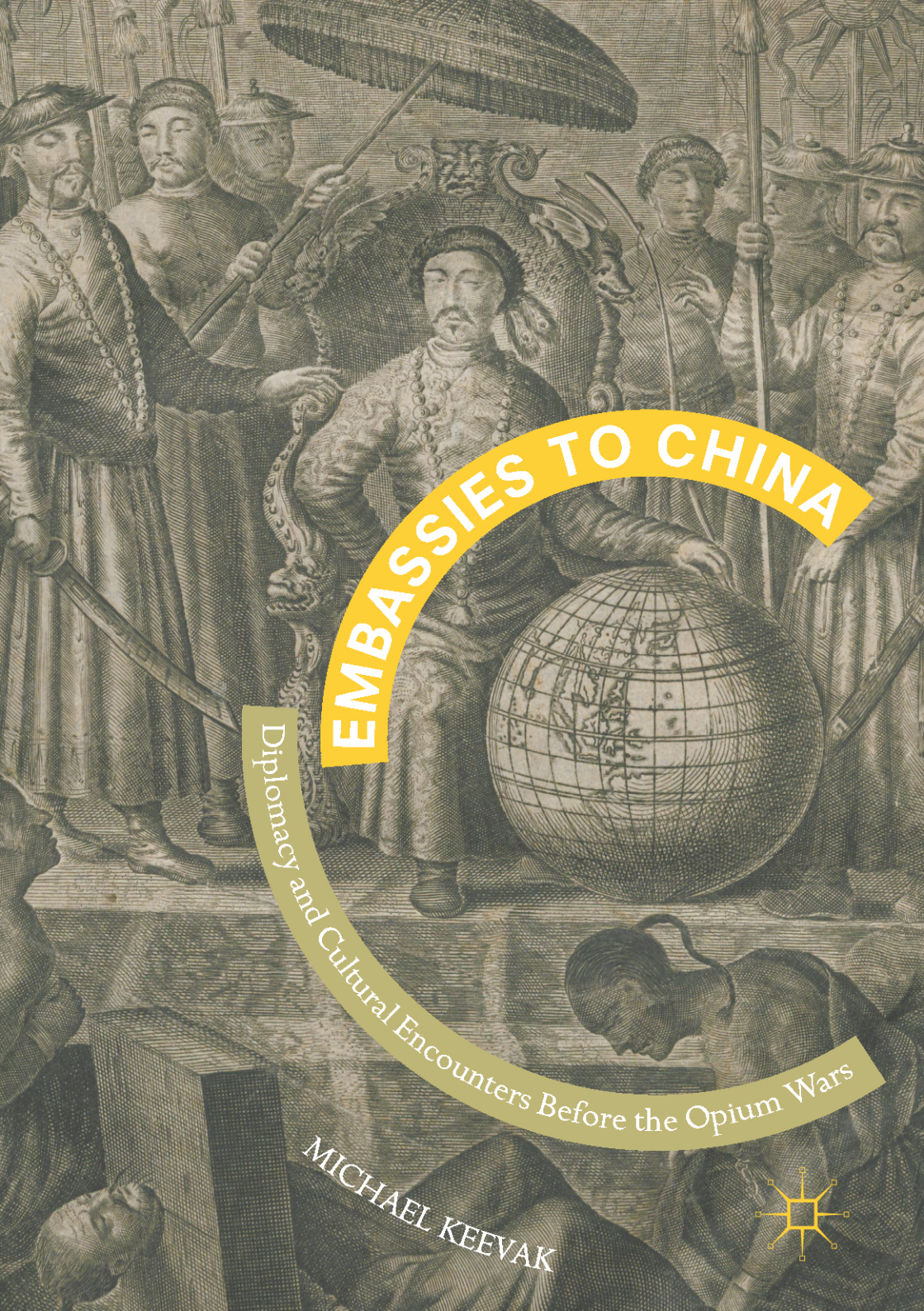
EMBASSIES TO CHINA
Diplomacy and Cultural Encounters Before the Opium Wars
MICHAEL KEEVAK

Embassies to China

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Diplomacy and Cultural Encounters Before the Opium Wars

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Michael Keevak
National Taiwan University
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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Embassies and Failures

In the three-and-a-half centuries before the Opium Wars changed so many things about China's relationship with the West, European governments sent regular embassies to the Middle Kingdom, hoping to take advantage of its inexhaustible wealth and its seemingly unlimited supply of people and resources. The Westerners came to China with many requests, mostly concerning commerce but also including aspirations about colonial expansion and the spread of their religious and other cultural norms. The embassies were very carefully prepared and often consisted of large international entourages (sometimes a hundred men or more), replete with secretaries, officers, scientists, artists, physicians, navigators, interpreters, soldiers, and assistants with a wide variety of functions. If they originated in Europe rather than in one of their trading centers somewhere on the way to China, the embassies traveled on long and dangerous voyages for up to one year over water, around the southern tip of Africa and on to India, then through the Singapore straits and into the South China Sea, where they generally made landfall at Macao, which from the middle of the sixteenth century was under Portuguese control. (Even the Russians, who did not have to cross the sea, traveled mainly by river on an arduous journey that occupied some six months.) The ambassadors were issued detailed instructions as well as letters of introduction and other kinds of credentials from their respective leaders, and the entire proceeding was full of formalities and protocols that corresponded to a complex set of rules governing trade, diplomacy, and the process of negotiation with foreign lands.

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Yet what the Westerners soon discovered was that China's ideas about international relations were just as complicated and full of tradition as their own, and that in so many respects the two systems seemed to be in direct conflict. Europeans thought of themselves as the height of civilization and the bearers of the one true religion, but they also professed notions of mutuality that included agreements, signed contracts, and the rule of law. The Chinese, however, assumed an equally haughty self-conception that placed themselves at the center of the world and rendered everyone else a barbarian outsider. Yet theirs was also a system in which mutuality was impossible, because foreigners were expected to gravitate toward the superiority of Chinese civilization and to pay tribute to the emperor by becoming his symbolic vassal – via carefully worded letters, meticulous ceremonies and genuflections, and the presentation of native gifts.

As far as China was concerned, in other words, foreign ambassadors were subservient tribute bearers, not reciprocal envoys, and so long as both sides maintained their respective positions, one might wonder how they could ever get beyond a restatement of such apparently irreconcilable differences. We will see in this book, however, that this was not simply a clash of cultures in which the two sides could only speak at cross purposes. For in each of these encounters, China managed to force its point of view upon the West far more than the other way around. The Westerners' requests were invariably denied, and the visitors were also required to undergo a long process of education in order to learn how to behave as tribute-bearing nations, which was the only way they could be recognized at all. Trade might be possible but on very limited terms only. Foreign missionaries might be tolerated as well, but they could be expelled at any time and were under constant threat. And any sort of permanent presence, in the form of a commercial center or a colonial outpost, was not even considered.

Admittedly, there were some exceptions to this rule. A small group of Western missionaries was allowed to remain in the capital and to become the emperor's personal consultants on matters ranging from astronomy to translation. Macao also became a long-term base of operations for the Portuguese, although many details about its early days remain obscure. Other local or illicit trade was certainly carried on as well, although our knowledge about this is even more hazy since the arrangements were rarely recorded. The biggest exception, finally, was Russia, since the tsar was permitted numerous embassies, frequent trading caravans, and a permanent ecclesiastical mission in Beijing all by the end of the seventeenth century.

We will examine the Russian case in detail in Chapter 6, where we will see that much like the other exceptions just mentioned, it was anomalous only to a point: concessions might be offered to foreigners for the sake of expediency, but the terms of the conversation remained firmly in Chinese hands. The most commonly discussed example to date has been the first English embassy led by George Macartney in the 1790s, so well analyzed by James Hevia and others (Hevia 1995; Peyrefitte 1992). The legation was obstructed by the ambassador's famous refusal to perform the kowtow ceremony, and long negotiations resulted in his being permitted to address the emperor on one knee instead, just as he would, he insisted, when acknowledging his own sovereign. Scholars have long noted that his demands were rejected one by one by the Qianlong emperor in a very clear and very defiant written form, and reading Macartney's requests alongside the emperor's responses provides a perfect example of two systems or worldviews that seem to be utterly disparate (Morse 1926–29, 2:244–52; Cranmer-Byng 1957–58).

In the chapters that follow, we will trace a similar trajectory but both broaden and deepen the inquiry by looking at five other, less well-known instances taken from five different countries and covering nearly five hundred years of European history. We will start with a series of embassies that predate Marco Polo's pioneering journey to China in the 1270s, when beginning in 1248 the pope and the king of France sent several envoys to the leaders of the Mongol empire, who were at the time ravaging vast areas of eastern and central Asia and were pushing westward as well, eventually coming to the very edge of the Christian world near the Austrian border. In 1271 they would complete their conquest of China and establish the Yuan dynasty. The Western envoys were sent to the Mongols on a mission of peace: asking them to stop their territorial expansions and, it was hoped, to convert to Christianity. But the Mongol khan and his officials categorically refused. These embassies will serve as a useful prologue to the much more elaborate delegations sent out during the first age of European colonialism beginning in the sixteenth century, not only because these early journeys established a pattern of request and refusal that would be replicated well into the nineteenth century, but also because the very nature of the Westerners' appeals (in this case, "peace") was full of presumptions about the justification and the appropriateness of their civilizing mission.

This book is thus not simply interested in analyzing the clashes that resulted when Western ideas about foreign relations met equally strong

Chinese traditions. For we will also focus on the kinds of normative claims that underlay the requests themselves. "Peace," as we will see in Chapter 2, was a concept taken for granted by Europeans as a reciprocal agreement to end hostilities (and, ideally, to join the family of Christian believers). But when it was translated into the languages used by the Mongols and the cultural contexts in which they lived, that same term was understood in a very different way. To "make peace" was precisely the opposite of mutuality: not for both sides to lay down their weapons but for one side to capitulate to the other. When the Western envoys arrived and stated that their European masters wished to "make peace," in other words, it was mistakenly assumed that they were prepared to submit to Mongol rule.

"Peace" was only one of an array of concepts that did not cross over very well to the Chinese world. In subsequent chapters, we will be looking at four other instances exemplified by four embassies from Portugal, Holland, the Papal States, and Russia. The Portuguese journey, which we will cover in Chapter 3, set out from Lisbon in 1515 and was the first to reach China when Westerners finally returned to the region at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Arriving in the Canton area via their recently established stronghold at Malacca on the southern Malay peninsula, the entourage hoped to set up a trading post similar to the many others in their burgeoning overseas empire. They claimed to be on a mission of friendship from the Portuguese king, but it soon began to dawn on officials in Guangzhou that the newcomers were really attempting to monopolize the already existing trade and to set up long-term fortifications by force of arms. Utterly disastrous for the Portuguese (and for European relations generally), the ambassador and his entourage were eventually thrown into jail, where they died one by one over the course of many years.

Chinese sources accused the newcomers of many illegal activities, including "setting up stones," which almost certainly refers to the Portuguese custom of installing stone pillars or *padrões* as symbols of their expanding *Estado da Índia*, which at its height encompassed seaports from West Africa to Japan. Evidently, one had been erected at Tunmen as well, now part of Hong Kong's New Territories, to show that China had also been "discovered" by the Portuguese crown. Yet this was a vision of empire that differed markedly from the Chinese understanding of international relations, since in principle China did not seek to absorb other lands or to impose its form of government, religion, or any other cultural

practice on foreign peoples. We will examine, however, one important period in Chinese history that might be said to resemble an age of Western imperialism, a span of some three decades in the fifteenth century when the Ming admiral Zheng He was sent out to seek tribute from other nations rather than just assuming that they would gravitate to the Middle Kingdom on their own. This era also featured many visible markers of Chinese presence that might be profitably compared to Portuguese *padrões*, including border stones, commemorative steles, and temple bells. But these objects, too, had little to do with what the West called "empire."

In Chapter 4 we turn to Holland, a new imperial power in the seventeenth century that had taken over many former Portuguese outposts and had established its own regional base of operations at Batavia, present-day Jakarta. When the earliest Dutch legation arrived in China in 1655, as a matter of fact, it was the first official embassy from a European nation since the Portuguese debacle of 1517–22. Not claiming any interest in territorial expansion at first (they had already occupied southern Taiwan since the 1620s), the Dutch requested what they called a "free trade" agreement, by which they meant a mutual exchange between discrete nation-states unfettered by private or governmental controls. They sought the right to dock every year at a number of different seaports with as many ships as necessary, to trade with anyone, and to come and go without hindrance as circumstances required. But in China there was no such thing as free trade. The only way foreigners could engage in officially sanctioned commerce was to do so in the context of a tribute-bearing embassy, during which many ceremonies must be observed and native gifts offered. Becoming registered as a tribute-bearer was a complex procedure overseen by the Board of Rites, the ministry in charge of all ceremonies and external diplomatic affairs. Even if tribute-bearing status was granted, it carried its own set of rules and regulations that were point for point at odds with the Dutch demands: all tribute bearers were assigned particular ports of entry; they were given a maximum number of ships and men and told how long they would be allowed to remain; and they were informed how many years should elapse before the next tribute mission could be undertaken.

To give a further idea of the conceptual distance that separated these two points of view, the rules for tribute published in the *Huidian* or Collected Statutes at the end of the seventeenth century stipulated that if a foreign ship arrived in a year not designated for tribute, or had come to

trade "without reason," it must be sent away at once. But from the Western point of view, which assumed that commerce was inherently beneficial to both sides in terms of money and goods, how was it possible for someone to trade "without reason"? Similarly, the Dutch envoys, who were in reality merchants in the employ of the Dutch East India company, had to overcome the fact that their insistence on mutual profit seemed to have little effect on Chinese officials, whose tradition taught them that trade was a low priority and that merchants should be placed at the very bottom of the social scale. (Local authorities in Canton, however, who depended on international trade, were a much more captive audience.) Finally, we will see that the wording of the Dutch requests presumed that commerce was actually a divinely inspired means by which one part of the globe might acquire what it lacked from another. This, too, meant little to Holland's Chinese hosts, who professed that their country was a completely self-sufficient entity that required nothing from outside – and certainly nothing from outside barbarians. The Dutch, in sum, hoped for an unrestricted yearly trade, but instead they were sent away with an imperial edict informing them that they might pay tribute to the emperor but would have to wait another eight years to return.

In Chapter 5, we move from commerce to religion and will cover an embassy sent by the pope in 1705. I have mentioned before that Western missionaries were permitted to reside in China on a very limited basis, with the most high-profile group forming part of the emperor's entourage. Ostensibly, the pope had arranged this embassy to thank the emperor for his continued benevolence and to request permission to establish a superior general who would oversee all missionary affairs. The emperor understood very well that this was a delegation from a religious rather than a national leader, and the ambassador was duly received as the representative of a spiritual dignitary. But once the envoy had begun to state his business, it was apparent that his real aims were much more political in nature, and that the pope was hoping to install something like what we would now call a foreign consul. Moreover, unbeknownst to the Chinese world, the Middle Kingdom had become the center of a major religious and cultural debate in Europe known as the rites controversy, which focused on the degree to which a variety of local practices – including the worship of heaven, ceremonies made on behalf of the dead, and rites venerating the great teacher Confucius – were "compatible" with Christianity. The missionaries' official position was that these were only civil observances and could therefore be tolerated among Chinese Christian converts. But

shortly before the ambassador arrived in 1705, the controversy had reached a fever pitch in Europe and both the papal court in Rome and the faculty of theology at the Sorbonne had decided that most of the rites should be firmly rejected as atheistic. The ambassador was asked to report these pronouncements to the missionaries and to ensure their complete compliance, despite the fact that many of them felt that this would mean the end of Christianity in China.

The papal embassy, in other words, involved much more than just a goodwill mission or the pope's desire for a spiritual representative to reside in the Chinese capital. And yet such hidden agendas (a common enough feature of all Western embassies) were not the only problem, since when the ambassador began to speak about religious matters it also caused considerable friction. The Westerners considered themselves arbiters of the one true faith, but in China, the word "religion" (as well as "God") did not even exist. There were instead three principal "teachings" – Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism – that could not easily be separated one from the other, and taken together they formed a body of beliefs and codes of conduct that were diffused throughout all forms of social and familial life. Even the state apparatus was "religious" in nature, administered by numerous levels of bureaucrats who had passed examinations in the Confucian principles of morality and filial piety, and who were required to venerate Confucius in a variety of regular public ceremonies.

Most important of all, religion in China was not the monopolistic and often belligerent structure of belief that characterized Western Christianity. China had regularly absorbed other faiths throughout its long history, and what the West called syncretism helped the Middle Kingdom to maintain its sense of continuity throughout many centuries and despite many social upheavals. From this point of view, one's "religion" hardly made much difference, so long as one did not neglect one's duties to family or to society in general. But as Western Christianity now threatened to ban most of the Chinese rites, the emperor became increasingly irritated with the pope's envoy, who was put under house arrest. A second embassy came in 1720, more or less a clean-up operation that tried to salvage the misfortunes of the first one, but it hardly fared much better, since the sentiment against Christianity was just too strong. It was not simply that the emperor saw the Westerners' religion as dangerous or disrespectful, but indeed that it should not even be considered a "religion" at all.

Finally, in Chapter 6 we look at Russia, which as I have mentioned before received many favors that were consistently denied to other

European nations. In 1689 China actually signed a treaty with Russia that guaranteed "mutual commerce," and for the next decade Russian caravans came to Beijing every year (and about every two years after that). Second, unlike the small number of Roman Catholic missionaries, another treaty in 1727 gave Russia the right to establish a permanent Russian Orthodox mission in the capital. Most remarkably of all, I would argue, in 1721 a visiting Russian ambassador was granted permission to install a representative in Beijing who would oversee all Russian commerce and, when problems arose, speak for the Russian empire and its various policies. Considering China's conventional insistence that all outsiders were merely tribute bearers (and also the fact that an analogous request from the pope was ruled out just fifteen years earlier), this concession seems particularly surprising. Russia routinely called the man a consul, but in the Chinese bureaucratic tradition there was no such office and his status remained nebulous during his entire seventeen-month stay.

The simple reason for these concessions was that Russia was not, like other European lands, categorized as a "western ocean" country. Moscow had steadily expanded its territory eastward through Siberia in the sixteenth century, and by the early seventeenth it had reached the river Amur, an important dividing line between Russian and Chinese spheres of influence. Russia, therefore, was considered a "border tribe," and its affairs were administered not by the Board of Rites but by the Lifan Yuan or "Ministry for the Administration of Border Areas," an office that dealt with a complex set of nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples to the north and west beyond the Great Wall, an area long fraught with potential dangers and numerous invasions.

China thus formulated a policy in which allowances could be made in exchange for Russia's noninterference in central Asia, which was crucial for maintaining a precarious balance of power in the region. Frequent trade was one such concession, but others were far more pragmatic, such as permission to found a language school in which Russians would learn Chinese (and Manchu) as well as the other way around, thus alleviating the necessity of relying on Latin and the court Jesuits as translators and go-betweens. We will pay particular attention to the fascinating diary left by the "consul" himself, whose preoccupation with having his credentials accepted was repeatedly thwarted, each time with a different excuse. But on a deeper level, the diary displays with stunning clarity the way in which European notions of international diplomacy did not function in ways that the West wanted or expected. If there was a Russian "consul" in Beijing, it

was not because the Qing government had agreed to treat the tsar as an equal, but because it was willing to negotiate creatively to work out a solution to a particular domestic problem, namely, the security of China's northern border. Western-style "diplomacy" might be allowed to function at certain times and under certain circumstances, but this did not mean that China had altered its traditional attitude toward foreigners or that the West's point of view had somehow managed to win out. On the contrary, Russia's hopes for commercial profit, religious freedom, and diplomatic recognition, like that of all other Western nations, remained largely unfulfilled.

Each of the embassies surveyed in this book, then, at least from the Westerners' point of view, was a failure, and even those few requests that were actually granted were conceded on a very limited basis and only in terms dictated by the Chinese. The ambassadors did not hide their disappointment and frustration, but a much more interesting undercurrent in each of their accounts is the way in which European pretenses were constantly being deflated by Chinese interlocutors, whom we can see laughing, sardonically smiling, or showing (mock?) sympathy for the benighted barbarian and his strange ways. Such irony was typically lost on Western narrators, who considered themselves superior to anything they encountered in the Middle Kingdom. As one representative member of the first Portuguese entourage put it, Chinese beliefs were full of "absurdities."

Many in China, of course, were equally haughty and arrogant, and early references to the Portuguese (and later applied to all Europeans) warned that the men with the great eyes and the big beards lacked proper etiquette and could not be trusted because of their "changeable" and "unpredictable" sentiments. For both sides, perhaps, the real motives of the other remained somewhat inscrutable, but when two versions of peace, empire, trade, religion, and diplomacy collided, the Chinese side nearly always seemed to emerge victorious, and the West's desires, whether they were ever understood or not, could be rendered completely superfluous.

Before closing this introduction, however, I would like to point out that "China" and "the West" were hardly absolute or monolithic categories during this period, despite my insistence that the two engaged in conversations in which key concepts might be viewed in radically different ways. These were not static encounters in some sort of abstract space; they were complex and multivalent affairs with many forms of interaction over time. Moreover, while we look at embassies from a number of different European nations, we have to keep in mind that neither "Europe" nor

"the West" were fully consolidated political or geographical entities at this time, just as "China" was much more fragmented than its official pronouncements claimed or its cultural chauvinism implied. China, too, was ethnically and religiously diverse, and during most of the period surveyed in this book, the ruling elite were of Manchu descent and deeply resented as foreigners, both culturally and linguistically. Finally, China was not necessarily as self-sufficient as it made itself out to be, given its long-standing participation in international trade, especially with East and Southeast Asia, as well as its extensive commerce with Europe in porcelain and other commodities beginning in the sixteenth century.

And yet despite these many layers of international or intercultural contact, both sides clearly looked *at each other* in monolithic ways. For Western visitors and armchair travelers alike, "China" was just as much an imaginary place as a real one, devoid of any deep regional or ethnic or class differences, even if its stereotype as the static, mummified, or immobile country did not become common until the second half of the eighteenth century (and thus slightly later than the examples surveyed in this book). The Chinese, similarly, did not bother to distinguish between European differences. Spain, Portugal, Italy, France, and other countries were regularly confused, all of them being lumped together as "western ocean" nations. Both Holland and England were known as the "red-haired barbarians," and Portugal, the original "western ocean country," could be located either in the "southern ocean" or the "northwestern ocean" along with Sweden, Denmark, and England. Holland might be found in the "southeastern ocean" or the "southwestern ocean," where England was sometimes placed as well (Fairbank and Teng 1941, 178, 180, 184–85, 187, 225, 232).

But was Western knowledge about China any better? Both sides understood each other only as much as they were able or willing, but what strikes the modern reader is how much these encounters seemed to be in Chinese control. Western visitors got almost nothing they asked for and were not allowed to remain; they were told that the only way they could interact with the Middle Kingdom was by obeying its laws of tribute, even if these rules were largely symbolic. Western nations did not actually become vassals of the Chinese state, and China did not really consider them as dependencies either. Tribute regulations were a means of restraint, invoked or relaxed as necessary but nonetheless functional. Both sides may have been full of illusions when they met, but in a sense the West became part of the Chinese world much more than the other way

around; despite the Europeans' best efforts, in other words, these were not embassies to China, they were tribute missions.

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CHAPTER 2

Making "Peace" with the East

During the thirteenth century, the princes of Europe had reason to feel afraid. A newly forming Mongol empire had advanced with amazing speed and seemingly unstoppable strength out of eastern and central Asia, at one point reaching as far West as modern-day Poland and Austria. In response to this threat, Pope Innocent IV sent several missions of Franciscan and Dominican friars to the region beginning in 1245, accompanied by official letters requesting that the Mongols halt their advances and, it was hoped, embrace the Christian religion. The Mongol leaders replied by unequivocally refusing to heed the pope's requests or his moral admonitions, and the friars found no solution for warding off any potential onslaught against European Christendom. A number of accounts of these embassies have survived, as well as written communications from both sides, and before the much more famous travels of Marco Polo at the end of the same century, these documents provide some of our earliest glimpses of an encounter between Western Christianity and the cultures and religions of the East.

But what kind of encounter was it? On the surface, it might seem more a clash of opinions than a real conversation, for the two sides frequently spoke as if they inhabited two incompatible universes, both of which centered on different conceptions of divine power and its relationship with human action. While the pope contended that he had been entrusted by *Deus eternus* or Eternal God with the salvation of all mankind, the khan insisted he had been given sovereignty over the world by *möngke Tengri* or

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Eternal Heaven. The pope prayed for the Mongols to heed God's will and to join the Christian fold, thus bringing their invasions to an end. The khan replied that it was God's will that Christians and all other peoples of the world must bow to Mongol supremacy.

One might wonder how any sort of negotiation was possible between these two universalist positions, both of which claimed that they were merely carrying out the will of heaven. In this sense, the embassies were certainly failures, as the two sides could only speak at cross purposes and refused to accommodate the position of the other. From the West's perspective, this was a failure of translation, or rather conversion (of people, of terms), since their religious and political discourse dictated that the only way to live with a "pagan" or "heathen" culture was to convert it and to "civilize" it, a process that naturally required translation and explication of important religious terminology. But from the Mongols' point of view, this sort of conversion (of people, of terms) made little sense and was hardly necessary, since on the one hand their multiethnic empire allowed for the simultaneous acceptance of a number of different religious beliefs, and on the other hand, they were already quite familiar with the basics of Christianity and needed no further semantic clarification.

Everything seemed to hinge upon the linguistic and cultural snarls that surrounded two very different conceptions of God (and, as we will see, "peace"), but this was not really because the terms themselves had failed to translate. As a matter of fact, the pope's messages were understood with great precision by the Mongol side. Christianity was not the real problem either, as even its monotheistic God was not necessarily incompatible with Mongol indigenous practices. The problem was that the version of Christianity expressed by the pope and his envoys, and especially its brand of exclusivist rhetoric, failed to appeal because it was seen as having so little to offer – and certainly no more to offer than the forms of Christianity that were already there. In many ways, of course, the Mongols held an equally exclusivist position, and they reacted to the West's one-sided proposition with a one-sided proposition of their own: to submit to Mongol authority or be recognized as an enemy.

The Pope's Two Letters

Indeed, this was a much more complex conversation than it might at first appear, and if it was a stalemate, it may have been from the West's point of view only. An excellent example is the fascinating exchange between the pope and Güyük Khan (reigned 1246–1248), the third Great Khan and a

grandson of Genghis Khan, founder of the Mongol empire. The pope had entrusted each of his envoys with two letters, both composed in formal Latin and both addressed to "the king and the people of the Tartars," as the Mongols were then called. As was customary when communicating with anyone outside the orthodox (or rather Latin) Christian community, the first letter contained a detailed summary of the Christian faith – original sin, the Trinity, incarnation, redemption, salvation – followed by an equally formulaic explanation that the pope, as vicar of Christ and holder of the keys to the kingdom of heaven, was responsible for the salvation of all mankind. This, the letter added, was the reason for sending an embassy in the first place. The text concluded with an exhortation to acknowledge Jesus as the son of God and to follow the Christian religion. The second letter, dated eight days later, expressed shock that both Christian and other territories had been occupied by Mongol forces, as this was in violation of an innate law that all mankind should live amicably under God. A fitting penance was required in order to avoid God's wrath. The letter asked the Mongols for an explanation of their past and future actions and hoped that further discussions might take place – "especially concerning those things that pertain to peace" (Rodenberg 1883–94, 2:72–75; Dawson 1955, 73–76).

