighteenth-century individuals who, while ethnically Chinese, culturally straddled both the Chinese and European worlds. Unlike some of his earlier companions, however, he adjusted to the situation more successfully. Maybe a reason for the levelheaded attitude of Pietro to his mission is to be found in the psychological realm. When he reached Naples, unlike Lucio Wu or Filippo Huang, Pietro was in his twenties, a youth who, although not fully adult yet, had nevertheless spent his first adolescence in China. Lucio and Filippo had left their native families so early that their Italian years at the College, in the hands of the surrogate father Matteo Ripa and of that harsh and not so holy 'family' they found at the

College, indelibly scarred them. Pietro was more mature and came from an established Christian family and once back in China found some support in his own older brother Paolo and in his own relatives in Zhangzhou, whom he periodically visited and with whom he maintained strong links. He wrote his reports in the Latin he had learned in Naples and continued to fondly remember the noble and ecclesiastical benefactors of the College, and the priests he had lived with in Italy. At the same time, however, he felt fully integrated back in China, precisely because his experience of separation from his homeland during his formative years had been less traumatic than that of Lucio or Filippo.

For the historian, the voice of this native priest offers an occasion to understand the self-perception of those 'culturally hybrid' individuals that in the eighteenth century shuttled between China and Europe, and left a personal record of their experience. This level of micro-historical detail, however, finds a broader significance only if seen within the transcontinental networks of exchange of peoples, ideas and merchandise that extended from Italy and several other European countries, to America, and Asia at the time. These networks were made not only of European-dominated components, but also of Asian ones: Chinese, Malaysian, Indian, Siamese, Tonkinese, and so on. Pietro Cai travelled on Spanish and Portuguese ships, was invited on a French-managed vessel in Pondicherry, but also sailed on Asian waters on Chinese junks and Siamese boats, planned to cross the Malaysian peninsula on elephants and escaped the Chinese imperial police on the riverine ferries of southern and central China. He spoke several languages and dialects, wrote in Latin and Chinese, and participated in the world of maritime China that Fujianese like himself had helped shape for centuries. The challenge scholars of Asian-European relations are faced with is to link the personal, spiritual and religious dimensions of these individual lives to the macro-historical structure of the *longue durée* characterized by imperial projects, commercial networks and intellectual trends, a task that here I can only suggest for future work.

Notes

Archival acronyms used throughout the Notes section are as follows: AGOFM, Archivum Generale Ordo Fratrum Minorum, Rome; APF, SC and SOCP, Archivio Storico della Congregazione per l'Evangelizzazione dei Popoli o 'de Propaganda Fide,' Rome; series 'Scritture riferite nei Congressi' and 'Scritture Originali della Congregazione Particolare dell'Indie e della Cina'; AUNO, Archivio Università di Napoli 'L'Orientale,' Naples.

¹ A preliminary version of this article was published in Italian as Menegon, Eugenio (2006) 'Ricerca numero uno: la vita avventurosa tra Europa ed Asia di Pietro Zai (Cai Ruoxiang, 1739–1806), alunno del Collegio dei Cinesi', in Michele Fatica (ed.) *Matteo Ripa e il Collegio dei Cinesi di Napoli (1682–1869). Percorso documentario e iconografico. Catalogo della mostra, Archivio di Stato di Napoli, 18 Novembre 2006–31 Marzo 2007*, Napoli: Università degli Studi di Napoli 'L'Orientale', pp. 87–100.

