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Interlopers at the Fringes of Empire: The Procurators of the Propaganda Fide Papal Congregation in Canton and Macao, 1700–1823

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Abstract

The office of the procurator of the papal Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide) offers a unique case study of noncommercial interloping in the long eighteenth century in the Pearl River Delta, and reveals the complexity and fluidity of life at the intersection of Asian and European maritime environments in that special human ecosystem. The oceanic infrastructure of the Age of Sail and the Sino-Western trade system in Canton sustained the Catholic missionary enterprise in Asia, and the professional figure of the procurator represented its economic and political linchpin. Procurators were agents connected with both European and Qing imperial formations, yet not directly at their service. They utilized existing maritime trade networks to their own advantage without being integral parts of those networks' economic mechanisms. All the while, they subverted Qing prohibitions against Christianity. Using sources preserved in Rome, this article offers new insights into the global mechanisms of trade, communication, and religious exchange embodied by the procurators-interlopers and their networks, with significant implications for the history of the Sino-Western trade system, Qing policies toward the West and Christianity, and the history of Asian Catholic missions.

Keywords: Guangzhou, Macao, Canton System, Propaganda Fide, papacy, Jesuits, Portugal, Kangxi Emperor, Clement XI, Yongzheng Emperor, Qianlong Emperor, Qing dynasty

Introduction

A rising tide of scholarship on early modern maritime history has focused on native Asian patterns of trade and military-political control, challenging the old paradigm of “European expansion.” Nevertheless, while in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Asian actors had a bigger share of the maritime initiative, during the eighteenth century Europeans increasingly dominated long-distance trade and intensified their military control of oceanic routes. The Pearl

River Delta became one of the greatest commercial hubs of global trade, attracting and serving the needs of merchants and vessels from Asia and Europe alike, under the control of the Qing state. As indicated by the title of this special issue of *Cross-Currents*—“Binding Maritime China: Control, Evasion, and Interloping”—“interlopers” shared Asian maritime spaces with states, para-states, and major commercial interests and trading companies, often overlapping with their networks in an ambiguous relationship of exploitation.

This article examines the figure of the procurator of Catholic missions in East Asia, a position based in the Pearl River Delta, as a specific case study of noncommercial interloping, in order to reveal the complexity and fluidity of life at the intersection of Asian and European maritime environments. I am partly inspired by recent scholarship uncovering the global economic networks of the missionary enterprise in Asia. The maritime infrastructure of the Age of Sail and the Sino-Western trade system sustained that enterprise, and the professional figure of the missionary procurator represented its economic and political linchpin at the interstices of empires. This man was concurrently a priest and an economic manager, materially supporting the spiritual enterprise of evangelization of the Catholic Church in surrounding independent Asian polities from his liminal position in Macao-Canton. In particular, I focus here on the procurators of the papal missionary agency of Propaganda Fide, whose archive, now in Rome, has survived relatively well the ravages of time, thus offering a rich documentary base to better capture the ambiguities of interloping.¹

Between the late seventeenth and the twentieth century, the papal Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide, best known as Propaganda Fide), based in Rome, sent “apostolic missionaries” to East Asia, trying to bypass the old royal missionary patronage systems of the Crowns of Portugal and Spain. The Iberian patronage system had been serving, and controlling, religious orders such as the Franciscans, Dominicans, and Jesuits since the 1500s. The new papal missionaries, belonging to a medley of religious orders and congregations, embodied the papacy’s ambition to be independent, to circumvent as much as possible the rights of royal patronage over the missions, and to remain above colonial politics. Figuratively speaking, these priests were religious stowaways traveling against the will of Lisbon and Madrid on the vessels of rival powers, such as France or Britain. Propaganda Fide used the newer networks of commercial shipping and international banking first

developed by Protestant maritime powers and East India Companies to move its personnel and funds to Asia.

Christian missions in China, supported by the Portuguese Crown and initially staffed only by Jesuits, had received the support of the literati class in the late Ming, and the patronage of the Qing dynasty until 1724. In that year, the Yongzheng Emperor forbade Christianity in the provinces, although he allowed a group of missionaries to remain at his service in Beijing as scientists, artists, and technicians. Missionaries outside the capital went underground, illegally continuing their activities and risking capture, expulsion, and occasionally death. Imperial luxury consumption habits, art, and technology were, however, the Trojan horses that missionaries employed to nest and survive within both the Qing court and the Canton System of international maritime trade, a complex of bureaucratic institutions, mercantile arrangements, and socioeconomic structures that connected the Pearl River Delta and China with global commercial networks and regulated the export of goods such as tea, porcelain, and silk, and the importation of select European luxuries and technologies.² By serving the state-building needs of the Qing, and pleasing the court through their services in the arts and sciences, Catholic priests in Beijing effectively protected the illegal and secretive religious activities of their confreres in the provinces. The missionaries' "capital" was calculated in number of converts, confessions, and communions as much as in Spanish pesos or silver taels. They took full advantage of the established structures of commerce and state control as their own vectors—being implicated in, yet often subversive of, them.³

If so-called Propagandists had reached China almost as stowaways, the procurators, who represented and supported Propaganda Fide's religious missions at the fringes of the Qing Empire, qualified as "interlopers" in the broadest sense of the word. They were infiltrators, passing their lives on shore, "intercepting the advantage that one should gain from the other" (Johnson 1755)—as the eighteenth-century definition goes—and interacting with many different parties, including the Portuguese, the Spanish, the French, the Qing, the papal bureaucracy, Chinese and foreign mercantile communities, the British and Dutch East India Companies, the Jesuits, the native Christians, and others. Procurators were agents connected with both European and Qing imperial formations, yet not directly at their service. They also utilized existing

maritime trade networks to their own advantage without being integral parts of those networks' economic mechanisms.⁴

The procurators ensured communication between Propaganda Fide's Roman headquarters and its missionaries in China and Southeast Asia (Cochinchina, Tunkin, Burma/Pegu, and Siam); managed the financial administration and distribution of funds and materials sent from Europe; and supervised all sorts of administrative and disciplinary matters regarding missionaries in the field. They supported the illegal inner missions in China, thanks partly to intelligence and indirect patronage at the Qing court gained through the long-term presence of Propaganda Fide missionaries serving as clockmakers, painters, and musicians.

To succeed in their job, procurators relied on the goodwill and collaboration of commercial companies and European and Asian states, as well as Chinese and Southeast Asian maritime networks. The procurators occasionally ran afoul of the Portuguese authorities in Macao, or of the Qing authorities in China, and they had to move their office between Macao and Canton twice, clearly revealing their nature as opportunistic interlopers. They did obtain a residence permit from the Qing government while in Canton, and later from the Portuguese in Macao and the British in Hong Kong. However, as we will see, their position remained precarious; they often had to live in quarters owned by others, and their status bordered on illegal. They lived dangerously not for economic gain, as most Europeans in Asia did, but to sustain a spiritual enterprise that was often subversive of state power.

A Maritime Hub for the Pope: Propaganda Fide and Its East Asian Procurement

Propaganda Fide was established in 1622 as one of the dicasteries (ministries) of the Holy See, for the purpose of coordinating and controlling all Catholic missionary activities in the world. However, this ambition, fueled by the spirit of the Council of Trent and the Counter-Reformation, was tempered by political realities. Overseas, the right of missionary patronage obtained by Portugal and Spain at the time of the discovery of the New World, and the presence of flourishing missions run by religious orders with the support of the two Iberian Crowns, de facto drastically reduced the extent of Propaganda Fide's reach (Pizzorusso 2000, 479).⁵

The attempt of the papacy to wrest control over evangelization from the Portuguese and Spanish was indeed only partially successful and encountered fierce resistance. It thus took

several decades for the papacy to establish a semblance of episcopal hierarchy in Asia (i.e., “vicars apostolic”) and to create a support structure for “apostolic missionaries” there. The needed assistance came from the French Crown. In the 1680s, Louis XIV saw Propaganda Fide’s efforts as an opportunity to extend the reach of French influence into the colonial possessions of his competitors, while earning prestige for France as a protector of Catholic missions. While Propaganda Fide slowly established small missionary outposts in the Chinese Empire, its vicars apostolic in China continued to experience jurisdictional opposition from Portugal and Spain. The financial backing of the French Crown and the logistical support of France’s navy and the fledgling French East India Company (founded in 1664 in part at the suggestion of the French China Jesuits), remained crucial, but the difficulties were truly enormous, and Propaganda Fide felt the need for a high-level intervention in China to set its enterprise on more solid footing. This eventually would lead to the creation of the office of Propaganda Fide’s procurator in Macao.

That decision represented a final compromise of an initial, more ambitious plan. Before settling on the establishment of a procurator with extended powers as the final solution, the papacy tried to establish direct diplomatic relations with the Qing court, proposing to station in Beijing a prelate sent by the Holy See, an idea that developed over several years. The Italian Franciscan Bernardino Della Chiesa (1644–1721), one of the first vicars apostolic in China—who was named bishop of Beijing by the Portuguese authorities as a concession to the pope—repeatedly suggested the idea of sending an apostolic legate to China starting in 1693 (Wyngaert 1947, 70–72). With the election on November 23, 1700, of a new pope, Clement XI (Giovanni Francesco Albani, 1649–1721), a relatively young and ambitious man, the situation became suddenly propitious for such an initiative. In September 1701, Propaganda Fide advised the pope to finally launch the embassy to the Kangxi Emperor, suggesting as apostolic legate and visitor a member of the Roman Curia, Carlo Tommaso Maillard de Tournon (1668–1710).⁶ Pontifical authorities hoped that Tournon could permanently reside at the Qing court as a papal representative and help coordinate all missionary work and also supervise some of its financial and logistical dimensions.

