

Multidisciplinary Approaches to 16th-18th Century Latin Works on China and Chinese: ongoing projects, current challenges and future perspectives.

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From the 16th to the 18th century there was an exceptional production of Latin texts on China. Latin was the learned language used in the official correspondence and in most of the publications across Europe, at that time, and the curiosity about China was at its apex due to the copiousness of information available through travelers, merchants and, above all, Jesuit missionaries.

After spending several years in those lands with evangelization purposes, the Jesuits would come back to Europe with a great amount of information willing to share it and spread it. In doing this, their main aim was to attract the interest of powerful people and obtain funds for the mission to build seminars and churches. It is also true, though, that many missionaries during their apostolate became passionate towards the culture of the country in which they were carrying out their duties, and decided to deepen their knowledge of it. Jesuit missionaries in China realized that they were facing a millenary civilization, that the cultural interchange between China and the West should have taken place on an equal base, that the approach should have been grounded on mental openness, tolerance and flexibility, in the process of conversion of people that were very different but not culturally inferior.

At the same time these missionaries understood the importance of making the peculiarity of Chinese civilization and tradition known to the old continent, which was eager of information but still too concentrated on itself. The circulation of their writings could not but stimulate and influence the thought and the research of the scholars it was coming in touch with. Therefore, many of them (Kircher, Leibniz, Caramuel, Goliuss etc.) also began to write works on China, thus contributing to the newly born sinological studies.

The variety of the texts compiled in those years was impressive and multiple skills together with multi-sided approaches are needed to better study them.

This presentation will briefly talk about the new wave of interest on these texts in the recent years, offering an overview of the main research institutions promoting their study and listing some of the past and ongoing projects. It will then move on presenting the main challenges and issues scholars may face while working on these texts, providing a few suggestions for the future.