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‘TO GO TO CHINA OR JAPAN ... NOT TO STAY IN THESE COLLEGES.’ JESUIT PROCURATORS OF CHINA AND PETITIONERS FOR THE INDIES (1640s AND 1690s)

Elisa Frei**

ABSTRACT

The Society of Jesus was a missionary order since its foundation in 1540. Many of its members chose to join it precisely because as Jesuits, they had the opportunity to go to the farthest and most unknown countries in the world. Jesuits who wished to become missionaries wrote the so-called *litterae indipetae*, petitions for the Indies. Thousands of these are still preserved in the Roman Archive, unedited, providing access to the desires, dreams, and fantasies – as well as the strategies, problems, and discomforts – of young European Jesuits of the Early modern age.

This article considers the different relationships some European Jesuits established with their confreres stationed in China as missionaries when they returned to Europe, through direct contact, correspondence and writings about the missions emerging from the *litterae indipetae*. It examines the visits of two men as case studies: the return to Europe in the 1640s of the Portuguese procurator Álvaro Semedo (1585-1658) and, by way of a comparison, the visits in Italy of the Italian procurator Filippo Grimaldi (1686-1694) half a century later.

On one hand, the procurators had the chance to select people with whom they had directly talked, those who seemed best suited to the missionary life in countries they well knew. On the other, their passage could trigger among the Jesuit candidates desires and vocations to the missions. Each overseas appointment was, in fact, influenced by political factors, the candidates' family circumstances, as well as the local superiors' or the General's opinions. Therefore, procurators were not always successful: because they could not bring with them all the people they wanted, or because their tours did not always obtain the same popularity among the European Jesuits.

Keywords: Asia, *Litterae Indipetae*, Jesuit Procurators, Álvaro Semedo, Filippo Grimaldi

* The original quotation is: "pera a China ou Japam ... não pera estar nestes collegios" (Manuel Ferreira, Goa, March 30, 1639, Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (ARSJ), Rome, *Fondo Gesuitico* (FG) 757, fol. 52).

** Elisa Frei is project assistant for the *Digital Indipetae Database* under development by the Institute for Advanced Jesuit Studies, Boston College, and a research associate at the Centre for Renaissance and Early Modern Studies, University of York, UK. I would like here to thank Seth Meehan, associate director of the IAJS, for his precious support during the revision of this article, and Isabel Pina, for showing me some examples of Portuguese *indipetae* mentioning Semedo, and for kindly offering me her help in re-thinking the topic of this article. I also thank prof. Eugenio Menegon for his first suggestions and my dear friend Francisco Malta Romeiras for his final remarks.

INTRODUCTION

Francis Xavier (1506-1552) was the first missionary of the Society of Jesus to travel beyond the Old Continent, departing in 1540 for the Portuguese *Estado da Índia*. From that period on, hundreds of missionaries sailed on the ships from the *Carreira da Índia* for more than two centuries, until the Portuguese crown expelled the Jesuits from their territories in 1759, and the Society was officially suppressed in 1773.¹

The Society of Jesus, led by its Superior General, had to choose many candidates for the missions (not only those within the Portuguese assistancy). The selection of missionaries was especially important because the East Indies were very remote and the Jesuits' efforts there were not easily controlled from Rome. How, then, was the General to select the right person to send abroad? One strategy was to ask the procurator of a certain province to look for recruits during his European tours and to interview them (and their superiors) personally, in order to understand even better if the person was appropriate for this hard task. Another way was to invite Jesuits who wanted to be missionaries overseas to apply for the position, writing what today are known as *litterae indipetae*, because their authors were "*Indiam petentes*", asking for the "Indies" (Eastern and Western). This article compares how these two policies were employed in the Portuguese and Italian assistancies during the 1640s and 1690s, by analyzing the role in this appointment process of two procurators Álvaro Semedo and Filippo Grimaldi. Focusing on the vice-province of China, one of the most exotic and distant destinations at the time, the essay highlights the effect the procurators' European tours had on the missionary vocation of the local Jesuits. The procurator-petitioner interchange could ignite an apostolic *stimulus*, which often resulted in the writing of a *littera indipeta*.

JESUIT PROCURATORS AND *LITTERAE INDIPETAE*

Procurators played a fundamental role for the *indipeti*, but more generally within the Society of Jesus. The order was divided into assistancies, themselves divided into provinces. There were different kinds of procurators in the organizational structure of the Society, among whom were those elected to go to Europe (like Semedo and Grimaldi). However, this kind of procurator is not mentioned in the *Constitutiones*, where only a few references about procurators of another sort (such as the procurator general, provincial and of the colleges) can be found. The provincial procurators were responsible for the Society's temporal affairs: they "oversaw the man-

¹ On this topic, see Liam Matthew Brockey, "Jesuit Missionaries on the *Carreira da Índia* in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries. A selection of Contemporary Sources," *Itinerario* 31, no. 2 (2007): 111-32, 113. On the expulsion of Jesuits see Jeffrey D. Burson and Jonathan Wright, eds., *The Jesuit suppression in global context: causes, events, and consequences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

agement of the material possessions of the province through a sophisticated accounting and reviewing process,” and, apart from these administrative tasks, “represented the Society’s corporate interests to the outside worlds.”² These procurators were often temporal coadjutors and, once appointed, did not move from their residential community. This article focuses not on them, but on the procurators elected by their provincial congregations. They travelled to Europe to defend the interests of their *Provincia*, and were usually *professi* (admitted to take the four vows).

Procurators periodically left their missions for Europe from every part of the world, including the Chinese vice-province. One of the goals of their travels was to attract interest and funding for the East Asian mission from some of the continent’s most eminent people of the time, both lay and religious. Kings, princes, popes, and scholars (especially philosophers and scientists) had particular interests in Chinese culture; also, European women who were passionate and active benefactors of the overseas missions.³ Procurators from East Asia often also took part in book projects to describe this culture to eager European audiences. Nicolas Trigault (1577-1628), Álvaro Semedo (1585-1658), Martino Martini (1614-1661), Philippe Couplet (1623-1693) and others wrote, collected, curated and published materials which became very popular in Europe.⁴ In terms of what they brought back to their missions, Jesuit procurators transported goods of all kinds. One of the most requested items, especially among the Chinese court, were European books. They transferred money, religious objects—such as crucifixes, wine for the Eucharist, engravings, and devotional pictures – not to mention the shipment of herbs, medicines, and handicrafts (clocks, hourglasses, and musical instruments).

Moreover, procurators sought to move people from Europe to their missions, typically by visiting Jesuit colleges and schools to find new recruits. They would directly

² See J. Gabriel Martínez-Serna, “Procurators and the Making of the Jesuits’ Atlantic Network,” in *Soundings in Atlantic History. Latent Structures and Intellectual Currents. 1500-1830*, ed. Bernard Bailyn and Patricia L. Denault (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 181-209, n183. On Jesuit finances see Frederik Vermote, “Financing Jesuit Missions,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Jesuits*, ed. Ines G. Županov (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 128-49 and “Finances of the Missions,” in *A Companion to Early Modern Catholic Global Missions*, ed. Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 367-400. About the global character of the Jesuit enterprise, see Luke Clossey, *Salvation and Globalization in the Early Jesuit Missions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

³ Among others, the Spanish duchess of Aveiro, Christina Queen of Sweden and Maria Theresia Fugger von Welleburg were in contact with Jesuits and interested in overseas missions. On the subject see, respectively: Ernest J. Burros, ed., *Kino escribe a la Duquesa: correspondencia del p. Eusebio Francisco Kino con la Duquesa de Aveiro y otros documentos* (Madrid: Ediciones José Porrúa Turanzas, 1964); Susanna Åkerman, *Queen Christina of Sweden and her Circle: The Transformation of a Seventeenth-century Philosophical Libertine* (Boston: Brill, 1991) and Ronnie Po-chia Hsia, *Noble Patronage and Jesuit Missions: Maria Theresia Von Fugger-Wellenburg (1690-1762) and Jesuit Missionaries in China and Vietnam* (Augsburg: Wißner-Verlag, 2015).