In Güyük's reply, each of Innocent's appeals to the will of God was matched by equally frequent invocations of what the Mongols called "the order of God." The pope had asked the khan to acknowledge Jesus Christ as the son of God and to follow his example as the King of Peace. He also insisted that God might have allowed the Mongols to overthrow other territories unjustly and have temporarily withheld punishment so that the conquerors might humble themselves of their own accord. But God's wrath had certainly been provoked and could not be avoided in the world to come. The khan replied with a different assessment: if these lands had been conquered, it was because they had refused to submit to the commands of God and the orders of Genghis Khan and his successors, who were merely performing God's bidding. "It was the ancient God who killed and destroyed the people of those countries," he replied, not me. "Except by the command of God, how should anyone kill, how should anyone capture by his own strength?" And as for the notion that he and his people should repent and become Christian, Güyük replied with an even more direct challenge to the pope's authority: "How do you know whom God forgives, to whom he shows mercy?" (Pelliot 1922–32, 1:17–23; Rachewiltz 1971, 213–14; Dawson 1955, 85–86) (Figure 2.1).

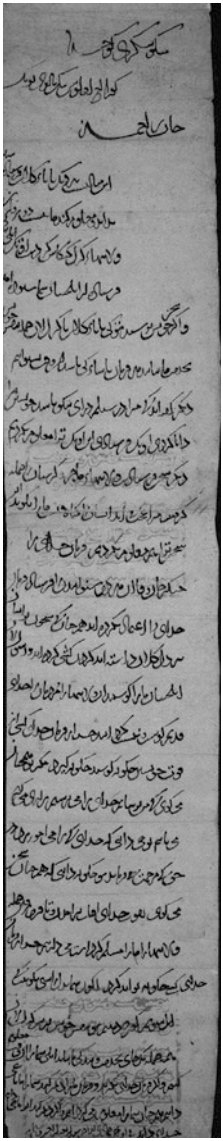

Fig. 2.1 Güyük Khan's reply to Pope Innocent IV in 1246, in Persian, from Paul Pelliot, "Les Mongols et la papauté" (1922). National Taiwan University Library

Innocent insisted on the existence of an omnipotent *Deus* whose son came to earth as a living god in the form of Jesus Christ, and that after his death the guardianship of the world was passed to his successors, and ultimately, to Innocent himself. The khan insisted on an omnipotent *Tengri* whose son came to earth as a living god in the form of Genghis Khan, and that after his death the guardianship of the world was passed to his successors, and ultimately, to Güyük himself. The pope warned of *Deus*'s vengeance and demanded an end to hostilities; the khan warned of *Tengri*'s vengeance and demanded capitulation. Each side maintained that the future was known to their God alone, whether the world recognized it or not. Whether in the form of Christian crusades against heretics or Mongol invasions against rebellious peoples, the possibility of armed conflict was seen by both sides as appropriate and justified.

To Innocent's dual appeal to convert and to stop persecuting Christians, finally, Güyük's answer was the same: "This request of yours we have not understood." Hardly an admission of ignorance or noncomprehension, however, Güyük was here replying that he did not understand *why* he should convert or discontinue his military advances, since his own religious system was perfectly capable of explaining divine protection and God's beneficence. What need was there for a Roman Catholic explanation? Similarly, his letter challenged the pope's requests by demanding in turn that Innocent and all other foreign princes must come to Karakorum to pay tribute to Mongol power – offering once again a very different vision of divine rule. "Thou in person at the head of the kings," he wrote, "you must come all together at once to do homage to us. We shall then recognize your submission. And if you do not accept God's command and act contrary to our command we shall regard you as enemies."

Carpini

The letter was originally presented to friar John of Plano Carpini, the first of Innocent's ambassadors who had reached Karakorum in 1246. Since no one at the papal court was able to decipher either Mongolian or Persian (the lingua franca of the region at the time), it was necessary to make a Latin text with the help of Güyük's secretaries, who required assurances from the friars that every word had been precisely comprehended. A Persian version was also prepared, "in case anyone should be found in those parts [i.e., Europe] who could read it" (Wyngaert 1929–2006, 1:123–24; Dawson 1955, 67).

Strangely enough, however, Carpini neglected to divulge the letter's contents, as if it were a matter of some confidentiality. This is surprising given that at least two contemporary manuscripts included the Latin translation (although neither was published until the middle of the nineteenth century) (Wyngaert 1929–2006, 1:135–43; Dawson 1955, 79–84; Holder-Egger 1905–13, 207–8), and a very similar edict was given to the head of the second papal legation, friar Ascelin of Lombardy, who had set out two years later and reached an area controlled by the Mongols in northeastern Persia. His narrative, recorded by one of his companions, was very widely disseminated, as long extracts were incorporated in the historical section of Vincent of Beauvais's *Speculum historiale* or The Great Mirror, the most widely read encyclopedia of the entire Middle Ages (Simon de Saint-Quentin 1965, 113–17; Voegelin 1989–2007, 10:91–93). A part of Ascelin's story was also translated into English in the early seventeenth century, and then more completely into French and Dutch in the early eighteenth, but then it, too, fell into obscurity (Purchas 1905, 11:168–72; Bergeron 1735; Bor 1706). Even in the once standard edition of Carpini published by the distinguished Hakluyt Society in 1900, the Latin text of Güyük's response was replaced by a footnote announcing that "the letter contains nothing of importance or interest" (Rockhill 1900, 28 n. 1). And the Persian version, written with a combination of Persian and Turkish and bearing the khan's official seal in Mongolian, lay unread in the Vatican archives for nearly seven hundred years until it was rediscovered in 1921.

It is tempting to suppose that the whole affair was an embarrassment for the pope and was therefore suppressed, but this is not necessarily the only explanation. The West was quite secure in the truth of its stance, and the general tenor of Güyük's attitude could easily be inferred from other parts of Carpini's narrative as well as from other available evidence. If Güyük's letter and others like it were regularly overlooked, I would argue that it was symptomatic of a more general tendency to regard the Mongols as nothing more than barbaric hordes engaged in wholesale slaughter with no understanding of established codes of warfare or diplomacy – not even capable, that is, of a meaningful conversation. This neglect remained largely unchanged until a brilliant essay first published in 1941 by Eric Voegelin, who realized that the khans' letters should be grouped together as "orders of submission," each of them representing a formal and consistent set of instructions pertaining to a highly developed notion of divinely sanctioned "empire-in-the-making," which according to the

Yasa or code of law under Genghis Khan potentially encompassed the entire world (Voegelin 1989–2007, 10:76–125).

The Western reception of Güyük's letter, in other words, was just as revealing as the text itself, and if anyone seemed to have trouble comprehending the other side, it was the "civilized" Europeans and not those whom they characteristically derided as savages. In the same way, the friars' narratives may have provided a wealth of information concerning an almost entirely unknown people, but the situation in the burgeoning Mongol empire was exactly the opposite, as their rule had already absorbed a great variety of peoples and languages and cultures by the time the friars arrived. In terms of religion, the empire was composed of a particularly heterogeneous kaleidoscope of beliefs, including Islam, Buddhism, Taoism, Manichaeism, and Christianity (Jacobite, Nestorian, Armenian, Greek Orthodox), and Güyük's reply was quite clear about its recognition of a *kiristan* religion and its ritual of "entering into *silam*," a Syriac word that signified Christian baptism. A Persian term *tarsa* (literally, "tremblers" or "God-fearers") was also used, and a slightly later letter by Arghun Khan (reigned 1284–1291), the leader of the Mongols in Persia at the end of the same century, referred quite accurately to Christianity as "the religion of *Misiqa*" (i.e., the Messiah) (Mostaert and Cleaves 1952, 450–51).

Rubruck

The West, on the other hand, lacked adequate terms to describe what they perceived as the Mongols' religion. *Tengri*, for instance, was never named, although Carpini did describe the existence of divinations, auguries, soothsayings, magic, and incantations, all of which were directed at "demons" who responded in the form of a "God" [*Deus*] called *Itoga* or *Kam*, a Mongol shaman who served as the means of communication with the spirit world and its multitude of deities and powers (Wyngaert 1929–2006, 1:41; Dawson 1955, 12). Of particular interest here is the very detailed record of a third and slightly later journey by friar William of Rubruck, who arrived in Karakorum in 1254. He traveled as a missionary rather than a papal ambassador, although he subsequently gave a full report of his findings to Louis IX of France. Unlike Carpini's, his text remained basically unread until it was rediscovered at the end of the sixteenth century (Hakluyt 1903–5, 1:179–293; Purchas 1905, 11:5–149), but it featured numerous shrewd observations about Mongol

shamanistic practices. Yet he, too, routinely reduced all matters of faith to Christian paradigms, producing a confusion in which the Mongols were alternately said to be polytheistic, monotheistic, or have no religion (in the Western sense) at all.

Both friars maintained that while their hosts prayed to many different sorts of idols (actually, ancestor icons), they also believed in one creator God but did not honor him with any kind of ceremony (Wyngaert 1929–2006, 1:36–37, 231– 32; Dawson 1955, 9; Jackson 1990, 155–56). One redaction of Polo's narrative concurred that they worshiped a "Most High God of Heaven," and the thirteenth-century English chronicler Matthew Paris, citing the testimony of a Russian archbishop, said that every day the Mongols "raised their hands towards heaven, worshiping their Creator" (Yule 1926, 1:256; Matthew Paris 1872–83, 4:388). Finally, according to a contemporary Syriac Christian chronicler, "the Mongols had no literature and no faith of their own, but they knew one God, the Creator of the Universe." As was the case with many subsequent visitors to the East, Mongol worship was thus seen as a shadowy or mistaken form of Christian monotheism, and Rubruck even furnished proof to this effect in the form of an oral "profession of faith" from Güyük's successor, Möngke Khan (reigned 1251–1259): "We Mongols," he is made to say, "believe that there is only one God, through whom we have life and through whom we die, and towards him we direct our hearts" (Bar Hebraeus 1932, 1:355; Wyngaert 1929–2006, 1:298; Jackson 1990, 236).

While it may have been accurate that Mongol beliefs included a notion of a supreme God (although there seemed to be many *Tengri*'s, not just one), theirs was a society composed of a multiplicity of religions, all of which could be treated with a similar level of respect (or, if you prefer, indifference). Religious officials of every sort were accorded a certain degree of honor and privilege, including the pope and his envoys. Güyük even employed a number of Christians in high-ranking positions, including a Nestorian called Chingai, described as a "protonotary" in the Latin text, who received Carpini and may even have been responsible for composing Güyük's reply. According to Rubruck, Möngke's chief scribe was Nestorian as well (Wyngaert 1929–2006, 1:119, 245; Dawson 1955, 63; Jackson 1990, 173; Buell 1993).

Such openness toward religion was apparently not just a predilection but a matter of law; a surviving fragment of Genghis Khan's *Yasa* stipulated that "all religions shall be respected," and a thirteenth-century Persian history agreed that everyone was enjoined "to consider all sects

as one and not to distinguish them from one another." Carpini said that the Mongols, "since they observed no law with regard to the worship of God . . . compelled no one to deny his faith or law," and the report of Ascelin's embassy noted that "worship by men of every sort is observed in safety and liberty" (Riasanovsky 1929, 58; Juvayni 1958, 1:26; Wyngaert 1929–2006, 1:39; Dawson 1955, 10; Simon de Saint-Quentin 1965, 47). In any case, one's spiritual practice was much less important than one's obedience to Mongol sovereignty. Another redaction of Polo remarked that the Mongols "do not care what God is worshiped in their lands." "If only all are faithful to the lord khan," it continued, "thou mayest do what pleaseth thee with the soul." And according to the Syriac chronicler, "with the Mongols there is neither slave nor free man; neither believer nor pagan; neither Christian nor Jew; but they regard all men as belonging to one and the same stock. . . . All they demand is strenuous service and submission" (Moule and Pelliot 1938, 1:96; Bar Hebraeus 1932, 1:490).

These views were almost certainly overstated, for a number of contemporary sources have also recorded how local traditions could indeed be suppressed in favor of Mongol customs. There is a further body of evidence to suggest that their professed liberality toward religion could be summarily disregarded, and that in some cases a particular preference might be feigned for the purposes of territorial expansion. Carpini's favorite metaphor for their behavior, twice mentioned, was flattery followed by a scorpion's sting (Wyngaert 1929–2006, 1:47, 76–85, 94, 98; Dawson 1955, 16, 32–39, 44, 47; Simon de Saint-Quentin 1965, 39, 45, 52, 77–8, 98). And yet there can be little doubt that in many places in the empire, individual freedom of belief greatly increased after the Mongols had come to power, and that this situation was wholly unlike the sort of religious discrimination regularly practiced in the West (Roux 1986; Jackson 2005a, 259–62; Morgan 2007, 37–38; Jackson 2005b, 47–49).

My point is that much like their divergent opinions regarding God's will and the Empire of Heaven, the two sides were also very far apart in their approach to religious belief in general, for while Latin Christianity could be called monopolistic and exclusivist, the Mongols' religious policy was much more pluralistic and inclusive. This is not to say that Carpini and Rubruck were uninterested in other religions or did not repeatedly accommodate themselves to local customs. They did their best when confronted with the constant need to bestow gifts at nearly every stage of their journey. They also acquiesced by kneeling, bowing, or genuflecting when addressing anyone in a position of authority. Some concessions

were more a matter of necessity: treading on the threshold of an officer's tent could result in an instant death sentence, as was also true for refusing to bow before an idol dedicated to Genghis Khan. Carpini hesitated on the latter but eventually agreed to lower his head respectfully (Wyngaert 1929–2006, 1:38, 107–10, 119–20, 124, 202, 214, 249, 297; Dawson 1955, 10, 54–56, 63, 67; Jackson 1990, 117, 133, 179, 236).

Ascelin

Ascelin, however, is a useful comparison because his visit produced friction from the start. We might pause to summarize his story in some detail because it is much less well known to most English readers. After his arrival in Mongol territory, he began by proudly announcing himself the ambassador of the pope, the greatest and most honored man in the world whom all Christians honored as their lord and father. When the Mongols responded by wondering how the pope could possibly be more powerful than their khan, the true son of God whose name was universally celebrated and revered, Ascelin retorted that the pope had never even heard of him. And yet everyone had indeed heard of the Mongols, he continued, a barbaric race of men who had come out of the East and were now unjustly subjugating a multitude of other nations (Simon de Saint-Quentin 1965, 95–96).

Things had not gotten off to a very good start. When Ascelin subsequently refused to genuflect before the khan's commander, he was asked how he showed reverence to his own master. He answered by pulling back the hood of his robe and slightly tipping his head, adding that various forms of prostration were possible but that this was never done by force. He preferred death, he continued, to such idolatry, even though one of the friars of his party, who had spent more than seven years in a Mongol area, remarked that the triple genuflection was just a symbolic "sign of subjection" that all envoys were required to perform. But for Ascelin, it was just this "scandal" of subjection (as he put it) that he wanted to avoid, and after declaring his intention to do nothing ignominious to his position or beneath the dignity of his religion, announced that if the Mongols agreed to convert to Christianity the friars would not only humbly genuflect before them but even kiss the soles of their feet. To this offer one of his hosts mockingly replied: "You ask us to become Christians and be dogs just like you? Isn't your pope a dog and all you Christians dogs?" (Simon de Saint-Quentin 1965, 99–103).

As a result of their intransigence, Ascelin and his party were sentenced to death without mercy (according to the narrative they were condemned on three separate occasions). But after the intervention of one of the commander's wives, who reminded the Mongol officers that ambassadors deserved protection, it was decided instead to send the friars on to Karakorum, where they could see for themselves the Great Khan's magnificence and bring back a true report of his grandeur and power. Yet Ascelin refused to do this as well, claiming that his instructions were simply to deliver the pope's letters to the first Mongol army he could find (Carpini had been given similar orders, but he agreed to be sent on to the capital despite, in his words, not knowing "whether we were going to death or to life") (Simon de Saint-Quentin 1965, 101–2, 104–5; Wyngaert 1929–2006, 1:111; Dawson 1955, 57).

The scene climaxed when the officers mocked Ascelin's insistence on the power and greatness of the Latin church, inviting him to enumerate what lands his pope had ever conquered, or whether he had been granted a fame that extended throughout the world like their Great Khan. Ascelin replied that the pope was indeed greater and more famous, not because he had conquered anyone but because God had made him the direct successor of St. Peter and the head of the worldwide Universal Church that would last until the end of time. He tried to continue but was prevented from doing so by "violent and noisy threats that more and more erupted into a frenzy." The Mongols had little choice but to forward the pope's missives to the khan while Ascelin waited for a reply, which after numerous delays arrived in the form of an order of submission much like the one given to Carpini, accompanied by an additional edict requiring strict compliance with the laws of Genghis Khan, the son of God and the lord and master of the world (Simon de Saint-Quentin 1965, 105, 113–17; Voegelin 1989–2007, 10:91–93).

If these stories are true, it seems remarkable that Ascelin had managed to escape with his life, and those whom he unapologetically called *brutales homines* appeared to show far more patience and restraint than he did. It is likely that readers of the *Speculum historiale* would have cheered at his rebuffs to the effrontery of paganism, but one wonders what might have happened were the situation reversed and Mongol shamans had come to convince the pope to practice their own religion instead of Christianity. Ascelin, in fact, did return with two envoys in 1248, but their political discussions with Innocent were a tightly kept secret and no progress was achieved. The Mongols had sent another ultimatum to submit, again with a reminder that it was *Tengri*'s will that the khan might conquer other territories; the pope drafted a new letter for the envoys to carry back with them, again with a warning that the will of *Deus*

must not be provoked (Matthew Paris 1866–69, 3:38–9; 1872–83, 5:37–38; Berger 1884–1920, 2:113–14).

In that same year, two Mongol messengers met Louis IX in Cyprus while he was on his way to a crusade in Egypt. The ambassadors carried an unusually friendly letter announcing that all Christians would be exempt from forced labor and certain forms of taxation. The envoys also enticed the king with information that the author of the document, a high-ranking Mongol general, had been a Christian for many years and that even Güyük had now been baptized (Carpini had been fed similar rumors). The real motive for this embassy was unclear, but it seems to have concerned a proposed military alliance against Muslims in the Middle East, a policy that Arghun later pursued with even greater vigilance (Voegelin 1989–2007, 10:94–95; Wyngaert 1929–2006, 1:125; Dawson 1955, 68; Matthew Paris 1872–83, 5:80, 87; Achery 1723, 3:627; Moule 1930, 94–127).

The letter must have seemed a particularly encouraging reversal of fortune for the French king, who had also been sent orders of submission just one year earlier. In return, Louis sent a large embassy to the khan that included royal gifts, but Güyük had died and a complicated power struggle was now underway. Any dreams of an alliance were forcefully brought back to reality, and in the end the king received little more than a new letter from Güyük's widow asking for a yearly tribute of gold and silver as a sign of France's submission, and according to Louis's biographer, the king very much regretted having sent an embassy at all (Matthew Paris 1872–83, 4:607–8; Rachewiltz 1971, 119–24; Jackson 1990, 33–39; Pelliot 1922–32, 3:12–77; Voegelin 1989–2007, 10:96). Carpini and Rubruck, on the other hand, were much more cautious. Probably recognizing that additional direct contact would be both fruitless and dangerous, they each rejected any suggestion that Mongol envoys might return with them to the West. They rightly judged that this was just an excuse for espionage (and of course they were doing exactly the same thing), and Carpini worried that the Mongols might be encouraged to attack once they realized "the dissentions and wars which are rife among us" (Wyngaert 1929–2006, 1:125–26, 293, 298–99; Dawson 1955, 68; Jackson 1990, 230, 237–8).

The Mongols and Religion

Yet the Mongols hardly needed to travel to detect some of the contentiousness of their Western visitors, especially when it concerned religion. Ascelin, as we have seen, was particularly blunt, but in terms of their

presentation of Christianity, Carpini and Rubruck could be just as direct and uncompromising. One of the highlights of Rubruck's narrative was a public debate, which he claimed to have won, between himself, Muslims, and Buddhists on the question of which was the true religion (Wyngaert 1929–2006, 1:289–97; Jackson 1990, 226–35). There was also an awkward and rather puzzling moment when before being sent on to Karakorum, he was granted an audience with Batu Khan, another grandson of Genghis Khan who was ruler of the Mongol territory in what is now southern Russia. Rubruck began his oration by wishing Batu divine as well as earthly possessions, and by assuring him that heavenly gifts would be bestowed upon him if he agreed to become Christian. Rubruck concluded his homily with a quote from the Gospel of Mark (16:16): "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be condemned." "At these words," Rubruck reports, Batu "gave a slight smile, and the other Mongols began to clap their hands at us in derision. My interpreter was dumbfounded, and I had to reassure him not to be afraid" (Wyngaert 1929–2006, 1:214–15; Jackson 1990, 133).

What was the cause of this reaction? A report by another friar traveling in the region might give us a clue, for he claimed that something had actually been omitted in Rubruck's version of the story. After Batu had been admonished for not becoming Christian, he is said to have replied: "The nurse begins first to let drops of milk fall into the child's mouth, so that the sweet taste may encourage the child to suck; only next does she offer him the nipple. Thus you should have first persuaded us in simple and reasonable fashion. . . . Yet you threatened at once with everlasting punishment" (Bezzola 1974, 175 n. 320; Jackson 1990, 282).

While not inspiring anything like the knee-jerk irritation produced by Ascelin's very similar requests, Rubruck was obviously being ridiculed by Batu and his men. The friar may have thought they were belittling (or dismissing) Christianity, but in fact they seemed to be deriding merely his evangelical rhetoric. There was once again a clear undercurrent of familiarity among Mongol leaders regarding Christianity and its claims, and this was also true for Möngke's profession of faith, where Christians were counted merely as one (not very appealing) system of belief among others. "Just as God has given the hand several fingers," Möngke avowed, "so he has given mankind several paths. To you God has given the Scriptures and you Christians do not observe them. . . . whereas to us he has given soothsayers [*divinatores*], and we do as they tell us and live in peace" (Wyngaert 1929–2006, 1:298; Jackson 1990, 236–37).

On another occasion, Rubruck described Möngke as holding a feast at which Nestorian clerics, Muslim scholars, and Buddhist monks had all been invited to attend. One of Rubruck's informants had told him that Möngke preferred Christianity but still desired that officials from all religions should pray on his behalf. Yet, Rubruck suspected the khan of insincerity. Not only did he not favor Christianity, Rubruck opined, but he had no religion at all: "[the khan] believes in none of them. . . . And yet they all follow his court as flies do honey, and he makes them all gifts and all of them believe they are on intimate terms with him and forecast his good fortune" (Wyngaert 1929–2006, 1:256; Jackson 1990, 187).

Although Rubruck seemed not to have realized the import of what he was suggesting, he was exactly right with regard to Möngke's motives. It was not accurate to say that the khan believed in no religion, however, but that in a certain sense he believed in them all, or at least the possibilities that any one of them might have to offer. Good fortune was good fortune, and no religion was, on principle, excluded. This helps to account for the khans' interest in theological debates, which were evidently very frequent (Jackson 1990, 226 n. 1; Young 1989, 109–11). The Mongols' pragmatism also stressed the human world and the life of the present, not an afterlife or the world beyond; Genghis Khan, for example, allegedly sought advice from other religions because he had become obsessed with living longer, an alternative sort of eternal life than that which was promised by religions such as Christianity. Carpini likewise criticized their conception of life after death as being too literal: "They know nothing of everlasting life and eternal damnation, but they believe that after death they will live in another world and increase their flocks, and eat and drink and do the other things which are done by living men in this world" (Jackson 2005b, 45; Wyngaert 1929–2006, 1:41; Dawson 1955, 12).

An Embassy of Peace

As we might expect, Rubruck and the other friars took a rather dim view of this inclusivist, polytheistic approach. As a friar in China wrote at the beginning of the fourteenth century, "it is their opinion, or rather their error, that every man is saved in his own sect." Carpini (or his editor) even worried that their tolerance was only a temporary ploy until the Mongols got want they really wanted: mastery of the world. The only positive assessment appeared in the thirteenth-century Persian history previously mentioned. Since Genghis Khan was "the adherent of no religion and the

follower of no creed," it freed him from bias and fanaticism and assured that he had no preference for one faith over another: "he honored and respected the learned and pious of every sect, recognizing [all] such conduct as the way to the Court of God" (Wyngaert 1929–2006, 1:39, 376; Dawson 1955, 10, 237; Juvayni 1958, 26).

But in Carpini's case, it is perhaps surprising that he seemed to experience the least amount of hostility from the Mongol side, owing perhaps to his advanced age (already in his 60s), to his tact, or to the fact that his was the pioneering embassy. He may not, like Rubruck, have openly called his hosts barbarians (or, like Ascelin, have said it to their faces), but his report was also full of negative pronouncements about their "abominations" and their multitude of "evil characteristics" (Wyngaert 1929–2006, 1:47, 94; Dawson 1955, 16, 44). In fact, it seems rather mysterious that his requests, which were much the same as Ascelin's or Rubruck's, were greeted with such a lack of antagonism and, indeed, with approval.

It will be instructive to review Rubruck's situation first, which was complicated by the fact that he was not officially designated as an ambassador. Although at various moments he had assumed such a role for the sake of safety or convenience, the main pretext for his journey was that another important Mongol leader was reputed to be a Christian and that Louis IX wanted to deliver him a private letter, the text of which we are never given. Rubruck's motives were particularly bewildering to his hosts precisely because he said he was not an envoy: "They were amazed and kept repeating constantly: 'Why have you come . . . ?'" Once he had delivered his letter, he was transferred to the khan and to Karakorum step by step, because, as he pointed out several times, he needed the khan's permission to stay (Wyngaert 1929–2006, 1:244; Jackson 1990, 172).

Carpini, on the other hand, had come as a papal emissary and like Ascelin had announced himself as such from the start. He proclaimed, much as the other friars did, that the pope was concerned about the Mongols' conquests and hoped that they would agree to convert to Christianity; otherwise they would not be saved. "Having heard our reasons and understood what we have noted above," Carpini related, "they replied that on the strength of what we had said that they were willing to provide us with pack-horses and an escort" (Wyngaert 1929–2006, 1:105–6; Dawson 1955, 53–54).

I have already noted how emissaries were accorded protection in the Mongol world, but the ease with which Carpini had been accepted might seem, in retrospect, a bit odd. While it cannot be proven definitively, there seems to be a distinct possibility, as Peter Jackson has argued, that the real

reason for the embassy – peace – was misunderstood by the Mongols when it was translated into a language that they could comprehend. In his groundbreaking analysis of Güyük's letter, the great early-twentieth-century sinologist Paul Pelliot noted that in Mongolian, as well as in the Persian language used by the Mongols for international communication, the word "peace" and the word "submission" were the same (both adopting the Turkish term *il* or *el*) (Pelliot 1922–32, 1:19, 26; Mostaert and Cleaves 1952, 492–93; Jackson 2005b, 46, 90). When Carpini first made himself known, he asserted that it was the pope's wish "that all Christians should be friends of [the Mongols] and be at peace with them." Innocent's written message similarly urged Güyük to discuss "especially those things that pertain to peace" (Wyngaert 1929–2006, 1:105; Dawson 1955, 53, 76; Rodenberg 1883–94, 2:75). Once these communications had been translated from Latin for the Mongol leaders, then, it must have seemed that Innocent was offering to take the first step not toward peace but toward submission, or rather acquiescence, which in the Mongol universe were inseparable.