The maritime commercial routes between Europe and Asia, plied by vessels of the East India companies of several countries and by a multitude of other Asian ships, were the necessary conduits for the papal missionary initiative, whose success depended on a full understanding and exploitation of the transportation infrastructure and economic mechanisms of the maritime world. Unlike the Jesuits, Franciscans, and Dominicans who had received from the Iberian Crowns the right of free passage on their ships to Asia, papal envoys and missionaries had to use vessels of other countries to reach their destinations. The transportation of Tournon's legatine party in 1703 illustrates the logistical difficulties, as well as the complexity, of global maritime politics at the time.

To avoid Portuguese interference, Propaganda Fide and the Holy See's Secretariat of State decided that the legate would travel on a pontifical ship to Genoa and then Cadiz, and, once in Spain, secretly embark on a French ship sent by Louis XIV, who offered the pope to pay for all the expenses of the voyage (Combaluzier 1950). However, the War of Spanish Succession (1702–1710), which saw France and its allies in Spain in conflict with the Dutch, English, and Habsburg coalition, prevented the French ships from reaching Cadiz. The papal legate thus sailed on a Spanish ship to Tenerife in the Canary Islands in February 1703 and started preparations on his own for a passage to the West Indies, in order to reach China via the Pacific route. The French flotilla, however, eventually reached Tenerife on April 28, 1703, and on May 1 the legate and his party sailed off to Asia via the Cape of Good Hope. Apparently unbeknownst to the legate, the French expedition had been charged not only with transporting him to India, but also with attacking and capturing the cargo of Dutch or English enemy ships in Asian waters. The journey was slow and many sailors on the ship were affected by scurvy, which obliged the flotilla to deviate from its assigned route and stop at Île Bourbon (today's Réunion) off the coast of Madagascar for fresh provisions, delaying by almost three months its arrival in the French entrepôt of Pondicherry (India) to November 1703. From there, Tournon sailed to Manila on July 5, 1704, where he waited several months for a ship to China. On April 1, 1705, he finally arrived on an islet near Macao, where the Portuguese secular and ecclesiastical authorities met him. From there, without entering Macao, according to instructions received from the Holy See, he sailed to Canton, where he spent five months in the missionary residence of the Spanish

Augustinians, awaiting imperial permission to proceed to Beijing (for details, see Fatinelli 1705, 2, 4; Combaluzier 1950, 274).

This long and arduous journey shows how the men sent by the pope had to navigate political as well as marine shoals and rely on the courtesy of European and Asian secular rulers, and East India companies, to obtain passage and financial support. In fact, over the course of the eighteenth century, Propaganda Fide's apostolic missionaries would even travel on the politically unpalatable ships of the Protestant Dutch and English, whenever a French passage was not easily obtainable due to the fickleness of dynastic alliances and colonial wars (Fatica 1991, xxvi–xxvii, 42–50). This dependence on secular and commercial support exposes the structural weakness of the papal missionary enterprise and explains why Propaganda Fide finally approved what missionaries and vicars apostolic stationed in the field had advocated for some time: the establishment of a procurator's office in East Asia.

In the summer of 1705, while waiting in Canton to leave for his diplomatic mission at the Qing court, Tournon took the initiative to create the post. All of his peregrinations from port to port in Europe, the Atlantic, and Asia had no doubt made him painfully aware of the logistical difficulties of shipping personnel and resources across the oceans, and the need of an administrative center in a strategic Asian port. His apostolic visitation of the fledgling Chinese and Tonkinese Propaganda Fide missions, moreover, shed light on the precarious economic conditions of pastors and converts, mainly due to insufficient and long-delayed funding from Rome. Macao and Manila were not ideal seats for a procurator, given the opposition of Portugal and Spain to the papacy's designs, and, in fact, in 1698 Bishop Della Chiesa suggested that a procurator be based in a *Chinese* port, such as Canton (Guangzhou) in Guangdong or Amoy (Xiamen) in Fujian (De Munter 1957, 28; Margiotti 1973, 1002; Staffa 1959, 109).

Tournon ordered the purchase of a large house then owned by the Missions Étrangères de Paris (MEP) in the quarter of Xiaonanmen (小南門, Small Southern Gate) in Canton (see figure 1a), and named his assistant, Ignazio Giampé (1658–1726), as the first Propaganda Fide procurator (Margiotti 1973, 1002). As the most important center of Chinese international commerce, Canton was the preferred destination for the large vessels of all East India companies and the oceangoing junks from Asian countries, including peninsular and insular Southeast Asia and the Philippines. It was the terminal of a vast transportation network toward the interior of

China. It hosted a Catholic community ministered by several religious orders (Franciscans, Augustinians, Jesuits, Dominicans, MEP). Finally, it was the seat of the Qing governor and governor-general in charge of introducing foreigners to the court. The Propaganda Fide procurators would thus be well positioned to gather intelligence, to receive and send mail, and to facilitate the economic workings of the papal missions in China and Southeast Asia by networking with foreign and Chinese merchants, Qing government officials, the Portuguese authorities in nearby Macao, and the Spanish entrepôt of Manila. By virtue of their location in Canton, the procurators remained independent of colonial powers and intermittently tolerated by the Qing government, and they acted as “interlopers” at the intersection of large imperial formations and long-distance trade networks.⁷

The Canton residence remained the procurator’s seat until 1732, when procurator Arcangelo Miralta (1682–1751; in office 1729–1750) and all other missionaries were deported from Canton to Macao by imperial order. The missionaries’ expulsion was part of a broader attempt by the Yongzheng Emperor to control the foreign presence in Canton; at that juncture, some local officials even presented an impractical proposal to transfer all trade to Macao. In fact, this would have hurt the economic interests of the court, since having large ships sail to Whampoa (Huangpu) Island near Canton made them hostages of the tides and Chinese pilots, and thus more easily controllable and taxable by Qing officials—something impossible in Macao, where ships could sail to deep waters without warning. The expulsion of missionaries, however, risked jeopardizing the entire logistical and economic operations of the Catholic Church in the interior of China, including the two important Portuguese and French Jesuit missions at court, curtailing opportunities for easy shipping of mail and merchandise, and subjecting missionaries from France, Italy, and elsewhere to the whims of the Portuguese authorities in Macao. The German Jesuit Ignaz Kögler (1680–1746), head of the Astronomical Directorate in Beijing, immediately petitioned the Yongzheng Emperor to allow at least the procurators of the main religious orders to remain in Canton. The emperor requested his officials in Guangdong to explore the option, but in the end no missionary was officially allowed to return to Canton.⁸