⁴ On the endeavor of translating Confucius for Europe, see David E. Mungello, *Curious Land. Jesuit Accommodation and the Origins of Sinology* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985), esp. the chapter “*Confucius Sinarum philosophus* as a culmination of Ricci’s accommodation.”

approach Jesuits who were still involved in their religious formation and would fascinate them with stories about their missions, making promises to them and establishing special relationships with them. After leaving the schools, the procurators would try to use the information about their potential candidates for their missions to influence the Superior General's selection of the petitioners writing to him.

To understand why Jesuits petitioned for overseas assignments, the influence of the procurator's propaganda about his mission is one of the factors to be taken into consideration.⁵ *Litterae indipetae* reveal not only the effect that procurators had on a vocation to the Indies, but also the importance of the procurators to grease the mechanisms of an overseas appointment. The Superior General normally had no personal knowledge of most petitioners. He could have met someone during his daily life, especially Jesuits living in the Roman residences, but usually, he had to rely on other people's account. The local superiors had the first intermediary role, but they themselves often showed their willingness to keep their best members with them, instead of leaving them free to depart. This behavior was reasonable, considering how many years (and how much money) a province spent for the support, education, and formation of every Jesuit. After all these efforts, letting go of many persons was not what the local superiors preferred, especially in the case of talented and well-trained priests or artists.⁶

The procurators, on the contrary, had in their interests to involve many new Jesuits in their enterprises. They wanted to return to their missionary countries with all

⁵ The effect of a Procurator's European tour has already been demonstrated by Aliocha Madalvsky, especially in the Milanese residences in the seventeenth century. See: "Administrer les vocations missionnaires. Les Indipetae et l'organisation des expéditions de missionnaires aux Indes Occidentales au début du XVII^e siècle," in *Missions Religieuses Modernes. "Notre lieu est le monde,"* ed. Pierre-Antoine Fabre and Bernard Vincent (Rome: École française de Rome, 2007): 45-70; "Entre mito y saber: los jesuitas milaneses y las misiones lejanas en el siglo XVII," in *Missions d'évangélisation et circulation des savoirs XVI^e-XVIII^e siècle*, ed. Charlotte de Castelneau L'Estoile, Marie-Lucie Copete, Aliocha Maldavsky, Ines Županov (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2011): 41-57; "Società urbana e mobilità missionaria: i milanesi e la missione lontana all'inizio del Seicento," *Rivista di Storia del Cristianesimo* 6, no. 1 (2009): 159-84. Also, Delfosse noticed how a Procurator's passage had a fundamental role in the production of petitions for the Indies in the European colleges: Annick Delfosse, "«Ecce ego mitte me». Antoine Thomas ou le désir des Indes," in *The itinerary of Antoine Thomas S.J. (1644-1709), scientist and missionary from Namur in China / L'itinéraire d'Antoine Thomas S.J. (1644-1709), scientifique et missionnaire namurois en Chine*, ed. Isabelle Parmentier and Michel Hermans (Leuven: Ferdinand Verbiest Institut, 2017).

⁶ The Society's *Constitutions* clearly affirm that its members must respond to the missionary call, as highlighted in Alessandro Guerra, "Per un'archeologia della strategia missionaria dei Gesuiti: le *indipetae* e il sacrificio nella 'vigna del Signore'," *Archivio italiano per la storia della pietà* 13 (2000): 109-92, 150. However, the Ignatian order needed most of its members to stay in Europe. Therefore superiors, and even some Generals, complained about the shame of sending valuable Jesuits to the furthest destinations: for instance, Claudio Acquaviva would have preferred to keep Alessandro Valignano close to him rather than sending him to Asia, as he wrote: "io sento la lontananza sua, non solo per l'amore che gli porto ... ma per l'aiuto grande che ne potrei havere se fosse in Europa ... quelle parti pure imposte alle mie spalle" (letter written on April 9, 1581, preserved in ARSI, *Neap.* 2, fol. 67v and quoted in Guerra, "Per un'archeologia della strategia missionaria," 160).

the qualified people they could. The experiences of procurators of the vice-province of China in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries remain illustrative of these desires and how procurators sought to fulfill them. For instance, Nicolas Trigault was appointed procurator and went back to Europe after a few years in China. He edited and published Matteo Ricci's (1552-1610) treatise about the Ming Empire, with the title of *De Christiana Expeditione apud Sinas* (Augsburg, 1615). It immediately became a best seller throughout Europe and had numerous and immediate editions in Italian, French, German, Spanish, and later also partially in English.⁷

Ricci was one the first Jesuits who settled in China and practiced the *accommodatio*. According to this practice, as theorized by the Visitor Alessandro Valignano (1539-1606), Jesuits had to adapt themselves in every way to the new realities they encountered in their missionary territories, such as food, language, clothing, and ceremonies. Ricci never became a procurator nor went back to his assistancy, but it is likely that he addressed the petitioners for the Indies directly, trying to stimulate their enthusiasm. In his monumental, encyclopedic, and in-depth work, which was at the same time very compelling, Ricci relived his daily missionary life, in the third person and without rhetorical embellishments, aiming to recount only things personally seen or referred to him by trustworthy persons.

Trigault travelled as a procurator to the Jesuit colleges and residences in Europe during the 1610s. There is no doubt that petitions for the Indies in the *Gallo-Belgica* province peaked because of Trigault's European tour.⁸ The admiration for an exceptional person and the spirit of emulation he inspired upon his return were enhanced by the fact that he had entered the Society of Jesus in the Gallo-Belgian province. In his promotional tour, Trigault made a stop in Belgium. His manners, clothes, and stories of the missions left many of those he met open-mouthed and amazed. This reaction was true not only for the many curious and Jesuit supporters but also for the students and the Jesuits of a certain age, who were already aware of the first reports of the Chinese mission, thanks to the Society's publications of missionary accounts from there.

⁷ About Trigault see Liam Matthew Brockey and Anne-Marie Logan, "Nicolas Trigault, SJ: A Portrait by Peter Paul Rubens," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 38, no. 1 (2003): 157-68 and Luca Fezzi, "Osservazioni sul *De Christiana expeditione apud Sinas suscepta ab Societate Iesu* di Nicolas Trigault," *Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa* 35, no. 3 (1999): 541-66. At the time, several works on China were available to the European public: the Portuguese authors and readers were of course very interested in this topic. See some of João de Barro's *Décadas da Ásia* (the first book was published in 1552; Diogo do Couto was then responsible for nine other *Décadas*), and the *Tratado das cousas da China* (1569) by Gaspar da Cruz, a Dominican friar. The Spanish Augustinian friar Juan González de Mendoza published in 1585 the *Historia de las cosas más notables, ritos y costumbres del gran reyno de la China*. See on the subject Rui Manuel Loureiro, *Fidalgos, Missionários e Mandarins* (Lisbon: Fundação Oriente, 2000); and Antonella Romano, *Impressions de Chine. L'Europe et l'englobement du monde (XVI^e-XVII^e siècle)* (Paris: Fayard, 2016).

⁸ Trigault's case will not be analyzed in this article. On him, see Delfosse, "«Ecce ego mitte me»" and Edmond Lamalle, "La propagande du P. Nicolas Trigault en faveur des missions de Chine (1616)," *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu* 9 (1940): 49-120.

Procurators consistently appear in the *indipetae* of the early modern age, particularly in the months following their visit in a certain Jesuit residence. The procurators had the power to ignite a desire for the Indies, especially in students, who had some knowledge of the missionaries' accounts in the Indies but had never seen them in person. Some *indipeti* even attributed to procurators the merit of convincing them to join the Society of Jesus and instilling in them the desire to serve abroad. For example in 1722, in his *indipeta*, Domenico Mario recalled that, "a year before I entered the order, two procurators headed to Rome passed through Nice, my Fatherland."⁹ Young Mario had listened to the stories of those "great conversions that were made by ours, and our immense labors for God's glory" in the missions. The procurators' tales had filled him with such a "desire to go and serve those Fathers" that the next year he asked to become a Jesuit.