- 2 Today, the ancient college has become the State University of Naples 'L'Orientale'. The college was established in 1732 by Matteo Ripa (1682–1746), apostolic missionary and artist at the court of the Kangxi Emperor, and an opponent of the Jesuits and their evangelistic methods. The institution's chief aim was to form young Chinese for the priesthood in an orthodox and theologically sound environment, supervised by priests of the new Congregation of the Holy Family established by Ripa, and send them back to China as underground pastors during the period of interdiction of Catholicism that characterized the reigns of Kangxi's successors until the 1860s; on the history of the College and its transformation since the unification of Italy, see Fatica, Michele (2001) 'L'Istituto Orientale di Napoli come sede di scambio culturale tra Italia e Cina nei secoli XVIII e XIX', *Scritture di storia* 2: 83–121; and Fatica, *Matteo Ripa e il Collegio dei Cinesi di Napoli (1682–1869)*, op. cit., note 1.
- 3 Di Fiore, Giacomo (ed.) (1995) *Lettere di Missionari dalla Cina (1761–1775). La vita quotidiana nelle missioni attraverso il carteggio di Emiliano Palladini e Filippo Huang con il Collegio dei Cinesi di Napoli*, Napoli: Istituto Universitario Orientale.
- 4 Willeke, Bernward (1948) *Imperial Government and Catholic Missions in China during the Years 1784–1785*, New York, Franciscan Institute, pp. 133–4 (translation from *Qing Gaozong shilu*, juan 1227, 8a).
- 5 Willeke, *Imperial Government*, p. 134, cf. *Qing Gaozong shilu*, juan 1227, p. 8b.
- 6 See 'Liber collegialum et aggregatorum; Libro della recezione de Collegiali alla prima pruova. 1717–1887', AGOFM, Missione Hankow, MH 23–4, f. 8r: 'il Collegiale Pietro Zai, fratello germano del nostro missionario Apostolico Paolo Zai'; and 'Risposta alla memoria del Sig. Proc. della Congr. di P.F. in data 29 gen. 1771', Macao, 30 gennaio 1772, APF, SOCP, vol. 59, 1773, f. 21r.
- 7 I would like to thank Dr Zhang Xianqing (Institute of Anthropology, University of Xiamen, China) for information on Lindong and its Catholic lineages.
- 8 Letter of 1743 from Sanz to Paolo Cai, quoted in González, José Maria (1952–8) *Misiones dominicanas en China (1700–1750)*, Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, vol. 2, pp. 80–1.
- 9 See Kuo, Giovanni Maria (1917) *Elenchus alumnorum, decreta et documenta quae spectant ad Collegium S. Familiae Neapolis*, T'ou-sè-wè: Ex Typographia Missionis Catholicae in Orphanotrophio T'ou-sè-wè, pp. 2–3; and 'Liber collegialum et aggregatorum ...', f. 8r.
- 10 On the formation of the pupils, see D'Arelli, Francesco (1999) 'I cinesi del Collegio della Sacra Famiglia di Gesù Cristo di Napoli: dal Ritus vestiendi alla partenza per le missioni di Cina,' in Michele Fatica and Francesco D'Arelli (eds) *La missione cattolica in Cina tra i secoli XVIII–XIX. Matteo Ripa e il Collegio dei Cinesi*, Napoli, Istituto Universitario Orientale, pp. 195–266. The Chinese Rites Controversy was a theological battle that lasted over one century (1635–1742) between those missionaries (chiefly the Jesuits) who supported accommodation to certain Chinese ancestral and public rituals among Chinese Catholics, and those who opposed them. The Dominicans and Matteo Ripa were among the opponents, and they finally received approval for their position by the Holy See.
- 11 See Di Fiore, *Lettere di missionari dalla Cina*, pp. 10–2.
- 12 See APF, SC, 'Registro dell'esame de Missionari', vol. III, 1757–1809, ff. 26r–v; and 'Nota degli Alunni attualmente esistenti nel Collegio della Sacra Famiglia di Napoli', 1767, in APF, SC, Collegi Vari, 'Collegio dei Cinesi della Sagra Famiglia in Napoli, 1766–1778', vol. 10, f. 67r.