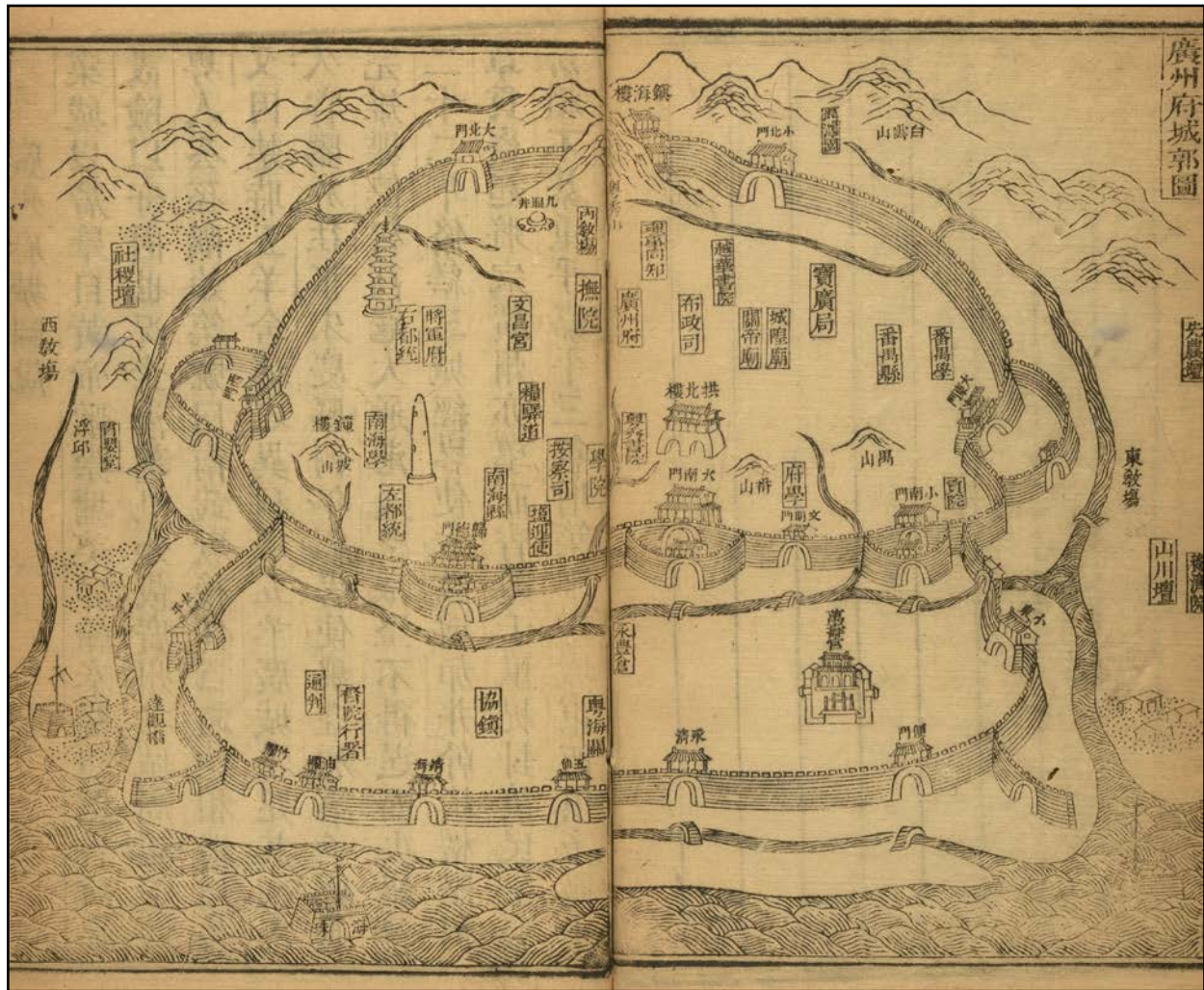


Figure 1a. Map of late imperial Canton. The quarter of Xiaonanmen 小南門, where the procurators lived from 1705 to 1732, occupies the lower right corner of the walled city of Canton. *Source: Guangzhou fuzhi 廣州府志 (Prefectural Gazetteer of Guangzhou), 1758, j. 2, 9b–10a, Harvard-Yenching Library, Rare Books Collection. Used with permission.*

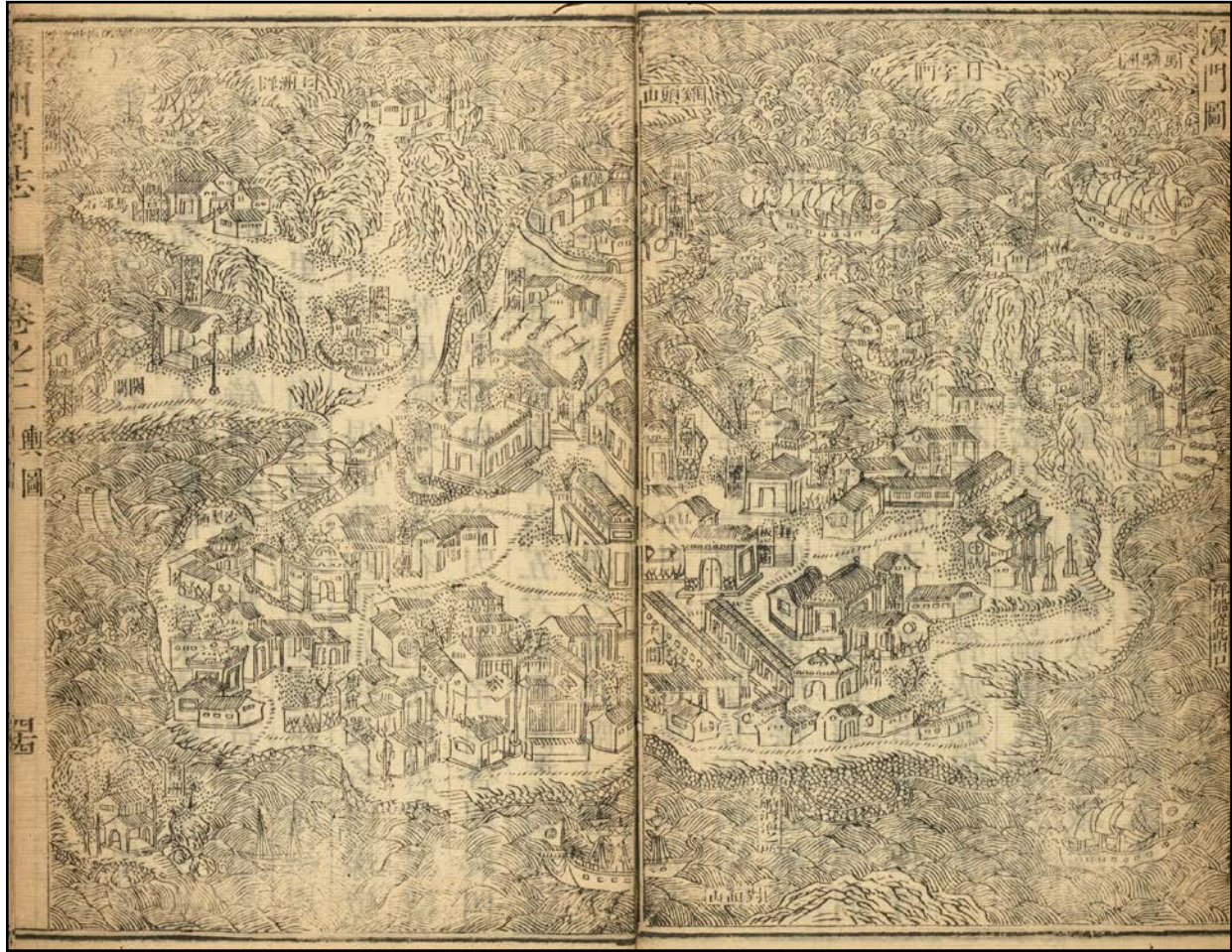


Figure 1b. Map of late imperial Macao. Between 1732 and 1776, the procurators resided in Macao, in the Dominican convent of São Domingos, known in Chinese as the “temple of wood planks” (*banzhang miao* 板樟廟), seen here at the center of the map (*zhang* is written in a variant form). In 1776 they returned to Canton and lived in the foreign factories, finally relocating to Macao in 1787. *Source: Guangzhou fuzhi* 廣州府志 (Prefectural Gazetteer of Guangzhou), 1758, j. 2, 43b–44a, Harvard-Yenching Library, Rare Books Collection. Used with permission.

This was the first forced transfer of the Propaganda Fide procurators’ residence away from Canton. As an agent of the pope infringing on the Portuguese *padroado*, Miralta was not allowed to purchase any real estate in Macao, but a compromise was reached. He eventually found hospitality in the convent of the Portuguese Dominicans (see figures 1b, 2a, and 2b), where the Propaganda Fide procurators resided until 1776 in a sort of jurisdictional limbo, as far as the Portuguese authorities were concerned.⁹ Some bishops of Macao actually protected the procurators against the expulsion orders of the Portuguese government (Vale 2002, 380–381).¹⁰

Procurator Nicola Simonetti (in office 1772–1778), however, sided with the Macanese governor against the new bishop, Alexandre Guimaraes (1727–1799), who had arrived in 1774 and was a supporter of the royalist policies of the Marquis de Pombal. When news reached Simonetti that his patron had been demoted by order of the viceroy in Goa, and that a new governor sympathetic to the bishop was on his way, he decided to hurriedly relocate to Canton in 1776 (Vale 2002, 392–394).



Figure 2a. The church, square, and convent of São Domingos (Saint Dominic) of the Portuguese Dominicans, seat of the Propaganda Fide procurators in Macao (1732–1776). Watercolor by George Chinnery (1774–1852), c. 1835–1838. *Source:* Private collection; image from Bonhams Auctions, London (December 6, 2012), © Bonhams 1793, Ltd. Used with permission.

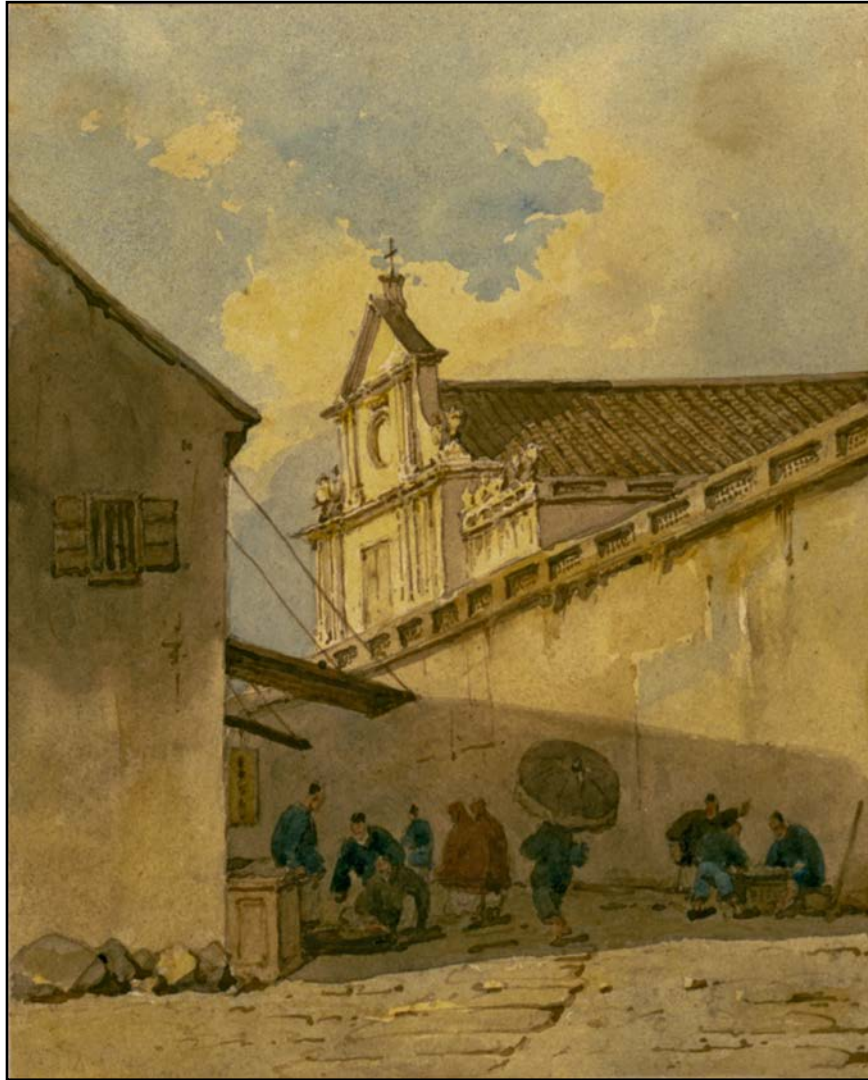


Figure 2b. Street scene with São Domingos Church. Watercolor by George Chinnery, c. 1840–1845. *Source*: Peabody Essex Museum, Museum purchase, Augustine Heard Collection, 1931 M3810.84. Courtesy of the Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, MA. Photography by Mark Sexton.