The procurators' tours of Jesuit schools and houses throughout Europe also provided the ideal opportunities for *indipeti* to renew their requests. A visit by a procurator, precisely marked a moment when new missionaries would be needed for imminent voyages. In these cases, the aspirants who had always focused on just one destination, describing it as the only one they desired, came to understand that it was better for them to change their strategy and to be suddenly persuaded to serve at another place (the one mentioned in the procurator's appeal), even if on the other side of the globe. The most insistent candidates took advantage of the procurators' tours to even show to the Superior General how aware they were of the latest missionary expeditions, of the type of missionaries required, and the operations' other logistical details. At times, writing an *indipeta* was certainly a spontaneous initiative. Yet, many candidacies were written during or soon after the visits by the procurators (with many explicitly mentioning them). Such petitions confirm once again how external factors intervened in the petition process, factors that could encourage the drafting of a letter or constrain it.¹⁰

The current historiographical trend of "gesuitomania" has revealed a keen interest for this kind of source.¹¹ At the Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (from now on

⁹ The whole Italian quotation is as follows: "un anno prima che entrassi nella Compagnia, passando da Nizza mia Patria due Padri procuratori per Roma ... grandi conversioni che per mezzo dei nostri si facevano, e le nostre fatiche immense per gloria di Dio ... desiderio di andare a servire quei Padri," ARSI, FG 751, fols. 227-227v, Genoa August 29, 1722.

¹⁰ Delfosse, "«Ecce ego mitte me»,” *passim*.

¹¹ For reference and the *status questionis* see Emanuele Colombo, "Gesuitomania. Studi recenti sulle missioni gesuitiche (1540-1773)," in *Evangelizzazione e globalizzazione. Le missioni gesuitiche nell'età moderna tra storia e storiografia*, ed. Michela Catto, Guido Mongini, and Silvia Mostaccio (Rome: Società Editrice Dante Alighieri, 2010), 31-59. On this topic, see also Gian Carlo Roscioni, *Il desiderio delle Indie. Storie, sogni e fughe di giovani gesuiti italiani* (Torino: Einaudi, 2001); Camilla Russell, "Imagining the 'Indies': Italian Jesuit Petitions for the Overseas Missions at the Turn of the Seventeenth Century," in *L'Europa divisa e i Nuovi Mondi*, ed. Giuseppe Marcocci and Stefania Pastore, vol. 2 ([Pisa]: Edizioni della Normale, 2011): 179-89 and id., "Vocation to the East: Italian Candidates for the

ARSI) there are thousands of letters, written from the sixteenth century until recent times from all over Europe. Although they often followed predetermined patterns, in many cases their authors showed through them their most intimate way of thinking and emotions. These letters had a very precise aim: the writers needed to convince the General that they were “the” Jesuits who had to be sent overseas and completely commit their life to the mission. *Litterae indipetae* therefore had a great importance for the Society of Jesus, and this is the reason why they were so meticulously preserved until today. On one hand, they were “for the writer, a spiritual account of his vocation for the mission and a clear expression of his motivation.” On the other hand, for the order, they were “a legal proof of the candidate’s own will, ready to be used against potential claims by the family, and a tool for the administration of vocations.”¹² They started to be collected around the 1580s, under the generalate of Claudio Acquaviva (1581-1615). There are now in ARSI about fourteen thousand *litterae indipetae* in the *Fondo Gesuitico* (from now on, *FG*), spanning from 1540 to 1773. The Portuguese *indipetae* of the Old Society are in ARSI, *Lusitania* 71, 72 and 73 (1592), and in *FG* 758 (1599-1600) and 757/II (1611-1717). As for the other nationality focused in this article, the Italian petitions are the most numerous group in ARSI, and can be found in *FG* 732-751, *Italica* 173 and *Veneta* 99. The other *indipetae* in ARSI come from the other assistancies, namely Spain, Germany, and France.¹³

ÁLVARO SEMEDO AND THE PORTUGUESE ASSISTANCY IN THE 1640S

The most represented nationality in the Chinese Empire was always, predictably, the Portuguese, even if Italians played an important role as well.¹⁴ More generally, in the case of Portugal, the overseas mission was “a natural outlet and a mass phenomenon.”¹⁵ The Portuguese assistancy was operative in four different continents: Europe, the Americas, Asia and Africa. More than 50% of the Portuguese Jesuits worked overseas, and this means that most of them were quite prepared to spend a

Jesuit China Mission at the Turn of the Seventeenth Century,” in *Renaissance Studies in Honor of Joseph Connors*, ed. Machtelt Israëls and Louis A. Waldman, vol. 2 (Florence: Villa I Tatti; Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies, 2013): 313-27.

¹² “Para el redactor un relato espiritual de su vocación por la misión y una manifestación abierta de su motivación ... una prueba jurídica de la voluntad propia del candidato frente a eventuales reclamos de la familia y un instrumento de administración de las vocaciones” (Aliocha Maldavsky, “Pedir las Indias. Las cartas ‘indipetae’ de los jesuitas europeos, siglos XVI-XVII, ensayo historiográfico,” *Relaciones* 33, no. 132 (2012): 147-81, n148).

¹³ For the evolution of the Jesuit assistancies and provinces, see the classic *Synopsis historiae Societatis Iesu* (Leuven: Typis ad Sancti Alphonsi, 1950), from column 632 on.

¹⁴ Joseph Dehergne, *Répertoire des Jésuites de Chine de 1552 à 1800* (Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1973), 398-401.

¹⁵ “Un horizon naturel et un phénomène massif” writes Charlotte de Castelnau L’Estoile, “Élection et vocation. Le choix de la mission dans la province jésuite du Portugal à la fin du XVIe siècle,” in *Missions Religieuses Modernes. “Notre lieu est le monde,”* ed. Pierre-Antoine Fabre and Bernard Vincent (Rome: École française de Rome, 2007), 21-43, n21.

life as missionaries, and very far from home.¹⁶ Correspondently, many Portuguese families were ready to wish their members a definitive farewell, because leaving as missionaries usually implied not coming back anymore.¹⁷ On these premises, one would think that the Portuguese *litterae indipetae* would be the most numerous group. In fact, this is not true, mostly for two reasons: they have not been preserved or never existed at all because the Portuguese candidates, rather than forwarding their requests to the General, usually spoke directly to their local superior.¹⁸

Álvaro Semedo, born in 1585 in Nisa, was a Portuguese procurator of the vice-province of China.¹⁹ He entered the Society aged 17 in Évora and, six years later, embarked for East Asia. After staying three years in Goa, he arrived in 1613 in Nanjing. Because of the government's persecutions against Christianity, in 1617 Semedo was expelled from there and exiled by imperial decree to Macau with the Italian confrere Alfonso Vagnone (1566-1640). Semedo reentered China in 1621 and was appointed procurator of that vice-province in 1636. He then had to leave for Rome a year later. He traveled through Lisbon and Madrid in 1640, in France and in Italy in 1642. In April 1644, he returned to the East, becoming the Chinese vice-provincial twice, from 1645 to 1650 and from 1654 to 1657. In the following years, he passed through Macau, Guangzhou and Hangzhou. Those years were crucial for Chinese (and global) history, because in 1644 the Manchu armies defeated the Ming dynasty, took the capital and established the Qing dynasty, who ruled the Empire until 1912. In 1658, after all these political turmoils, Semedo died in Guangzhou.

Semedo was important not only for the Jesuits, as procurator and vice-provincial, but also for the European public as a knowledge broker. Semedo was one of the first Europeans to see the Nestorian tablet, an ancient stele who testified the presence of Christianity in China many centuries before the Jesuits arrived there. He was a proto-sinologist, because his decade-long residence in the Empire allowed him an admirable fluency in its language and culture. Importantly, Semedo was also a writer. He drafted annual accounts from China (lately published in the *Litterae Annuae* collections, edited by the Society of Jesus), letters to Jesuit addressees and most of all,

¹⁶ For the story of the Portuguese assistancy, the classic reference is Dauril Alden, *The Making of an Enterprise: the Society of Jesus in Portugal, its Empire, and Beyond 1540-1750* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996). In this monumental work, he analyzes many data and explains almost every aspect related to the Portuguese assistancy.

¹⁷ Procurators were, curiously, almost the only ones who went back and forth from their missionary countries, not few of them dying in between.

¹⁸ L'Estoile, "Élection et vocation," 26.