Moreover, it was quite clear from Güyük's reply that the pope's offers were being understood in just this way, although it was probably not fully comprehended by Western readers, who simply translated the term as *pax*. Güyük's letter began: "A petition of peace [i.e., submission] was sent; it was heard from your ambassadors." In doing so, Güyük employed two separate terms, the word *il* and a Persian term, *bandag*, meaning servant or vassal. Or as the Latin version put it, "having held counsel for the sake of living in peace [i.e., submission] with us, you, Pope, and all the Christians have sent us your emissary." The letter also concluded by twice employing the word *il*: "You must say with a sincere heart: 'We shall become your subjects [i.e., submit]; we shall give you our strength.' You [Pope], at the head of the kings, must come at once in person and do homage to us. We shall then recognize your submission [i.e., we will then be at peace]." Lastly, the imperial seal affixed to Güyük's letter proclaimed that the khan's edicts must be respected and feared by all "subjected [i.e., peaceful] peoples" (Pelliot 1922–32, 1:24; Rachewiltz 1971, 213; Voegelin 1989–2007, 10:86–90).

Making Peace

In short, the only way to "be at peace" or to "live in peace" in the Mongol empire, as articulated by Genghis Khan's *Yasa*, was to acknowledge subservience to Mongol power and its divinely ordained mastery of the world. To send a "petition of peace" or to hold counsel "for the sake of living in

peace" was not to enter into a peace treaty, as the Westerners had hoped; it was an act of capitulation, even if, for the moment, the West might remain outside of Mongol control (Voegelin 1989–2007, 10:115–16). The friars recognized at least the basic contours of this policy. On three separate occasions, Carpini mentioned that no peace could be achieved with the Mongols without submission. Yet he still seemed to expect that the pope's desire for a truce, or what Rubruck called a "message of peace [*pacifica verba*]," might be had on Western terms (and the pope, ironically, referred to his God as "the King of Peace"). Rubruck, however, seemed to think it was more a matter of deceit, even though he, too, was given an order of submission to take back with him. "They have never conquered any country by force, only by subterfuge," he noted. "It is when people make peace with them that under cover of this peace they bring about their ruin" (Wyngaert 1929–2006, 1:64, 84, 93, 250, 290, 307–9; Dawson 1955, 25, 38, 44; Jackson 1990, 179, 227, 248–50; Voegelin 1989–2007, 10:96–99).

I have already cited how the Mongols were puzzled over the reasons for Rubruck's expedition, seeing that he was not an envoy, but I have omitted the concluding words of their query, which we can now appreciate in a very different light: "They were amazed and kept repeating constantly: 'Why have you come, seeing that you did not come to make peace [i.e., to submit]?'" (Wyngaert 1929–2006, 1:244; Jackson 1990, 172). If the Mongols were confused by Rubruck's arrival, in other words, it was not because he presented himself as a missionary rather than an ambassador; the empire was full of monks, clerics, religious officials, and holy men of many kinds, although Rubruck had perhaps come a greater distance than many of his colleagues. Nestorian Christianity also had a long history of missionary activity throughout the region.

But when Rubruck arrived at Möngke's court in Karakorum, he declared that he had come at first to deliver Louis's letter to Sartaq Khan, Batu's successor and a fellow Christian. The Mongol officers' response to this statement was likewise very revealing:

> They would ask whether you [Louis IX] wanted to make peace with them. "He sent a letter to Sartaq as a Christian," I answered, "and had he known he was not a Christian he would never have sent him the letter. As for making peace, I tell you that he has never done you any injury. If he had done you any, so that you were obliged to make war on him and his people, he himself, as a man of justice, would be willing of his own accord to make

> amends and to seek peace. If you, without good cause, intend to make war on him or his people, our hope is that God, who is just, will aid them." They were amazed and kept repeating constantly: "Why have you come, seeing that you did not come to make peace?" (Wyngaert 1929–2006, 1:244; Jackson 1990, 172)

Rubruck was once again evidently unaware of the true meaning of the Mongols' query, whether the French king "wanted to make peace." In Mongol terms, to be at peace was not simply the opposite of being at war, or a state in which neither side had "done injury" to the other. Similarly, Rubruck's confidence in God's justice was also at odds with the Mongol version of the very same principle. Finally, Rubruck insisted that his king would never have written Sartaq if the latter were not a Christian. In the Mongol universe, however, to make contact was not a sign of sameness or allegiance, but instead a demand that submission be made; anything else was considered rebellion and could result in subjugation by force. Rubruck concluded this episode with one last comment that showed just how much he and his hosts were speaking at cross purposes. The Mongols, he said, "have already reached such a level of arrogance that they believe the whole world is longing to make peace with them" (Wyngaert 1929–2006, 1:244; Jackson 1990, 173). The world as Rubruck knew it was indeed anxious to make peace with the Mongol armies, but it was hardly the sort of contractual arrangement that the friars, the pope, or the king of France would have had in mind.

Nestorianism

And what of the Christians' own level of arrogance? There is one further passage in Güyük's letter that is especially interesting in this regard, even though the Persian text is corrupt and difficult to decipher. The khan responded to the pope's call to convert by asking in return: "You say none the less: 'I am Christian [*tarsa*]; I worship God; I despise [or lament?] and . . . [words are missing in the text].' How do you know whom God forgives, to whom he shows mercy?" (Rachewiltz 1971, 213). The basic meaning is clear enough that Christians were being criticized for their animosity toward people of other faiths. This would not be our first example of a Mongol leader pausing to comment on his visitors' monopolistic attitudes toward religion; Batu's conversation with Rubruck comes to mind, as does Möngke's profession of faith, which among

other things chided Christians for not following the moral teaching of their own Scriptures: "You do not find in the Scriptures . . . that one man ought to find fault with another, do you?" (Wyngaert 1929–2006, 1:298; Jackson 1990, 236–37). Arghun's letter went even further, complaining that the pope had sent a message accusing all other religions, as well as all other religious writings, of "praying falsely," and that only the religion of *Misiqa* was true. But as Pelliot was the first to suggest, we only have to turn to the Latin text of Güyük's missive to get a more complete picture of the sort of religious discrimination that was really being decried: "But you men of the West [*homines occidentis*] believe that you alone are Christians and despise others. But how can you know to whom God deigns to confer his grace?" (Mostaert and Cleaves 1952, 450; Wyngaert 1929–2006, 1:143; Dawson 1955, 83; Pelliot 1922–32, 1:22 n. 7).

This portion of Güyük's complaint, that is, was less about Christianity per se than about the Christians of the *West*, whose aversion to religious otherness extended even to those who were ostensibly members of their own faith, especially the Nestorians, who were clearly favored at Güyük's court. Carpini barely mentioned the Nestorians except as one of the "countries" [*terrarum*] that the Mongols had subdued, but he also protested about the untrustworthiness of unspecified Christians in Güyük's entourage, who were certainly not Roman Catholics. Rubruck, on the other hand, constantly voiced his distaste for the Nestorians' doctrinal "errors," as well as their ignorance, drunkenness, usury, corruption, and fondness for divination and fortune-telling. He hesitated to receive the sacrament from them when they celebrated Mass, and on several occasions he said he did not even realize that these men were Christian (Wyngaert 1929–2006, 1:89–90, 124–25, 238, 248, 250, 266–68; Dawson 1955, 41, 68; Jackson 1990, 163–64, 176, 179, 198–200).

According to Rubruck, the feeling was mutual, as the Nestorians refused to admit other Christians unless they had been rebaptized, and John of Montecorvino, another Franciscan who traveled to China in 1294, agreed that the Nestorians had grown so powerful in the region that they allowed no other form of Christianity but their own. This, he added, was very unchristian behavior (Wyngaert 1929–2006, 1:280, 346; Dawson 1955, 224; Jackson 1990, 213). But were the Western friars any better? The pope and his ambassadors routinely spoke as if their religious authority was both absolute and unquestioned, but this was true neither at home nor in other parts of the world, where Christianity thrived in a variety of churches entirely separate from that of the Vatican. Even in

Europe, the Papal States were then under siege by the Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick II, forcing Innocent to flee Rome and to move his court to France, the location from which his letters to the Mongols were composed. This lack of ecclesiastical unity, in fact, captured at least as much of Innocent's attention as an imminent Mongol attack; his ambassadors also carried an edict, replete with extensive Biblical citations, addressed to all patriarchs and prelates of Eastern Christianity urging them to return to Roman Catholic orthodoxy (Sbaraglia 1759–68, 1:362–64; Jackson 2005b, 92–94). These letters, too, were highly conventional, but they serve to remind us that Christianity itself, despite its monopolistic pretenses, was in some sense contested and multiple from the start.

This is not to say that the Mongols were entirely free from religious discrimination, or that, in the famous words of Edward Gibbon in the eighteenth century, theirs was "a system of pure theism and perfect toleration." Rubruck maintained that they "regarded the word Christendom [*christianitas*] as the name of a people [*gentis*]," which is to say that *kiristan* or *tarsa* remained distinctly foreign designations. Güyük's letter similarly referred to the *kiristan* as a people whom the Mongols had conquered. Sartaq had already been baptized as a (Nestorian) Christian, yet his men were careful to warn Rubruck that their master's beliefs did not affect his Mongol origins: "Do not say our master is a Christian. He is not a Christian; he is a Mongol." For Rubruck, this was one more example of the arrogance or *superbia* of his hosts: "although they may perhaps have some belief in Christ," he lamented, "they have no desire to be called Christians, since they want to promote their own name – Mongol – to a level above all others" (Gibbon 1952–55, 3:625; Wyngaert 1929–2006, 1:205; Jackson 1990, 120).

Arghun's 1290 letter similarly maintained that ethnic identity took precedence over choice of faith, but he also implied that whichever God one favored, it was still the Mongols' *Tengri* who reigned supreme. "We the descendants of Genghis Khan," he wrote, "are Mongol subjects, and whether some enter into *silam* or some don't, this is only for Eternal *Tengri* to know. People who have entered into *silam* . . . do not disobey the religion and orders of Eternal *Tengri* and of *Misiqa*." But he also added a now familiar criticism of Christian exclusivity: "You say that I have not entered into *silam*, you are offended and harbor thoughts of discontent. But if one prays to Eternal *Tengri* and thinks as he ought to, is it not as if he had entered into *silam*?" (Mostaert and Cleaves 1952, 451–52).

The Mongols could be just as insistent as the pope on the ultimate authority of a God of heaven, in other words, but this was a form of discrimination that could unproblematically *include* the Christian God. On one of the occasions when Möngke's officers asked Rubruck why he had come, he answered with another paraphrase from Mark (16:15): "It is the duty of our religion to preach the Gospel to all men." This, too, was well comprehended by the Mongol side, but Möngke's reply suggested that Rubruck's religion had already been incorporated into a plurality of beliefs and ritual practices: "The khan well understands that you have no diplomatic business with him, but that you have come to pray for him just as do many other priests" (Wyngaert 1929–2006, 1:292–93; Jackson 1990, 229–30).

Christians and Others

Western Christianity thought of itself as subsuming all foreign cultures into the one true faith and offering the sole possibility of salvation in the world to come, but the Mongols perceived Christianity as one of many alterities in a heterogeneous empire of the world of the present. For the pope and his representatives, the universalist Kingdom of Peace and the universalist Order of God could never coexist, and *Tengri* and *Deus* were utterly incommensurable. But for the Mongols, one could accept the Christian God just as easily as any other, and in this sense the religion was – as Güyük's letter put it – perfectly "understood." If there was a sticking point, it was the exclusivist demands that went along with Latin Christianity, a necessary project of conversion (of people, of terms) that unlike Nestorianism was ultimately unwilling to adapt itself to local customs. This first exchange between East and West was a dialogue in which two versions of peace, or rather submission, had been forced to meet. But the result was a fascinating and revealing combination of misunderstanding and subsequent appropriation: while the West assumed that its gracious message of salvation had fallen on deaf ears and quickly failed, the Mongols had already incorporated that message into a very different system in which the Western paradigm of religious conversion (to change into something else, to be made anew) might have no significance at all.

When Marco Polo returned to the region beginning in the 1270s, preceded by his father and uncle in the 1260s, the Great Khans were now the Yuan emperors of China, and their official status as rulers of a global empire-in-the-making had become absorbed into a somewhat

different tradition of Chinese cultural efflorescence – although the emperors were still looked upon as the Sons of Heaven. The Middle Kingdom was the center of the world but not necessarily its territorial master. Western missionaries were allowed to return and to extend their stay, with Montecorvino being the first to settle in the Chinese capital permanently in 1294, where he set up churches and entertained the emperor with his music and his boy choir, a somewhat different and more indirect strategy for conversion than papal emissaries carrying official letters.

Montecorvino's mission, too, had begun with a letter from the pope, but it was a message that had little effect, as the emperor "was too far gone in idolatry" (Wyngaert 1929–2006, 1:346; Dawson 1955, 224; Sbaraglia 1759–68, 4:85–86; Moule 1930, 168–69). And yet the Yuan emperors, like their Mongol predecessors, were very tolerant toward other religions, and certainly much more tolerant than their Christian visitors, both Catholic and Nestorian, who continued to battle against each other. Montecorvino accused his rivals of a variety of intrigues, and his greatest success, he said, was the conversion of an Ongut prince from Nestorianism to "the truth of the true Catholic faith." Other Western friars were similarly welcomed, such as the Dominican John of Cora (ca. 1330), who observed that the emperor, much like the Great Khans before him, had supported Christians and wanted them to pray for him and his health (Wyngaert 1929–2006, 1:348; Dawson 1955, 225; Yule 1913–16, 3:102).

It is revealing to note, finally, that from the founding of the Mongol empire under Genghis Khan to the end of the Yuan dynasty in 1368, when all forms of Christianity seem to have disappeared (although Nestorianism remained active in Mongolia), rumors were rife in the West concerning the conversion or imminent conversion of nearly every Chinese or Mongolian leader (Yule 1913–16, 3:10). Stories about Güyük's religious sympathies were especially prevalent, even though this particular form of wishful thinking generally neglected the fact that his attraction or his affiliation would almost certainly be to some form of Eastern Christianity and not to Roman Catholicism (Carpini specifically noted that members of Güyük's household prayed "after the Greek fashion") (Wyngaert 1929–2006, 1:125, 206; Dawson 1955, 68; Jackson 1990, 122; Juvayni 1958, 1:259; Bar Hebraeus 1932, 1:411). Matthew Paris recorded a far more unlikely version that Güyük had become "a faithful Catholic," and similar traditions grew up around Yuan emperors who had supposedly been baptized by friars from the Western church (Matthew Paris 1872–83, 5:87; Wadding 1731–1886, 6:176; Moule 1930, 215).

The reality of Western religious influence, however, was much less rosy. Rubruck tersely noted that he had managed to baptize only six people, but the number of non-Latin Christians was, by contrast, flourishing. A bit later, the Franciscan John of Marignolli was allowed to remain in the Chinese capital from 1342 to 1345, but he seemed to impress the emperor more with his auspicious gifts than with his religious preferences, which went unmentioned in the official records (Wyngaert 1929–2006, 1:312, 528–29; Jackson 1990, 253; Yule 1913–16, 3:213–14; Moule 1930, 257). And in Chinese sources from this period, Christians of all types were regularly designated by the obviously foreign term *yelikewen*, a transliteration of the Syriac word *archaon* or *arkagun* or *erkegun*, an appellation of uncertain meaning that was variously used in Chinese as a religious, national, or cultural label (Chen 1923; Moule and Giles 1915, 631, 638; Moule 1930, 218–225; Li 2011, 53–57).

With the advent of the Ming dynasty, however, this form of religious toleration came to an end, and when Western missionaries were finally able to return to the region beginning in the sixteenth century, and especially under the once again more tolerant Qing dynasty of the seventeenth, Nestorian rivals and other Christians of the East had all but vanished. The main competitors were now much closer to home: European Protestants. Missionary conversations with Chinese officials took a somewhat different form, too, since it was no longer a question of peace treaties or of world conquest, but instead another form of submission in which both sides assumed that theirs was the only true example of civilized humanity.

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CHAPTER 3

Portugal and "Empire"

In the last chapter, we have seen an example of a Western embassy coming to the Far East in pursuit of a goal – in this case, peace – that was understood in unexpected ways once it had been translated into a very different cultural setting. The pope had sent emissaries to the Mongol empire on a mission of peace, with the dual purpose of urging them to stop their invasions and, it was hoped, to embrace Christianity. Both these requests were bluntly refused. In Mongol terms, to make peace or to sue for peace did not entail any sort of bilateral negotiation or a treaty in which two sides could agree to end their hostilities toward one another. For according to Mongol policy, the only way to be at peace was to capitulate, to submit to Mongol authority and become absorbed into their ever expanding and potentially limitless world-empire. Even if this was a symbolic gesture only, much like the kowtow in China, it was a course of action that the pope and his ambassadors were never willing to consider. Christianity, after all, claimed a certain world-empire of its own.

Luckily for the West, any further invasions did not materialize (and according to one contemporary report, the Mongols had intended to conquer Rome, too [Matthew Paris 1872–83, 4:388–89]), but I also argued that one of the most striking features of this encounter was their markedly divergent attitudes toward religion in general. While Chinese and Mongol leaders espoused a pluralistic and generally tolerant position toward the varieties of religious conviction in their enormous empire, European visitors were highly critical of any system of belief that they perceived to be unlike their own – including, significantly, the many other

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forms of Christianity that thrived in the lands to the East. We should not be surprised that religion was such a central concern for these early visitors, as all of them were missionary friars whose job was to encourage conversion to Roman Catholic Christianity. And yet they had arrived on a mission of peace and not religious confrontation, hoping to stop the Mongols' invasions and their territorial expansion. Little wonder, then, that their hosts should have been puzzled by their visitors' real reasons for coming, particularly since even their notion of "making peace" turned out to mean something very different once it had been translated into Mongol terms. In any event, the Europeans' demands utterly failed, as the Mongols insisted on their right to a universal empire and rejected the notion that they would have to give up their own gods in order to embrace the Christian one.

But what interests me here is the dual and almost schizophrenic nature of the Westerners' requests, since on the one hand the friars sought a mutual agreement to prevent hostilities and yet were not beyond making extremely belligerent moral judgments and asserting the necessity of conformity to their own religious and cultural norms. What was their real goal: for the Mongols to put down their arms or to embrace the true God? From the Westerners' point of view, of course, these were one and the same thing, and when larger numbers of European travelers began to appear in the region at the beginning of the sixteenth century, generally on missions of commerce rather than religious conversion, similarly mixed messages were sent out to Eastern leaders. This is beautifully symbolized by a well-known episode in the pioneering journey to India by Vasco da Gama in 1497–99. At first landfall near Calicut on the southwestern coast, his men were allegedly greeted by two Moors who shocked the Portuguese by addressing them in a European tongue. "The devil take you," the Moors exclaimed, "what brought you hither?" "Christians and spices" was the Lusitanians' famous reply (Gama 1898, 48).

Tomé Pires

This is not to say that da Gama and his party had come to Asia to evangelize as well as to trade, although on the surface it might sound this way. Part of their initial motivation was a far-flung hope that "lost" Christians might be found on the other side of the Arab world with whom Europeans could unite in a final onslaught against Islam. While the spice trade and its potentially astronomical profits were certainly important

objectives, the Portuguese and other Europeans were also searching for allies in a kind of holy war against those whom they perceived to be the eternal enemies of Christendom. Trade was thus also merged with a variety of presumptions and normative claims about the supremacy of the West and the correctness of its Universal Church.

In this chapter, we will focus on one of many European commercial embassies between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries, when European travelers, missionaries, and ambassadors had finally managed to return to the empire along a sea route that brought them not across central Asia but to China's southern ports. They hoped to tap into China's fabled wealth as well as its seemingly limitless market for European products. The problem, however, was that China was so little attracted to what the Europeans had to offer, and rather than vend their own wares, the foreigners had to settle their accounts for Far Eastern spices, silks, and tea with silver drawn from Western-controlled mines in the colonial New World, resulting in a distinct imbalance of trade that was a constant frustration and remained largely unchanged until the nineteenth century, when a product with a guaranteed market niche was finally found: opium.

This story of the vagaries of early modern Sino-European trade has been told many times, but rather than trade as such, this chapter will concentrate instead on Western notions of "discovery" and empire, taking as its example the very first Portuguese embassy of 1517–22, which was sent out from Lisbon in 1515, only four years after the Portuguese had established an East Asian base of operations at the port of Malacca on the southern Malay peninsula. This embassy is an instructive example on many counts, not least of which because of its complete failure to achieve any of its stated aims. Far from entering into a bilateral agreement which would allow the Europeans to enter Chinese ports to trade, the Portuguese ambassador and his entourage were ultimately imprisoned, and any hope of official trade with China was thwarted for decades thereafter. The ambassador himself (an unusual choice, an apothecary called Tomé Pires who had worked at the Malacca factory) appeared to show great discretion and tact, but as always Western diplomacy could be accommodating one moment and then antagonistic and hostile the next, a Jekyll-and-Hyde story of European behavior well summed up by the tale of two brothers, Fernão Peres de Andrade, the careful and on the whole compliant captain of the mission, and the subsequent appearance of his much more cavalier brother Simão, who seems to have treated China as yet one more point of conquest in Portugal's expanding Eastern empire, which at its height encompassed key seaports from Africa to Japan.

A Tale of Two Brothers

But even Fernão's conduct smacked of European pretensions from the start. When the mission arrived in the Canton estuary in 1517, it was necessary to wait for permission to sail upriver. De-emphasizing trade at first, Fernão announced that he had simply brought letters to the "king of China" expressing "peace and friendship" (Barros and Couto 1777–78, 3.2.8:208), but after numerous bureaucratic delays and still no response from Canton, he threatened to proceed to the city with or without written authorization. What sort of peace and friendship was this? Finally, without official sanction, the embassy was passed along to the next station where they were given Chinese pilots to assist them. Things went from bad to worse when the ships actually reached Canton, as they proudly announced their arrival with flags and lances and a salute of their cannon, ignorant or heedless of the fact that all such activity in the area was strictly forbidden. They later apologized for their misstep but the damage was done, and one of the excuses they gave, that Chinese ships did the same thing when approaching Malacca, would certainly not have helped the situation since Chinese overseas trade was expressly prohibited, and in any case Malacca, which the Portuguese had recently taken, had been formally linked to China as a tributary polity (Wills 1998, 337).

Trade was allowed while the embassy awaited the next step, which was to be granted an imperial audience. Pires was brought ashore to await Beijing's decision, while Fernão prepared to return to Malacca, announcing that another Portuguese squadron would come the following year to collect the ambassador. Meanwhile, trade waters in nearby Fujian province were tested, also with excellent results (Barros and Couto 1777–78, 3.2.8:220–21). Prospects seemed bright. In the following year, however (it was now 1519), the ambassador still had not been given permission to depart Canton, and the captain who had come to collect him was none other than Fernão's condescending brother Simão, whose behavior quickly ruined what had thus far been accomplished, shaky though it was. According to the most thorough Portuguese chronicler, João de Barros, Simão was "noble in presence, pompous, vainglorious, and extravagant, all of his actions being done with the greatest magnificence." So taken was he with European ceremony that he was the first in the Indies to have shawm players instructed in order to serve him (Barros and Couto 1777–78, 3.6.2:16).

As soon as Simão arrived at the port of Tunmen (now part of Hong Kong's New Territories) and its offshore island, the center of all foreign trade in Canton and known as Ilha Beniaga (deriving from a Malay word for trade/merchandise), he alarmed local officials by attempting to construct fortifications, under the pretext that the area was full of pirates and that even the Chinese government was powerless against them. He set up a gallows where a Portuguese sailor, guilty of some offense, was executed, demonstrating for the Chinese how seriously such crimes were treated under Portuguese law. Both of these acts, Barros continued, were very ill-received, since the Portuguese were not entitled to establish any presence on the island, and it was the Chinese emperor who reserved the right to carry out justice against any foreign wrongdoer. A great scandal was caused by the fact that other foreigners (Siamese, Malay, and so on) were not allowed to trade until the Portuguese had concluded their own. The Portuguese refused to pay any customs duties, and Simão and his men had badly abused an official who complained about the practice. They were accused of having robbed other foreign ships. Finally, local children were taken away to be used as slaves, some of whom were later discovered in the Portuguese city of Diu on the Western coast of India. While the buying and selling of children was a common practice throughout the Orient, Barros concluded that these unfortunates had been seized without their parents' knowledge, and some had even been taken from noble families (Barros and Couto 1777–78, 3.6.1:12–14).

THE *FOLANGJI*

Nearly all these allegations appeared in Chinese sources as well, where they were repeated and elaborated upon for centuries thereafter. Particularly lurid were the contentions (known to Barros, too) that the kidnapped children were being cooked and eaten, and Simão's actions were quickly melded with the much less heinous mistakes of his brother to form a totality of undesirable characteristics. The earliest references appeared in the *Ming shi lu* or Ming Veritable Records, dated between 1517 and 1521. They blamed the Portuguese for various "evil activities," including blocking trade with other foreigners, kidnapping people, and building fortifications. It would not be long before both personal and official accounts added more examples of their cruelty and cunning: that they had come without permission and shook the earth with the sound of their cannon, that they had used firearms to defend their position, and that they had never been heard of

before and were therefore highly suspicious. Or as a local gazetteer from the Guangdong province put it: "A people not recognized as tributary to China . . . filtered into the harbors . . . and constructed barracks and a fort, mounted cannon to make war, captured islands, killed people, robbed ships, and terrorized the area" (Balfour 1970, 172).

To make matters worse, when they first arrived they announced that they had come from Malacca, not Portugal, and they were entered into the records as the *Folangji* people, the Chinese transliteration of the Indian and Southeast Asian regional term *Ferengi* ("the Franks"), the word used since the period of the European crusades to designate all Western Christians. An early entry in the *Ming shi lu*, however, puzzled over the fact that there was no such country in the "southern ocean" (*Ming shi lu* 1961–66, Wuzong 158:2b), and commentators often repeated the fact that the *Folangji* had never been registered in the annals of the *Da Ming huidian* (Collected Statutes of the Great Ming). During earlier periods of Chinese history, the Portuguese might have found a more cordial reception, owing to a more welcoming attitude toward all sorts of faraway peoples. But by the sixteenth century, Chinese foreign relations had taken on a much more defensive character. The maritime regions were plagued by rampant piracy, and overseas travel was officially prohibited. Foreign trade was allowed only in the context of highly regulated and taxed tribute missions, even though a substantial amount of mostly Southeast Asian trade continued to exist despite these regulations.

Padrões

But what about the troublesome *Folangji*? Were they traders or pirates? What were their motives? Were they genuine tribute-bearers or had they come with other aims in mind? They said they had come to trade and had brought gifts of peace and friendship from their sovereign, and yet by the same token they seemed unwilling to participate in an already existing system of international commerce. They had recently intruded into the Chinese world by making war on Malacca and ousting its sultan. There were even rumors that they had killed their own king (cited in Pelliot 1948, 118–19, 128). Had they come to China to spy out the land, hoping for a similar conquest? In 1521, the *Ming shi lu* warned that *Folangji* buildings were "intended for long-term residence," and the account given in the Guangdong gazetteer emphatically stressed that these people intended to remain and had not come just for trade: "wishing to annex

territory they made a survey, set up stones, and tried to manage all the other foreigners" (*Ming shi lu* 1961–66,Wuzong 194:2b; Balfour 1970, 172).