This shows that the prohibitions of the Yongzheng era had completely lapsed. By the 1760s, after the establishment of the formal mercantile cartel of the Co-hong (*gonghang* 公行), foreign supercargoes began to permanently reside in Canton. An “interloper” like Simonetti was able to take advantage of this new tolerance to illegally live on imperial territory with the complicity of local authorities and merchants, while trying to obtain a residence permit from Beijing. The procurator apparently obtained the protection of the sympathetic Guangdong customs superintendent at the time (an office commonly known among foreigners as Hoppo),¹¹

and settled in “a comfortable dwelling” within the headquarters of the chief Hong merchant Pan Zhencheng 潘振承 (1714–1788), better known in foreign sources as “Poankeequa” or “Pam Ki Kua” (Pan Qiguan 潘啟官; see figure 3).¹² Simonetti was introduced to Pan by Jean-Charles François Galbert, interpreter of the French consul and son of a supercargo of the French Compagnie des Indes, with whom Pan had excellent relations. The procurator, moreover, also asked the Portuguese ex-Jesuit Felix da Rocha (1713–1781), court astronomer and cartographer in Beijing, to secretly intervene at court to obtain him an official residence permit in Canton.¹³



Figure 3. Portrait of Pan Zhencheng, painted on a mirror, 1770s. *Source:* Originally from the collection of Niclas Sahlgren (1701–1776), Director of the Swedish East India Company. Used with permission of the Gothenburg City Museum (GM: 4513), Sweden.

After Simonetti's death, Candido Paganetto (in office 1778–1781) and Francesco Giuseppe della Torre (in office 1781–1785) occupied the same quarters in Canton and obtained recommendations through the same French connection. Jean Matthieu Ventavon (1733–1787) and Luigi Cipolla (1736–1783), ex-Jesuits in Beijing faithful to the pope and members of the Propaganda Fide mission after the dissolution of the Society of Jesus in China in 1776, asked in 1778 their good friend in Canton, the French vice-consul Philippe Viellard, to recommend Paganetto to the governor-general of Guangdong-Guangxi as well as to Pan Zhencheng. The Propaganda Fide procurator, however, also had enemies in Beijing: other ex-Jesuits, faithful to the Portuguese Crown, wrote memorials to the Qing government, asking it to expel their papal enemy from Canton.¹⁴ Paganetto soon left the mission, discouraged by the conflictual situation, and the newly arrived Della Torre substituted him. Again, the Beijing missionaries used their connections to get him a permanent residence permit. In April 1782, the ex-Jesuit Louis Poirot (1735–1813) wrote to Della Torre that, through a friendly high official, he had “presented a memorial to request a residence permission for you... to the favored minister of the Emperor”—the notorious and omnipotent Hešen (He-shen 和珅, 1750–1799)—during an audience in which he conversed with him in Manchu and obtained assurances that the imperial grace was forthcoming. Apparently other ex-Jesuits in the capital, especially Ventavon, had earlier forwarded to Hešen a recommendation letter by Pan Zhencheng.¹⁵

Della Torre and his assistant, Giambattista Marchini (1757–1823), eventually obtained the imperial permit and could officially settle in Canton, but soon thereafter an incident revealed the precariousness of their situation. In 1783, ten Propaganda Fide missionaries from different congregations arrived in Macao but were treated poorly by the Portuguese authorities; they were therefore forced to reach Canton under cover, and to find illegal shelter with Della Torre. The procurator worried about spies and betrayals and wanted the group to disperse as soon as possible. Several of them left for different inland destinations (Sichuan, Shanxi, Jiangxi, Shandong), and in May 1784 the last four Italian Franciscans set out for their mission in Shanxi with the assistance of the Fujianese Chinese priest Peter Cai Ruoxiang 蔡若祥 (1739–1806). Imperial authorities eventually arrested the Italians in Huguang, together with some Chinese Christians, and discovered their connection with Della Torre. Several native converts were arrested in Canton, and the procurator was interrogated and asked to pay an enormous fine. He

could not do so, so the Hong merchants were requested to pay the penalty in his stead, as officials deemed the incident a consequence of the merchants' negligence in controlling foreigners. The Hong merchants offered the large sum of 120,000 taels of silver, which was advanced by the Guangdong provincial treasury to the central government to pay for river conservancy in Henan and would be repaid in four years by the merchants (thus being ultimately extracted from their foreign trade). However, the matter soon ballooned into a national security case. Imperial authorities perceived this party of foreigners to be connected to a Muslim revolt in northwestern China, prompting the Grand Council and the emperor to launch an empire-wide anti-Christian campaign. They also ordered a strict search for Cai Ruoxiang, who escaped with a Portuguese ship to Goa, following a Qing blockade of Macao designed to force his surrender.¹⁶

Local officials did not initially arrest Della Torre, as he held a legal imperial permit of residence. However, an edict issued on November 14, 1784, stripped him of his functions:

Duoluo 哆囉 [Della Torre], prompted by the request of persons of the interior, sent men there, and thus gravely violated our laws. Previously we have not punished him because he is, after all, a Westerner of no consequence. Though we do not suggest a punishment for him even now, we will not permit him any longer *to take care of the mail that comes in and goes out with the foreign ships.*¹⁷

This edict clearly shows that the emperor considered the task of the procurator (called in the documents *Luoma dangjia* 囉嗎當家, i.e., “Roman manager”) simply “to take care of the mail which comes in and goes out with the foreign ships.” The governor of Guangdong and the Hoppo deemed this edict too lenient and petitioned to have the office of the procurator abolished, arguing that Hong merchants could take care of the Beijing missionaries' mail. The emperor, however, resisted, out of respect for the court Europeans at his service:

The Westerners trade in Guangdong and come to the capital to engage in the arts, and this has never been forbidden. They have resided in Canton for a long time, but they must be closely watched, so that people from the interior cannot create bonds with them. If we would stop now allowing Westerners to reside in Canton just because this case is being investigated, *this would only show our suspicion and uneasiness and would not be the proper way of controlling the foreigners.* In addition, since Canton is only a short distance from Macao, what difference does it make whether Westerners are in Canton or Macao?¹⁸

Qianlong and the Grand Council therefore used the case to display imperial benevolence and confidence, rather than “suspicion and uneasiness,” toward the maritime world and the Canton System, clearly linking foreign trade with the work of the court missionaries. At this juncture, Pan Zhencheng, charged by Qing authorities with monitoring Della Torre, visited him and suggested that he leave for Macao. Della Torre, however, did not heed this advice, and he was arrested in January 1785 and transferred to Beijing for interrogation. He was not ill-treated, but he became mortally sick in prison and died at the end of April, on the day an imperial pardon obtained by the ex-Jesuit Ventavon was about to reach him (Willeke 1948, 113).

As a result of this government campaign, the missions of Propaganda Fide suffered serious damage, as over forty missionaries were discovered, arrested, and deported from China. However, Qianlong’s edicts show that, while condemning the illegal entry of missionaries in the inland provinces, the emperor tried to protect the procurators and did not order their expulsion from Canton. Marchini, Della Torre’s assistant in Canton, for example, was not considered guilty of abetting the entrance of the Italian Franciscans and could thus remain in the city. He became interim procurator and immediately set all of his energies on obtaining permission from Lisbon to return to Macao, where he transferred the procuration house in 1787; Macao remained its seat until its transfer to British Hong Kong in 1842. Officially confirmed as procurator in 1790, Marchini served in that capacity for a total of thirty-seven years, from 1786 until his death in 1823. His life spanned the end of the European Ancien Régime, the French Revolution, the Napoleonic period, and the restoration of the Congress of Vienna, characterized by a continuous British ascendancy in maritime East Asia. In China, he experienced the waning years of Qianlong’s ambivalent tolerance of missionaries, followed by a steep decline and the actual end of Propaganda Fide’s presence at the Qing court under Jiaqing in 1811, all before the game-changing Opium Wars ushered in a new era for the Qing Empire, the Canton System, and the missions (Metzler 1985, 95–97). The 1820s are thus an appropriate chronological end point for this article.