¹⁹ For Semedo's biographical portrait, see: Dehergne, *Répertoire des Jésuites de Chine*, 245; Isabel Pina, "The European Circulation of Álvaro Semedo's work," in *China-Macau and Globalizations: Past and Present*, ed. Luís Filipe Barreto and Wu Zhiliang (Lisbon: Centro Científico e Cultural de Macau, IP; Macau: Fundação Macau, 2017), 90-103; Mungello, *Curious Land*, 74-95; Isabel Pina, "Álvaro Semedo," *Dicionário de Orientalistas de Língua Portuguesa*, accessed August 29, 2018, <https://orientalistasdelinguaportuguesa.wordpress.com/alvaro-semedo/>.

he was the author of the renowned treatise *Imperio de la China i Cultura Evangelica en èl*, first published in 1642.²⁰

Semedo's work appeared about half a century after the first Jesuits started working in the Chinese empire. At that time, China was a subject of great interest in Europe, mainly because of the favorable reports written by the Jesuit missionaries, who appreciated its "territorial and demographic size ... its economic and commercial development ... its intellectual greatness ... the association between knowledge and political power and the consequent socio-economic status ... the diffusion of the press and printed books."²¹ Semedo's positive account was another reason why China was generally so well seen by European intellectuals of the time. He was also not too critical about Chinese religions, following his predecessor Ricci's footsteps, and preferred to focus on an "idealized portrait of Chinese education," based on "good manners and filial obedience," also praising Confucius (551-479 BC ca.) as a "saint, master and doctor of the realm."²² This point of view was, of course, related to the Jesuit practice of *accomodatio*, a key strategy especially in territories such as Japan and then later China, where the European crowns had no military power and therefore the Jesuits had to find a way to thrive without external (and, usually, forceful) assistance.

During his time in Europe, Semedo was regularly and explicitly remembered in some *litterae indipetae*. Year after year, petitions for the Indies mentioned his name, showing what an impact he had on the vocation of his Jesuit-fellows. These letters were semi-private epistles, in which some of the writers' true motivations always remained implicit.²³ Petitioners were often silent about many issues, especially the practical ones: only a small percentage, for instance, mentioned openly a favorite

²⁰ It had several editions (eight only during the seventeenth century), in Spanish, Italian, French and English. The story of the original manuscript, which got lost, is not well known. It was probably written while Semedo was in Europe, around the 1640s. It is not even certain what language Semedo used: Portuguese (his native language) or Spanish, like in the first printed edition. In fact, it is not even sure if he was actually the author of the whole book, and in which parts his editor took the initiative. The latter, Manuel de Faria e Sousa (1590-1649), claimed some years later to be the author of the *Imperio de la China*, even if on the basis of Semedo's notes. Probably, the two collaborated into this monumental historical project, and also met personally in Madrid, during Semedo's European stay in 1640.

²¹ "Grandeza territorial e demográfica ... seu desenvolvimento económico e comercial ... sua dimensão intelectual ... a associação entre o saber e o poder político e o respectivo estatuto sócio-económico ... difusão da imprensa e dos livros," "Álvaro Semedo," *Dicionário de Orientalistas*.

²² Mungello, *Curious Land*, 83, 85.

²³ Every petitioner had the same aim, but very different strategies, skills and motivations to ask what he longed for. While they usually underlined their indifference and submission to the General's will, they sometimes actively asked for a specific destination. They claimed to be sincere and openhearted with the General, but several of them concealed to him important details. This becomes clear after reading the documents related to some *indipet*'s cases (see Elisa Frei, "The Many Faces of Ignazio Maria Romeo, SJ (1676-1724?), Petitioner for the Indies: A Jesuit Seen through his *Litterae Indipetae* and the *Epistulae Generalium*," *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu* 85, fasc. 170 (2nd Semester 2016): 365-404). See also note 11.

destination. A person in bad terms with his family could inform the General of possible protests, but it was more common for such a problem to come to light only *after* the General had appointed someone to the Indies and his family took action against it.²⁴ In the same way, someone wanting to go to China usually tried not to show himself too insistent on this destination, because expressing one's will and pouring out personal desires, hopes and fears were not the (official) reasons to compose *litterae indipetae*. Indifference was one of the Jesuits' most important peculiarities and the core of the fourth vow (strict obedience to the Pope in missionary matter).²⁵ Everything that clearly contradicted the *indifferentia* principle could cause the General's disapproval and consequent rejection. Therefore, if only several Portuguese *indipetae* mention Semedo's name, it does not mean that his role was limited only to those petitioners: probably, they were just the tip of the iceberg of the influence of the Chinese procurator.

In 1637, Pero da Costa was already in Goa (India) but wrote to the Superior General of the time, the Italian Mutio Vitelleschi (1615-1645), to have his position changed.²⁶ This became an ardent aspiration of his after Semedo's passage in his area, which gave him the chance to apply for Japan. China was a vice-province of the older Japanese province, and moreover the two empires were often intertwined in the Jesuits' imagination. At that time, missionaries were experiencing many troubles there: after the unification of the country by Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537-1598), the shōgun looked at the foreign presence as a potentially dangerous element. The admission in Japan of other religious orders (mostly Spanish Dominicans and Franciscans), the interruption of the Portuguese commercial monopoly and the increasing presence of Protestant merchants (esp. English and Dutch), were bringing what the Jesuit rhetoric saw and propagandized as a promising and flourishing mission to its end. Starting from 1587, constant bans were promulgated against Catholicism, until

²⁴ See for instance the aforementioned Jesuit Romeo, who received in 1704 the longed-for "licence" but whose family's intervention stopped from leaving for the Indies. In one of his dozens *indipetae* he wrote optimistically that his father approved of his decisions (in the meantime he was addressing a vociferous letter of protest to Rome), that his "mother's emotionally-charged protest (... 'squalling') was almost over, and that she seemed to him 'quite pacified'," trying to convince the General that the situation was not so bad as it could seem (Frei, "The Many Faces of Ignazio Maria Romeo," 377, 380).

²⁵ The famous fourth vow of *obedientia coeca* was not aimed at making create puppets in the pope's hands, but missionaries ready to go anywhere in the world the latter destined them. The Society of Jesus was not a mendicant order, and its members must and could not meditate and pray apart from the world: on the contrary, they had to immerse themselves in it, act, and live on constant move. Moreover, Jesuits "wore no distinctive habit; they did not recite or chant the liturgical prayers in choir; they resided in houses and colleges and not in monasteries; and they were governed by an authoritative superior general rather than provincial or general chapters" (Robert Aleksander Maryks, "Introduction," in *Exploring Jesuit Distinctiveness. Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Ways of Proceeding within the Society of Jesus*, ed. by id. (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 1-3, n2). See also John O'Malley, "The Distinctiveness of the Society of Jesus," *Journal of Jesuit Studies* 3, Vol. 1 (2016): 1-16.

²⁶ ARSI, FG 757, fol. 50, Goa, 10 September 1637. The most noteworthy part of his letter is the following: "no presente a boa ocasião, e chegada a esta Provincia do Padre Procurador Alvaro Semedo, me não excitaraõ a manifestar a V.P. estes meus não menos prolongados que firmes desejos da missão do Japão."

in 1641 the archipelago was closed to every foreigner (and as such stayed, according to the *sakoku* policy, until 1858). Nevertheless, all these political difficulties and the periodical persecutions and executions of Christians did not keep Jesuits away from dreaming of Japan, but on the contrary, these events only stimulated many men to ask for such a dangerous and probably deathly destination, as Costa's appeal reveals. However, petitioners asking for that destination meant also, more widely, the Jesuit province of Japan and its missions, like Tonkin or Cochinchina.

One year after Costa's letter, António Rebelo wrote to Rome to the same Superior General.²⁷ He wanted to be sent to China or Japan, and this desire had been in his heart for eleven years. Although underlining his demerits and faults, Rebelo believed himself the right person to work there. For him the time had come, because by then the procurator Semedo was on his way to Europe, ready to look for several missionaries to take with him back to China. Rebelo wanted to join them because, as for many other petitioners, it was more vital to leave as soon as possible, than to know where to go.

After another year, Manuel Ferreira wrote to Rome.²⁸ He spoke quite frankly, admitting that his life in Goa was not what motivated him to join the Society. He reported that "to be in these colleges is like being in Portugal," as the Portuguese crown recreated a branch of its empire very similar to the original country. It did not seem to Ferreira to be in an exotic and dangerous mission, but just to work in another fatherland. What he heartily wanted was to reach China or Japan, and he had already asked Semedo to be his intermediary, talking *vis-à-vis* to the General and sponsoring his cause. This probably did not happen, because Ferreira never went to China as well.