- 13 Zhongguo di yi lishi dang'anguan (ed.) (2003) *Qing zhong qianqi Xiyang Tianzhujiao zai Hua huodong dang'an shiliao* (Historical materials on the activities of Catholicism in China in the early Qing), Beijing, Zhonghua shuju, vol. 1, p. 357, doc. 270; cf. Willeke, *Imperial Government*, p. 51.
- 14 Letters by Cai to the College, 9 September 1767 (Madrid), 1 December 1767 (Madrid) and 8 October 1769 (Macao), in AUNO, busta 15, Inc. 7.
- 15 APF (Archivio Storico Propaganda Fide, Roma), SOCP, vol. 57, 1771, ff. 102r–112r, report by Emiliano Palladini, Macao, 31 October 1770, f. 104v.
- 16 See some rather hagiographic biographies of Pallas in González, José Maria (1955–67) *Historia de las misiones dominicanas de China*, Madrid: Imprenta Juan Bravo, vol. 2, pp. 541–51; Ocio, Hilario and Neira, Eladio (eds) (2000) *Misioneros dominicos en el Extremo Oriente*, Manila, Life Today Editions, vol. 1, pp. 321–2.
- 17 On Pedro Yan (Nien o Ngien) de Santo Domingo (1728–97), see González, *Historia*, vol. 2, pp. 298, 423–4, 434.
- 18 See APF, SOCP, vol. 57, 1771, ff. 90r–v, letter of Pietro Cai to Emiliano Palladini, Macao, 27 November 1770. On Pedro Miao (Meu) de Santa Rosa, see González, *Historia*, vol. 2, p. 427, n. 33.
- 19 APF, SOCP, vol. 59, 1773, Palladini, E. (1771) 'Memoria pel Sig. D. Francesco Zen,' Macao, 29 January, f. 19r.
- 20 APF, SOCP, vol. 59, 1773, Palladini, E. (1772) 'Risposta alla memoria del sig. Proc. Della Congr. di P.F. in data 29 gen. 1771', Macao, 30 January, f. 21r.
- 21 AUNO, busta 15, inc. 7, letter by Pietro Cai to Gennaro Fatigati, Huguang. 6 August 1781, f. 1v.
- 22 Willeke, *Imperial Government*, p. 19, note 7. My narrative is mainly based on Willeke, except when specified.
- 23 Willeke, *Imperial Government*, p. 70, translation from *Qing Gaozong Shilu*, juan 1216, 7a–7b, modified.
- 24 Willeke, *Imperial Government*, p. 71; AUNO, busta 15, inc. 7, letter by Romualdus Ansaloni, rector of the Royal Seminary of Rachiol, Goa, to governor of Goa, Portuguese with Italian version, 9 March 1787.
- 25 Willeke, *Imperial Government*, p. 66, note 74, citing Morse, Hosea Ballou (1926–9) *The Chronicles of the East India Company Trading to China*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press and Oxford: Oxford University Press, vol. 2, p. 107.
- 26 See e.g. letter of Pietro Cai to Propaganda from Goa (College of Rachiol), 16 May 1786, in APF, SOCP, vol. 65, 1787–88, f. 234v.
- 27 Kuo, *Elenchus alumnorum*, p. 3.
- 28 See Launay, Adrien (1916) *Mémorial de la Société des Missions-Étrangères, deuxième partie 1658–1913*, Paris: Séminaire des Missions-Étrangères, pp. 266–7.
- 29 APF, SOCP, vol. 65, 1787–8, ff. 271r–v e 274r–v [sic]: Letter of Pietro Cai to Propaganda, Madrastra, 29 giugno 1789; *ibid.*, f. 276v.
- 30 APF, SOCP, vol. 65, 1787–8, f. 270r: letter of Pietro 'Cai to Propaganda, Madrastra, 19 July 1787.
- 31 APF, Archivio Procura Macao, letter signed by Giovanni Maria Ly (alias Pietro Cai), to Marchini, Malacca, 28 January 1788, f. 1r. On Marchini, see Willeke, *Imperial Government*, p. 24, n. 34.
- 32 APF, Archivio Procura Macao, letter signed by Giovanni Maria Ly (alias Pietro Cai), to Marchini, Batavia, 16 June 1788, ff. 1r–v.
- 33 APF, Archivio Procura Macao, letter signed by Giovanni Maria Ly (alias Pietro Cai), to Marchini, 'Kian In sub Fozen hien', 14 November 1788, ff. 1r–2v.
- 34 APF, Archivio Procura Macao, letters signed by Giovanni Maria Ly (alias Pietro Cai), to Marchini, Hanzhong, 16 February 1791, ff. 1r–2v; *ibid.*, Hanzhong, 27 December, 1797, ff. 1r–v.
- 35 APF, Archivio Procura Macao, letters signed by Giovanni Maria Ly (alias Pietro Cai), to Marchini, Hanzhong, 26 June 1801, ff. 1r–v; *ibid.*, 'Siao Zai', June 20, 1802, ff. 1r–2v.
- 36 APF, Archivio Procura Macao, letter signed by Giovanni Maria Ly (alias Pietro Cai), to Marchini, Hanzhong, 13 June 1804, ff. 1r–v.