In sum, the office of procurator in Macao-Canton emerged as a compromise solution after the failure of two papal legations at the Kangxi court in 1705 and 1721 to establish a foothold in Beijing for the Holy See to supervise *all* missionaries in China and East Asia.¹⁹ The position eventually evolved into a hybrid bureaucratic-ecclesiastical post, to manage the Propaganda Fide

missions and coordinate with Rome the activities of the vicars apostolic. The creation of the procurator's post responded to the need to solve eminently practical problems, determined by the enormous distances of the maritime global routes, the long time required to obtain decisions from Rome, and the economic needs of missionaries. Dominicans, Franciscans, and Jesuits had long tackled these problems by instituting overseas missionary provinces with ample autonomy. Propaganda Fide was a much more centralized operation in the papal tradition, and this would always remain one of its weaknesses. Circumstances, however, finally dictated the establishment of the procurator's office in Asia, with a certain degree of discretionary executive powers, in the suitably liminal location of the Pearl River Delta. The church used all of its influence to safeguard the functions of the procurator, switching as necessary from Qing imperial protection in Canton to Portuguese royal acquiescence in Macao, "intercepting" with French help the advantage that Pan Zhencheng and the Canton System offered through connections with official and mercantile interests in Beijing, Canton, Macao, and Manila. The various functions of the procurators, and how they concretely operated as "interlopers" in the Sino-Western maritime world, will be described in the next section.

The Job: Logistics and Finances

The most arduous task for any missionary was the initial travel to reach China from Europe. The procurator in East Asia was not involved in the maritime travel arrangements. Propaganda Fide had to rely on religious orders and congregations to recruit men for China, and each order or congregation had its own procurators in Europe and overseas, who would provide alms and shelter for the journey in coordination with Rome.²⁰

Mail, funds, and merchandise could be sent via any route, and Swedish, Danish, and English ships were preferred for their reliability. Whenever possible, however, Propaganda Fide missionaries themselves tried to use French vessels leaving from Lorient in Brittany. Traveling missionaries found lodging in convents along the route to the ports and received assistance from the nuncios in Paris, Lisbon, and Madrid. These papal diplomats played a crucial role in supporting the operations of Propaganda Fide, acting as a postal service for the papacy; offering intelligence to Rome; implementing central orders regarding missionaries in their jurisdictions; transferring funds to banking agents, even all the way to India and East Asia; obtaining needed

passports and discounted passage; and purchasing gifts to soften Qing authorities and the imperial court.

The services of the procurator in the Macao-Canton region became crucial upon arrival. The missionaries waited on board their ship for instructions, eventually disembarked, and moved to the procurator's quarters. Depending on their status, missionaries then had to wait either to be smuggled illegally inland, or to obtain imperial permission to proceed to the court in Beijing, issued via the office of the governor-general of Guangdong-Guangxi in Canton. Christian guides would rent vessels and arrange for the underground priest to leave Canton clandestinely, while court missionaries usually had to pay an official visit to the governor-general's palace and receive a travel permit. To reach Beijing, the missionaries used their own alms, money received from Propaganda Fide, and support offered by the imperial government. Since the new priests initially spoke no or little Chinese, they always traveled with local Christian guides. Once they reached their destination, missionaries maintained a constant epistolary relationship with the procurator, who became one of their few sources of information and funding. While they usually maintained a relatively familiar rapport with him, missionaries also had to pay him respect as a superior and earn his trust, in order to continue punctually receiving their subsidies in silver; receiving and sending correspondence; and being provided with necessities such as books, religious images, foreign gazettes, medicines, wine, tobacco, chocolate, Indian textiles, clocks, supplies for technical work at court, and gifts for the court (see Menegon 2013).

This brings us to the important economic functions of the procurator. One of the main annual duties of the procurator was to produce the "Conti della procura" or "Stato della cassa generale"—that is, the general accounting of the procuration for the past year. This document, accompanied by a series of "Note ai conti" (Notes on the accounting) explaining the individual entries, was sent to the Roman headquarters together with the "Memorie," a narrative report of the yearly events. Once received in Rome, an accountant at Propaganda Fide analyzed the "Stato." If problems were detected, the procurator had to answer for them. Obviously, the entire process could take years, and several procurators had to face deficits and the burden of heavy debts, finding solutions on their own while waiting for a Roman decision.

A set of instructions written in Rome for Emiliano Palladini (1733–1793), the new procurator dispatched to Macao in 1760, provides a good sense of the economic responsibilities

of the office (D'Arelli and Tamburello 1995, 214–228). At the time, the Propaganda Fide missions in East Asia included outposts in Siam (Thailand), Cochinchina (Southern Vietnam), Western Tunkin (Northern Vietnam), and Pegu (Burma). However, all of these missions were run and funded by religious orders affiliated with Propaganda Fide but financially independent, such as the French MEP and Italian Barnabites. Propaganda Fide had closed its small mission in Eastern Tunkin (Northern Vietnam) in previous years, leaving it to the care of the Dominicans of the Province of Our Lady of the Rosary in Manila, who were under Spanish royal patronage. In China, religious orders supported several vicariates apostolic, including the French MEP in Sichuan and the Spanish Dominicans in Fujian. The procurator directly supported the Italian Franciscans in Northern China and the Beijing Propagandists with an annual stipend that varied according to status and location. A European missionary in Beijing would get the equivalent of 200 Mexican pesos a year, while a Chinese priest received 100, and a Chinese catechist 25. In Shaanxi, Shanxi, Huguang, and Shandong, the vicars apostolic got 250 pesos, European missionaries 125, Chinese priests 70, and Chinese catechists 25.

Propaganda Fide in Rome had to first authorize the transfer of funds from its general budget to commercial agents, papal nuncios, or some other prelate. Most of Propaganda Fide's income came from landed properties, real estate, and commercial rentals in Rome and the Pontifical States, as well as inheritances and donations by benefactors, sometimes established as pious foundations in Italy, Europe, or overseas.²¹ We have a record of these transfers in the "Recapiti," the registers of authorized payments kept by the congregation. In the early eighteenth century, transfers were complex operations involving multiple steps. In 1724, for example, Propaganda Fide issued a mandate worth 422 Roman gold scudi to the procurator, a sum donated by the former vicar apostolic of Fujian Mons. Charles Maigrot MEP (1652–1730), then retired in Rome. The procurator was supposed to distribute these alms among different recipients, including the former China vicar apostolic Claude de Visdelou (1656–1737), self-exiled to Pondicherry after the debacle of the Tournon mission, and two members of the 1721 papal legation transferred from China to Burma.²² It is likely that Propaganda Fide asked the procurator to make the payment from Canton and to use multiple channels to reach his men in India and Burma, buying with silver the equivalent in gold. The procurator supplied Rome with information on the fluctuation of exchange rates of gold and silver in India in order to explain his

numbers: “This year gold has been very expensive, and we had to pay it 111 taels every 10 ounces; ...in Madras, 10 Chinese ounces of gold correspond to 125 pagodes, and 100 pagodes usually correspond to 125 pesos.”²³

In the last quarter of the eighteenth century, the system apparently became more standardized and easily monitored based on existing commercial channels, and Propaganda Fide started using the services of the firm Pedemonte Fratelli Ardizzone in the port of Cadiz via the nuncio in Madrid, but also directly, as it took only two weeks to transmit information between Rome and Cadiz. In a 1777 letter, for example, these agents communicated the arrival of a Swedish ship, the *Sofia Madalena* (i.e., *Drottning Sophia Magdalena*), under the command of Captain Carlo Gustavo Ekenberg [*sic*, for Ekeberg] directed to China.²⁴ They carried 5,000 Spanish pesos on that ship for the procurator Simonetti in Canton, and sent to Rome a receipt signed by the captain. The total amount for the operation came to 5,369.4 pesos, with a 7.4 percent surcharge for the transaction in Europe alone, including 1 percent (50 pesos) paid to the captain for transportation, and 37.12 pesos for “other minor expenses till embarkation on the ship.”²⁵

In fact, the remittances sent by Rome never reached the intended final destination in their entirety, as a portion had to be paid for shipping and exchange fees *within* China as well. In case wars, shipwrecks, or other factors delayed the funds from Rome, the procurator could borrow money from local European or Chinese merchants in Macao and Canton, from the procurators of other religious orders, or even from the charitable institutions of the Casas de Misericordia (Houses of Mercy) and mounts of piety in Macao and Manila, and pay interest amounting to 25 percent or more.²⁶

In Canton, moreover, the procurator could count on Chinese Christians for help. In the 1760s and 1770s, for example, a certain “Signor Lieu Antonio” acted as the mission’s Chinese agent in Canton. Lieu began his career as a postal courier, traveling between Beijing and Canton to transport the mission’s mail and funds. He soon used this position to start a business, maintaining a commercial relationship with a Christian correspondent in Beijing. He would invest the Propaganda Fide’s silver arriving from Europe in merchandise, or possibly even commercial loans, and by 1766 he had become rich enough to purchase “a mandarin’s button for 500 taels.”²⁷ Once he had that rank, Lieu refused to carry European letters any longer, probably

for fear of being intercepted by the authorities and losing his new official title. By 1776, he was residing mostly in Canton and acting as a sort of bank for the missionaries, issuing letters of exchange against the surrender of Spanish silver coins coming from Macao, whose value was transmitted to the missionaries by his Beijing agent. In that same year, one missionary observed that “[Lieu] earns a lot, receiving in Canton so much money in advance, which he then makes payable to us so late in Beijing” at the 93-carat exchange rate for silver current in Canton, inferior to the current rate in the capital.²⁸

Contacts with French, English, and Swedish supercargoes and other foreign merchants were particularly coveted in supporting the operations of the procurator. Procurator Palladini and the Propagandists in Beijing, for example, corresponded with the Swedish supercargo Jean Abraham Grill (1736–1792) in Canton, asking him to forward their mail to Europe, borrow funds, disburse the annual subsidies to transiting missionaries, or purchase goods in Europe and Canton on their behalf. Grill obliged, in exchange for influence peddling among imperial officials close to the court missionaries, and the acquisition in Beijing of natural specimens, insects, and plants that he would send on to his learned friends in Sweden (see Müller 2008).²⁹ Once again, a procurator-interloper inserted himself in the complex system of commercial transaction of global trade, at the intersection between empires and mercantile networks.