In 1640, Rui de Melo wrote from Coimbra asking the General for the overseas missions.²⁹ His testimony importantly confirms some of the petitioners' habits. One of them was to write (or at least, sign) epistles in blood. This way, the authors theoretically showed their commitment for the vow they made to go to the Indies – but sometimes also their despair.³⁰ From archival evidence, the phenomenon of using blood in a petition might not have been widespread, but Rui de Melo supposed that

²⁷ ARSI, FG 757, fol. 51, Lisbon, August 8, 1638. Rebelo wrote that the Lord was giving him "grandes dezejões da gloriosa missão da China e Japão." He hoped to join Semedo, who came to Europe from China, "pera na torna uiagem me embarcar em sua Companhia."

²⁸ ARSI, FG 757, fol. 52, Goa, March 30, 1639. The name on the signature has been overwritten and it is not totally clear if it is "Ferreira," a very common family name in Portugal. This Jesuit wrote: "procurador da China ... significaua a VP os deseios q Nosso Senhor me daua de ir pera a China ou Japam, e como esse fora todo o meu intento, quando pedi com tanta instancia a missão da India, e não pera estar nestes collegios, quem a ser quasi o mesmo que estar nos de Portugal."

²⁹ ARSI, FG 757, fol. 54/l, Coimbra, July 9, 1640. Rui de Melo imagined the General having received, through Semedo's intermediation, "muitas cartas escritas com sangue."

³⁰ Elisa Frei, "«To spread all my sweat, blood and life»: Italian Litterae Indipetae between 1690 and 1730," in *Narratives and Representations of Suffering. Failure and Martyrdom: Early Modern Catholicism Confronting the Adversities of History*, ed. Leonardo Cohen (Lisbon: Catholic University of Portugal, forthcoming).

the General would have received “many letters written in blood,” so he probably saw that many of his companions had the same idea. Secondly, Melo’s letter demonstrates how procurators not only met aspiring missionaries – talking with them and registering the names in their notes – but also, when possible, they collected these applications and concretely forwarded them to the General. In fact, even if someone volunteered for the mission in person, the Roman curia still needed a written certification of this intention, in case any second thoughts or familiar recriminations took place. Melo was not chosen either, because he died in Lisbon in 1694.³¹

One of the successful petitioners was Adriano Pestana, who was born in São Miguel island, Azores, in 1617, and entered the Society when he was eighteen. After eight years he left for Asia, where he taught at the Macanese College, from 1648 until 1654. In 1660, he disappears from the Jesuits’ Catalogues, so he probably either died by then, or, more likely, he left the order because his name does not appear among the deceased Jesuits.³² But before, in 1640, Pestana wrote a *littera indipeta* asking for the “glorious mission of China,” underlining that many times before he had done the same.³³ Moreover, he added that he was in close relationship with Semedo, who was ready to explain to the General all the reasons why Pestana was the right person to send there. The tight bond with Semedo and his recommendation were probably the reasons allowing him a successful missionary experience.

Baltasar de Sá contacted the General in 1641, pleading for the Japanese missions.³⁴ Again, the courier of this epistle was supposed to be Semedo himself. At that time, the political situation in Japan prevented any foreigner to enter without being immediately discovered, especially if he had a religious intent. Semedo took the chance and used the argument of the paramount difficulties in Japan to promote the

³¹ “Ulyssipone 13 febr. 1663,” Joseph Fejér, SJ, *Defuncti secundi saeculi Societatis Jesu. 1641-1740*, vol. 3: I-M (Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1988), 276. It is frequently impossible to find out where these petitioners lived and died. Repertoires for the Chinese empire are quite complete, and they list anyone leaving for China with the *Carreira da Índia* ships: it is quite sure who was operating there. As for the other petitioners, many of them left the Society, or simply disappeared from the Catalogues. Being the sketch of their biographies not the aim of this article, only if the informations are available on the main sources their destinies will be here mentioned; moreover, another problem is the homonymy of many Jesuits of the early modern age. The sources to find the main data about these “unknown” Jesuits are: Dehergne, *Répertoire des Jésuites de Chine*; Joseph Fejér, SJ, *Defuncti secundi saeculi Societatis Jesu. 1641-1740*, vol. 1: A-C (Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1985) and Joseph Wicki SJ, “Liste der Jesuiten-Indienfahrer 1541-1758,” *Aufsätze zur Portugiesischen Kulturgeschichte* 7 (Münster: Aschendorffsche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1967), 252-450. A recent thorough analysis of these repertoires, however, highlighted how they (esp. Wicki’s *Liste*) can lead to overestimate the death rate of Jesuits missionaries (Frederik Vermote, “Travellers Lost and Redirected: Jesuit Networks and the Limits of European Exploration in Asia,” *Itinerario* 41, no. 3 (2017): 484-506, n492-3).

³² Dehergne, *Répertoire des Jésuites de Chine*, 202.

³³ ARSI, *FG 757*, fol. 58, Coimbra, August 26, 1640. Pestana wrote about the “grandes os dezeios que Deus Nosso Senhor me communica da glorioza missão da China,” of whose appropriateness he was “mui acertado.” He was in close contact with Semedo: “a quem mui particularmente me tenho comunicado.”

³⁴ ARSI, *FG 757*, fol. 59/l, s.l., February 4, 1641. He too wrote to the General “pello padre Alvaro Semedo,” in order to “acompanha-lo pera o Japam ou China.”

creation of the province of China. Probably Sá was lucky to receive permission to leave, but he died during the journey to the East.³⁵

In 1642, António de Lessa gave to Vitelleschi an account of his vow to join the Society of Jesus to go to the East. He preferred Japan but, since it was officially closed by then, he was also willing to move to China.³⁶ In his case, he was invited by his local superior to write a request and give it to Semedo, who delivered it to the General himself. This testifies the close relationship between the General and the procurator, when it came to the selection of missionaries for the latter's territories. Lessa longed for the overseas mission for seven years, but this desire only increased after Semedo's visit and because of the actual opportunity to be sent there. Lessa was also under the influence of the Jesuits ready to leave for Asia, momentarily living in his college in Coimbra. Since his letter was written in April, all the preparation was probably almost done. He concluded his petition asking to adopt the name "António de Xavier", in honor of Francis Xavier, a hero of the Society of Jesus since its foundation. Xavier laid the foundations for many missions in Asia, remaining an ubiquitous symbol in the *litterae indipetae*, not only of the Old (until ca. 1773, depending on the country) but also of the New Society (after 1814).³⁷

These are but a few examples of the letters written by Portuguese Jesuits requesting missionary assignments abroad. The texts reveal much about the authors' personal desires, frustrations and joys. While procurators back in Europe rarely went unnoticed, they did not always bring the successful results they expected, in terms of money, grants and people. The overseas mission policy was closely related to them, but Jesuit superiors (first of all the General, but also local superiors) and also political circumstances influenced the outcomes of their tours.

FILIPPO GRIMALDI AND THE ITALIAN ASSISTANCY IN THE 1690S

It was very common for Jesuits of what is now Italy to serve in leadership roles during the last years of the Ming dynasty and during the first Qing emperors. This happened after Matteo Ricci in the case of the Tyrolean Martino Martini (1650-1659), the Sicilian Prospero Intorcetta (1666-1674), and the Milanese Filippo Grimaldi (1686-1694).³⁸

Grimaldi was born in Cuneo in 1638 and entered the Society of Jesus at the age of twenty.³⁹ He left Lisbon for Macau in 1666, a particularly hard time for the China

³⁵ "in navigatione Indica, 9 iul. 1650," Joseph Fejér, SJ, *Defuncti secundi saeculi Societatis Jesu. 1641-1740*, vol. 5: S-Z (Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1990), 1.

³⁶ ARSI, *Lus.* 74, fol. 288r, Coimbra, 13 April 1642. Part of this epistle has been translated into English in Brockey, "Jesuit Missionaries," 5.

³⁷ See note 2.

³⁸ Dehergne, *Répertoire des Jésuites de Chine*, 314-5, 401-4.