The encounter between Italy and China

- 37 Information on the last two years of his life in *Nouvelles lettres édifiantes des missions de la Chine et des Indes orientales*, Paris: Séminaire des Missions-Étrangères, 1818–23, vol. 4, pp. 234–5, cf. Willeke, *Imperial government*, p. 26, n. 40.
- 38 See Di Fiore, Giacomo (1985) 'Un cinese a Castel Sant'Angelo. La vicenda di un alunno del collegio di Matteo Ripa fra trasgressione e reclusione', in Ugo Marazzi (ed.) *La conoscenza dell'Asia e dell'Africa in Italia nei secoli XVIII e XIX*, Napoli: Istituto Universitario Orientale, pp. 219–86.
- 39 See Di Fiore, *Lettere di missionari dala Cina*, passim.
- 40 AUNO, busta 15, inc. 7, Letter to Gennaro Fatigati, 6 August 1781, ff. 1r–v.

British Imperialism, French charity and the changing behaviour of Italian Franciscan missionaries in Shanxi Province, 1800–1850

Henrietta Harrison
Harvard University

Abstract

Prior to the Opium War the Italian missionaries in Shanxi were dependent on the local Chinese population both for their safety and their funding. This meant that only missionaries who were willing to conform to Chinese customs could succeed and thus it was impossible to implement the rulings against various Chinese customs made by the papacy in the eighteenth century. The treaties that followed the war greatly reduced the penalties on missionaries discovered in the interior and made it possible for French charitable funding to reach them. Once the missionaries were no longer dependent on the Chinese but on sponsors in Europe those with much more hostile attitudes to Chinese customs were able to enforce them, leading to a century of alienation and hostility between them and the Chinese Catholics.

Keywords

China, Catholic church, Missions, Shanxi, finances.

Among the Chinese troops transferred to Guangdong to fight the British in the Opium War was a small number of Catholics from the northern Chinese province of Shanxi. Alfonso de Donato (di Napoli 1804–49), the missionary in charge of the area, included these men in a report to Rome, noting that they had confessed and communicated before their sad departure.¹ This is the only reference to the Opium War in the letters that the Franciscan mission in Shanxi sent to the Propaganda Fide; the tone is one of pride that there are devout Catholics in the Qing armies, but there is no sense that this was to be a turning point. Nevertheless, within a few years China's defeat in the war had transformed the behaviour and practices of Italian missionaries in Shanxi. The treaties that followed the British victory greatly reduced the danger to Europeans in China, and as a result Italian missionaries who had previously been deeply embedded in local Chinese Catholic networks began to assert opinions that contradicted those of their supporters. In particular they enforced, for the first time, longstanding papal rulings that banned certain Chinese customs. They were able to do this because the inflow of French charitable funding, which was made possible by the treaty, made them independent of local financial support.² These factors increased the institutional power of the