The Job: Intelligence and Communication

When the Cadiz agents delivered the Spanish pesos to Captain Ekeberg in 1777, they also sealed in the same box the bundle of official dispatches from Rome for safekeeping. This reference to the dispatches, and the fact that they were hidden in the most secure box where the sizable amount of annual subsidies was locked, show the importance that correspondence with Europe and between the procurator and his men in China had in order to run a smooth operation. The procurator was, in fact, concurrently an intelligence officer and a postmaster.

Intelligence Officer

Macao and Canton were good spots to gather gossip, rumors, and political and economic intelligence from Europe, maritime Asia, and China. Of course, some of the information had to be cross-checked with the help of others closer to the source. This was particularly true for the

happenings in the Qing imperial capital. One of the Beijing missionaries commented in 1724 that the procurator in Canton “is 600 leagues away from the Court, and does not understand its manners.” He added a comparison, perhaps out of proportion in terms of the distances involved, but aptly tailored to his Italian ecclesiastical correspondents: for the pope to post a procurator in Canton was not unlike having the king of France or the German emperor station their agents at the papal court in Civitavecchia, the main port of the Pontifical States, rather than in Rome itself.³⁰ This was an unfair jab by a notoriously grumpy veteran in Beijing, the Lazarist priest and musician Teodorico Pedrini (1671–1746). The procurators actually tried to convey the best information they could gather, summarizing the letters of the China inland missionaries and missionaries in the Philippines and India, reporting what they had heard from foreign and Chinese merchants, and also using Qing government channels and the imperial gazettes to copy or translate materials in Chinese in the long annual reports already mentioned (the “*Memorie del procuratore*,” an extensive manuscript series deserving of further study).

Aside from detailed reports on each Propaganda Fide mission in China, the “*Memorie*” also comprised spiritual and economic accounting, descriptions of progress and persecution, and numerous excerpts of letters from missionaries, as well as tidbits of current events in China, Beijing, Canton, Macao, and the maritime world surrounding China, from Manila to Southeast Asia and India. Rumors and news about the emperor’s health, his whereabouts, and court politics were often noted, since they affected the China mission. In 1727, for example, the Discalced Carmelite Rinaldo Maria di S. Giuseppe Romei (1685–1760), the vice procurator of Propaganda Fide stationed near the Summer Palace in Haidian at the outskirts of Beijing, reported to procurator Miralta in Macao the arrival of the Yongzheng Emperor to the palace early in the morning on June 2, and the news of the death of his most beloved brother on June 18:

The emperor showed great sorrow for his brother’s death, and bestowed on him great honors, even after his death. We Europeans were also called to kowtow six times in a courtyard [of the palace], we brought candles..., separately from the mandarins. The emperor showed us favor as you will see in the Gazette, and since this [defunct] prince was in charge of the Europeans [in Beijing], many of our missionaries went to ask His Majesty about his imperial health, like all Grandees of Beijing did, as there is nothing else we can do to positively influence him toward us.³¹

The missionaries also reported to the procurator what they heard about feuds within the imperial family. For example, the Discalced Carmelite Giuseppe Maria di Santa Teresa Pruggmayer (1713–1791) reported from Beijing in 1765 the “disgrace in which the empress wife has fallen. She was repudiated and locked into a small room, which can be called a prison, and this for having cut her own hair in response to some injurious words that the [Qianlong] Emperor proffered against her.”³²

The procurators also gathered news on Qing military campaigns and political scandals. In a letter written in 1768, for example, Palladini informed Cardinal Lazzaro Opizio Pallavicini (1719–1785), future secretary of state of the Holy See, about the war between the Burmese and the Thai and the destruction of the Siamese capital. He also reported the “consternation” of the Court of Beijing in learning about several defeats of its own troops in Burmese territory. Palladini finally relayed the gossip that the Burmese king was supporting a pretender from the Ming house in hope of unseating the Manchu monarch, considered a usurper.³³ In 1771, the procurator requested from a Propagandist at court fresh news on the Qing’s Burmese war campaign, but in that instance the missionary replied that he could not openly ask for this kind of sensitive information at court.³⁴

The procurators collected information from the official *Beijing Gazette* (*Jing bao* 京報), incorporating digests and extracts sent from his men in the capital, as well as materials from copies directly acquired in Canton. In 1728, for example, a long manuscript in Italian and Chinese with a sampling of news and political decisions from the gazette was attached to the “Memorie,” and in 1752 the court clockmaker and Discalced Augustinian Sigismondo da San Nicola Meinardi (1713–1767) began purchasing the “daily gazettes of the memorials submitted to the emperor” with the permission of the procurator, so as to be “immediately informed every day about relevant news and take action as needed.”³⁵

When important events for the church happened at court, or anti-Christian campaigns swept the empire, the procurator and his agents also tried to gather original Chinese documents and send them to Rome. Often, bribery of clerks in the administrative offices of provincial governors, and even in Beijing, yielded nice Chinese-language copies of edicts, memorials, interrogations, and trial transcripts, still preserved in ecclesiastical archives in Europe today. The procurators were also asked to gather legal materials that could help the church understand the

judiciary system of China in times of persecution. For example, in 1727, the Lazarist Ludovico Antonio Appiani (1663–1732) sent to Propaganda Fide from Canton copies of the Ming and Qing legal codes acquired in Beijing, precisely at the time of some of the fiercest anti-Christian campaigns by the Yongzheng government.³⁶

Finally, the procurator received European (Dutch, Italian, French, English, and Portuguese) “gazettes and *mercures*” through their maritime networks, updating him and the other missionaries on events back home and on the geopolitical changes affecting the maritime world and the balance of power among states. These magazines were also prized by the missionaries as a much-needed diversion and way to soothe their homesickness. The Discalced Carmelite Arcangelo Maria di Sant’Anna Bellotti (1729–1784), a clockmaker in Beijing, repeatedly begged the procurator to send on to the capital those gazettes after they had been read in Canton, writing once that “I have really enjoyed the news about wars that you sent me, because in Europe the reading of such gazettes was a great source of entertainment for me, and now that I lack them, I feel like I live in another world.”³⁷ And, of course, the gazettes kept the missionaries abreast of recent events: Pruggmayer, for example, asked in 1776 for some gazettes from Canton, “as we know nothing new about this year’s events, especially the war of the English against their American subjects.”³⁸

The documents that best reflect the Propaganda Fide procurators’ far-flung links across the globe are their registers of correspondence with the minutes of their outgoing letters, some of which have survived from the period 1761 to 1874. Even a quick glance at the letters penned in Portuguese, Spanish, Latin, Italian, and French by the multilingual procurators, and occasional Chinese versions translated for them, shows the extent of Propaganda Fide’s network. It included members of the Roman Curia; superiors within Propaganda Fide; clergy across Italy and Europe; commercial agents in Cadiz, Madras, London, and Manila; captains and supercargoes in Canton and Macao; Portuguese authorities in Lisbon, Macao, and Goa; ambassadors and nuncios in Europe; noble patrons in several Italian states; vicars apostolic and missionaries in China, Southeast Asia, and India; procurators of religious orders in Europe, the Philippines, and Macao-Canton; and Chinese Christians and priests.³⁹

Postmaster

Important mail from Macao was usually sent in three or more copies, and in the second half of the eighteenth century the preferred routes were via England, France, and Portugal. The Portuguese route, however, was the least secure, since relations with the Crown were tense. Especially when maritime wars intervened to disturb navigation, neutral ships from Sweden sailing via Cadiz would be used. Another possible neutral way was via Malabar in India, then to the bishop of Babylon or the superior of the Discalced Carmelites in Bassora (Basra in Mesopotamia), and from there to Italy (D'Arelli and Tamburello 1995, 218–219).

Forwarding mail to the Chinese inland missions from Macao or Canton represented another, quite different challenge. The procurator and his missionaries often used their own couriers to transport letters and parcels from Canton-Macao to Beijing and vice versa. These couriers were usually Christian men employed as servants or sacristans by the missionaries, or simply lay converts, engaged in professions that naturally took them from Beijing to the south. Pay alone was usually not enough to entice these men, so another important incentive for couriers was the possibility to earn a living by engaging in commercial activities between Beijing and Canton.