³⁹ See Grimaldi's biographical profile in Ugo Baldini, "Engineering in the Missions and Missions as engineering: Claudio Filippo Grimaldi until his return to Beijing (1694)," in *Tomás Pereira, S.J. (1646-1708). Life, Work and World*, ed. Luís Filipe Barreto (Lisbon: Centro Científico e Cultural de Macau, 2010), 75-

mission. The Qing government had previously forbidden Christianity, a policy that remained until 1671. In that year, Grimaldi traveled to Beijing, where he collaborated with his confrere Ferdinand Verbiest (1623-1688) in constructing scientific instruments. Because of these activities, Grimaldi gained Kangxi's favor and was appointed his ambassador for diplomatic missions to Moscow and Rome. Grimaldi arrived in 1689 in Rome, where important meetings and intellectual exchanges with the philosopher Gottfried Leibniz (1646-1716) took place. Leibniz was an ardent sinophile, intrigued by all the extraordinary firsthand news that only the missionaries like Grimaldi could give him, both in person and via letters. Grimaldi also had the chance to visit the major continental courts (such as Paris, Munich, Krakow, and Vienna) and meet with the most important personalities of the time, gathering support and funding for the China mission. After this extended European sojourn, Grimaldi returned to Beijing in 1694. Verbiest, though, had died six years earlier, and the emperor appointed Grimaldi to replace him as the president of his Mathematical Tribunal. Within the Society of Jesus, Grimaldi also rose quickly, becoming vice provincial in 1695 and serving as the rector of the College of Beijing from 1700 to 1701 and, finally, from 1703 to 1706, as the Visitor of the Japanese province and Chinese vice-province. Suspended by Charles Maillard de Tournon (who was trying to impose the last dictates of Rome in China, forbidding the Confucian rites for neo-Christians), Grimaldi died in Beijing in November 1712.

During Grimaldi's presence in Europe between 1686 and 1690, there was a significant increase in interest among Jesuits for missionary assignments. Precisely in those years, *litterae indipetae* in the whole Italian assistancy rose dramatically, from 47 in 1687 to 71 a year later to 75 the year after, and to 95 in 1691.⁴⁰ His visit undoubtedly contributed to a general peak in the missionary requests and, even more, established a precedent for others in his position.

Grimaldi's European assignment was very complex and involved multiple tasks: on the one hand, the Kangxi emperor wanted him to "start a dialogue between the Chinese and the Russian Empires;" on the other, Verbiest entrusted him to "present information (especially to *Propaganda Fide*) supporting the missionary methods in

184. In this article Baldini shows how hard it is to determine whether Grimaldi was a skilled mathematician and researcher, because of lack of contemporary sources confirming it – or the contrary. Probably, Grimaldi was sent to China also thanks to his intellectual gifts and scientific studies; in conclusion "he was probably not very proficient in mathematics initially; he knew enough for routine work in Astronomy but was probably limited in the 'pure' and theoretical areas" (ibid., 82, 84, 87). See also Federico Masini, "Filippo Grimaldi," in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani online*, last modified 2002, accessed August 9, 2018, [http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/filippo-grimaldi_\(Dizionario-Biografico\)/](http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/filippo-grimaldi_(Dizionario-Biografico)/).

⁴⁰ See the Appendices II and IV in Elisa Frei, "Sfoghi di un cuore infiammato. Il desiderio dei gesuiti italiani per le Indie orientali (1687-1730)" (PhD diss., University of Trieste/Udine, 2017). The preservation of *litterae indipetae* is not homogeneous and it also depends on the *Assistentia* where they were written; in the Italian case, it is quite regular from the end of the 16th century until 1729, when they suddenly disappear, only to reemerge in the New Society of Jesus (ibid., 27). It is therefore clear the role that archival accidents have when considering these phenomena.

China, in particular on rites; to obtain greater autonomy from the General of the Society for the Vice Province of China from the Province of Japan ... ; to find a number of young Jesuits spurred by missionary zeal who also had scientific, technical or artistic skills.”⁴¹ The process of the missionary selection could work out smoothly or not, and Grimaldi’s case testifies how the procurators not only could have been disappointed, but also the local Jesuits who wanted to set sail but were not able to do so. Grimaldi planned to bring back with him around forty new recruits, as he said to Leibniz; even if there was no unanimous source, in the end he could only add a few men to the Eastern missions.⁴²

Grimaldi’s presence sparked the interests of many Jesuits, like Giovanni Andrea Gheresi, who wrote eight *indipetae* in the course of a decade (1689-1701) and showed himself well updated on practical details of the coming expedition. Upon meeting Grimaldi he renewed to the General the “more than ever fervent supplications for the long-awaited Missions of China.”⁴³ To convince him, he explained that his father had recently died and his mother had decided to retire in a convent: it was the ideal moment to fulfill his “holy desire to get away from the world.” In addition, Gheresi’s inheritance (“that little bit that my Father leaves”) could now be used “for the benefit of travel and mission.” Gheresi not only knew that Grimaldi was looking for “some young Jesuits [...] to start, under the imperial authority, a project of Chinese youth education,” and therefore applied for this assignment, proposing to teach to the Chinese and “at the same time, learning their language.” He was also aware that the General had “benevolently granted to Grimaldi, a young man,” which however had caused him “many difficulties.”⁴⁴ Probably, he was referring to Pluro’s case, as discussed below. This development was an opportunity for Gheresi, and even if he was aware of the latest news and did not lack initiative, he was not lucky enough to be called as Pluro’s substitute and never left Italy.

In 1690, the Italian Pantaleo Balbi wrote with great delight to the Superior General in Rome. Grimaldi had extended an invitation to Balbi to join him in Asia, and the latter’s spiritual father had permitted him to accept the offer. All that was “necessary,” Balbi explained to the General, was “to have Your Paternity’s permission.” The timing of the appeal to the General was telling: Balbi wrote the General on the feast of the *indipeti*’s patron, Francis Xavier. Yet, Balbi would be disappointed. Despite the offer

⁴¹ Baldini, “Engineering in the Missions,” 123, 141.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 143-4.

⁴³ As Gheresi wrote: “più che mai fervorose suppliche per le tante sospirate Missioni della Cina ... santo desiderio di staccarmi affatto dal mondo ... quel pocho che mio Padre lascia in beneficio del viaggio e della missione ... alcuni giovani [...] a fine di dar principio con l’autorità Regia all’educatione della Gioventù Cinese ... nel medesimo tempo apprendere la lingua,” ARSI, *FG* 749, fol. 338, Genoa November 19, 1690.

⁴⁴ The original quote is: “havea havuta la bontà di concedergli un giovine per la Santa Missione della Cina ... molte difficoltà,” ARSI, *FG* 749, fol. 355, Genoa March 3, 1691.

from Grimaldi, the General rejected his petition for unknown reasons. Balbi never left Italy and died in Genoa forty years later.⁴⁵

Federico di Massarano wrote four *indipetae* between 1689 and 1691, the same years as Grimaldi's European visit. In one of his later letters to the General, Massarano pointed out that Grimaldi had promised to "willingly take me on his return to China, if I had time to get the approval of the General."⁴⁶ In his appeal, Massarano pledged his will to "contribute as much as I can to the good of those [Chinese] missions, which I know are in need of temporal help." He also offered financial assistance, as, over the years, he had saved some money he received "as an annual pension from my parents." Moreover, he proposed to the General that he could bring with him "things that, according to the news received from Father Grimaldi, are much more useful to missionaries in China than money." These "useful" items mentioned in the letter were likely books, as it is possible to deduce from other similar letters. Although the General evidently did not grant Massarano's request, the young Jesuit wrote again to him a month later. Grimaldi's return to Asia had been delayed, allowing Massarano the "opportunity to hope for the glory of going with him on his departure."⁴⁷ What happened to Massarano remains unknown. Most likely he left for Asia, as he never wrote another *indipeta* to the General, and another Jesuit did include his name among those leaving Portugal for Asia.⁴⁸ The obstacle to a departure could not only be the General's decision, but also an *indipeta's* indecision. The procurators could be disappointed either because they failed to persuade enough petitioners to join them, or because they found those they were able to convince to be unqualified in the end. Grimaldi experienced such frustration.