The structures that the Portuguese began to fashion, in other words, were not designed simply to protect them from piracy or to provide a place to store money and goods during or between the monsoonal trading seasons. It was apparent to Chinese observers as well that the *Folangji* were interested in taking control and perhaps trying to seize territory, just as they had done in Goa or Malacca or at numerous other sites. The Guangdong text is of particular interest because it mentions "setting up stones," which almost certainly refers to the Portuguese practice of erecting stone pillars as markers of dominion in many areas of their empire, whether or not these sites were fully intended to be colonized. According to a chronicle of King Manuel I published in 1566, Vasco da Gama had set up five of them on his first voyage to India as signs of his lawful right, as granted by papal dispensation, to everything "discovered" in these new lands. When soon thereafter, Diogo Lopes de Sequeira set sail from India to Malacca, he was instructed by the king to erect these stones wherever it was convenient to do so. Barros noted in passing that one had even been placed at Tunmen by Jorge Alvares, the first to reach the Canton area in 1513 or 1514, corroborated by a 1515 report to the king that Alvares was "the first to leave a mark [*marquo*] for your majesty." During the embassy of Tomé Pires, finally, an envoy from Malacca arrived to complain that (in the words of one of Pires's men) "as we had set up a stone on the land and had a house we should soon have the country for our own; that thus we had done in Malacca and in other parts" (Góis 1909, 2:19–20; Albuquerque 1884–1935, 2:415; Barros and Couto 1777–78, 3.6.2:20; Keil 1990, 14; Ferguson 1901–2, 2:468, 3:12).

These monumental pillars were called *padrões* (singular: *padrão*), a rather untranslatable term related to *pedra*, or stone, but perhaps best translated into English as "standard" in the military sense, a flag or other icon around which troops would gather as a rallying-point. They were carried in bulk on Portuguese ships and typically featured both national and religious symbols such as the royal coat of arms and a cross. They were semi-finished in Portugal, but when they were erected on site they were generally inscribed with a short motto, the date, the name of the king, and the leader of the exploratory mission responsible for this new "discovery." *Padrões* had grown out of an earlier practice of marking Western presence by setting up wooden crosses or carving messages on trees, but soon after the Portuguese had crossed the equator in the 1460s, their imperial

symbols became more grand and more permanent. A number of them have survived to this day, including one of the earliest, set up by Diogo Cão in West Africa in 1482. "In the year 6681 since the creation of the world," it read, "and 1482 years since the birth of our Lord Jesus, the most exalted, excellent, and powerful prince King D. Jõao of Portugal has had this land discovered and these *padrões* set up by Diogo Cão, esquire of his household" (Peres 1983, 201; Ravenstein 1900, 628). Clearly a sign of Portuguese colonial aspirations, this message was noticeably passive in construction, as was typical in the Portuguese tradition. Manuel has *had* these places "discovered." He seizes them, takes control; they were not come upon by accident but were the result of deliberate planning and were henceforth part of his dominion (Cortesão 1972; Subrahmanyam 1997, 83–84) (Fig. 3.1).

Markers of "Discovery"

Padrões, however, were not simply emblems of Portuguese possession. They also served as cartographic markers, like pins on a map showing the extent of Portuguese influence and testifying to their technological skill in areas of the world previously unknown to European mariners. In areas south of the equator in particular, new methods of navigation were required, and a *padrão* served as a kind of national patent to demonstrate to other Europeans that Portugal had perfected the means to reach these uncharted territories and, crucially, could repeat the journey whenever they desired (Seed 1995, 100–48).

This may have been true for new routes that the Portuguese had established around the tip of Africa and in the opposite direction into the South Atlantic. But when these stones were carried to East Asia, the notion of European "discovery" became even more problematic, since while that region, too, may have been equally uncharted as far as the West was concerned, it had also been an area of thriving international trade long before the Portuguese arrived. "New routes" to Malacca, the Spice Islands, China, or Japan simply followed long-established itineraries and ports of call for Arab, Indian, Malay, Siamese, Chinese, Japanese, and Korean traders (among others), and the Portuguese themselves made no secret of the fact that much of their information had been gathered from already quite sophisticated local sources. Native pilots were constantly being used, and an early Portuguese rutter containing information about a maiden voyage from Malacca to the Spice Islands also included sailing

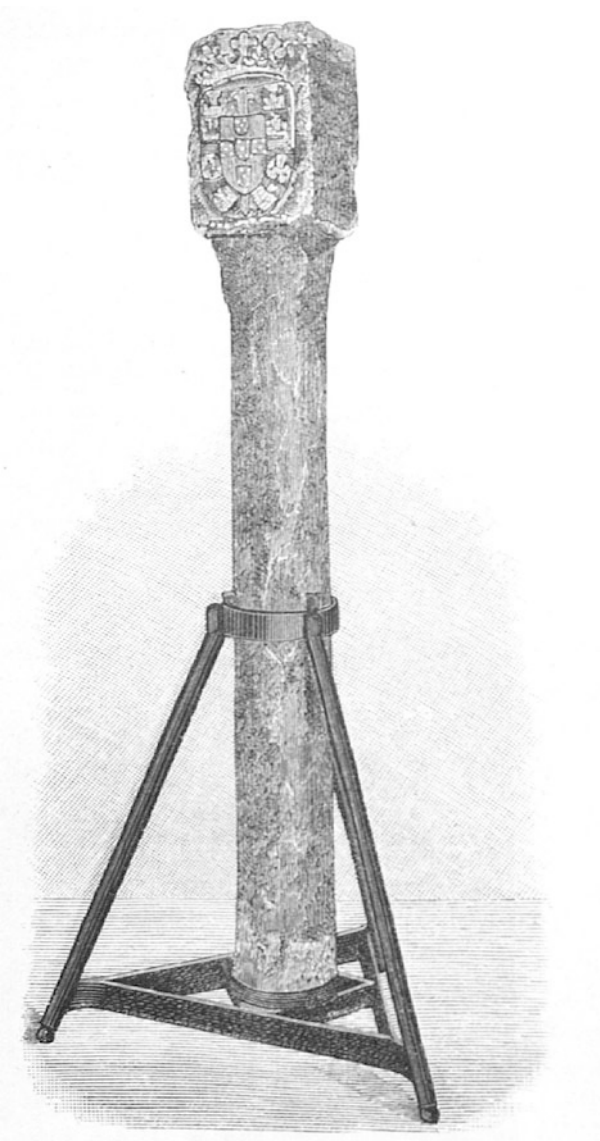

Fig. 3.1 Padrão de Santo Agostinho, set up Diogo Cão in 1482, from Luciano Cordeiro, *Descobertas e descobridores* (1892). National Taiwan University Library

directions from Malacca to China, which the Portuguese had gone nowhere near, and with distances given in Malay *jãos*, perhaps derived from a Chinese unit of distance (Pires 1944, 2:301–3). The rutter also featured schematic maps of the Canton estuary (and Beijing?), Taiwan, southern China (and the Philippines?), as well as a section of the northeastern Chinese coast (and Japan?). A 1512 letter from Afonso de Albuquerque to Manuel gave the source of much of this information as a now lost Javanese map that, according to Albuquerque, was "the best thing I have ever seen." "Your Highness can truly see," he continued, "where the Chinese . . . come from and the course your ships must take to the Clove Islands" (Albuquerque 1884–1935, 1:64–65; Pires 1944, 1: lxxviii–lxxix).

Period maps of the regions traversed by Portuguese ships clearly depicted *padrões* and other European icons of possession, as for example on charts of the western and southern coasts of Africa, India, and Southeast Asia. There can be little doubt that the Portuguese aspired to obtain similar control over some part of Chinese territory, which for them would have been one more link in a chain of foreign trading ports beginning in Lisbon and stretching in either direction to the other side of the world. An idea of what might have been planned can be gleaned from early representations of Portuguese Malacca, with its large fort and defensive walls separating the European settlement from the rest of the inhabitants, its *padrão* clearly visible at a key site on the coastline, and other symbols of royal control such as a *pelourinho* or pillory in a central part of the city. Sixteenth-century depictions of other locales in the Portuguese empire, such as Diu, Kannur, or Kollam on the western coast of India, or Hormuz in present-day Iran, featured parallel fortifications and strategically positioned administrative symbols (Corrêa 1858–66, 2:250, 2:394, 2:438, 3:10, 3:624) (Figs. 3.2 and 3.3).

China as Empire?

But at Tunmen in the early 1520s, Portuguese designs were completely thwarted. For in China, as I will show, the *Folangji* had come up against a different vision of empire that was precisely opposite to Manuel's monumental program of overseas "discovery." Chinese imperial power was traditionally based on cultural and economic influence, not colonization. Confucian ideology dictated that foreigners should come to China rather than the other way around, since

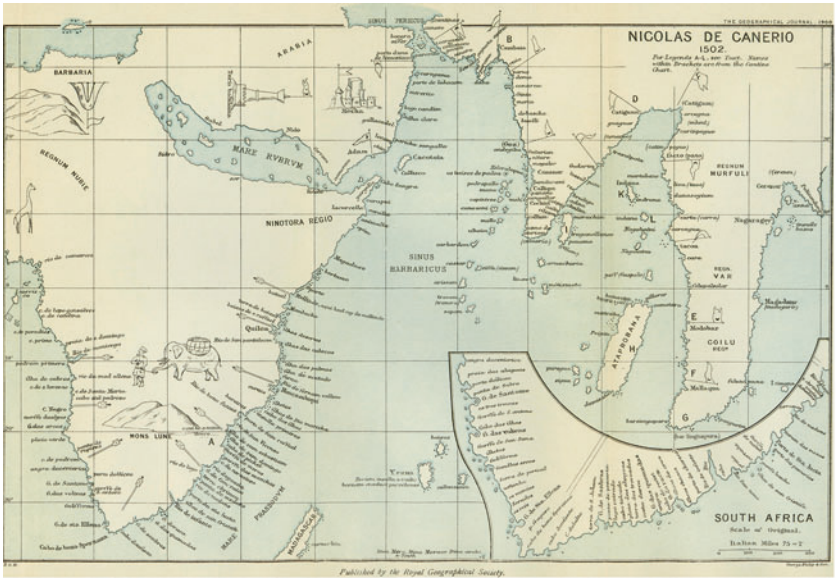

Fig. 3.2 Map of Africa, India, and Southeast Asia featuring *padrões* and flags at key points along the coastline, from E.G. Ravenstein, "The Voyages of Diogo Cão and Bartholomeu Dias" (1900). National Taiwan University Library

outsiders would naturally be attracted to the "heavenly virtue" of the emperor and thus reinforce the empire's cosmological position as the superior Middle Kingdom, the center of the world. We should recall that even the terms "emperor" and "empire" are full of Western bias. Stemming from the Roman tradition and from the Latin word *imperium*, these expressions were applied to China as early as the fictionalized travels of John Mandeville in the mid-fourteenth century, where Cathay and its Great Khan were identified as the most powerful empire and emperor of the entire world. But for most of its long history, China was not an empire in the sense of being interested in foreign conquest.

There was, however, one major exception to this rule, particularly revealing for our purposes because it occurred just one hundred years before the arrival of the Portuguese and covered largely the same area as their *Estado da Índia*. For a brief period in China's Ming dynasty, in the

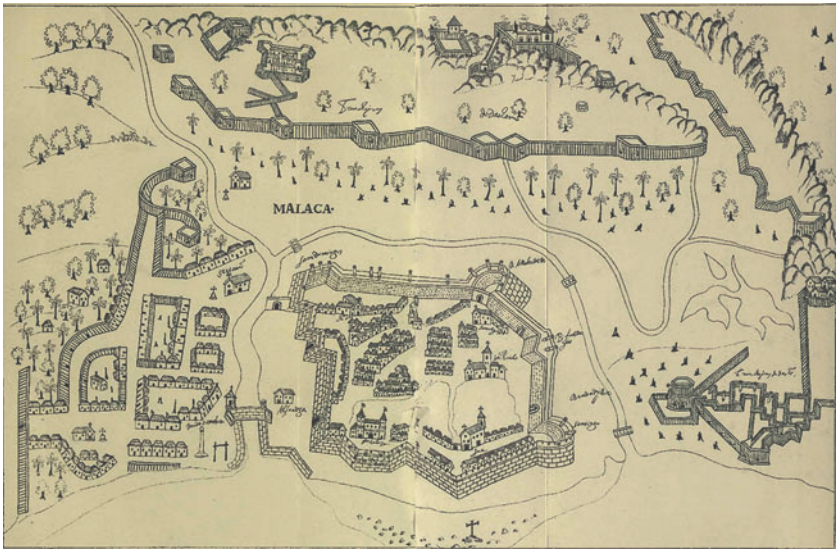

Fig. 3.3 Map with Malacca fortress in 1646, clearly showing a cross-shaped *padrão* facing the sea as well as a *pelourinho* and gallows in the left foreground, from Afonso de Albuquerque, *Commentaries* (1875–84), vol. 3. National Taiwan University Library

early fifteenth century, it was decided to depart from tradition and to seek out tribute rather than simply to receive it. An extensive series of overseas explorations – with hundreds of ships and tens of thousands of men – was undertaken by the eunuch admiral Zheng He, best known to English readers as the man who was at one time touted as the "discoverer" of America almost a century before Columbus. It is likely that he did not travel so far west, but over the course of nearly three decades (ca. 1405–33), there were seven major expeditions to Southeast Asia, India, Africa, and the Middle East, in which Zheng He visited many of the same sites that would later become Portuguese possessions (Duyvendak 1938–39). There is as yet no definitive answer as to why these voyages were begun, at such huge expense, just as there is no clear reason why they should have stopped just as suddenly, except perhaps for the fact that they were so anomalous and cost so much money.

Whatever the case, once the Ming navy had been reduced and its program of international exploration withdrawn, much of the documentary material relating to Zheng He was also systematically destroyed.

While it is thus very difficult to determine many of the specifics of this potentially "imperialistic" period of Chinese history, we can still find useful traces of it in a number of Western texts. In 1563, Garcia de Orta's encyclopedic treatment of East Indian drugs and herbs made frequent mention of the Chinese as the region's principal traders, and at the beginning of his survey of Iberian "discoveries" up to the year 1550, Antonio Galvão unhesitatingly referred to the Chinese as *ja senhores da India* or lords of the Indies (Galvão 1862, 19). Gaspar da Cruz, in the very first Western book dedicated solely to China in 1569, vaguely noted that the empire had "subjected many kingdoms and many peoples thanks to its singular government," and in 1585, in the most influential book on China during the entire period, Juan González de Mendoza discussed at some length how their conquests had reached "the furthest part of India" until they had voluntarily withdrawn themselves (Boxer 1953, 189; Mendoza 1853–54, 1:94–95). By the late 1580s, this was a "persistent rumor" repeated in a fictionalized Latin colloquy describing the visit of four Japanese visitors to Europe, part of a public relations project orchestrated by the head of the Jesuit mission in Japan, Alessandro Valignano, who had also spent a number of years in India where he might well have seen vestiges of Chinese presence, including significant numbers of Chinese people still living there (Sande 2012, 65).

But all these notions were then countered by the pioneering Jesuit in China, Matteo Ricci, who famously announced that after a diligent study of more than four thousand years of Chinese history, he was unable to find even the smallest reference to the fact that the Chinese had once "conquered neighboring kingdoms and reached as far as India." One of the main differences between the Chinese and the Europeans, he added, was that the former were never interested in conquest (Ricci 1942–49, 1:66). Perhaps, this idealization of Chinese history was reflective of the official position under the later Ming emperors, when Zheng He had been willfully forgotten and overseas contact was no longer favored. But by the same token, there can be little doubt that a certain cultural memory of Chinese international influence had lingered on a century after the Zheng He expeditions had come to an end. Even Ricci's early-seventeenth-century editor, Nicolas Trigault, had inserted a small paragraph wondering whether this Western "mistake" might be due to "certain vestiges of Chinese people in external locations" such as the Philippines (Ricci 1615, 59; Ricci 1953, 55).

Chinese *Padrões*?

And yet even if much Chinese source material about Zheng He has been lost, there are other, even more concrete vestiges of Chinese influence that can be profitably compared to Portuguese *padrões* and other markers of colonial possession. We know, for instance, about a Chinese stele erected in Calicut from the accounts of two different members of Zheng He's entourage. "In the fifth year of the Yongle emperor [1407]," one of them wrote:

> the court ordered the principal envoy . . . Zheng He . . . to deliver an imperial mandate to the king of [Calicut] and to bestow on him a patent conferring a title of honor. . . . Zheng He went there in command of a large fleet of treasure-ships, and he erected a tablet with a pavilion over it and set up a stone which said: "Though the journey from this country to the Middle Kingdom is more than a hundred thousand *li*, yet the people are very similar, happy, and prosperous, with identical customs." (Fei 1996, 138)

This "imperial mandate" seemed to be a statement of formal investiture, in which Calicut, the most important port and trading center on the western coast of India, would be officially accorded the honor of becoming a tribute-bearing nation. Like many other sites in Asia, it became home to a substantial Chinese community and was also, as several Portuguese authors noted, the site of a large trading factory known to Westerners as Cota China or Chinacota – that is, "the Chinese fortress" (Orta 1913, 122; Barros and Couto 1777–78, 3.9.9:436–37, 5.1.1:4; Corrêa 1858–66, 1:186). As Barros put it, the Chinese had previously "navigated the coasts of India and had set up *Feitorias* in order to trade in spices" (Barros and Couto 1777–78, 4.5.3:559, 2.2.9:213; *Novus* 1532, 150).

Down the coast in Cochin, numerous Portuguese authors observed that another Chinese stone in the possession of the king was being held in great veneration as a symbol of his royal power. According to one traveler, it had been left "as a mark [*marquo*] in memory of [the Chinese] having been there" (Barros and Couto 1777–78, 4.7.19:308–9, 5.1.1:5; Castanheda 1924–33, 7.143:332; Orta 1913, 122). The official Ming history furthermore recorded that an imperial rock inscription had been placed on a local hillside, which for the Chinese government was another means of recognizing a tributary polity, as well as part of a complex tradition of religious sacrifice made in honor of, among other things, foreign mountains and rivers. Similar inscriptions were mentioned for

Malacca and Brunei, and according to a third narrator from Zheng He's entourage, Malacca had been "raised to [the level of] a country" by means of a stone tablet from China (Nagel 2001, 459, 460 n. 104; Fei 1996, 55).

Such investitures were often requested rather than imposed from without, since becoming a Chinese ally could carry numerous advantages both regionally and internationally. We know, for example, about a Chinese border stone sought by the central Vietnamese region of Champa in the mid-fifteenth century – not, however, to mark it as the emperor's territory but instead to invoke Chinese protection against the incursions of neighboring Annam. The stone tablet in Malacca similarly noted that its leader "wished to become like a division of China, so that [he] would be superior to the other border regions" (Nagel 2001, 459; *Ming shi lu* 1961–66, Taizong 47:4b). A further testament to Chinese cultural influence were temple bells, a number of which survive throughout Asia and date from as early as the eighth century. A Portuguese traveler to Malacca in the first decade of the seventeenth century reported seeing one near the beach and noticed its complex visual imagery. Chinese temples must have been commonplace, too; Barros spoke of one at Mylapore (Salmon 2007; Barbosa 1996–2000, 2:461; Barros and Couto 1777–78, 3.2.1:107).

In Sri Lanka, finally, there is one remarkable stele found in 1911 in the southern seaport of Galle, where it had ended up being used as a cover for a drainage ditch. The stone commemorated a visit by Zheng He in 1409 and was inscribed with texts in three languages (Chinese, Tamil, and Persian), each of which concluded with a list of gifts presented to three separate sets of deities in the Buddhist, Hindu, and Islamic traditions. The precise purpose of the stele is not entirely clear, and it may have been connected to some sort of construction project, perhaps a temple. But by the same token, its diplomatic overtones were apparent: "Of late we have dispatched missions to announce our Mandate to foreign nations," the Chinese inscription began, "and during their journeys over the oceans the missions have been favored with the blessing of Thy [Buddha's] beneficent protection." Another contemporary source referred to the same stone as part of an "imperial plan" (*huang tu*) (Needham 1954–, 4:3:522–23; Nagel 2001, 433–36; Fei 1996, 64).

The Portuguese as Inheritors

As Joseph Needham has noted in his acute analysis of the Galle stele, a seventeenth-century Portuguese Jesuit may have seen it before it disappeared for almost three hundred years. "Half a league beyond Maturê,"

the missionary wrote, "there is a Pagoda . . . where are to be found stone *padrões* which the Kings of China ordered to be set up with Letters of that nation – as a token, it seems, of their devotion to those Idols" (Queyroz 1930, 1:35). Part of a typical disparagement of all foreign religious practices (in the next sentence we learn that the "Pagoda," probably a Sri Lankan Buddhist temple, was later replaced by a Franciscan Church and "the worship of the true God"), it is much more revealing that the missionary specifically referred to the stone as a *padrão*, as if the Chinese had once marked out an overseas empire just like the Portuguese. The traveler who marveled at the Chinese bell in Malacca was even more insistent about a supposed precedent for Portuguese imperial conquest: the bell had been placed on the beach, he asserted, "by the King of China as a *padrão* just as we ourselves erect stones with the arms of our King" (Barbosa 1996–2000, 2:461).

The difficult question of whether China possessed an empire in any way analogous to a European model, in other words, is less important than the fact that many Portuguese seemed to think of *themselves* as following in or continuing just such a tradition, as if they had stepped into a region in which former Chinese allies could simply switch their allegiance from one imperial master to another. In some cases, this is precisely what happened. A customs agreement with Ormuz from 1541 explicitly referred to the Portuguese king as equivalent to the Chinese emperor, and the sultan of Johor, to take another example, agreed to pay the same tribute to Portugal that his predecessor had given to China (Barros and Couto 1777–78, 5.9.5:330–31; Alves 2005, 43). It has also been argued that Portuguese methods of vassalage and tribute in the East were heavily influenced by East Asian (and Islamic) models, just as Portugal's *cartaz* system of safe-conduct passes for ships was based on earlier practices of Muslim merchants (the word *cartaz* itself deriving from an Arabic term for "paper" or "document") (Thomaz 1994, 232; 1999, 120–21; Flores 2014, 34–35).

But there were also numerous differences between Portuguese aspirations and those of China, although both, to a large degree, had been interested in commerce, and both, to an even larger degree, had considered themselves decidedly superior to other peoples. It might be said that China, during its brief foray into overseas development under the command of Zheng He, had embarked on a certain program of "discovery" of its own, but it seems inaccurate to say that Malacca, Calicut, Cochin, Brunei, and a host of other territories were ever

absorbed as Chinese colonies, nor were their rulers ousted or foreign bureaucratic structures forced upon them. China did not send missionaries and impose its religious beliefs on anyone else either, although of course there were certain expectations about propriety and respect and that foreigners should "come and be transformed" (*lai hua*) by Chinese civilization. While Zheng He's ships carried huge armies, there seemed to be very isolated cases in which the use of force was deemed necessary, and in any case he did not seem interested in completely monopolizing international trade and then, like the Portuguese, in defending that right through the use of arms and defensive fortifications. Trade agreements were certainly made, but what have come down to us are largely ceremonial statements relating to paying homage through tribute rituals (Ptak 1998).

It is thus with a certain irony that we read about the Portuguese king's overtures to the idea of "peace and friendship." In fact these terms were so commonly used during the period as to be almost formulaic; *paz* and *amizade*, along with *irmandade* (brotherhood), were constantly being employed in communications with local sovereigns. Early examples include Manuel's instructions to Lopes de Sequeira to seek "peace and friendship" with all monarchs east of Madagascar, and da Gama's assurance to the leader of Calicut that the Portuguese king was his "friend and brother." Similarly, in the 1502 negotiations with Sofala, a key seaport in Mozambique and a major transfer point for gold trade in the region, the local sheikh was asked whether he would like to establish "peace and friendship" with the Portuguese and to allow them to trade, being assured that "if he was a good friend of the King of Portugal this peace would last forever, and as long as he acted truly he would be like a brother with the King of Portugal" (Albuquerque 1884–1935, 2:414; Castanheda 1924–33, 1.17:62; Corrêa 1858–66, 1:273–74).

Such terminology was based on assumptions in the West about the primacy of mutual alliances based on international law, another concept that functioned quite differently according to Chinese expectations. To put it as briefly as possible, in China, contact with the outside world was based neither on friendship nor on brotherhood, and as the Dutch were to learn at the conclusion of their first official embassy in the middle of the seventeenth century, a successful overture to the emperor's court meant that outsiders would be permitted to recognize him only as their "sovereign and father" (*tsun jin*).

The King's Letter

We will examine the Dutch encounter in detail in our next chapter, but first we need to conclude the present one by returning to the story of the ill-fated Pires embassy and, ultimately, to that now absent letter of "peace and friendship" from King Manuel. Based on the precedents I have just cited, and there were many others (Saldanha 1997, 353–83), it is highly likely that Manuel had employed similar terms in addressing the Chinese emperor. Even two hundred years later, another Portuguese legation sent by Jõao V – and whose letter still exists in the Chinese archives – began by addressing the emperor as his "dear and beloved friend" and "brother." It also spoke of such things as the "reciprocal utility" of commerce between the two nations (Sousa e Menezes 1929; Saldanha 2005).

But in the case of King Manuel, we also have a very illuminating eyewitness account of the Pires embassy composed by Cristovão Vieira, one of those who was subsequently imprisoned and who wrote about his experiences while still in captivity more than ten years later. In fact, there were three letters presented at the emperor's court: one from Manuel; one in the name of Fernão Peres de Andrade, which purported to be a translation of the king's sealed letter; and one from officials in Canton recommending that the Portuguese requests be approved – before, that is, relations had begun to sour.

As Vieira put it, when Andrade first arrived, he ordered his interpreters to write a letter stating that he had come with an ambassador to the "king of China," and as a result, a written statement was fashioned "according to the custom of the country," namely, that an ambassador "had come to the land of China by command of the king of the *Folangji* with tribute. [He has] come to beg, according to custom, for a seal from the lord of the world, the son of God, in order to yield obedience to him" (Ferguson 1901–2, 2:467, 3:10–11). Barros assumed that Manuel's letter must have been written "in the manner used to write to the Pagan Kings of those parts, giving preeminence to that [foreign] prince, to the greatness of his realm, and to its governance" (Barros and Couto 1777–78, 3.6.1:7). Indeed, Manuel's tone could be quite deferential when necessary, such as in an early communication with the Zamorin of Calicut in 1500. But he would not have been willing to refer to any eastern monarch as "lord of the world" (a title Manuel would have liked to reserve for himself), and certainly not as "the son of God" (Albuquerque 1884–1935, 3:85–88; Greenlee 1938, 187–90; Thomaz 1990). Portuguese commentators knew that the Chinese sovereign was traditionally called the son of heaven, but

when this was mentioned it was generally the object of considerable ridicule. As another of the Portuguese captives remarked, "it is the custom of the country to call their king the son of God and their land the country of God; all other peoples outside the country they call savages who know neither God nor country, and every ambassador that comes to their country comes to yield obedience to the son of God and other absurdities"; in Maffei's popular *Historiarum indicarum*, this was "barbarous and foolish arrogance" (Barros and Couto 1777–78, 3.6.1:8, 11, 14; Corrêa 1858–66, 2:524; Mendoza 1853–54, 1:76; Ferguson 1901–2, 2:491, 4:65; Maffei 1589, sig. 101v).

