

Abstract

In this study I examine the Society of Jesus' struggle to partake in the circulation of people, information, and knowledge between Asia and Europe in the context of one of the greatest geopolitical transformations of the seventeenth century—the fall of the Ming (1368–1644) and the rise of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) in China. This political cataclysm, I argue, should be understood as an Asian event with global consequences, and thus serves as a prism for analyzing the Jesuits' involvement in the intricate and changing world of long-distance communication. As I demonstrate, the transition prompted the Jesuits to reevaluate existing travel systems and encouraged them to form novel global communication circuits as well as to engage in intensive production of news for diverse purposes.

By tracing the repercussions of a putatively 'Asian' episode on a 'European' organization, and by bringing into the conversation a broad range of sources in Latin, Portuguese, and Chinese, this study unravels new aspects of the entangled histories of China and Europe in the early modern period and demonstrates the variety of powers that took part in the construction of a newly connected world, as well as the crucial role played by non-Westerners in these processes. Finally, the study reevaluates neglected aspects of the history of the Jesuits. While scholars have focused extensively on the Jesuits' intellectual activities and missionary strategies in China, this study examines their role as active directors, initiators, and logistically-minded entrepreneurs of long-distance travel and as intercontinental producers and distributors of news within global networks stretching from Asia to Europe. This investigation offers new interpretations of the Jesuits' activities in Europe and China, as well as of their relations with European and Asian powers, and presents Eurasia as meaningfully connected through these processes.

The dissertation focuses on two broad themes. Part One follows the Jesuits' reordering of communication infrastructures within China, and between China and Europe through maritime and overland routes. In the course of these efforts, which challenged existing communication and travel procedures, the Society ventured to question the authority of the Portuguese *Padroado* to which it was originally bound, while working diligently to reinforce its ties with rising Asian powers in search of new venues of stability and independence. Part Two investigates the Jesuits' reorganizing of the content of what they communicated among themselves as well as to other European circles. It focuses on the circulation of current-affairs information regarding the political situation in China and analyzes its production and use in inner-Jesuit correspondence, in early printed publications, and finally as contemporary histories written in the aftermath of the events. Rather than looking at the well-coordinated propaganda efforts of the Society, this study foregrounds sources that were less public, and shows that in their efforts to acquire and control information the Jesuits produced diverse, sometimes contradicting, reports of the Ming-Qing transition. These, as well as the more famous missionary publications, varied according to the different audiences across the Jesuit networks and the missionaries' political affiliation. Examining the changes in Jesuit reports of current affairs highlights the Society's contribution to the market of news in Europe and demonstrates how a Chinese historical episode gradually consolidated into an 'object of knowledge' in Western minds. Taken together, the two parts unearth an inclusive vision of early globalization that illustrates the making of long-distance communication in the early modern era as the product of the convergence between organizations and individuals, logistics and faith, 'East' and 'West.'