Carlo Giuseppe Pluro knew that the procurator would soon leave Italy when he wrote to the General, asking him "the grace, already granted me, to cooperate in the Chinese mission."⁴⁹ Pluro's writing reflects his lack of education, making it quite hard

⁴⁵ Balbi died in Genoa in 1730, September 19th (Fejér, *Defuncti*, vol. 1, 75).

⁴⁶ Full quotation is as follows: "haverebbe volentieri condotto seco in questo suo ritorno dalla Cina, se avesse havuto tempo di procurarmene il beneplacito da Vostra Paternità ... contribuire quanto posso al bene di quelle missioni [cinesi], che so essere bisognose d'aiuto temporale ... da parte il denaro che ho d'una pensione annua da miei ... cose che, conforme alla notizia havuta dal Padre Grimaldi, ho inteso essere nella Cina molto più utili a Missionarii di quel che sia il denaro," ARSI, *FG 749*, fol. 348, s.l. [Milan January 31, 1691].

⁴⁷ Massarano wrote: "Il differire il P. Grimaldi al suo viaggio a cagione della mancanza d'imbarco, mi dà occasione di poter sperare la gloria d'acompagnarmi seco nella sua partenza," ARSI, *FG 749*, fol. 353, Milan February 28, 1691.

⁴⁸ Dehergne believed "Masseranus" to be a candidate to the Chinese missions in 1690, however uncertain about his destiny (Dehergne, *Répertoire des Jésuites de Chine*, 169). Massarano does not appear among the deceased nor the Jesuits who left with the *Carreira da Índia* ships.

⁴⁹ This is the whole quotation: "per tornare ad ottenere la gratia, già concessami, di potere andare a cooperare nelle Messione de Lacina [sic]... Padre Grimaldi, doppo che fui partito da Genova con alcune sue, mi fece nuove istanze e, se bene non le ho rifiutate, pure havendo tardato a darli l'ultima risoluzione se n'è partito; onde io sono restato indietro né senza qualche scrupolo d'havere tardato, dal che venghi privato di questa gratia ... dimostrato [...] un poco disgustato che mi perdessi d'animo di seguirlo per mare, massime havendoli fatto far spese per terra, et in oltre pensando che mi lascio togliere

to understand what he wanted to say. Apparently, he had met Grimaldi in Genoa, where he invited Pluro to join him. It seems that Pluro agreed, but did not make a final commitment before Grimaldi left town. Even though Grimaldi had at first shown interest for Pluro, he had soon realized that this Jesuit did not possess enough conviction and refused to bring him to China. “I remained behind, guilty of being late,” Pluro complained afterwards, “and therefore deprived of this grace.” Pluro in his letter admitted that Grimaldi was “a little disgusted that I lost the courage to follow him by sea, especially because he already spent money for me, thinking that I allow myself to lose such an exceptional opportunity.” As a result, Pluro wrote to the General about his fears of always living “with constant scruple,” if he did not plead again. He proposed that he join the aforementioned Massarano: it is clear that the local *indipeti*'s network worked very well, rapidly spreading information about life-changing events, such as imminent departures. Pluro wanted to serve Massarano in his already programmed journey, “because for now there is no hope to join the others in Portugal.” Pluro, whose many spelling errors indicate he was a temporal coadjutor (domestic helper, and not ordained priest), worked as a cook in the Milanese area but was also registered as a stone-cutter, which is probably the reason why Grimaldi wanted him to join the expedition.⁵⁰ His final destiny remains unknown, and it is likely that he left the Society of Jesus around 1700.⁵¹

Finally, the procurator's selection could, on the contrary, be successful from both the procurator's and the petitioner's points of view. In 1689, thirty-year old Giovanni Paolo Gozano from Milan wrote three letters to the Superior General requesting a missionary assignment abroad. In one of them, he shared with Thyrso González de Santalla (1624-1705) all the “consolation” he felt after Grimaldi had informed him that he had been “elected to serve” him “in the Mission of China.”⁵² Departing Europe the following year, in 1690, Gozano reached the Chinese Empire four years later. He held several important positions, such as the Visitor of China and Japan and the Rector of the Jesuit College of Beijing. In 1724, he was exiled by the Emperor Yongzheng (reigning 1722-1735) to Guangzhou and later was appointed vice-provincial of Japan, a position he held until he died in Macau in 1732.⁵³ With Gozano, Grimaldi had chosen, on his own initiative, a capable person from Europe who successfully operated in such a different environment.

The role of procurators of the vice-province of China for the Italian Jesuits at the turn of the eighteenth century, however, was not constant. For instance, the next

una occasione di tanto merito ... con continuo scrupolo ... servire nel viaggio [ai due], mentre non [h]anno più speranza di cong[i]ungere li altri in Portugallo,” ARSI, *FG* 749, fol. 465v, Milan March 5, 1692.

⁵⁰ Baldini, “Engineering in the Missions,” 145n268.

⁵¹ His name does not appear on the Milanese *Catalogi triennales* from the year 1700 on (ARSI, *Med.* 61).

⁵² “Consolazione ... eletto a servirlo nella Missione della Cina,” ARSI, *FG* 749, fol. 277, Milan September 7, 1689.

⁵³ Deherné, *Répertoire des Jésuites de Chine*, 116-7.

procurator, Miguel do Amaral, toured Europe just four years after Grimaldi, between 1694 and 1699. Amaral was frequently mentioned in the *indipetae* of the period as well, as he returned to Europe in 1722 with a stop in Portugal. Once again, it was probably because of a Chinese procurator, that in those years another acme appeared in the Italian *litterae indipetae*. They were 83 in 1693 and 79 in 1695.⁵⁴ For instance, Sicilian Giovanni Filippo Ricci sent the first of his eight petitions in 1690, when Grimaldi visited Europe, asking to be sent first generically to the “Indian Missions” and then admittedly to “to the [Missions] in China,” where he knew Grimaldi was in “need of persons.”⁵⁵ Six years later, Ricci wrote about the new procurator Amaral, asking to leave with him for China.⁵⁶

Kaspar Kastner was another procurator of the vice-province of China who visited the Italian assistancy, but he is only mentioned in a few Italian *indipetae* during his time in Europe (1702-1707). Born in Munich in 1665, he embarked for the first time for Asia at the age of thirty-one and traveled extensively within the Chinese Empire until his appointment as procurator. Kastner held a number of other positions in China, such as serving as the emperor’s cartographer, president of the Mathematics council, and tutor of the prince. He died in 1709 in Beijing at the age of forty-four.

In 1704, the Italian Ludovico Gonzaga asked the General’s “blessing for China” even though he admitted that, according to “what I really feel,” he was more destined to Japan, as his first and great desire, “as soon as God will open it for the entrance of the Holy Gospel” – a wishful thinking.⁵⁷ Gonzaga explained that he did not want to lose such a “favorable opportunity to join Father Castner and many Companions” who were sailing to East Asia. In fact, he joined him in 1706,⁵⁸ and arrived in Goa at the end of the same year. In 1707, Gonzaga left for Macau, and at the end of the same year he was sent to Beijing, where he arrived in 1708. From there, he gave, in 1710, a direct testimony of Kastner’s death.⁵⁹ In 1716, Gonzaga had to leave Beijing for health reasons; he moved finally to Macau, where he died in 1717.⁶⁰ Kastner’s return to Europe was also referenced by another Jesuit from the Roman province, Agostino Cappelli, who wrote to the General “daring to beg the Goodness of Your Reverence to send me as his [Kastner’s] companion in this journey.”⁶¹ Also Cappelli was destined for China. In general, the timespan corresponding to Kastner’s Euro-

⁵⁴ Appendices II and IV in Frei, “Sfoghi di un cuore infiammato.”

⁵⁵ Italian quotations is: “grand’obbligo ... Missioni Indiane ... quelle Missioni, o pure nell’altre della China ... ci vien detto ... bisogno di gente,” ARSI, *FG* 749, fol. 301v, Trapani, January 6, 1690.

⁵⁶ ARSI, *FG* 750, fol. 8, Loreto, June 21, 1696.

⁵⁷ “La sua benedizione per la Cina ... secondo a quel che sento veramente ... come mio primo e gran desiderio, quando Iddio ne aprisse l’ingresso al Santo Evangelio ... opportunità sì favorevole del Padre Castner e di tanti Compagni,” ARSI, *FG* 750, fols. 193, 193v, 193vv, 193vvv, Rome, December 9, 1704.