The embassy party, Vieira continued, had no idea about the way in which their king's letter had been reworded. The interpreters reported merely that it "had been well done according to custom." However, when "the [original] letter of our lord the king was opened, there was found therein the reverse [*ao Reves*] of what the interpreters had written. It therefore appeared to them . . . that we had entered the country of China deceitfully, in order to spy out the land, and that it was a piece of deception because of the difference between the letter of the king and the other letters" (Ferguson 1901–2, 2:467, 3:11). This description is particularly revealing, because it provides our clearest hint as to what the missing letter might actually have contained: not merely a "difference" from the translated version but indeed "the reverse" of it, which is to say that the gesture of "obedience" expressed in the Chinese text was (to put it mildly) not found in the Portuguese original.

And as for the contention about spying, an accusation we have met before, this was after all not very far from the truth. Even Andrade (not Simão but the "good" brother Fernão) had sent out men to reconnoiter Canton, including one who took advantage of the lights from a lantern festival to climb the wall and take stock of the city's defenses. Others were dispatched to explore the Ryukyu islands but only got as far as Zhangzhou in nearby Fujian province. In Galvão's succinct phrasing, Andrade had spent fourteen months "informing himself of the things of the country, as his king had commanded him" (Barros and Couto 1777–78, 3.2.7:201–2, 3.2.8:220–21; Galvão 1862, 130).

The Portuguese Expulsion

According to Vieira's version of events, finally, once Manuel's letter had been opened it was the beginning of the end. The interpreters were closely questioned and asked why they had written a *carta falsa*. They replied that

the king's letter had come closed and sealed and was to be delivered directly into the emperor's hands, that it was necessary to make it conform to the necessary protocols, and that these people had come from far away and did not know Chinese customs. Letters of complaint made things even worse. The *Folangji* were robbers, they said. They refused to pay their customs duties, they constructed fortifications surrounded by artillery, and worst of all they had stolen Malacca. As a result, the embassy's presents were refused and Manuel's letter was burned (Ferguson 1901–2, 2:467–48, 471, 3:11–12, 16).

But what we have to understand here – and this is a subject to which we will return many times during the course of this book – is that Western actions did not necessarily determine the relative success or failure of any of their embassies to China. European insistence on "what went wrong" was often inaccurate and, indeed, beside the point, for they simply were not in control of these encounters and so many factors had nothing to do with them at all. The Portuguese excuses could have been accepted and their transgressions overlooked, but the fact is that they were not. Even if they had behaved flawlessly and had fully complied with all of their hosts' demands, it is probable that their requests would still have been denied. A variety of factions within the central government, both for and against foreign trade, contributed to these difficulties, as well as a perennial divide between court interests and those in faraway maritime regions like Canton, where commerce was an economic necessity.

In the south, trade was always welcomed, even with the badly behaved *Folangji*, although much of it was technically illegal or had to take place offshore. Barros reported how from the beginning, the embassy was impressed by the way that the Canton trade was managed (Barros and Couto 1777–78, 3.2.8:218). But what really decided things against the Portuguese was the sudden death of the emperor, at the age of twenty-nine, in the spring of 1521, not long after Pires had arrived in Beijing. Known as the Zhengde emperor, he had a reputation for an erratic and unconventional lifestyle and a penchant for foreign things and exotic people. He had shown considerable favor toward the embassy at first, perhaps even having some personal contact with them in Nanjing, as he was returning from a southern tour and Pires was making his way toward the capital (Pelliot 1948). At the time of his death, however, no decision had been reached regarding the Portuguese requests, and once he had passed away, custom dictated that all foreign embassies were required to leave Beijing immediately – a convenient pretext for Portuguese expulsion.

Power had shifted and new factions had taken over. It certainly didn't help matters that by the time Pires had arrived back in Canton, several new skirmishes had occurred in the waters around Tunmen. Just before the emperor died, for instance, a newly arrived fleet of ships had begun to trade without incident. But when news of the emperor's passing became known, the ships, according to Barros, were ordered to leave "on pain of death" (Chang 1934, 53–61; Barros and Couto 1777–78, 3.6.2:19). Was this simply because of a long-standing tradition or was it something more? Similarly, the taking of Malacca, nominally a Chinese ally, was not necessarily a reason to refuse an embassy, although this was invoked as if it were a matter of normal foreign policy. The Portuguese were once again ordered to leave and were issued a rather hollow ultimatum, in the form of an "imperial castigation" to restore Malacca before tribute could be accepted, and that other tribute-bearing nations could be called in to assist. "If [the *Folangji*] refuse and blindly hold to their ways," an investigating censor memorialized, "although the various foreign [that is, Southeast Asian] barbarians are not used to using weapons, we will have to summon them to arms, proclaim the *Folangji* crimes and punish them, so as to make clear the Great Precepts of Right Conduct" (*Ming shi lu* 1961–66, Wuzong 194:2b; see also Shizong 4:27b).

During the Zheng He period, such lofty principles might have been backed up by a navy of awe-inspiring size, but in 1521 this was distinctly anachronistic rhetoric. The military forces near Canton were for the moment sufficient to keep the small number of Portuguese ships at bay, but this did not really solve the problem of those in China who were in favor of continued commercial contact. Within only a year, the Portuguese were able to find numerous other bases of operation up the coast, reaching as far north as Ningbo in the Zhejiang province, where over the next twenty years, according to da Cruz, they became "so firmly settled . . . and with such freedom, that nothing was lacking them save having a gallows and *pelourinho*." That, too, would turn out to be only a temporary outpost, as those who favored the idea of a "closed" China continued to struggle against those whose livelihood depended on foreign trade. In the case of the Portuguese, this remained unresolved until a permanent factory was permitted at Macao in the early 1550s, where commerce could be condoned but still take place under tight governmental control (Boxer 1953, 192–93; Ptak 2004, 27; Fok 1991).

But in 1522, Pires and his suite were the victims of a situation that in the end had little to do with them. They had come to China hoping to

extend an empire that had grown at an astonishing rate during the early years of the sixteenth century, but they had to confront a very different and equally haughty conception of territory that, for the moment at least, was more powerful than their own. Portuguese bullying tactics were frequently mixed with expectations of reciprocity and equanimity, which often made their real motives hard to decipher, but in China there was no such equanimity and all licit communication with outsiders could only take place on the assumption that China, not the West, was the center of the world. It was only on such a basis that trade – in theory, at least – was allowed to exist, and this is the subject of the next chapter.

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CHAPTER 4

Holland and "Trade"

In the last chapter, we saw that one major aspect of European bias toward the rest of the world – its notion of empire – did not come across very cleanly when Westerners returned to China at the beginning of the sixteenth century. The Portuguese were the first to arrive during this new wave of European contact, hoping to acquire a bit of land on which to set up a permanent trading factory, just as they had done at numerous other sites in their burgeoning *Estado da Índia*. As a symbol of their imperial designs, they set up a *padrão* or stone marker as an indication that China had already been "discovered," and that the sea routes to reach Canton belonged to them and to them alone.

At the same time, they sent an ambassador with a message of "peace and friendship" from the Portuguese king, hoping thereby to achieve some sort of agreement under which to set up operations. But they had no qualms about ousting local rulers or forcing others to recognize their new colonial sovereignty when necessary. Such mixed messages were not always an obstacle at other ports of call, where with a combination of diplomacy and bullying they had managed to secure trade monopolies and to set up small administrations defended by armed fortresses. But in China, things were different. Here, the Portuguese found a much more powerful and competing tradition of empire that had little to do with conquest or "discovery." Here, it was assumed that outsiders would naturally come to China rather than the other way around, drawn by a centripetal attraction to the cultural efflorescence known as the Middle

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Kingdom. The Portuguese had indeed come, but not according to the terms required by the Chinese side. These two notions of empire, theoretical though they might be, could not easily coexist, and in this first modern encounter between China and the West, the Chinese version had clearly won out, although perhaps not always for the reasons assumed by the Portuguese.

In this chapter, we will take up a similar tale as well as a related issue having to do with commerce: the notion of trade itself, which could also mean something very different in the Chinese context. I am especially interested in European attempts to obtain what they called "free trade" privileges, then as now a rather slippery term with a variety of significations, some more technical than others, but generally used to mean freedom from various kinds of private or governmental control (Thomas 1926). Their requests might seem straightforward enough, as enumerated by a list presented by a Dutch embassy in 1666: to be able to come every year with as many ships as needed; to have the right to trade with anyone at a number of different seaports; to arrive and depart whenever it was most convenient; to be granted a residence to protect their money and merchandise; and so on (Montanus 1671, 328–29).

But in China, this notion of "free trade" did not exist, at least not in any formal capacity, and indeed foreign trade could be said to have had a completely different ideological history. As I have mentioned many times before, the Middle Kingdom traditionally perceived of itself as the center of the world and required nothing from outside. Theirs was a mode of thinking that did not stress mutuality at all, and even for foreigners to be recognized as partners (in trade), a certain form of subjugation or vassalage was required, although from the Chinese point of view, this was an ennoblement and a civilizing gesture. To come into contact with the empire or to engage in any form of relations with it necessitated obedience, and if trade should be granted as a result, it was a gesture of compassion and beneficence, not a recognition of common or reciprocal advantage. The West hoped for trade agreements based on presumed notions of bilateral international law, but in the Chinese universe there were only contacts based on hierarchy, with China at the center and the emperor at the summit.

Any official business with outsiders could only be conducted once they had been accepted as tribute-bearing nations, which involved more than just a humble demeanor or a willingness to engage in a variety of verbal and physical obeisances. Tribute involved a complex process of regulation and precedent, in which foreigners must present gifts to the emperor,

recognize the symbolic centrality of China, and make periodic visits to the court in Beijing to perform certain rituals. Numerous presents and privileges would be received in return, among them, typically, the right to trade, both at the ambassadors' residence in the capital and at the port of entry. These rules were most fully laid out in the various editions of the *Huidian* or Collected Statutes, particularly the one compiled under the Kangxi emperor in 1690, which was then significantly augmented under Qianlong in 1764. Even a cursory glance at the 1690 version will reveal the extent to which these policies differed from European expectations: a tribute mission must contain no more than one hundred men, only twenty of whom are allowed to proceed to the capital; the number of ships must not exceed three; if a foreign ship arrives to trade "without reason," or in a year not designated for tribute, it must be sent away; ships are not allowed to trade before the principal tribute ship has arrived; an embassy must depart without delay as soon as the trade is completed; and so on (Fairbank and Teng 1941, 164–69).

Taken together, these regulations have come to be called (by Western scholars) the "tribute system," although there is no such term in Chinese and it wasn't really a system at all, just a set of traditions that had slowly accumulated over long periods of Chinese history, and especially during the more inward-looking Ming dynasty (1368–1644), when China had successfully separated itself from its East and Southeast Asian neighbors and had reinforced its place among Confucian cultures as the self-described apex of human civilization (Wills 1984; Mancall 1984, 13–39). The basic contours of this policy also functioned very well as a means of dealing with more remote barbarians like the Portuguese. In the often cataclysmic conditions of the early Qing dynasty, formally established in 1644, the conditions for foreign tribute were once again reinterpreted and adapted to suit new needs, among them the more frequent presence of Westerners and their colonial outposts in territories adjacent to China (the Portuguese at Macao, the Spanish at Manila, the Dutch in Taiwan).

Yet we should keep in mind that the rules of the "tribute system" were always porous, since despite the empire's legendary reclusiveness and self-sufficiency, foreign trade had been conducted for centuries, not only via the old Silk Road overland routes but also by sea from the south and the east. There was also a well-established practice in which visitors could use the pretenses of tribute to their own advantage, as the simplest way to enter the country to trade, and to receive valuable imperial gifts in return, was to attach oneself to a group purporting to be an official embassy, and

both sides seemed to know perfectly well that the whole thing was only a charade (Yule 1913–16, 4:218–29, 242–44; Fletcher 1968, 207–8). It was also the case that tribute regulations were not necessarily applied with any degree of consistency. Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, for example, European embassies were treated in remarkably different ways despite the fact that they all followed more or less the same procedures. Some legations were turned away immediately, such as a Russian embassy in 1654, for refusing, among other things, to kowtow. Others scrupulously followed tribute protocols yet were still very ill-treated, such as the last Dutch embassy of 1795 (Fu 1966, 1:20; Baddeley 1919, 2:130–66; Duyvendak 1938–39).

As in our previous chapter, it is clear that European wants and desires did not stand at the center of any of these encounters, and if Westerners obtained any benefit for all their trouble, it might have been for external or (from their point of view) arbitrary reasons. Our focus in this chapter will be the next official embassy following the Portuguese disaster of 1517–22, a Dutch legation that arrived in 1655, headed by two merchants in the employ of the Dutch East India Company and sent out from their East Asian headquarters at Batavia (present-day Jakarta). Compared to the Portuguese, the Dutch were very well received, first by local officials in Canton and then by the emperor in Beijing. But their explicit goal, an unrestricted yearly trade, was also unmistakably thwarted. They may not have ended up dead or in prison like the unlucky Portuguese, but the Dutch did receive a blunt refusal in the form of an imperial edict, stating that far from being granted annual trading rights and a mercantile residence, they must leave the country at once and return to pay tribute to the emperor every eight years.

Once again, we might be tempted to see this rebuff as a simple stalemate, a moment at which two very different conceptions had been forced to meet and could not get much further than a recognition of the other's position. But we will see that there were other reasons for the emperor's decision that had little to do with the requirements of the tribute system, most important being the fact that all coastal trade had been halted in order to combat the rebellion of Ming loyalist Zheng Chenggong (known to the West as Koxinga), whose naval forces posed a considerable threat both to Qing rule and to Dutch attempts to control East Asian maritime commerce (Fu 1966, 1:20–21). The timing of the Dutch embassy, in other words, could not have been worse.

By 1655, moreover, there was another new wrinkle in the ongoing conversation between China and the West that the Portuguese had never

explicitly encountered: European rivals. The Portuguese had already controlled Macao for 100 years and enjoyed the only regular, officially sanctioned trade with Canton. They had only recently been forced out of the Spice Islands by the (Protestant) Dutch, who among other sites now controlled Malacca, the former Portuguese stronghold. By the early seventeenth century, the English were also a major threat. Things were made particularly challenging for the Dutch because the main spokesman for the Portuguese at the Chinese court was a Catholic missionary, Adam Schall von Bell, a native of Cologne and senior leader of the Jesuit mission, who had been promoted to the rank of mandarin of the highest order and had become a close confidant and advisor to the young Shunzhi emperor, at the time only seventeen years old. Schall actually took credit for turning the tide against the Dutch, after they had been made numerous promises by officials in Canton. But this, too, was probably a chimera and had little to do with the real reasons for the Dutch being turned away. And finally, we will have to examine one last qualification about the Dutch defeat: that according to the Chinese side it wasn't a failure at all.

NIEUHOF

Our main source of information about the embassy is a report composed by its chief steward and secretary, Johannes Nieuhof, published in 1665 under the title *Het Gezantschap der Neerlandtsche Oost-Indische Compagnie, aan den grooten Tartarischen Cham, den tegenwoordigen keizer van China* (The Embassy of the Dutch East India Company to the Great Tartar Cham, the Present Emperor of China). This large folio was extremely popular, owing not so much to the ambassadorial narrative itself, which comprised only the first half of the book, but because of the huge variety of encyclopedic material appended to it and drawn from numerous contemporary Western (primarily Jesuit) sources. Even more influentially, the text boasted nearly 150 engravings, many of which were based on drawings executed by Nieuhof on site, including city and landscape views as well as Chinese people and things, all of which contributed markedly to Europe's incipient fascination with chinoiserie styles. The book was simultaneously published in Dutch and French by one of Holland's premier printing houses, followed by German, Latin, and English editions, as well as a second Dutch version printed in Antwerp. Other, shorter versions were also published in French, German, and English (Fig. 4.1).

HET
GEZANTSCHAP
Der Neêrlandtſche Ooſt-Indiſche Compagnie,
AAN DEN
GROOTEN
TARTARISCHEN CHAM,
Den tegenwoordigen
KEIZER VAN CHINA:
WAAR IN
De gedenkwaerdighſte Geſchiedeniſſen, die onder het reizen door de Sineeſche Landtſchappen, Quantung, Kiangſi, Nanking, Xantung en Peking, en aan het Keizerlijke Hof te Peking, ſedert den jare 1655. tot 1657. zijn voorgevallen, op het bondigſte verhandelt worden.
BENEFFENS
Een Naukeurige Beſchryving der Sineeſche Steden, Dorpen, Regeering, Wetenſchappen, Hantwerken, Zeden, Godsdienſten, Gebouwen, Drachten, Schepen, Bergen, Gewaſſen, Dieren, &c. en Oorlogen tegen de Tarters.
Verçiert met over de 150. Afbeeltſels, na 't leven in Sina getekent: En beſchreven
DOOR
JOAN NIEUHOF;
Toen eerſte Hofmeeſter des Gezantſchaps, tegenwoordig Opperhooft in COYLAN.
t'AMSTERDAM,
By JACOB VAN MEURS, Boekverkooper en Plaatſnijder, op de Keyzers-graft, ſchuyn over de Weſter-marct, in de Stadt Meurs. ANNO 1665.

Fig. 4.1 Title page from Johannes Nieuhof, *Het gezantschap der Neerlandtsche Oost-Indische Compagnie, aan den grooten Tartarischen Cham, den tegenwoordigen keizer van China* (1665). National Taiwan University Library

One of the most interesting things about the volume is that in many ways it is a book full of contradictions. While part of its attractiveness was due to its being one of the first eyewitness accounts of China from a non-missionary informant, the vast majority of its detail was drawn from missionary sources like Matteo Ricci (as edited by Nicolas Trigault), Martino Martini, and Alvaro Semedo. This irony was further intensified by Nieuhof's readiness to blame the embassy's lack of success on his Catholic rivals, the Portuguese in general and Schall in particular. Even in Nieuhof's journal, which still exists in a manuscript copy along with many of his drawings, an otherwise dry and neutral account of the itinerary paused to grumble about the embassy's Jesuit enemies, who spread rumors among the Chinese that the Dutch were nothing more than sea robbers – capable, for instance, of living underwater for three days at a time (Blussé and Falkenburg 1987, 55). But despite the fact that the *Gezantschap* offered so much more by way of expensive and attractive trimmings, and that, as the preface to the Dutch edition claimed, it might help to uncover China's "secrets" (Nieuhof 1665, sig. *4), the book remained at bottom a story of failure: "for all these great Presents and great trouble and so dangerous and long Travel," Nieuhof wrote on the last page of his narrative, "we effected nothing else but that the *Hollanders* were received as Friends by the Emperor . . . and might return eight years hence to salute his Imperial Majesty" (Nieuhof 1669, 146).

Recent research has shown that the embassy actually achieved much more than it might at first appear (Kops 2002). For one thing, even to be "received as Friends by the Emperor" (that is, to be accepted and registered as a tribute-bearing nation) was quite an accomplishment and could have been a first step to many other advantages, including, perhaps, the possibility of increased trade. Portugal was the only other Western power to have achieved anything like this status. Second, despite the official rejection in Beijing, Dutch trade was enthusiastically supported by the ruling elite in the Guangdong and Fujian provinces, who of course had the most to gain financially, and immediately following the embassy's return to Batavia in 1657, a lucrative offshore business was begun near Canton (and, later, Fuzhou). Chinese and intra-Asian commerce also increased at the Dutch trading posts in Taiwan, a strategically located site that they had occupied since the early 1620s. Nieuhof had concluded his account by suggesting that an alliance against Zheng Chenggong might also improve their chances for regular trade (Nieuhof 1669, 146), and after the Dutch lost Taiwan to Zheng's forces in 1662, their desire for revenge led to a

military cooperation with the Qing government that resulted in Zheng's defeat and, beginning in 1663, a new imperial decision that the Dutch could trade every two years, although this privilege would also be revoked four years later (Montanus 1671, 182; Wills 1974, 1984).

Trade and Tribute

The story as told by Nieuhof, however, was one of frustration and, from the Dutch point of view, broken promises. One of the things he neglected to mention was that the only reason that the Dutch had agreed to send an embassy at all was because their earlier tactics of harassment and intimidation had not produced very adequate results (although in the beginning it did win them the right to establish their Taiwan outposts). The decision to try diplomacy instead was spurred forward in 1652 by Martino Martini, a returning Jesuit who had lived in China for the previous ten years and had stopped at Batavia, where he informed company officials that with the change of dynasty, Canton was now more keen on trade – not only with the Portuguese at Macao but also with all foreigners. The Dutch responded the following year with two exploratory missions, one from Taiwan and one from Batavia, but they soon discovered that nothing could be accomplished without an official embassy. When Nieuhof and his party arrived in 1655, they found that the Canton leadership was indeed very anxious to trade, and permission to come to Beijing was confirmed by a letter in which the emperor himself, so we are told, "was pleased to grant a free Trade in *China* to the *Hollanders*,... for which great favor his Imperial Majesty did expect the Embassadors to come and give him thanks" (Nieuhof 1669, 42). One wonders the degree to which this might have been wishful thinking (it was unlikely that "free trade" would have been sanctioned), or whether the Dutch were being willfully misled. At least one faction at court was very receptive to Dutch aims, but in all the official Chinese reports, including those prepared in Canton, the question of trade was discussed from within the context of tribute-bearing only.

The ambassadors set out on their four-month journey from Canton to Beijing full of hope, and once they had reached their destination and had appeared before the Board of Rites, who were in charge of examining all foreign embassies, two imperial mandates arrived expressing satisfaction with the Dutch legation and once again implying that their requests might

well be authorized (Nieuhof 1669, 119–20). Yet when the Board came to discuss details, it was clear that not everyone was in favor of regular contact, and various proposals were put forward as to how often the Dutch should be permitted to come to pay tribute (and whether, in the intervening years, trade might be allowed). The Board's recommendation, as recorded in the Chinese archives, was for once every five years, adding that offshore trade was prohibited and would only be allowed at the ambassadors' residence – that is, during tribute missions (Fu 1966, 1:19; *Shunzhi shi lu* 1964, 102:22a). The Dutch were incensed by this turn of events and assumed that something must have happened to sway the court against them – and apparently so suddenly. Once more, the Portuguese and Schall were held directly responsible, although officials in Canton were also suspected of double-dealing. It was clear that tribute and trade had become separate issues, or rather that one did not necessarily entail the other. The Dutch hardly cared about the frequency or the status of their tribute visits as long as they could enjoy the benefits of an (annual) unobstructed trade. But in the emperor's final decision, the tribute schedule was changed from five to eight years, at which time, he repeated, "you may bring your Merchandizes ashore into your Lodging, without Bartering them at Sea before Canton" (Nieuhof 1669, 133; Fu 1966, 1:19–20; *Shunzhi shi lu* 1964, 103:20a–21a). Perhaps things were left intentionally vague, insofar as offshore trade during other years was not specifically banned (and I have already mentioned that it did continue to occur).

The Dutch knew very well that there were rules about being accepted as a tribute-bearing nation, and the Chinese understood completely that trade was the focal point of Dutch aspirations. But the Westerners hoped that an agreement might be reached anyway, partly because they were willing to pay the right people for the privilege, and partly because they assumed (and were led to assume) that the Chinese wanted foreign trade just as much as they did. Yet circumstances were such that this kind of arrangement was impossible, and Nieuhof had no doubt that the main reason for their failure was interference from other Westerners, although his description of the interview before the Board of Rites showed that he also had some understanding of factional differences within the central government. Special reproach was reserved for Schall, who served as the main interpreter and translator at court. His initial meeting with the legation was cordial and familiar, but Nieuhof soon realized that the Jesuit leader was very antagonistic, the first indication being a rather strange moment, to which we will return, when Schall "fetched a deep

sigh" as the rarest of the Dutch presents for the emperor were being inspected (Nieuhof 1669, 117). He was also accused of trying to add in an official report that Holland rightfully belonged to the Spanish (Nieuhof 1669, 118), even though the Dutch Republic had declared formal independence from Spain in 1581, a fact which had also been recognized by the Spanish king at the conclusion of the Eighty Years' War in 1648.

Dutch Distortions

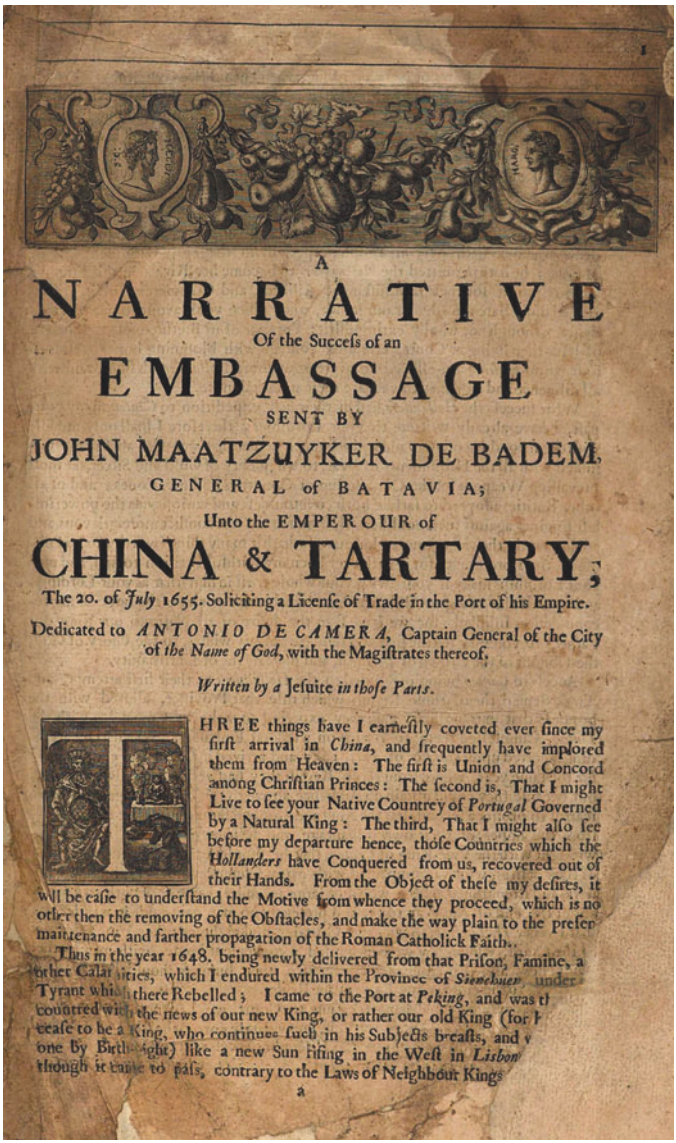
Schall's knowledge of recent Dutch history is less important than the fact that his criticisms were part of a familiar barrage of aspersions that the Dutch and their rivals regularly leveled at each other, and which the Dutch constantly had to respond to in their dealings with the Chinese. The exploratory missions immediately preceding the embassy in which Nieuhof took part had to clear the way by counteracting the numerous rumors that had been spread by the Portuguese at Macao (Nieuhof 1669, 21–25). But in their desire to be acknowledged as tribute bearers, the Dutch had to smooth out many other snags along the way, one of which was related to Schall's mysterious sighs. Among the complex rules for tribute, an embassy had to present "local products" (*fang wu*) as part of their credentials before they were permitted to travel to the emperor's court. Just before they first met Schall, the Dutch had been forced to admit that a number of their most impressive gifts had been procured not from Holland but from their already extensive Dutch trading network in India and the Far East (Nieuhof 1669, 116). Their embassy, after all, had originated in Batavia, not Amsterdam. Even worse for them, the ambassadors were forced to explain the peculiarities of their government as against Chinese expectations and precedents. The United Provinces didn't even have a sovereign, although the titular Prince of Orange (William III, future king of England), who was only five years old at the time, might have served as stadtholder had not most of the United Provinces left that office temporarily vacant. The Netherlands was a confederation of provinces, not a country governed by a king. Moreover, in China, tribute from foreign sovereigns was typically brought by a ruler's immediate relatives, not by private merchants from the East Asian headquarters of a joint-stock trading company.