The more successful of these Christian “courier-merchants” sometimes also acted as financial agents for the mission in Canton, as we have seen in the case of Antonio Lieu. Some also used their connections with the world of foreign priests and merchants to obtain positions within the office of the Hoppo in Canton, and the staff of the governor-general of Guangdong-Guangxi, based in Canton.⁴⁰ In 1766, for example, Dekui 德魁, a director within the Imperial Household Bureau (*Neiwufu lanzhong* 內務府郎中) who was in charge of European court artisans, was named as the new Hoppo. Fr. Arcangelo mentioned him as “our friend... [with whom] we used to meet and talk daily, and who by nature would not damage us Europeans,... and who has offered to help us in all we might need.” Two Christians joined his staff and left Beijing at his expense for Canton, later acting as informers and messengers for the mission.⁴¹ Pruggmayer also referred to one “Yao Mathia, baptized many years ago in Beijing, who then moved with his whole family to Canton to become rich with the Customs.” At the end of 1780, Yao was in Beijing, ready to return back to Canton with “recommendation letters to get a job in the Customs, written by a mandarin in Beijing to the Grand Custom Official of Canton, recently

sent there by the emperor.”⁴² Earlier that same year, we find a reference to mail given to a Christian clockmaker called Luigi Kao, who was included in the retinue of the new governor-general of Guangdong-Guangxi, Gioro Bayansan 巴延三, traveling from the capital to his post in the southern province.⁴³

Christian servants, however, were too few to support all the needs. “What’s the use of money [from Europe] if we [here in Beijing] lack people to send [to the south to collect it]?” asked Pruggmayer in 1777.⁴⁴ This is why the internal courier system had to be supplemented by other channels of transportation, including trustworthy Chinese merchants traveling between Canton and the north, who agreed to transmit mail and arrange for the shipping of larger parcels and merchandise. Some were Christians, others sympathetic non-Christians. In addition, a firm of Christian merchants from Linqing in Shandong, site of one of the Franciscan missions and seat of the vicar apostolic, served the missionaries along the imperial Grand Canal well for many years.

Private couriers were not, however, the only way to send letters. Missionaries could also employ the imperial postal system, as did many officials, in spite of an imperial prohibition against using it for private correspondence (Wilkinson 2013, 159). The experience was not always positive, as the official system was slow and letters sometimes got lost. The connections of foreign supercargoes with the Hong merchants in the Canton System became useful to expedite mailing through the official postal system. In October 1766, the emperor issued an edict that all letters for the Europeans in Beijing had to be forwarded by the chief Hong merchant to the imperial post for delivery without opening or delaying them.⁴⁵ In 1767, missionaries commented that the most reliable channel to send mail via this new system was the French supercargo and his Hong merchants: that year the French Jesuits received their mail from Canton in the record time of fifty-nine days. Ten years later (1776), however, the official mail seemed to be slow and impractical again: sending letters from Beijing to Canton via the county magistrate of Guangzhou delayed their delivery, as they often sat for a long time in his office (Menegon 2013).

The secrecy of the mail was also an issue. At a time of conflict between Propaganda Fide and the ex-Jesuits under Portuguese and French patronage, the procurator, under the protection of Pan Zhencheng, decided to use the official post controlled by the county magistrate only for

ordinary dispatches, as they were sent to the Imperial Astronomical Directorate in Beijing still controlled by pro-Portuguese ex-Jesuits. Sensitive correspondence was instead sent through faithful merchants. The same caution applied to outgoing mail to Europe, as the papacy was often at loggerheads with Portuguese authorities. After the dissolution of the Society of Jesus, disputes about Jesuit properties in Beijing and papal supremacy over the Portuguese-backed episcopal hierarchy occupied much of the procurator's energy. These clashes obliged him and his missionaries to be very careful with their mail, lest it be intercepted by their enemies. Here, the procurators had to act, once again, as interlopers within various "postal systems" to safeguard their vital correspondence with Rome and within Asia.

The Job: Ecclesiastical Disciplinary Functions

Jurisdictional struggle brings us to the last set of duties and rights of the procurator. From the point of view of the church, his ecclesiastical and religious functions were most important. The procurator had disciplinary functions to fulfill and was increasingly given broader autonomous powers over his subjects. For example, while missionaries from specific orders and congregations would join their brethren in the locales where they already had missions, all others (including the Chinese priests trained in the Chinese College of Naples) were to be assigned their final destination by the procurator. He also had to vet new missionaries, communicating to Rome whether they had sworn the papal constitution against the Chinese rites, what their education, moral character, and doctrinal knowledge were like, and what mission they were joining. He also received one of three copies of the annual report that the vicars apostolic compiled for Propaganda Fide, keeping him abreast of all happenings in the missions. He needed to maintain a "spiritual accounting" of all infant and adult baptisms, confessions, communions, and last rites (extreme unction) in the missions, and to investigate whether Christians and priests were following orthodox practices. While he did not have judicial authority, he nevertheless was encouraged by Rome to use all means to help solve problems within the vicariates in East and Southeast Asia "inspired by his determination to obtain peace and love."⁴⁶ In his annual "Memorie," the procurator included extensive excerpts from the letters by missionaries and vicars apostolic filed in the procuration archives, relating advances and setbacks, and also suggested policy measures. This, in the end, was the core function of the procurator, and the

ultimate reason why he needed, when necessary, to act as an interloper to help his brethren “to go and teach all nations,” as the evangelical motto adopted by Propaganda Fide went (see figures 4a, 4b, and 4c).⁴⁷



Figures 4a, 4b, and 4c. Three seals representing the global mission of the Propaganda Fide congregation, seventeenth century to the present. Upper left (4a): Seal of the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith on the title page of Diego Collado OP, *Ars Grammaticae Iaponicae Lingvae* [A grammar of the Japanese language], Rome, 1632. *Source*: Project Gutenberg EBook # 21197. Upper right (4b): Nineteenth- or early twentieth-century seal of the Congregation, unknown provenance. *Source*: <https://www.evangelici.info/propaganda-fide>. Lower center (4c): Current seal of the Pontifical Urban College of Propaganda Fide, the Congregation’s missionary seminary established in Rome in 1627. *Source*: <http://www.collegiourbano.org/>.

Conclusion

The Canton System (1700–1842) was an enormously complex social and commercial organism, unique in the world because it was, in Qing historian Paul Van Dyke’s words, “so heavily dependent on the special geographical, topographical and hydrographical qualities of the Pearl River Delta, and on the special relationship with Macao” (Van Dyke 2005, 10). Scholars have recently explored this region on its own terms, not only as a connector between China and the maritime sphere, but also as a distinct human ecosystem.⁴⁸

Foreign Catholic missionaries and native Christians were among the myriad actors inhabiting this liminal zone, straddling the oceanic world and the dense socioeconomic fabric of late imperial China. The figure of the procurator brings together different strains of the Pearl River Delta’s complexity. While embodying the universal evangelizing project of the Catholic Church—his core calling—he had to be conversant with the Canton System and the global trade mechanisms in the Age of Sail, and to do so in several languages; to familiarize himself with the intricacies of Qing and Southeast Asian bureaucratic procedures and court politics, and the equally byzantine dynastic and state rivalries of the Europeans; to navigate the social landscapes of colonial Macao and Qing Canton; and to communicate with missionaries, Chinese converts, and non-Christian sympathizers in inland missions, both to comprehend their situations and to facilitate his ecclesiastical, economic, and logistical tasks.

The procurator thus played multiple roles, without fully belonging anywhere. In other words, he was the ultimate interloper. Yet his interloping in the Delta could obtain the desired results inland only if connections to the native society were solid, a linkage that was only minimally assured by his own efforts. It could happen mainly thanks to relationships of trust cultivated both locally and across long distances by pastors and converts living hundreds or even thousands of miles away from Guangdong, in Shanxi, Shandong, Bei Zhili, Huguang, Sichuan, Fujian, Cochinchina, Tunkin, Burma, Siam, and so on. As we saw, the Qianlong Emperor and his Grand Council also astutely noted this crucial factor in 1784, when writing that Westerners “have resided in Canton for a long time, but they must be closely watched, so that people from the interior cannot create bonds with them.”⁴⁹ Silver, ships, and correspondence might have been the necessary material means supporting the illegal and legal activities of the church within the Qing Empire and Southeast Asia, but without the intangible ingredients of moral conviction,

communitarian spirit, and religious motivation by these “people from the interior” (*neidi ren* 內地人), the whole enterprise would have collapsed without leaving a trace.⁵⁰

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Notes

- 1 On the professional profile of missionary procurators in general, see, e.g., Golvers (1999), Figueira de Faria (2007), and Frison (2010). A seminal essay on missionary finances in the early modern China mission is chapter 17, “Finanze,” in Margiotti (1958); recent research is exemplified by Vermote (2013). All nineteen Propaganda Fide procurators in China between 1705 and 1904 were Catholic priests. Some were secular priests, independent of any congregation; others belonged to orders or congregations, including the Chierici Regolari Minori (Minor Clerics Regular), the Chierici Regolari della Madre di Dio (Clerics Regular of the Mother of God), the Sacra Famiglia di Gesù Cristo (Congregation of the Holy Family of Jesus Christ), the Battistini (Congregation of Missionaries of St. John the Baptist), the Franciscans, and the Missioni Estere di Milano (Foreign Missions of Milan). On the Propaganda Fide procurators' archive in Rome, see Metzler (1985).
- 2 See Van Dyke (2005) for the most recent assessment of the Canton System in these broad terms.
- 3 On Yongzheng's policies toward Christianity as a subversive religion, see Menegon (2017a); on the use of technical skills as “Trojan horses,” see Menegon (2016) and (2018b).
- 4 For a recent volume on early modern commercial interlopers *sensu stricto*, see Denzel, de Vries, and Rössner (2011). For the contemporary definition of interloping mentioned here, see Johnson (1755, 522), under “to interlope” and “interloper.” The word *enterloper*, a combination of Latin and medieval Dutch, emerged in English in the 1590s and denoted