⁵⁸ Wicki, “Liste,” 315.

⁵⁹ ARSI, *Japonica-Sinica* 173, fols. 308, 308v, 309, Beijing, November 22, 1710.

⁶⁰ Dehergne, Répertoire des Jésuites de Chine, 114.

⁶¹ “Ardito di supplicare la Bontà di Vostra Reverenza a volermi destinare suo compagno nel viaggio,” ARSI, *FG* 750, fol. 194, Rome, December 21, 1704.

pean tour was not characterized, within the *Assistentia Italiae*, by an increased production of *litterae indipetae*: they always ranged between twenty and forty each year.⁶² Either Kastner was not able to have a great effect on the Italian vocations, or this “indifference” was related to the problems that the China mission experienced at the time, which made it impossible even for the most stubborn dreamer not only to go there, but also to ask for it.⁶³

Beyond these cases related to the Chinese missions, as Aliocha Maldavsky had noticed, after the passage of a procurator, Jesuits began to ask destinations that were not popular before.⁶⁴ The Philippines, to some petitioners, was an ideal stopping point to move to Japan or China, rather than attractive in itself. Still, Giuseppe de Cassio wrote four requests for the Philippines after having his missionary desire revived by the passage of the procurator Domingo Marino from the islands in 1706.⁶⁵ In the same year, Chile also became a popular request based on the visits by its procurator. Antonio de Napoli told the General about his oral agreement with the Chilean procurator, Ignacio Alemán,⁶⁶ who promised him that, if Rome approved the request, he would have favored his departure.⁶⁷

Such petitioners took advantage of opportunities they heard about from visitors and others, and they employed different strategies to secure an assignment. Consider the six requests written by Stefano Serio between 1698 and 1706. The Sicilian first asked for the generic destination of the “Indian Missions.”⁶⁸ A few months later, however, he indicated a more precise destination, the Philippines, explaining to the General that he did so “after hearing that the procurator of the Philippines is in Rome, looking for preachers and brothers for those missions.”⁶⁹ Serio was unsuccessful but undaunted. Two years later, he asked to be sent to Chile, where he knew that Domingo Marino, head of the Chilean province, needed new missionaries.⁷⁰ His preferences were based on available locations or those needing men – and he was not

⁶² Appendices II and IV in Frei, “Sfoghi di un cuore infiammato.”

⁶³ The main issue at the time was the so-called Rites Controversy. There was no common policy among the different religious orders, and also within the Society of Jesus, on how deep the *accomodatio* should be. Most of the Jesuits followed Ricci’s method (which pleased the Ming and Qing emperors) allowing the converts to perform the rites honoring Confucius and the ancestors. The religious issue was strictly intertwined with the political and nationalist interests of the missionaries operating in the Empire. On the topic see, for instance, David E. Mungello, *The Chinese Rites Controversy. Its History and Meaning*, Monumenta Serica Monographic Series 33 (Nettetal: Steyler Verlag, 1994) and Nicolas Standaert, “Christianity Shaped by the Chinese,” in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, ed. Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 558-76.

⁶⁴ Maldavsky, “Pedir las Indias,” 147-181, 160.

⁶⁵ ARSI, FG 750, fol. 234, Palermo, April 6, 1706.

⁶⁶ With this name, Napoli was most likely referring to Antonio Aleman, who was provincial of Chile between 1684 and 1689 (*Synopsis*, column 664).

⁶⁷ ARSI, FG 750, fol. 239, Naples, May 10, 1706.

⁶⁸ Called “Missioni Indiane” in ARSI, FG 750, fol. 160, Palermo, February 22, 1704.

⁶⁹ “Si sono accesi i miei desiderii, e concepite più vicine le speranze, dall’haver udito trovarsi in Roma il Padre procuratore dell’Isole Filippine, il quale desia non meno predicatori che fratelli per quelle missioni,” ARSI, FG 750, fol. 172, Palermo, July 15, 1704.

⁷⁰ ARSI, FG 750, fol. 232, Palermo, March 22, 1706. Chile was born as vice-province of Paraguay in 1624, but from 1684 on became a province itself (*Synopsis*, column 665).

the only Jesuit reasoning this way. This approach shows a certain adaptability on the one hand and a readiness on the other, though, unfortunately, it did not result in leading Serio to any mission at all.

Moreover, during the procurators' promotional visits in Europe, many Jesuits wrote a single request for an assignment abroad. Often, these one-off requests were short and not very detailed. Never followed by a second letter, these appeals were probably based on a short-lived enthusiasm or even on an unofficial obligation to apply and show a pious vocation that was almost mandatory among Jesuits. In any case, it is clear that many petitions moved numerically and geographically on the same trajectory as the procurators' travels.

CONCLUSIONS

This article only mentions a few examples of Portuguese and Italian unedited *litterae indipetae* of Early modern age. Nevertheless, it shows the influence procurators could have on European *indipeti*, in inspiring their missionary vocation on the one hand and in determining the selections of the people involved on the other. Procurators could interact with the candidates, verify their vocation, test their abilities, have epistolary relations with them and make them half promises of taking them. In this pre-selection phase, the procurators, confronted with local superiors, probably made preliminary agreements with them on which candidate should be considered or ignored.

While a procurators' recommendation seems to have been quite frequent, the General's approval was nonetheless essential, otherwise a departure would have been impossible. From the requests of men selected by procurators, many were endorsed by the General, who, with rare exceptions, had no reason to oppose a candidate he did not know in person and with whom often had never even come into epistolary contact before. Also emerging from the *indipetae* are those last-minute changes: defections, uncertain Jesuits, second thoughts of persons considered suitable who were not, ships that could not take off at the expected time, etc. Likely to be ready for such inconveniences, the procurators were probably inclined to make promises and assurances to *more* Jesuits than what they would have brought with them, meaning there would always be some Jesuits ready in the case of last-minute problems. On this point, practically every *indipeta* declared a readiness to leave immediately whatever might be the circumstances: in the middle of the night, in the pouring rain, barefoot, without any baggage nor money.⁷¹ Some of them saw, in an

⁷¹ A petitioner for the Indies, for instance, wrote to the General: "give me the order to leave immediately, barefoot, without any supplies for Germany, then in Muscovy, then in Batavia, then to China, or for any other part of the Eastern or Western Indies [Your Paternity] wants me to be, and you will see me execute Your orders" (ARSI, FG 750, fol. 308, Florence, March 9, 1715). The original quotation is: "mi comandi di partirmi subito a pie' scalzi senz'alcun viatico per la Germania, indi in Moscovia, indi in Batavia, indi alla Cina; o per qualsivoglia altra parte dell'Indie, o orientali, o occidentali, che desidero, e subito mi udirà porre in esecuzione i suoi comandi." The exceptions mentioned above are the several *indipeti* asking the General some time to wish farewell to their families or to conclude a personal matter before leaving.

already planned departure's setback (storms or other accidents that caused some delay) the perfect chance, sent by divine grace to give them more time or to help them join the other lucky companions already chosen. But also, there was always someone afraid of leaving when everything was already settled.

As for the destinations, even in the general vagueness and indifference expressed by many candidates, there was a clear influence of the missions available at the time of writing the *indipeti*. The result was frequent and sudden changes among those who had asked for a place for years, as if it was the only one that really mattered. At the passage of a procurator looking for Jesuits to take with him on the other side of the world, these *indipeti* suddenly relocated their vocation and declared themselves ready to leave with him for a place never mentioned before, and with even greater enthusiasm. In fact, most of the aspiring missionaries preferred to have a safe, and above all, immediate appointment, rather than an exhausting wait with an uncertain epilogue.

In a case such as the vice-province of China, whose procurators were charismatic figures, good writers, well dressed, and often, particularly brilliant individuals, Jesuits could easily be attracted by them. What Chinese procurators told about their missionary country, life at the Imperial court, the astronomic or diplomatic work – even if this was not what most of the Jesuits in China ever did – everything could not be but exciting and extremely alluring for young Jesuits who were used to study, teach and preach in small European realities.

The procurators did not play a fundamental role in the life of every petitioner for the Indies. Still, many of them saw their fate strongly influenced and completely changed by these prominent figures, who had come to Europe from afar, expecting to return to Asia with as many recruits as they could assemble.