From the Dutch point of view, these discrepancies only gave them a sense of superiority over the unenlightened Chinese; "these Commissioners could not well understand nor apprehend this form of our Government,"

Nieuhof remarked, "because the *Tartars* and *Chineses* know no other than Monarchial." And how were the ambassadors going to explain European colonialism, in this case the Dutch East Indies? In the end, they simply gave up and "were forced to make use of the name of the Prince of *Orange*, as if [we] had been sent by his Highness" (Nieuhof 1669, 116). Such distortions may not have made much difference to the Chinese government, who repeatedly overlooked breaches and omissions in matters of tribute from those whom they, in turn, considered to be unenlightened foreigners. But getting past Schall was something else entirely, and in addition to Nieuhof's prejudiced rendering of these negotiations, we are lucky to have an equally prejudiced rendering by Schall himself, incorporated into an acrimonious report on the Dutch embassy made by another Jesuit at court who admitted to an all-out effort to frustrate Dutch designs. This report, revealingly enough, was separately paginated and appended to the English translation of Nieuhof that appeared in 1669 (and, later, in the French and German versions as well), where anti-Dutch sentiments would find an equally eager audience among more of Holland's bitter colonial rivals, and the English in particular (cf. Astley 1745–47, 3:483–91). A manuscript version in Italian, which identified the author as Gabriel de Magalhães, also exists in the Jesuit archives in Rome (Magalhães 1669; Saccano 1655) (Fig. 4.2).

Schall

Magalhães's version of events made no secret of the fact that greedy officials in Canton were only too anxious to accede to Dutch requests for open trade, and that many at court had been swayed as well. Urgent action was thus required, with Magalhães and his confederates embarking on a smear campaign against the "Universal Robbers" and "Arch-Pirates of all Seas," who had failed to take Macao but had violently occupied Java and Taiwan, all under the pretense of trade (Magalhães 1669, 4). This attack had its intended effect, and when the Dutch came to Beijing they were not allowed to sell anything, forcing them, said Magalhães, to abandon their commercial plans and to claim instead that they had merely come to China to congratulate the emperor and his new dynasty (Magalhães 1669, 7) (this shift had appeared in Nieuhof's version as well [Nieuhof 1669, 116]). But the real trump card was that Magalhães had managed to convince Schall to speak to the emperor personally, and we are then given Schall's own account, as recorded in another letter.



A

NARRATIVE

Of the Succeſs of an

EMBASSAGE

SENT BY

JOHN MAATZUYKER DE BADEM,

GENERAL of BATAVIA;

Unto the EMPEROUR of

CHINA & TARTARY;

The 20. of *July* 1655. Soliciting a Licenſe of Trade in the Port of his Empire.

Dedicated to *ANTONIO DE CAMERA*, Captain General of the City of *the Name of God*, with the Magiſtrates thereof.

Written by a Jeſuite *in thoſe Parts.*

THREE things have I earneſtly coveted ever ſince my firſt arrival in *China*, and frequently have implored them from Heaven: The firſt is Union and Concord among Chriſtian Princes: The ſecond is, That I might Live to ſee your Native Countrey of *Portugal* Governed by a Natural King: The third, That I might alſo ſee before my departure hence, thoſe Countries which the *Hollanders* have Conquered from us, recovered out of their Hands. From the Object of theſe my deſires, it will be eaſie to underſtand the Motive from whence they proceed, which is no other then the removing of the Obſtacles, and make the way plain to the preſer maintenance and farther propagation of the Roman Catholick Faith.

Thus in the year 1648. being newly delivered from that Priſon, Famine, a other Calamities, which I endured within the Province of *Siemchuen*, under Tyrant who there Rebelled; I came to the Port at *Peking*, and was th countred with the news of our new King, or rather our old King (for h ceaſe to be a King, who continues ſuch in his Subjects breaſts, and v one by Birth-right) like a new Sun riſing in the Weſt in *Lisbon* through it came to paſs, contrary to the Laws of Neighbour Kings

a

Fig. 4.2 Title page from Gabriel de Magalhães, "A Narrative of the Success of an Embassage sent by John Maatzuyker de Badem, General of Batavia, unto the Emperour of China & Tartary" (1669). National Taiwan University Library

When the embassy had first arrived, according to Schall, the emperor asked him for his opinion and Schall made no attempt to hide his contempt. The Dutch, he said, were trying to impress everyone with their strength and their long-standing institutions, yet they possessed only a tiny piece of a country that they had recently usurped from its lawful ruler, becoming "Vagabonds of the Sea . . . to furnish themselves for maintenance of their Rebellion at home" (Magalhães 1669, 8). Clearly, he went on, Canton officials had been bribed, but as the embassy had already been authorized to come to court it was better to admit them. However, they should under no circumstances be granted the privilege to trade, since once they established themselves there was no getting rid of them (Magalhães 1669, 8).

We also have Schall's opinion about the Dutch presents. "Scarce one in ten was found to be of *Holland*," he caustically noted, with the manuscript version adding that they had been "bought or stolen from the parts of India and other lands they had passed through" (Magalhães 1669, 9; Saccano 1655, fol. 174). But Schall also alerted the emperor to something else that was fishy about the embassy. When asked how long it took for them to travel to China they had replied sixteen months, but how was it possible, Schall urged, if the Dutch had come to China just two years previously, for them to have returned to their homeland and come back in such a short time (not to mention the additional months that were required to travel from Canton to Beijing)? The question of the distance an embassy had traveled was another important component in tribute procedure, both as a testament to China's universal influence and as a reflection of the sincerity of a foreign sovereign's allegiance. It also determined tribute frequency, as faraway nations might be asked to wait longer to return (Laos and Burma were granted ten years) or not have a fixed term at all, as was the case with Portugal (Fairbank and Teng 1941, 176). But as the Dutch had lied about their journey, Schall observed, how could they be trusted? Had they really come to spy out the land, hoping to build fortresses just as they had done in other areas near China?

But it was Schall's intricate consultations with the Board of Rites that, in his view, had turned the tables. When he saw a draft of the Board's recommendations, not yet reviewed by the emperor, Schall realized that they "declared a unanimous propensity" to Dutch requests for regular commerce (Magalhães 1669, 11). He vigorously expressed his objections, and after a great deal of further discussion, he was assured that trade would be denied, although, at the time of his writing, the final decree had not yet

been published. Instead, Schall concluded with the text of a letter to the Emperor from the governor-general of the Dutch East India Company at Batavia, who openly expressed his desire to trade and asked for permission for Dutch ships to enter Chinese ports. Schall complained that the letter lacked all formality and that it had come unsealed and without any honorific formulae, as if the governor were writing "to one of his Familiar Friends and equals." Although the Canton officials, he said, were able to "dress it up," Schall closed his testimony by insinuating that "at length the world [would] be undeceived" by these "few Merchants in *Java*" who dared to address the emperor of China in such an uncouth manner (Magalhães 1669, 12).

Magalhães

We will return to the governor-general's fascinating letter – and the Dutch "credentials" – in a moment, after we examine the finale of Magalhães's own report, which was full of vitriolic bias and underscored the fact that the Dutch might well have succeeded were it not for the concerted Catholic effort to stop them. He also offered the text of the imperial decree that Schall had not yet seen, but before doing so, he returned to the subject of the Dutch presents and provided a complete catalogue, showing how they were divided between state gifts for the emperor, the empress, and the empress dowager, as well as a further group of items given by the ambassadors themselves (Magalhães 1669, 14–16). The point of all of this was not to show how many of them were not native products (cloves, nutmegs, sandalwood, and the like), but to demonstrate how the perfidious Dutch, "with the specious pretense of being Tributaries" (Magalhães 1669, 13), had attempted to buy their way into a trade agreement with presents and bribes – and, importantly, with the full cooperation of their friends in Canton. The presents themselves were not very impressive, Magalhães stressed, but the Canton officials knew that they must be distributed among members of the royal family so that "the whole business should not be capable of denial" (Magalhães 1669, 13).

When the embassy was asked why no presents for the empresses had been mentioned in their written memorials, the Dutch replied that they had unexpectedly discovered these things on board ship after they had departed Batavia! How lucky, Magalhães's sarcastically noted, to have happened upon such precious items while underway from Java to

Guangdong – or perhaps, he added in one final sardonic note, the Dutch had "found" them aboard a Portuguese ship that they had marauded along the way (Magalhães 1669, 13). The real luck, Magalhães insisted, was that these "innovating heretics" had been prevented from doing any further damage to Macao as well as to the Catholic religion; they had already destroyed Christianity in Japan, he said, but "our God . . . would not permit their ingress into *China*, to the like damage of Religion there" (Magalhães 1669, 16). And as final proof of their failure to "purchase the *China* trade," Magalhães completed Schall's testimony by providing the report from the Board of Rites as well as the emperor's final decree, although both these versions differ slightly from others that we possess. I have already mentioned that trade was not necessarily excluded from the recommendations of the Board of Rites, and in Magalhães's version, this was made more explicit and perhaps had allowed even more freedom: "after their appearance before your Majesty," it said, the Dutch "may buy and sell some certain things, provided they have regard always to such constitutions as are made concerning all strangers within this Realm, and exactly conform themselves in the manner of buying and selling to the Laws and Ordinances established in that behalf" (Magalhães 1669, 16). Magalhães's version of the imperial decree was much shorter than the Chinese or Dutch texts and trade was not mentioned at all, giving him another chance to gloat. Yet here, too, there was a very vague conclusion that might have allowed much more elbow room than Magalhães had realized: "in all other things," the emperor said, "we give our Royal consent and approbation to the Remonstrance of our Court of Request [the Board of Rites]" (Magalhães 1669, 17). But as far as Magalhães was concerned, to paraphrase another Jesuit letter quoted at the end of his text, when the emperor changed the term from five to eight years, it was tantamount to telling the Dutch never to return.

The Dutch Governor's Letter

As we now know this was not really the case, but one could hardly have expected Magalhães, Schall, or anyone else to have understood it at the time. Neither the Portuguese nor the Dutch were able to comprehend the decree's true effects or even its true causes. Both sides were convinced that the court Jesuits were responsible for blocking the embassy's chances, and it may well be that Schall's influence had worked its intended effect. Yet it

was also likely that the Dutch would not have been able to succeed even if no other Westerners were against them, but before we turn to these alternative explanations, we should look more carefully at the Dutch governor's letter, to which the emperor's decree was a careful reply.

We will recall Schall's shock at the audaciousness (or ignorance) of the Dutch document, not only in terms of its attitude but because of its complete lack of extratextual embellishment. The Chinese, however, seemed much more interested in form than in content, and much to the Westerners' frustration, letters, like imperial gifts, often seemed more important than the ambassadors themselves – and certainly in terms of what was considered correct procedure. The first Dutch representative sent from Taiwan had brought presents and a letter for Canton officials only, both of which were "flung . . . about in a scornful manner" (Nieuhof 1669, 21), until he could convince the mandarins that the Dutch were not as bad as the Portuguese had made them out to be. Trade was initially granted but then refused until a formal embassy had been sent to Beijing (Nieuhof 1669, 23). The second attempt, hastily organized at Batavia, was similarly blocked because there was still no letter or presents for the emperor, even though "sufficient advice had been given thereof to the *Hollanders*" (Nieuhof 1669, 25). Finally, the situation was amended by Nieuhof and his party, but no matter how well prepared they were, they still discovered that nothing could be decided in Canton until their letters and presents to the emperor had been received at court (Nieuhof 1669, 33), and that even a letter addressed to officials in Canton could not be officially accepted until the embassy had traveled to Beijing (Nieuhof 1669, 45).

Then there were numerous questions about the letters themselves, and officials in Canton were visibly "displeased at the slight Fashion of the [Dutch] Credentials": why were they not written on better paper? why were they not boxed in gold? why did they lack an official stamp or seal? (Nieuhof 1669, 33). When the emperor's decree was given to the Dutch at the end of their mission, on the other hand, it was wrapped in silk and housed in a special case, written on gilded paper decorated with golden dragons, and ceremoniously placed on a table covered by a yellow carpet. When the ambassadors arrived back in Canton on their return journey, the imperial letter was similarly the center of solemn ritual (Nieuhof 1669, 133, 142). The Dutch were also understandably concerned over questions of translation, and unluckily for them, when they reached the capital they were forced to rely on Schall, who was hardly neutral. Schall, as I have

mentioned before, grumbled that the Dutch letters had been "improved" by the viceroys, but if we compare the original text, which still exists in Dutch, with a Chinese version housed in the archives of the Grand Secretariat, we discover that the two were much the same, although the Chinese text has been somewhat pared down. There was an additional complimentary opening in the Chinese version, but this, too, was rather standard: "the governor general of the Hollanders . . . salutes and congratulates Your Majesty, the Emperor of Da Qing Empire, and asks after your Majesty's health, wishing Your Majesty good fortune in everything and the enjoyment of a long life on this earth" (Fu 1966, 1:16–17).

The Chinese Translation

Perhaps there was yet another, completely rewritten version that has not survived. According to Schall, the viceroys in Canton did not only "mend and patch the General of *Batavia*'s Letters, but composed a new" (Magalhães 1669, 13), and Magalhães, as we have seen, remarked that after arriving in the capital, the Dutch had talked about tribute only, not trade. Finally, in the discussions before the Board of Rites, one objection to the Dutch request for trade was that it did not even "appear by their Credentials that any such thing was desired" (Nieuhof 1669, 120). But in the Chinese text of the letter preserved in the archives, the governor's tone was very direct and, indeed, extremely abrupt by Chinese standards. Despite Schall's alarm, so far as we know this aspect of the Dutch communication never caused any serious difficulties. As in so many other things, the Chinese appeared far more tolerant of the barbarians' mistakes than the barbarians were of theirs. Schall was correct that the governor had addressed the emperor as an equal, but certainly not as an equal in either rank or status. The missive was unquestionably formal. But as it was also an appeal for free trade, or what the Dutch typically called "mutual commerce" (Nieuhof 1669, 3, 23), it tacitly addressed *China* as an equal, or rather it had presumed that Holland was equal to the Middle Kingdom, which was of course unthinkable. From the West's point of view, this was axiomatic and the basis for any form of international contact: that two sovereign nations might come together to form what Nieuhof called "a firm League . . . , confirmed under Hand and Seal by both parties" (Nieuhof 1669, 25).

Yet their request began in such a way that might well have puzzled any Chinese reader, and one wonders how often Schall or another translator

sighed while attempting to explain so many terms that simply made no sense in the Chinese tradition:

> The omnipotent God who created the Heavens, the Earth, and whatsoever is in them contained, hath divided the Earth into several Kingdoms, Empires, Provinces, Islands, and Dominions; and hath ordained by eternal wisdom, that no one place should be stored with all manner of things; but whatsoever is either necessary for the life, or convenient for the ornament of mankind, whether production of Nature, or invention of Art, should be found partly in one Countrey, and partly in another; Divine Providence so disposing it, that the wants of this Land should be supplyed by that, and the defects of that retributed by another, that so by means of Commerce, Men might enjoy Society, and the common wants of all Nations might, by receiving mutual relief, knit themselves together in the bonds of Friendship. (Magalhães 1669, 12; Dam 1927–1954, 2:1:767–68)

The Chinese version was simpler but the sense was the same:

> The Lord Creator, who made the earth, divided it into ten thousand nations. Some raise natural products; others produce manufactures. The former have something which the latter have not; the latter have something which the former have not. The Lord Creator wishes people to exchange what they have with each other so that they can respect and admire each other and be in harmony. (Fu 1966, 1:17)

The first problem, which I do not want to go into here because it will be the subject of the next chapter, was how to express the Western idea of God in Chinese. Here "Lord Creator" was translated literally as "the lord who makes things" (*zao wu zhu*), but the notion of a creator God was alien to Chinese notions of the world, although the term would have been familiar as a Christian concept. Later in the governor's letter, God is called "Lord of Heaven" (*tian zhu*), the standard term used by Catholics in Chinese (*Ming Qing shi liao* 1972, 3:4:377a). Much more troublesome, however, was how to explain that commerce was divinely ordained, that it was God's will that each nation should require the products of others both to supply its own wants and to bind everyone together in congenial human society. In the Confucian tradition, commerce was considered a very base activity, and while there were plenty of parallel ideas about harmony and human concord, they were certainly not based on Western ideas of international relations, much less on commercial exchange. The Middle

Kingdom needed nothing, and it was not simply one among many nations but was in a sense the only nation, the true home of civilization. But even in the Christian West, the idea that one was somehow required by God to seek the resources of others might have seemed a bit strange, although obviously this view was based on a post-lapsarian Biblical notion that the world was by nature in a fallen state, and that its resources had been scattered across the globe after the destruction of the Tower of Babel.

Divine Commerce

Yet was international commerce a divine command? English readers may be familiar with very similar rhetoric in two contemporaneous letters from Elizabeth I, published in the popular compilations of Hakluyt and Purchas, one to the emperor of China and one the sultan of Aceh, both of which argued that global trade was universal and an expression of God's providence (Hakluyt 1903–5, 11:420; Purchas 1905, 2:410). Although these ideas had a long pedigree in the Western tradition, they were also arguably part of a relatively new cultural phenomenon related to the growth of early modern capitalist economies and their competition as imperial powers. The most famous (or, if you prefer, notorious) exponent was the celebrated Dutch jurist, Hugo Grotius, who was commissioned by the Dutch East India Company in 1604 to write in support of a Dutch captain having seized a Portuguese ship near Malacca and subsequently selling its rich cargo at a great profit. At the time, Portugal was part of the Spanish empire, with whom the Dutch were at war, and Holland, like other European nations, was bitterly opposed to the Iberians' long-standing monopoly on East Indian trade. But the ship's seizure was seen as both morally and legally questionable, by many in Holland as well, and Grotius came to the defense with an influential treatise, *Mare liberum* (The Freedom of the Seas), where he maintained that Spanish and Portuguese domination was unlawful and that the seas, navigation, and trade were open to all nations. But what interests us here is that Grotius employed the very same sort of quasi-religious rhetoric that we see in the Dutch and English letters to Eastern monarchs. If God has distributed the resources of the world "in accordance with the design of divine justice," he wrote on the first page, it was so that "human friendships [could] be fostered by mutual needs and resources, lest individuals, in deeming themselves self-sufficient, might thereby be rendered unsociable" (Grotius 2009, 2; Alexandrowicz 1967). What was so remarkable about this position was

that it claimed that trade was not simply a human right but indeed a *natural* one, and that to obstruct free trade, because of either a monopoly or an "unsociable" attitude like that of the Chinese, was to go against both God and nature.

The Dutch governor's letter to the emperor, in other words, was written from a perspective in which free trade was seen as both self-evident and necessary, never mind the fact that it was not really so free for local rulers whose sovereignty was frequently impinged, or that the Dutch were just as monopolistic as their Portuguese (or Spanish or English) rivals. We might call it a religion of trade, to be measured against an equally adamant claim about the naturalness and divinity of the practice of tribute. And when the Dutch governor added that trade had led his people "not only to nearby lands and kingdoms but even . . . to the ends of the earth" (Dam 1927–1954, 2:1:767), this, too, was utterly unlike the Chinese point of view, in which the emperor and the Middle Kingdom stood at the center of the world and China was hardly just one among the family of nations.

The governor's letter did not mention tribute at all, although in the Chinese text, a phrase was added that the ambassadors would travel to the capital "to present tributary presents" (*ji gong li wu*) (Fu 1966, 1:17; *Ming Qing shi liao* 1972, 3:4:377a). The Dutch text, rather, concluded with what the governor must have assumed would be the clinching argument in favor of the Westerners' proposals: the promise of financial gain. "We hope that your Majesty will grant us this favour, seeing it is the decree of Divine Providence and an universal practice amongst all men, whereby great profit shall accrue to your Majesties Subjects and Countries" (Magalhães 1669, 12). Or as the Dutch version put it, "your subjects and people [will] enjoy no less advantage and profit than we do" (Dam 1927–1954, 2:1:768). While such a strategy might have had little effect on anyone who subscribed to the Confucian tradition, which placed merchants at the very bottom of the social scale and considered them parasites, it had met with much greater success with the viceroys in Canton. Yet even for them, it was dangerous to be seen as being too keen on monetary profit, especially in any sort of official record. According to Nieuhof, during the first Dutch visit of 1653, the viceroys had greatly enriched themselves by buying most of the Dutch merchandise at far below market rates (Nieuhof 1669, 23). But their public attitude was completely different, as was demonstrated in a lengthy report submitted by the governor of Guangdong, which included letters from each of the viceroys addressed to the Dutch government in Taiwan. Both men expressed their

shock and distaste at the very idea of mixing tribute with trade. "Our Da Qing empire respects only the Chinese classics and rites," one of them proclaimed, "we esteem the five sorts of grain higher than pearls and jade which are useless." The other wondered how "anyone could presume to degrade us with petty affairs of profit by goods and personal gain . . . If [the Dutch] say that they are only coming to do trade, the court's response is that we do not value goods, we value only the good character of a person" (Fu 1966, 1:12; *Ming Qing shi liao* 1972, 3:4:337b–338a).

Whatever the formal rules for tribute may have been, local or unofficial trade continued nearly all the time. It was just that whenever it was deemed convenient or necessary to control or cancel or distance oneself from that trade some precedent or regulation could always be appealed to. This helps to explain the viceroys' "sudden" emphasis in their 1653 letters on the minutiae of tribute-bearing: the necessity of native gifts, the "gold leaf memorial" from the Dutch ruler, the appropriate port of entry, the frequency of the visits, the precise number of ships and men allowed, and so on. Both men also referred to the fact that it was not necessary for the Dutch to leave "hostages" (*zhi*) in Canton, a term used for those who stayed behind while a tribute embassy traveled to court, even though the Canton princes knew very well that on this particular occasion, the Dutch had come only to trade and had not even brought any tribute gifts with them (Fu 1966, 1:12; *Ming Qing shi liao* 1972, 3:4:338a). The real situation, according to Nieuhof, was that this legation had already been granted permission to establish a permanent post in Canton and wanted a small group of merchants to stay behind, "for the better vending of the remainder of the Goods" (Nieuhof 1669, 23). But when that plan was subsequently rejected, the word "hostages" was employed instead, just as the language of tribute could be invoked at any time. In Nieuhof's case, the ambassadors had likewise been led to believe that trade would be allowed in Canton, yet their hopes ran even higher because they had finally managed to fulfill the requirements for being recognized as a tribute-bearing nation. But even this did not result in any explicit acknowledgement of free trading rights, as was so firmly shown by the emperor's decree.

The Emperor's Decree

If we turn, finally, to examine that document more thoroughly, we will find that it was actually a meticulous response to the Dutch requests and not just an evasion. It also deflected the Dutch governor's bloated and

self-righteous rhetoric with a bloated and self-righteous rhetoric all its own. Matching the Europeans' insistence on the sanctity and naturalness of mutual trade was an equal and opposite insistence on the centrality of China and the fact that Holland had never before been part of the Chinese world. In keeping with tribute custom, the emperor also thanked the Dutch for their presents and enumerated the (even more valuable) gifts he offered in return. Next, the decree demonstrated that the central government understood perfectly well that the Dutch were asking for trade, and that trade could result in substantial monetary benefit: "You have asked leave to come and Trade in my Countrey, to Import Commodities into it, and to export others out of it, which will make very much to the profit and advantage of my Subjects" (Nieuhof 1669, 133). In the Chinese version, however, the subservience of the Dutch was stressed much more strongly, first by referring to them as tribute-bearers (at least five times), and then by expressing satisfaction that despite their great distance, they had longed for Chinese civilization and had come to respect the emperor as their "sovereign and father" (*tsun jin*). The benefits of trade were acknowledged, but they were also firmly and unmistakably combined with the rituals of tribute. "Concerning your petition for entering and leaving for your convenience in paying us homage and presenting tribute and for the exchange of goods," the emperor agreed, "this will circulate money and commodities which would be to the profit of our merchants and people" (Fu 1966, 1:20; *Shunzhi shi lu* 1964, 103:20b). At this point, a draft version in the archives of the Grand Secretariat had added: "from ancient times down to the present, small nations have obeyed the great ones and great nations have cared for the small ones" (Fu 1966, 2:435 n. 104; *Ming Qing shi liao* 1972, 3:4:387a). There can be little doubt who was being considered the small nation here.

And then the bomb was dropped. With a single imperious gesture, all the Dutch aspirations were summarily rejected:

> You have asked to come and trade in my Countrey . . . But in regard your Countrey is so far off, and the winds very high here, which will very much endanger your Ships, it would very much trouble me if any of them should miscarry by the way; therefore if you please to send hither, I desire it may be but once every eight years, and no more than one hundred Men in a Company, whereof twenty may come up to the place where I keep my Court; and then

> you may bring your Merchandizes ashore into your Lodging, without Bartering them at Sea before Canton. (Nieuhof 1669, 133)

This was a classic example of a refusal in the form of praise and compassion, just as the postponement of tribute (and formal trade) for another eight years was presented as a gift, not a punishment. This sort of rhetoric came across even more powerfully in the Chinese version, which emphasized that if tribute was too frequent or involved too many tribute-bearers, it would be unnecessarily burdensome and "command our sympathy" [literally, "I could not bear it"]. Or as this version concluded, "you should understand the kindness with which we will cherish and protect you. Respectfully serve as a feudal territory [*fan fu*]. Carefully do the duties of your office. Reverently receive this gracious order." Holland had endeavored to be an equal partner in trade but had become a subservient feudal territory instead, much to the chagrin of Nieuhof and the ambassadors, who upon receiving the emperor's edict were ordered – as was customary – to depart the city within two hours. But in the eyes of the Chinese, to be registered as a tributary nation was a sign of success not failure, indicating that Holland had been officially recorded in the *Huidian*, without which nothing further could have developed. Nieuhof lamented that the embassy had "effected nothing else but that the *Hollanders* were received as Friends by the Emperor" (Nieuhof 1669, 146), but it was this particular form of friendship that, from the Chinese point of view, made all the difference.

The Dutch Departure

The Dutch went away, then, convinced that they had been tricked or misled, that the Canton viceroys were two-faced and overly greedy, and that their designs had been jealously thwarted by their Catholic rivals. As an afterthought, Nieuhof wondered whether "a few presents more [*een kleene Bezending*]" to the Emperor might not help matters (Nieuhof 1665, 205; 1669, 146), but the reality was that there were many factors in the Chinese refusal that had nothing to do with the Dutch at all, including internal power struggles at the beginning of a new dynasty, which was also considered foreign; because of tensions between the court and rulers in Canton, whose power was considerable; and because the central government was not disposed toward any further opening of sea trade while Zheng Chenggong had remained a threat. Dutch notions of international trade were certainly alien to the

Chinese tradition of foreigners as tribute-bearers, but this sort of incompatibility was not really the main hindrance; it was a pretext and nothing more. If the Chinese central government had been interested in trading with the Dutch, they certainly would have done so, but the fact is that they were not interested, and much more importantly, that they were *able* to remain apathetic to European requests and expectations. Before the opium wars, China was at the center of these exchanges, not the European West. Finally, if the West claimed that their God had scattered the resources of the world as part of a divine plan, the Chinese responded with a different notion of a world full of "native gifts" that must be presented to the emperor before any nation might "come and be transformed" by Chinese culture. The Emperor, not Jesus, was seen as the "son of heaven," and it is the precise meaning of that term that will be the subject of the next chapter.