- an unauthorized trader trespassing on privileges of chartered companies. By the 1630s, the word had also acquired the general sense of “self-interested intruder.”
- 5 On the Portuguese opposition to the papal diplomatic initiatives in China, see de Saldanha (2003).
- 6 On the staffing and professional profile of the legation personnel, see Menegon (2012).
- 7 On Canton and its maritime network, see, for example, Van Dyke (2005) and Blussé (2008, 50–53).
- 8 On the procuration in Canton, see Margiotti (1973, 1003); on the 1732 expulsion, see Zhongguo (1999, 1:168–175, especially 169–171, doc. 124, indicting memorial by Guangdong governor Ortai, August 21, 1732; and 173, doc. 126, imperial edict to Ortai, October 16, 1732); Yang (2004); Van Dyke (2005, 7); and Stücken (2003, 322–335).
- 9 See APF, SOCP vol. 36 (1732–34), Miralta, “Succinta Relazione dell’espulsione infame de Missionari di Cantone,” 421–423v; Vale (2002, 345–46 and 379–81).
- 10 The Crown had developed strong suspicions against the Jesuits and the Holy See for decades, and an attempt on the life of the king in 1759, in which some Jesuits were allegedly involved, precipitated a break in relations between Portugal and the papacy in the period 1760–1769. See Miller (1978, ch. 3).
- 11 “Hoppo” is the shorthand used by foreigners for the official in charge of the Guangdong Maritime Customs (Yue haiguan bu 粵海關部)—i.e., the Guangdong Customs Superintendent (Yue haiguan jian du 粵海關監督), called in Italian sources *supremo Mandarino della dogana* (supreme mandarin of the customs). From 1774 to 1778, Dekui 德魁 was Hoppo for a second term; on his connections to the missionaries, see below.
- 12 Pan, a native of Xiamen, had spent time in Manila as a young man and was fluent in Spanish; for biographical information on Pan, see Hummel (1943, 605–606); Cheong (1997, 161–164); Wilkinson (2013, 585); and Van Dyke (2016, 61–96).
- 13 APF, SOCP vol. 62 (1780–1781), Pruggmayer to Propaganda, Beijing, November 4, 1778, 37r; APF, *Procura Cina*, box 1A, Da Rocha to Simonetti, Beijing, November 26, 1776, 1r, and Beijing, March 2, 1777, 1r.
- 14 APF, *Procura Cina*, box 9.2, Poirot to Paganetto (?), Beijing, 1779? On Viellard, see Cordier (1908).
- 15 APF, *Procura Cina*, box 9.2, Poirot to Della Torre, April 25, 1782, 1r; box 16.2, Ventavon to Della Torre, January 17, 1782.
- 16 On the 1784–1785 anti-Christian campaign, see Willeke (1948); on Cai Ruoxiang, see Menegon (2010).
- 17 *Qing Gaozong shilu* 清高宗實錄 (Veritable Records of Gaozong), juan 1216, 7a, as translated in Willeke (1948, 111) with my modifications; see also Zhongguo (1999, 441, doc. 275, November 14, 1784), emphasis added.
- 18 *Qing Gaozong shilu*, juan 1218, 18a–18b, as translated in Willeke (1948, 112), emphasis added; see also Zhongguo (1999, 451, doc. 282, December 22, 1784).
- 19 The second papal legate, Carlo Ambrogio Mezzabarba, attempted in 1721 to obtain from Kangxi the same position of “superior of all missionaries” in Beijing, but was rebuffed; see Menegon (2012).
- 20 On missionary travel, see Menegon (2018a).
- 21 On the financial organization of Propaganda Fide, see Pizzorusso (2014).

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- 22 APF, *Recapiti*, 1724, entry no. 159.
- 23 APF, SOCP, vol. 31 (1723–1725), 257r. On exchange rates and currencies, see Margiotti (1958, 375–376).
- 24 This is the renowned Swedish explorer Carl Gustaf Ekeberg (1716–1784), correspondent of the naturalist Carl Linnaeus and captain for the Swedish East India Company’s voyages to China (see Hildebrand and Molin [1949]).
- 25 APF, SC, *Indie Orientali e Cina*, vol. 35 (1776–1778), 298r–299v, Pedemonte Fratelli Ardizzone to Cardinal Castelli, Cadiz, March 14, 1777.
- 26 See e.g. APF, SOCP, vol. 36 (1732–1734), 222r, Miralta to Propaganda, December 20, 1731, on a 25 percent loan disbursed in Canton by Pierre Duvelaër, supercargo of the French East India Company in 1727–1731, to be paid back by the nuncio directly in Paris.
- 27 APF, *Procura Cina*, box 14, Arcangelo to Palladini, June 4, 1766, Haidian, 1r.
- 28 APF, *Procura Cina*, box 17, Pruggmayer to Simonetti, Beijing, May 5, 1776, 2v.
- 29 The procurator’s and missionaries’ letters to Grill are kept and digitized at the Nordiska Museet in Stockholm (<http://ostindiska.nordiskamuseet.se/>). In the same archive, see also a 1765 letter of exchange to Grill signed by Palladini for the Armenian merchant Mattheus Joannes in Macao; Van Dyke (2005, photograph of the letter, plate 38).
- 30 APF, SOCP, vol. 31 (1723–1725), Pedrini to Appiani, Beijing, October 6, 1724, 203r–204v.
- 31 APF, *Procura Cina*, box 29, Romei to Miralta, Haidian, July 3, 1730, 1r–v.
- 32 APF, *Procura Cina*, box 17, Pruggmayer to Palladini, Beijing, October 2, 1765, 1v. This is actually a reference to the rumors that surrounded the second empress consort of Qianlong, née Ula Nara. In 1765, when she accompanied the emperor on a tour in Shandong, she tonsured her hair and became a nun. Branded as insane, she in fact might have chosen this course because of some dispute with the emperor, and we know that this episode fed many rumors, mostly unfavorable to the emperor, that Pruggmayer obviously picked up on too; see Hummel (1943, 372, the entry on Hung-li [the princely name of the emperor] by Fang Chao-ying).
- 33 APF, *Procura Cina*, box 41, “Registro delle lettere del Procuratore Palladini,” 1767–1769, Palladini to Cardinal Pallavicini, January 13, 1768, 1r–v. On missionary intelligence at the Qing court, see Menegon (2017b).
- 34 APF, *Procura Cina*, box 18, Giovanni Damasceno della Concezione Salusti OAD to Palladini, Beijing, August 4, 1771, 3v.
- 35 APF, SC, *Indie Orientali e Cina*, vol. 19 (1727–1728), 717r–731v, “Ristretto di varie notizie cavate dale [*sic*] Gazzette”; APF, *Procura Cina*, box 15, Sigismondo to Procurator Francesco M. Guglielmi, Beijing, September 10, 1752, 1r–v.
- 36 APF, SC, *Indie Orientali e Cina*, vol. 19 (1727–1728), 243r–244v. These copies of the Ming and Qing Codes are today in the Vatican Library, *Borgia Cinese* collection.
- 37 APF, *Procura Cina*, box 14, Arcangelo to Palladini, Haidian, February 24, 1763, 2r.
- 38 APF, *Procura Cina*, box 17, Pruggmayer to Simonetti, Beijing, September 9, 1778, 2v.
- 39 APF, *Procura Cina*, boxes 41, 42, 43.
- 40 On these connections, see Menegon (2016).
- 41 APF, *Procura Cina*, box 14, Arcangelo to Palladini, June 4, 1766, Haidian, 1r.

- 42 APF, *Procura Cina*, box 17, Pruggmayer to Paganetto, Beijing, February 12, 1781, 1r.
 43 APF, *Procura Cina*, box 17, Pruggmayer to Paganetto, Beijing, February 17, 1780, 1r.
 44 APF, *Procura Cina*, box 17, Pruggmayer to Simonetti, June 29, 1777, 3r.
 45 Zhongguo (1999, 380–382, doc. 244, October 10, 1766).
 46 See Metzler (1985, 80), citing a 1768 letter from the procurator.
 47 Propaganda Fide’s motto is “Euntes in mundum universum, praedicate evangelium omni creaturae” (Go ye unto the world and preach the gospel to every creature), from Christ’s command in the Vulgata version of the Gospel of Mark (16:15). Propaganda Fide also adopted another similar motto: “Euntes docete omnes gentes” (Go and teach all nations), from the exhortation in the Gospel of Matthew (28:19): “Euntes ergo docete omnes gentes, baptizantes eos in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti” (Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost).
 48 See most recently, in English, Faure (2007) and Miles (2017).
 49 *Qing Gaozong shilu*, juan 1218, 18a, as translated in Willeke (1948, 112).
 50 On the combination of material and intangible factors in the history of late imperial Christianity, see Menegon (2009).

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 - SC: *Scritture Riferite nei Congressi* [Documents referred to in the General Meetings] series *Indie Orientali e Cina* [East Indies and China]
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