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CHAPTER 5

The Pope's "Religion"

The second chapter of this book focused on a series of missionary ambassadors who were sent to the Mongol empire to sue for peace and to seek religious conversions, while the third and fourth chapters highlighted commercial embassies to China whose primary motives were overseas expansion and the increase of international trade. It is impossible, of course, to claim any real separation between the spiritual and the mercantile in any of these encounters, but I have tried to stress the way in which different embassies had different aims and were forced to engage in different sorts of conversations with the parallel concepts that they found in the Mongol or Chinese worlds.

In this chapter, we will return to matters of faith and look at two legations sent from the papal court to the Kangxi emperor in 1705 and 1720, at a time when Western missionaries had resided in China for more than a century and small communities of Chinese Christians had sprung up in nearly every region of the empire. The most prominent missionaries were a group of Jesuits who worked at the emperor's court in a variety of official capacities: as interpreters, astronomers, mathematicians, calendar makers, engineers, musicians, and tutors. The stated aim of the embassies was to thank the emperor for his benevolence and to ask for permission to establish a Catholic superior general who would live in Beijing and oversee all missionary affairs. Far from strengthening the Christian presence in China, however, the embassies caused increasing anger and led to the confinement of the first ambassador (who died five years later in Macao),

M. Keevak, *Embassies to China*,
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as well as all missionaries who refused to acknowledge that their religion was subordinate to state orthodoxy. The second embassy, more or less a clean-up operation that tried to salvage the misfortunes of the first one, hardly fared much better, since the sentiment against Christianity was just too strong, and the emperor was now siding with those who believed that the religion of the West should no longer be practiced in China.

What could cause such an apparently sudden fall from grace? Not long before, Catholicism had reached its peak, culminating in an Edict of Toleration issued in 1692 that officially recognized the teaching of the Lord of Heaven (that is, Catholic Christianity) as not seditious. But by the time of his death in 1722, the emperor's weariness and annoyance at Christianity was manifested in angry decrees and annotations that attacked the Westerners and their pernicious schemes. Throughout his sixty-year reign, Kangxi had emulated an ideal of the enlightened Confucian ruler: virtuous, scholarly, generous, and paternal toward each of his subjects – including the Western religious men who had chosen to live and work within his empire. The papal legates were thus treated with an unusually high degree of honor and privilege, since they had come from the leader of the court Jesuits and were received as spiritual dignitaries, not as political representatives. And yet this was precisely the problem. For it turned out that the legates' real aim was intensely political in nature, and that even when they did talk about religious matters, it was not in the sense that "religion" was understood in China.

The Rites Controversy

But before we can examine this contention more carefully, we will have to return to a question that we began to explore in Chapter 2: exactly what was religion in the Chinese world and how was it understood? We have already glimpsed a degree of spiritual toleration largely unknown to the Christian West, which was so often monopolistic and belligerent toward (for example) those of other faiths. But we will also have to come to terms with the fact that religion itself, as both a structure of belief and a set of cultural practices, could carry very different significations between East and West. In China, the word "religion" did not even exist. Instead, there were three principal "teachings" – Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism – that could not be separated easily and represented a body of beliefs, rituals, and codes of conduct that were much more diffused throughout the entire fabric of social and familial life (Yang 1961). Even the state

apparatus was "religious" in nature, administered by numerous levels of bureaucrats who had passed examinations in the Confucian principles of morality and filial piety, and who were required to venerate Confucius in a variety of regular public ceremonies.

This is not to say that the character or the institutionalization of European Christianity was any less complex or easier to comprehend, but simply that Westerners, and especially Western missionaries, had to confront a particular set of religious and cultural circumstances when they were finally able to return to China beginning in the sixteenth century. It was also a period in European history when its own religious cultures were undergoing fundamental changes and fractures, and the first modern missionaries to return to China, a small group of Jesuits who entered via Macao, had been sent by the pope as part of a global program of Catholic counter-reformation revival. While individual missionaries may have approached Chinese or other religious beliefs very broadmindedly (and the accommodationist practices of Matteo Ricci were exemplary in this regard), there was also a general mood in which the purity and uniqueness of the Catholic faith had to be safeguarded from any sort of syncretism or (as it was thought) further degradation.

But in China, what the West called syncretism was normal and helped to maintain the continuity of a sprawling, heterogeneous empire throughout many centuries and despite numerous upheavals. From this point of view, one's "religion" hardly made much difference, so long as one did not neglect one's duties to family or to society in general. Yet Western missionaries constantly did interfere, especially when they set out to determine which local practices were not "compatible" with Western Christianity. Ricci, the founder of the China mission, had decided that many rituals at the heart of Chinese life, including their custom of worshiping heaven, ceremonies made on behalf of the spirits of the dead, and numerous rites venerating the great teacher Confucius, were merely "civil" ceremonies and could therefore be tolerated. But not all his colleagues agreed, and the matter was eventually directed to Rome for an authoritative decision.

These debates have come to be known as the Chinese "rites controversy," which remains one of the most daunting and confusing chapters in the entire history of East-West relations because of its level of hysteria and an almost insurmountable quantity of material to digest (Standaert 2001, 680–88). Far from being a dispute between Rome and Beijing, however, it was by and large a European phenomenon that was understood and

judged according to distinctly Western prejudices and preconceptions. Rome produced a series of verdicts that were often inconsistent, with any one decision seeming to depend on which side had brought forth the evidence that was then being reviewed. A great deal of research and analysis was eventually carried out, but as it consisted almost entirely of Western sources, it, too, was decidedly biased and one-sided. Some testimony from Chinese converts was also collected and sent to Rome, but this data was largely ignored (Standaert 2012), and even an intervention from the emperor himself, who attempted to argue that Ricci was right, had fallen on deaf ears.

Another key aspect of the debate was linguistic, and Ricci had introduced similarly controversial measures to deal with the problem of how to express Christian terminology in a Chinese context. The first sticking point was how to translate the word for God, since while there were plenty of divine or semi-divine deities and powers in the Chinese tradition, as well as an "emperor on high" (*shang di*) and an abstract concept of heaven (*tian*), there seemed to be nothing like the Western monotheistic notion of a single, all-powerful creator God. Should an existing term like *shang di* or *tian* be adopted, or should an entirely new word be introduced, such as *tian zhu* or Lord of Heaven? Or would it better to employ a transliteration instead, such as from the Latin word *deus*? Each of these options was attempted at different stages of the debate, but in the end, Ricci decided that *tian* and *shang di* were not incompatible with Christianity either, since if one set out to read the ancient Confucian texts carefully enough, one could find in them a "pure" or "original" concept of God that had been obscured by later revision and reinterpretation.

There were many precedents for this sort of linguistic transference, beginning with the translation of the Old Testament into Greek, which made frequent use of the indigenous term *theos* when introducing the God of Christianity. But in the case of China, many missionaries found the use of such terms scandalous, feeling that the religion of Rome was being overly compromised by Jesuit policies. But even within the Jesuit community, there could be considerable dissent. Many of those who had worked in Japan, for example, where they had encountered analogous difficulties before Christianity was eradicated by the 1640s, were wary of the dangers of using local terminology and of allowing too many native practices to remain. Even more fatefully, Ricci's successor as head of the China mission, Niccolò Longobardo, objected that the real mode of Confucian

thinking was materialist and led inexorably to atheism. The "sect of the learned," he wrote, could not be considered as any sort of legitimate basis for Chinese Christianity. His remarks were meant for internal circulation only, but when they were leaked to the West, they added more fuel to an already rampant anti-Jesuit fire (Navarrete 1704). Soon there came a flood of very tedious and very long books in every European language weighing in on the matter, and by the early eighteenth century, most of the Riccian interpretations had been officially condemned, both by the papal court and by the faculty of theology at the Sorbonne.

Tournon's Motives

The real purpose of the pope's envoys, in other words, was not simply to thank the emperor or to ask for his continued protection. Even the question of a superior general was to some degree a misrepresentation. It is true that Rome sought a head of mission affairs, but not really to arbitrate or to conciliate between rival factions, since the matter had already been decided. It was necessary to take control over what was perceived as a misdirected policy, and in this sense the focus of the legations was not the emperor at all but other European missionaries, who were told what could and could not be tolerated for their Chinese converts. Effectively, this was a message that Confucianism and Catholicism could no longer coexist, and those who sided with the "Ricci method" were forced to find ways to salvage what they believed to be the end of their religion in China.

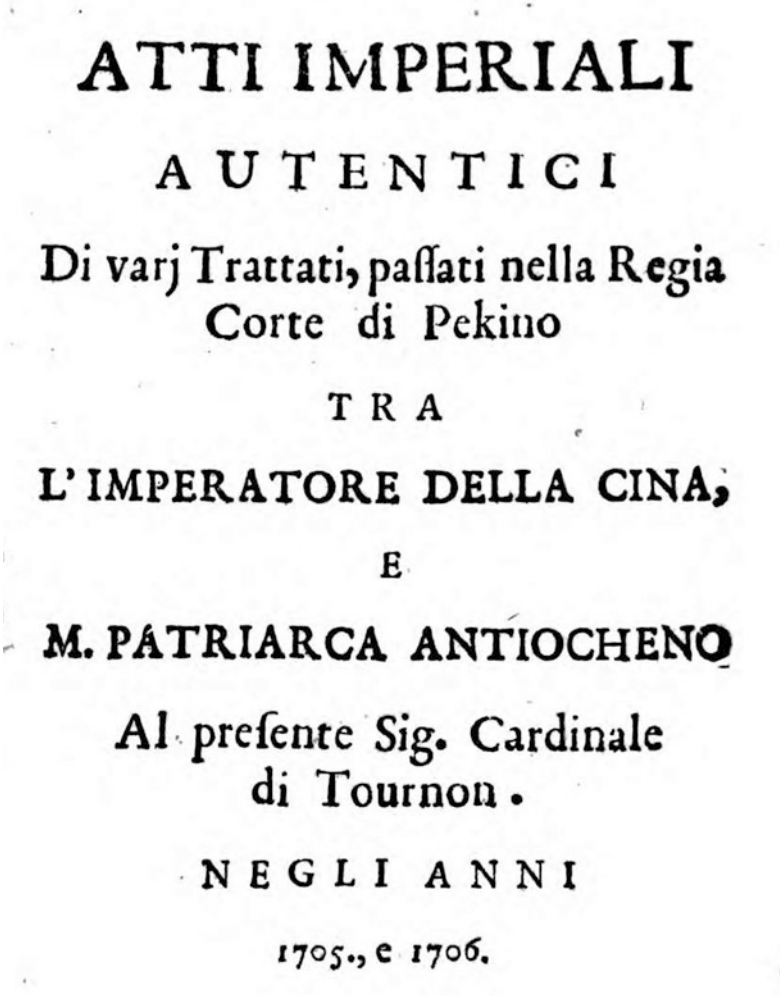
This agenda, as might be expected, was at first hidden from the emperor and his officials, who agreed, after long negotiations, to admit the legates as religious envoys and thus not subject to the complex rules surrounding visits from tributary nations like Portugal or Holland. Yet by the same token, Kangxi and his men were certainly puzzled. Why, he had asked the first legate, would you undertake such a long and dangerous journey only to show your gratitude or to establish a post which, in my opinion, could be filled by any of the missionaries already serving at court? The envoy's response was full of complications, not only because the whole question of the Chinese rites had to be avoided, but also because Rome secretly desired one of its own confidants – not, that is, a China Jesuit – to take up the position of superior general. And to complicate matters still further, the pope also had in mind that this new post would

open a channel of communication very like what we would now call a foreign consulate.

No wonder the emperor was suspicious. It must have seemed like layer after layer of Western ambition was being revealed each time a legate was questioned, and that the legations' true motives strayed further and further from the non-tributary basis upon which they had been admitted. Most of our information, in fact, comes from Western sources, precisely because these were religious visits and therefore not covered by official records dealing with foreign dignitaries. A few Manchu and Chinese documents have survived, most of them unknown until the early twentieth century. In the case of the first embassy, the majority of published sources were written from an anti-Jesuit perspective and in defense of the legate who had incited so much antagonism, while many archival documents, mostly in letter form, give a somewhat different story. One very interesting source is the *Atti imperiali*, published in Italian in 1710, a collection of sixty-nine documents from the imperial archives translated at the express order of Kangxi and sent to Europe in order to prove the bad behavior of the first legate. They were then republished as a polemic against the Jesuits with their original annotations replaced by seventy pages of notes defending the ambassador (*Memorie* 1761–62, 3:11–200), whom we can now introduce as Carlo Tommaso Maillard de Tournon, a young, proud, and opinionated nobleman who insisted that his authority as *legatus a latere* (literally, "a legate from the [pope's] side") outweighed all other considerations, including the fact that he knew no Chinese and that he had no previous diplomatic experience (Fig. 5.1).

It is telling how the same documents could be used to prove that Tournon was a contemptuous blunderer or simply a victim of Jesuit machinations. The "official" narrative written by one of his entourage (*Memorie* 1761–62,vol. 8; *Mémoires de la Congrégation* 1863–67, 4:171–80, 216–532), as well as an embittered retrospective by Tournon himself (*Memorie* 1761–62,1:12–164; *Mémoires historiques* 1766, 6:195–314; *Anecdotes* 1733–42, 1:1–287), present similar problems of interpretation, especially when read in conjunction with an immense 1400-page manuscript by a German Jesuit resident at court, Kilian Stumpf, titled *Acta Pekinensia*, which came to the Jesuits' defense and purported to be the true day-by-day record of the entire embassy supported by voluminous documentary evidence.

While it is impossible to take this text entirely at face value either, it provides many details omitted by (or unknown to) the pro-Tournon


ATTI IMPERIALI

AUTENTICI

Di varj Trattati, paſſati nella Regia Corte di Pekino

TRA

L'IMPERATORE DELLA CINA,

E

M. PATRIARCA ANTIOCHENO

Al preſente Sig. Cardinale di Tournon.

NEGLI ANNI

1705., e 1706.

Fig. 5.1 Title page from *Atti imperiali autentici di vari trattati passati nella regia corte di Pekino tra l'imperatore della Cina e… Cardinale di Tournon* (1710). National Taiwan University Library

contingent, often clarifying (or complicating) aspects of the story that are otherwise difficult to comprehend. A key instance is Tournon's first audience with Kangxi in December 1705, analyzed in a brilliant, groundbreaking essay by Francis Rouleau (Rouleau 1962). Previous scholarship, taking its lead from the "official" report, assumed that the legate had merely thanked the emperor, requesting visitations with the missionaries residing in China, and seeking to set up the position of superior general. The emperor had accepted the pope's thanks but refused to permit any visitation among the court Jesuits, who were beyond reproach, and he also refused any superior who was not a court Jesuit as well, since the position required long-term familiarity with the Chinese and Manchu languages, customs, and protocols (*Memorie* 1761–62, 8:18–19; *Mémoires de la Congrégation* 1863–67, 4:218–19). From Tournon's point of view, this was a shocking turnaround, since up to that time, so he had thought, the emperor had been completely receptive to all of Rome's proposals. Full blame was placed on the senior Portuguese Jesuit, Tomás Pereira, the emperor's favorite, who is said to have poisoned Kangxi's mind against the aims of the legation in order to keep the court Jesuits in power (*Memorie* 1761–62, 8:13–14).

Part of the difficulty was that the emperor's apparent enthusiasm needed to be carefully interpreted. According to Stumpf, Kangxi had communicated to the legate before their first audience that if he had come from the other side of the world only to ask for such trivial things, then his business could be concluded very quickly. But what Tournon had failed to understand was that this seemingly promising declaration was at the same time a question about the embassy's real motives. How could this "guest have made such a difficult and expensive journey," Kangxi said to his court officials, only "to offer such decorative compliments and formal greetings?" When Tournon's aims were put into writing, the emperor even lost his temper in front of the translators: "*Zhege shi wande*... This is trifling. Tournon has other matters of greater importance!" (Rouleau 1962, 289, 293; Stumpf 2015, 63).

Thus when the first audience finally took place several days later, Stumpf recorded that after initial ceremonies were carried out and food was offered, the emperor urged Tournon to speak more frankly:

> Why have you come here? Several times through intermediaries I have asked you, and I am not unaware that you have given answers. But now you are

> here present in person, perhaps you have something additional to say which you have up to now kept in your heart. Do not hesitate to speak out: come now, speak freely, hold nothing back.

In his response, Tournon admitted that his aim was not merely to pay his respects, but also "to institute lines of communication [*reciprocam notitiam*]" between the two sides, presumptuously adding that "all the European kings valued highly their commerce [*mutuum…commercium*] with the Supreme Pontiff." Kangxi here interrupted, commending Tournon for discussing religious matters only, and remarking that he had no objection to "regular contact" [*mutuam consuetudinem*] with the pope (Rouleau 1962, 317–18; Stumpf 2015, 88).

Hidden beneath this flurry of apparent synonyms – *notitiam, commercium, consuetudinem* – lay a crucial misunderstanding, since the emperor did not fully grasp what these "lines of communication" might entail. The confusion intensified when in his next sentence Tournon added one further term, which, as Rouleau has shown, was actually the core of the entire mission: *correspondentia*. In the preliminary memorial that had caused so much anger, Tournon had only vaguely mentioned that the pope was "desirous to have correspondence" with Beijing, but this was never elaborated upon. Now, however, he also stipulated that the agent for this "future correspondence" would have to be someone in the pope's confidence: someone familiar with the courts of Europe and especially with Roman curial politics (Rouleau 1962, 289 n. 49, 318; Stumpf 2015, 64, 88; *Atti* 1710, 9–12; *Memorie* 1761–62, 1:298–300, 3:20–22).

According to Stumpf's account, Kangxi suddenly became indignant:

> The emperor, frowning and in a manner of one giving friendly advice and in a quieter tone of voice said: "China and Europe have no business with each other. I tolerate you for your religion; your concern should be only with spiritual matters and your doctrine. From however distant and diverse kingdoms you have come here you all have one religion, and therefore any European staying here is capable of writing and receiving the papal letters to which you refer." (Rouleau 1962, 318; Stumpf 2015, 88–89)

I have mentioned before that the emperor was equally insistent that the post be filled by someone familiar with China, not the West, but his irritation seemed to run deeper than this. Certainly, Western divisiveness was once again in the spotlight, but it was also an affront that the missionaries in whom he had placed so much trust were seen as unfit go-

betweens. And what had happened to the office of superior general? The emperor still spoke as if that position revolved around a simple exchange of messages ("writing and receiving the papal letters"), although by this time he knew that Tournon was trying to steer things in a very different direction. He thus reminded his guest that his embassy was supposed to be a "religious" one, and, moreover, that Tournon had entered into a world in which Europeans, much less their religious belief, did not stand at the center.

The Emperor's Intervention

The emperor must have felt as well that his benevolence and his hospitality were being taken advantage of, especially after so many allowances had been made to admit Tournon in the first place. At the start of their audience, the interpreter was told to make plain to Tournon that he had received imperial favors never bestowed upon another foreign emissary, precisely because he was a priest and the head of a religious legation (Rouleau 1962, 316; Stumpf 2015, 86). Numerous concessions had also been made for his ill health, which plagued him throughout his visit. It is not entirely clear why the emperor should have been willing to bend so many rules, even if this was a representative of the spiritual leader of the court Jesuits. We also know from Stumpf that when the idea of the embassy was first suggested, Kangxi had bluntly replied that Tournon shouldn't come (Stumpf 2015, 15).

In order to understand more of the emperor's motivation, we need to return to the subject of the rites controversy, which, we might note, was never mentioned during the first audience. There is some question as to how much Kangxi knew about the deliberations raging on the other side of the world, but he must have been aware that something was brewing, because in 1700 he had been approached by a group of Jesuits with a highly deferential letter claiming that Western scholars, having heard of the greatness of China and the Chinese emperor, did not understand the reasons for the sacrifices to Confucius or the ancestors (or the meaning of *shang di* and *tian*). They humbly asked the emperor for his "instruction and correction" (Rosso 1948, 140), summarizing their own position and asking Kangxi whether he had anything to add.

On the same day, the emperor replied by praising the Jesuit interpretations as "excellent and in harmony with the Great Way," and the entire document was subsequently published with great fanfare in Beijing in a

trilingual edition (Chinese, Manchu, and Latin), as well as in Europe in Latin, Italian, English, French, and Dutch versions (Rosso 1948, 145; *Brevis* 1701). The whole thing was a somewhat desperate ploy on the part of the pro-Ricci side to bolster their position against increased opposition in both Rome and Paris, and it must have seemed that nothing could be more convincing for their cause than a pronouncement from the emperor himself that the Chinese rites were simply a means of honor and respect (Fig. 5.2).

But they had grossly miscalculated the effects that such an intervention would produce, since for Western theologians, Kangxi was a pagan ruler with no right to judge the progress of Christianity or to attempt any elucidation of its connection to Chinese practices. Moreover, the Jesuits probably underestimated how seriously the emperor would take their request, and that once his guidance had been solicited, he would then be intent on finding out what the outcome was. When Tournon arrived five years later, the very first question he was asked was whether he had heard any talk in Europe about the emperor's decree (*Atti* 1710, 1–2). The legate could only answer evasively, since the last thing he wanted to discuss was the Chinese rites.

Yet what Kangxi did not know was that Rome had already decided against the Jesuit position, and that it had been deliberating the matter with great scholarly attention since the 1690s, when the head of the Catholic mission in Fujian, Charles Maigrot, a member of the Paris Foreign Mission Society (in other words, not a Jesuit), had issued a mandate in which he claimed that previous statements about the rites were faulty and in need of further clarification. There could be no question, he argued, that sacrifices to Confucius or to the dead were superstitious and idolatrous and could not be considered as political or civil acts only. His resolutions were forwarded to Rome and also brought to the attention of the theological faculty at the Sorbonne, which had especially strong anti-Jesuit leanings at the time.

In 1704, Rome issued an official confirmation of Maigrot's position and announced that Tournon, along with the other ecclesiastical authorities in China, would be entrusted with enforcing the new regulations. As for the emperor, once he had been brought into the conversation he must have assumed that it would continue when the pope's legate arrived, but what he found instead was a guest who constantly avoided the subject and spoke as if he had come for entirely different reasons. The emperor may have cared little about these controversies when he was approached in

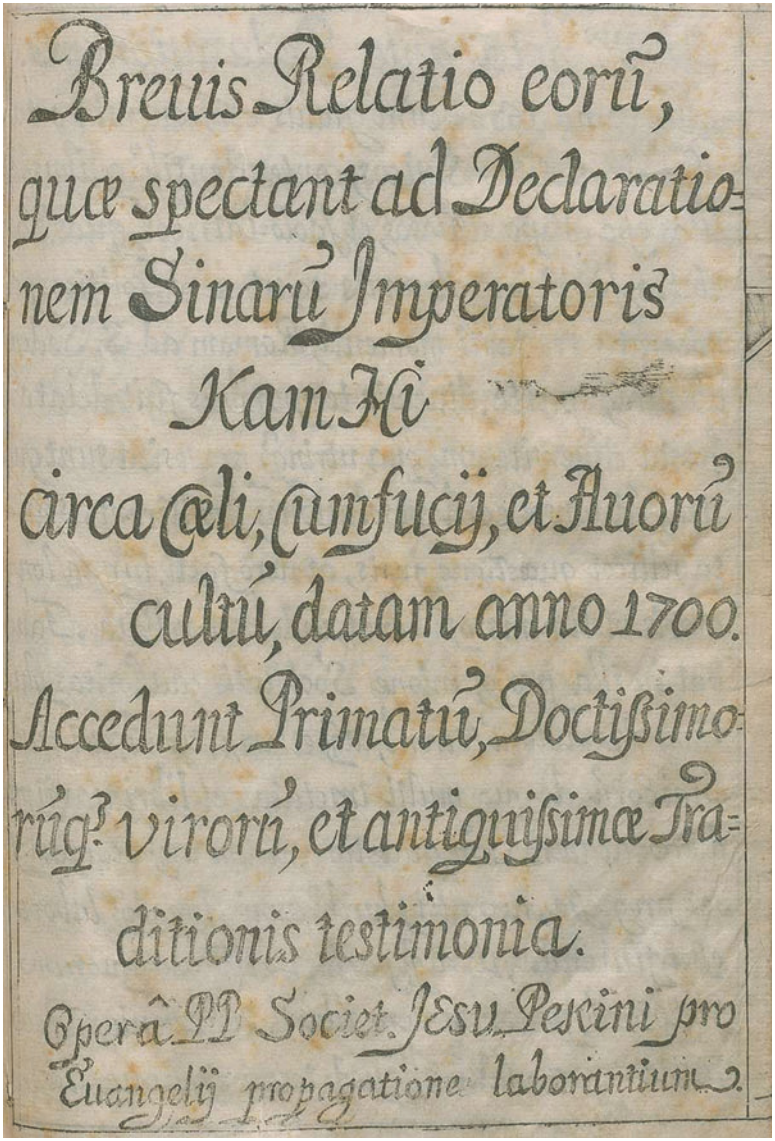


Fig. 5.2 Title page from *Brevis relatio eoru[m], quae spectant ad declarationem sinaru[m] imperatoris Kam Hi* (1701). National Taiwan University Library

1700, but once he had met Tournon and had begun to experience his puzzling behavior, it began to dawn on him that his Western visitors were not all of the same mind, and that the Christianity he knew as "the rules of Matteo Ricci" was not necessarily shared by all missionaries, and perhaps not even by the pope himself.

True vs. False Missionaries

The situation deteriorated after the first audience concluded, beginning the very next day, when according to the documents included in the *Atti imperiali*, Tournon was explicitly asked to clarify his position on the rites, which he had never mentioned. Tournon's reply was that he was not empowered to make any judgments, but that he might be able to look into the matter once his health had improved (*Atti* 1710, 18–21). Then there was a dispute about whom to send to Europe as bearer of the imperial presents, since Kangxi had decided to reciprocate and offer gifts to Rome. As usual, Tournon wanted one of his own associates, while Kangxi had different ideas. Six months later, Tournon was asked yet again if he had any further business, and he sent a message to the emperor asking for someone in whom he could confide an important matter. Kangxi demonstrated his frustration once more and sent Tournon a long and reproachful reply, asking him why he had been holding something back even after being granted a formal audience, and at the same time reminding him that he should conform to Chinese ways like the Westerners who had resided in the empire for some time (*Atti* 1710, 40–45). According to the memorial Tournon composed the following day, his original message referred only to the dispute over the gift-bearers (and he wondered why the emperor had become so irritated for no apparent reason) (*Memorie* 1761–62, 1:233–41; *Mémoires historiques* 1766, 6:291). In his rejoinder, Kangxi, too, concentrated on details about the presents, but it was also clear that underneath this barrage of communications lay a much graver concern: not just the wrangling among European Christians, a subject with which the emperor was becoming increasingly familiar, but also the fact that Western sympathy and respect for Chinese traditions was – at the very least – equally varied.

In other words, Kangxi was repeatedly trying to draw out from Tournon some sort of explanation – or even an acknowledgment – of his views on the rites, which the emperor now realized could have serious consequences for those who were permitted to live and work in China.

This also helps to explain another decree in the emperor's hand, written the same week, in which he complained about true versus false missionaries and ordered that only those who planned never to return to Europe might be allowed to live in the interior (Chen 1932, doc. 2; Rosso 1948, 239; *Atti* 1710, 61–63). The document closed with a familiar exhortation for missionaries of all nations to live together peacefully, but evidently the real message was that only those who followed the "Ricci method" – who stayed in China permanently, respected Chinese customs, and learned the Chinese language – were the "real" religious men.

This was repeated even more forcefully following the second and third audiences with Tournon, which occurred the following week. Realizing that things were at an impasse, the legate requested leave to depart China, which was granted, and at the same time he asked the emperor whether he had anything else to communicate to the pope. Kangxi said he would issue a statement the next day, and it was only then, during the third and last audience, that a direct discussion of the rites finally took place, beginning with the emperor's promised reply. China, he said, has lived according to the teachings of Confucius for two thousand years, and while Ricci and other long-term missionaries lived free from blame, if other Westerners should do anything contrary to the doctrines of the empire, they would not be allowed to remain (*Atti* 1710, 69–70, 86, 89; Stumpf 2015, 411).

In Stumpf's version of events, Tournon then excused himself from commenting on matters which he had no authority to decide and, not entirely truthfully, added that Rome had not yet come to any conclusion about the rites. He then put his foot in it by remarking that some things in Confucius's teaching were opposed to Christianity, and Kangxi asked for an example. Vengeance, Tournon responded, was expressly forbidden according to Christian law, but Confucius seemed to teach that children should avenge the death of their father. Kangxi corrected the legate in a very friendly manner, pointing out a distinction between public and private justice and arguing that the Chinese and Western conceptions of revenge were actually quite similar (Stumpf 2015, 411–13).

Perhaps Tournon could have left things alone at this point, but he made another fatal mistake by announcing that even though his own linguistic ability was inferior, he had summoned to Beijing a Western missionary who was well versed in Chinese books and could answer all the emperor's questions satisfactorily: Maigrot (Stumpf 2015, 413). Little did Tournon realize that Maigrot's entry into the conversation would enrage the

emperor still more, for Kangxi, soon on his way to his summer residence at Chengde, summoned Maigrot to join him there and quickly discovered that the missionary was far less proficient in Chinese than Tournon had claimed. Maigrot had also been asked to write down those passages in the Confucian books that he felt were irreconcilable with Christianity, and Kangxi did not shy away from insisting that the list was full of errors. He likewise complained of Maigrot's interpretation of the Chinese term for heaven, and was surprised to learn that Maigrot had not only never read Ricci's famous *Tian zhu shi yi* (On the True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven) of 1603, but that he didn't even recognize Ricci's Chinese name. At the climax of their interrogation, Maigrot was accused of trying to destroy Christianity by means of disagreements and quarrels, and he was told in no uncertain terms that if he was unhappy with Chinese customs he should consider leaving the country (Stumpf 2015, 694–95; Biker 1881–87, 5:79; *Vera* 1708, 74).

This must have been the last straw, since in the following month, according to the *Atti imperiali*, Kangxi recalled his gifts intended for the pope and claimed that he was unsure whether Tournon was an authentic legate or not, because he had never produced any valid credentials. The author of the standard work on the legations is right to point out that this was just a pretext, but it is equally interesting that once again Kangxi attempted to distinguish between the true and the false according to their views on Chinese customs (*Atti* 1710, 144–45; Rosso 1948, 170). Displaying his determination to have the matter resolved, he dispatched a pair of court Jesuits to Europe two days later, along with documents translated into Latin, hoping to discover the pope's real sentiments. In another four months, Maigrot was banished and all Western missionaries who wished to stay were ordered to apply for a special certificate; according to the decree, they must follow "the rules of Matteo Ricci" or be expelled (*Atti* 1710, 186–87, 202; Chen 1932, doc. 4; Rosso 1948, 243–44).

But aside from Maigrot and one or two others, this threat was not really carried out, perhaps because Kangxi still lacked verification of the pope's views. Now in Nanjing on his way south, Tournon immediately countered in 1707 with a decree of his own, dictating how the missionaries were to respond when being interviewed for the certificate: they were to insist that anything incompatible with Christianity was inadmissible and that Rome had already reached its verdict (Noll 1992, 27–30). Tournon proceeded to Canton and then to Macao, where he was told to remain until Kangxi's ambassadors had returned from Europe. Unfortunately, however, they

never made it to Rome, having both perished off the coast of Portugal. But before this became known, the emperor had sent another pair of envoys, just over a year later, armed with even more documents that were later published as the *Atti imperiali*. While the second envoys did reach their destination, they produced little effect; the pope merely reiterated his stance and expressed his full support for Tournon (*Mémoires pour Rome* 1710, 9–24).

Mezzabarba

Kangxi, meanwhile, waited, while Tournon remained confined until his premature death in 1710. News was slow in both directions, and while Tournon lay dying at the conclusion of what was a failed legation, the mood in Rome was one of celebration over his apparent accomplishments. Just before his demise, he received word that he had been made a cardinal. But Kangxi remained deeply disturbed that he had never received any reaction to his imperial pronouncements. In 1710, for example, newly arrived missionaries were asked for news about the rites, and one of them provided a summary of the pope's confirmation of Maigrot's mandate (*Mémoires historiques* 1766, 6:407–8; Rosso 1948, 296–97). But more authoritative reports were still lacking. A third embassy to Rome was planned in 1712, but this one never materialized (Reil 1977, 149–54).

In 1715, a major new statement on the rites finally came from Rome in the form of a papal bull, which attempted to put an end to the controversy by firmly reiterating the stance taken in 1704 and supporting Tournon's decree of 1707. The document not only condemned the rites without question, but it also stipulated an oath of obedience that all missionaries must take (De Martinis 1888–1909, 2:306–10; Noll 1992, 50–55). Copies of the proclamation reached China the following year, eventually coming to the attention of the court Jesuits and the emperor himself, who angrily declared that the bull must be a forgery – as if, once again, a "real" religious official could never have taken such a stance. He responded with a most unusual (and perhaps unique) decree of his own in 1716, now known as the Red Manifesto, issued in multiple copies by the imperial printing press and addressed to all Westerners in three languages (Manchu, Chinese, and Latin), lamenting the fact that many years had passed since his four envoys had been sent out and that only confusing reports had been received in return (*Anecdotes* 1733–42,

3:345–55; Chen 1932, docs. 7–9; Rosso 1948, 307–12, 336–37). Kangxi wanted definitive statements from his own agents, not from the likes of Tournon or Maigrot (Fig. 5.3).

His decree reached Rome in 1718, when the last survivor among the four imperial envoys, Giuseppe Provana, was ordered to return to China and to announce that a new legate would soon be sent to clear up matters. Provana, too, was to perish at sea, but his Chinese companion, Fan Shouyi, who had traveled to Europe with him and had there become a Jesuit priest, completed the journey and arrived in Macao in 1720, a few months before the new papal legate. Unsurprisingly, Kangxi recognized a rare opportunity for new information from a Chinese informant and at once ordered Fan to proceed north. Meanwhile, Fan gave a statement to the authorities in Guangzhou about his long delay, also revealing that before setting out, Provana had been instructed to remain silent on the issue of the rites, especially since another legate was on his way (Rosso 1948, 332–34; Rule 1995, 287). This infuriated Kangxi once more, since he had specifically dispatched Provana and the others to discuss that very subject, and he had already been waiting more than ten years for their return.

The new legate, Carlo Ambrogio Mezzabarba, proved himself from the start far more diplomatic than his predecessor, beginning with the fact that he set out from Lisbon and with the blessing of the Portuguese king, who technically still had ecclesiastical jurisdiction over all of East Asia (Tournon had traveled on a French ship in defiance of that patronage). After arriving

Fig. 5.3 The Red Manifesto (1716). Courtesy Lilly Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana

in China via Macao, he was asked at once by court officials about the fate of Provana and the authenticity of the papal bull. He replied that he had been sent as an official representative in Provana's stead, and that a decree had indeed been issued, which he could verify as soon as he saw it (Viani 1739, 35–37). As a further effect of the damage caused by the Tournon legation, before being granted an audience, Mezzabarba was also warned to be honest about hiding the true purpose of his mission. He demonstrated his forthrightness by admitting that in addition to thanking the emperor, he had come to make two requests: to serve as the superior of all the missionaries working in China, and to ask that Chinese converts be allowed to comply with the prohibitions contained in the pope's decree. The emperor politely received both appeals, but his officials informed Mezzabarba that the papal bull applied to Westerners only, and that the religion of the Lord of Heaven, since it was opposed to Chinese ways, could no longer be practiced in the empire. Missionaries who were skilled in the arts and sciences might remain; the rest were superfluous (Chen 1932, doc. 13; Rosso 1948, 343–45; *Mémoires historiques* 1766, 6:10–12; Viani 1739, 49–50).

The Emperor's Skepticism

Even before being granting an audience, in other words, Mezzabarba was clearly told that the only subject of conversation would be the Chinese rites. As a consequence, he was left with very little room to maneuver and was on the defensive the entire time. On several occasions, for instance, he tried to argue that the pope didn't want to reform Chinese customs but simply the errors of Chinese Christians, but this tactic gained little ground, especially now that the emperor was fully aware of what was at stake in the Western notion of religious "reformation." What would the pope say, insisted Kangxi's officials in return, if the emperor had tried to reform the rites of Rome? (Viani 1739, 47).

The next day, Kangxi announced that he did not want to see any communications from the pope at all and ordered Mezzabarba to return home. After considerable pleading, the legate revealed that in addition to a papal letter, he had also brought eight "permissions" that represented partial compromises on certain Chinese ritual practices (funeral ceremonies, sacrifices to Confucius), so long as they were "free from any superstition." A day later, he was given leave to provide a translation of these documents, and the day after that, he was told that an audience had been

approved (Rosso 1948, 346, 350–51; De Martinis 1888–1909, 3:77–78; Noll 1992, 57; Viani 1739, 71–72).

In another two days, the first audience took place, and much as in Tournon's case, the legate was received with considerable honor. Behind all the formality, however, little headway was achieved; the legate asked that Christianity be permitted "in its purity," and he was again told that Westerners did not understand Chinese ways. His new defense about papal infallibility, that his pontiff was assisted by the Holy Spirit and could not be deceived in matters of faith, did not get him very far either, and he attempted a similar argument in the next audience three days later, much more unusual in that it was a private meeting attended only by the legate, his chaplain, and Fan Shouyi as interpreter, all of whom where sworn to secrecy on pain of death (Viani 1739, 91–93; Chen 1932, doc. 13; Rosso 1948, 353).

According to their later testimony, the emperor dwelled at some length on divisions between European nations, both politically and spiritually, and remarked that he wished to encourage greater unity among his Western guests, not only the Jesuits of different nationalities but also those of diverse religious orders. Distinctions between the secular clergy, Jesuits, Franciscans, and Dominicans, he confessed, remained an enigma to him (Viani 1739, 106–7; *Anecdotes* 1733–42, 4:160). Chinese officials were also aware of recent dissentions between the Jesuits and the "Society of Peter" (*bai duo luo hui*), the Chinese term used to designate missionaries under the jurisdiction of the Propaganda Fide, the group to which Maigrot, Tournon, and Mezzabarba, for example, all belonged (Viani 1739, 61; Chen 1932, doc. 13; Rosso 1948, 348, 362). Even more revealingly, Mezzabarba reported that the emperor inquired about the refusal of the French to accept a papal bull issued in 1713, one more indication that Kangxi was becoming increasingly aware of the realities and limitations of papal power (Viani 1739, 109; *Anecdotes* 1733–42, 4:162).

As Paul Rule has suggested, Kangxi's growing skepticism toward Rome may have been influenced by information gleaned from Fan Shouyi, but of course the emperor had been accumulating knowledge about European discord for some time (Rule 1995, 287–91). He even wondered whether the bull that Mezzabarba had come to enforce was nothing more than a vendetta against the Jesuits concocted by Maigrot and his supporters, and as Rule has also argued, the Jesuits' carefully wrought image of their pope as the Western *jiao huang* or *jiao wang* ("emperor of religion" or "king of religion") was in serious jeopardy (Viani 1739, 118; Rule 1994, 258).

What kind of a ruler would not even have the ear of his own people? Kangxi had expressed similar puzzlement over Tournon's stipulation that the superior general must be a "man of confidence." "I do not understand what you are saying about a man of confidence," he replied, "nor do we have any such distinction in China in choosing people. Some are nearer to my throne, others midway, others at a great distance: would anyone, whosoever he be, to whom I entrust some business, be wanting in his due fidelity? Who among you will dare to deceive the pope?" (Rouleau 1962, 318; Stumpf 2015, 89).

Christianity as Heterodox

But in the case of the Westerners, apparently, neither candor nor obedience could be guaranteed. Less than two weeks later, an even more important audience was granted, important not because any new breakthroughs were achieved, but because all the missionaries residing in the capital were ordered to attend. Clearly, Kangxi wanted to ensure that his sentiments about the rites would be fully known to the entire Western community. Owing to the presence of so many eyewitnesses, we possess more commentary about this meeting than any of the others, but it was also the occasion which produced the greatest discrepancy of opinion about what had actually been accomplished (Di Fiore 1989, 157–225).

According to our fullest account, written by a member of his entourage, Mezzabarba was given leave to bring up anything he felt had been omitted or passed over too quickly during their earlier meetings. He responded by raising three points, none of which seemed new: that the pope had spent many years studying the rites and that the resulting decisions were both infallible and necessary; that all Westerners should live together in peace and obey the pope in religious matters just as they obeyed the emperor in everything else; and that Mezzabarba himself was willing to take full responsibility for all previous Western transgressions as well as for any ill feelings toward the missionaries.

The first point, since it concerned the rites, produced nothing but impatience in Kangxi, who repeatedly interrupted the legate to ask him why he continued to discuss such trivial matters in his presence. But the second and the third topics seemed to meet with much more approval, and especially the third, during which Mezzabarba threw himself on the ground face-first as he begged forgiveness. Kangxi commanded him to rise, praised him, and declared that he could not have spoken better, and that "now the

matter was very clear, and that it was finished." Or as a French extract of the same narrative put it, "the legation was successful, and the controversies were at an end." Mezzabarba was then asked whether he had anything to else to propose. He once again brought up the idea of installing a superior general, but this was deferred until another occasion – in other words, denied. And at the audience's conclusion, finally, the legate thanked his host for the honors and benefits he had received, and particularly for "the favorable concession that today has been granted to the Christian religion" (Viani 1739, 127–29; *Anecdotes* 1733–42, 4:190).

But what concession was that? According to the narrator, Mezzabarba believed that a victory had been achieved and that someone should be sent to Rome as soon as possible; the following day, he wrote to the pope rejoicing that the emperor "had finally permitted, after my petitions, the preaching of our holy law in all its purity." But others were far less sanguine, and even before Mezzabarba had left the audience hall, he was warned by some of the Westerners present that the emperor had been speaking "ironically." Several witnesses also remarked that Kangxi had smiled or even laughed sardonically when hearing Rome's opinion on the rites (Viani 1739, 129–30, 135; *Anecdotes* 1733–42, 4:194–202; Di Fiore 1989, 162, 168, 176). It is difficult to sift through these often conflicting readings, and in a very bare-bones Chinese version that has been left to us, the emperor merely stated that "according to what you have said, matters can be clarified." Yet when this text was translated into Latin and presented to Mezzabarba shortly before his departure, a passage was added indicating that during the audience, the legate had redoubled his efforts and had "obtained what he had asked for" (Chen 1932, doc. 13; Rosso 1948, 359; *Mémoires historiques* 1766, 7:22).

Or had he been willfully misinformed by his interpreters, as the most authoritative modern study of the legation has suggested? The Chinese text, too, specifically blamed the translators for leading Mezzabarba to assume that Kangxi had actually permitted Chinese converts to obey the papal decree, a concession which was, of course, highly unlikely (Di Fiore 1989, 89–97; Chen 1932, doc. 13; Rosso 1948, 361–63). Kangxi then ordered a translation of the papal decree that was the source of so much contention, and when it was duly prepared the following day, the immediate result was a famous decree in the emperor's hand that succinctly, firmly, and conclusively closed the door on Christianity during this period of Chinese history. "Reading this document," it began, "one wonders how the Westerners, who are small men [*xiao ren*], can talk about the

Great Way of China. None of the Westerners understands Chinese books, and when they talk and discuss they make people laugh." The edict went on to compare the bull to the "small teachings" [*xiao jiao*] of Buddhists and Taoists, and declared, finally, that "hereafter there is no need for Westerners to practice their religion in China; it must be prohibited to avoid more trouble" (Viani 1739, 139–41, 147; *Mémoires historiques* 1766, 7:24; Chen 1932, docs. 13–14; Rosso 1948, 364, 376).

A fitting climax to Kangxi's dwindling opinion of Western Christianity at the end of his life, this was one of his final statements regarding a once noble teaching now denigrated as "small": petty, unvirtuous, and worthy of contempt. Such severity of sentiment can be better understood just by looking at the translation of the bull that he would have seen, a copy of which still exists in the Chinese archives. Much of the original magisterial Latin has been abstracted and condensed, but the skeleton of prohibitions that remained condemned nearly all of the most fundamental rituals of Chinese culture one by one, including spring and autumn sacrifices to ancestors, the use of funeral tablets, and Confucian ceremonies carried out by both government officials and students receiving degrees (Chen 1932, doc. 14). Also forbidden were the use of *tian* and *shang di*, as well as – and this must have been a particular affront to Kangxi – the expression *jing tian* or "revere heaven," the very phrase that he had painted with the imperial brush and presented to the Jesuits as a mark of royal favor nearly fifty years before (Collani 1994). In 1675, this inscription had signified that the Christian and Chinese versions of *tian* were noncontradictory, but in 1721, once Rome's position had been unambiguously corroborated, it was now understood that the Western version of heaven was both heterodox and potentially dangerous.

It is interesting, however, that even after this debacle, the emperor still treated Mezzabarba with a variety of honors and pleasantries, including a banquet in which both the papal legate and a visiting Russian ambassador were invited to attend (although the two never met). Kangxi also regaled the legate with gifts for the pope and the king of Portugal, and in their very last audience, which took place only one month after the emperor's angry decree against Christianity, both parties continued to thank each other and Mezzabarba promised he would return with further instructions. Kangxi personally handed him a cup of wine and took his hands in a gesture of warmth and affection, "much to the admiration of the mandarins, who were beside themselves with amazement" (Viani 1739, 238).

"Of no consequence"

Perhaps the most fascinating aspect of this long and involved story, then, is trying to understand Kangxi's behavior toward Christianity throughout his reign. There can be no question that he was attracted to Western science and to Western mathematics, but scholars and commentators have long wondered about his apparent sympathy for Western religion as well, which was after all one of the smallest sects in China. He had remained close to the court Jesuits since his childhood and had felt understandable gratitude for their many services, but exactly why was he so willing (and, apparently, so tirelessly willing) to convince the authorities in Rome that their beliefs might be reconciled with Chinese practices? Why should he have cared so much about the rites controversy? Contemporary onlookers were equally puzzled, not just Chinese officials who resented the presence of the outsiders, but even other Europeans who had axes of their own to grind. The most famous critic was Voltaire, who closed his *Age of Louis XIV* with a chapter on how Westerners had managed to get Christianity proscribed in China despite the emperor's kindness and indulgence. Another voice was that of John Bell, a Scotsman who traveled with the Russian embassy that was in Beijing at the same time as Mezzabarba. "It must be acknowledged an instance of uncommon condescension," Bell wrote, "for a heathen Emperor to interest himself so much in the peace of a Christian church." And when an abstract of Mezzabarba's story was translated into English in the 1740s, its Protestant editor marveled that Kangxi "could have Leisure and Patience to hear . . . the Disputes of eternally wrangling Priests." In that editor's view, Western Catholics were merely replacing "one Set of idolatrous Rites for another" (Voltaire 1751, 2:318–28; Bell 1763, 2:37; Astley 1745–47, 3:596 n. d, 3:605 n. a).

And if Kangxi never actually followed through on his threats to expel the missionaries, in this he was also exceptional. Things returned to a more normal state when his son, Yongzheng (reigned 1722–1735), issued his first decree against Christianity barely a year after ascending the throne. All churches were ordered converted into public buildings, and the missionaries, with the exception of those residing at court, were exiled to Canton (and later banished to Macao) (Fu 1966, 1:138; Mailla 1777–85, 11:494–97; *Yongzheng shi lu* 1964, 14:14a–b). While these strictures, too, were not always rigorously enforced, the Westerners' religion was now publicly identified as an illicit sect and its practitioners were outlaws. When a third and final papal legation arrived in China in 1725, it was not even received

as a religious embassy and quickly dispatched back to Rome. Two years later, Yongzheng explained to a visiting Portuguese ambassador that his religion was regarded as heretical because it had impeded the Chinese way of life (Fu 1966, 1:143, 155–56; *Yongzheng shi lu* 1964, 35:11a; *Yongzheng shang* 2009, 56:17b; Wills 1984, 182).

While we will never be able to understand Kangxi's motives fully, it is important to remember that at no point was there any real evidence that he was attracted to the tenets of Christianity as such, much less to its insistence that it was the one true faith for all mankind. Missionaries could be honored as religious men who had renounced the world and who had lived according to a strict moral code; even Tournon, who was so deeply disliked, was received as a religious official or *xiu dao de* (literally, a "follower of the Way," that is, a monk or a priest) (Rouleau 1962, 316; Stumpf 2015, 86). But this did not necessarily mean that Kangxi was committed to the Westerners' teaching or to their evangelical methods, which on the contrary caused frequent irritation and conflict. Christianity may have been tolerated, and officially tolerated since 1692, but this never implied that its principles were either correct or necessary.

As a final example of this nuance, we might close by looking at a very interesting alteration made by Kangxi to a document addressed to Tournon in 1707. The legate had already left the capital and was trying to dictate how his colleagues should respond when they were being interviewed for their newly required residence certificates. The emperor replied with an angry message, relayed via a group of court missionaries, criticizing the legate for causing so much trouble and suggesting that he quietly leave the country. They were also reminded that they were only guests in the empire and that their assistance was not really required: "If we stay in China we add nothing, and if we leave China we take nothing away. Our presence is not needed [*wu yong*]."

But Kangxi, perhaps reluctant to accuse missionaries of uselessness when they had carried out so many important tasks for many decades, modified this last phrase and decided to call them irrelevant (or inconsequential) instead: "If we stay in China we add nothing, and if we leave China we take nothing away. We are indeed of no consequence [*wu guan*]." The same phrase was also used near the end of the controversy in 1720, in a much longer document issued on the eve of Mezzabarba's arrival. All the court missionaries were summoned to a formal audience, where they were plainly told that in order for them to remain in China,

they would have to follow the practices of Matteo Ricci. While they may have been obedient and possessed valuable skills, Kangxi continued, this did not mean that their presence – and certainly not their religion – made any real difference: "Just as the teaching you profess is without harm or benefit to China, so is it also of no consequence [*wu guan*] whether you go or stay" (Chen 1932, docs. 3, 11; Rosso 1948, 241, 338–41).

What had changed between 1707 and 1720 was that the Westerners' *religion* had become inconsequential, not just the foreigners themselves. A small shift, to be sure, but it also helps to explain how the emperor was able at once to retain a certain degree of sympathy for his trusted assistants, while at the same time allowing the utter prohibition of their religious teaching. It would only be one more year, in 1721, that he would finally label Christianity as *yi duan* or heterodox. But even this was only a response to the papal bull that had formally condemned the rites. In other words, it was not Christianity as such that was the problem. Any religion could be acceptable so long as it did not interfere with local traditions, just as it could always be chastised for opposite reasons. It is significant that the same document in which Kangxi condemned Christianity referred to certain Buddhist and Daoist teachings as *yi duan* as well (Chen 1932, docs. 13–14; Rosso 1948, 364, 367, 376).

Rome, however, held a very different opinion, both about what "religion" was and how it should be practiced, even in China. The papal legates had come to ask for something that was doomed to failure, since the terms of the conversation – in this case, "religion" – were firmly in China's control. To call the Westerners (and their teaching) *wu guan* was an undeniably deflating attack on those who thought of themselves and their faith as the apex of human civilization. But from another point of view, it was also an accurate claim, since as in so many other cases before the middle of the nineteenth century, Western desires were not simply frustrated in China but could be rendered completely superfluous.

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CHAPTER 6

Russia and "Diplomacy"

In this chapter we will examine several seventeenth- and eighteenth-century embassies from Russia, which have sometimes been ignored in studies of China's premodern relations with "western ocean" countries, probably because for many non-specialist scholars, including myself, the Russian material is so much more linguistically challenging. Yet what makes the Russian case so revealing is precisely how it fits – and doesn't fit – into a larger pattern of China's dealings with the West as a whole. For on the surface Russia's accomplishments seem to be utterly exceptional: while other Westerners were regularly disappointed by the prospect of a lucrative Chinese commerce, Russia was granted frequent trading privileges and was allowed to come directly to Beijing in official caravans. While other Europeans strove in vain to be recognized as anything other than subservient tribute bearers, Russia was able to sign two peace treaties in which both sides formally recognized the other as equals. And while European Roman Catholics were tolerated and the Jesuits had become honored servants of the court, Russia was granted permission to establish a permanent Orthodox mission in Beijing and to open two language schools, in which Russians would learn Chinese (and Manchu) as well as the other way around. Perhaps most remarkably, and this will be the main subject of the present chapter, Russia was able to install a trade consul in the capital when all other foreign princes (including the Pope, as we saw in the last chapter) were repeatedly refused. What made Russia so different?

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Unlike most other Western nations, Russia actually had a viable commodity to sell in China: Siberian fur. And yet the fur market was soon glutted and cannot by itself account for the fact that China should have been so interested in Russian contact. Likewise, it is hard to imagine that the Qing government feared the Russian empire or any other foreign power enough to agree to a mutual peace treaty, or that they should have cared one way or the other about the Russian language or its peculiar form of religion. And as international trade was never more than a magnanimous gesture toward barbarian outsiders who had come to pay tribute and to recognize the greatness of Chinese civilization, was there any real need for a foreign commercial official to reside in the capital on a long-term basis?

As we will see, each of these exceptions was actually the result of a coherent Chinese foreign policy, but one that did not always match Western assumptions about mutual pacts and international relations between discrete nation-states. China continued to insist on the inherent inferiority of all other peoples, and in the Russians' case, it was decided that they might be appeased by allowing them the right to trade, to open an ecclesiastical mission, or even to establish what they called a foreign consul. But in return for these concessions, which were in no way guaranteed simply because a pact had been signed or some other form of agreement had been reached, Russian cooperation was required for a very different purpose: to keep the peace in Central Asia.

In this sense Russia *was* different, since unlike "western ocean" countries such as Holland, Portugal, or the Papal States, whose envoys arrived from the south and the east and could be easily kept at bay by the tradition-minded Board of Rites, Russia was classified as a "border tribe" and belonged to an area long fraught with potential dangers and numerous invasions (including the reigning Manchu dynasty, in power since 1644). Russian relations came under the responsibility of an entirely different government office as well, the Lifan Yuan or "Ministry for the Administration of Border Areas," whose job was to deal with a complex set of nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples to the north and west beyond the Great Wall – the Mongols, the Dzungars, the Tungus, the Samoyeds, and a host of others (Sebes 1961, 304–12). At best, this was a precarious balance of power that had been violently upset once the Russians had appeared on the scene in the second half of the sixteenth century, and as their empire expanded further and further eastward through Siberia, by the mid-seventeenth century it

had reached the river Amur, an important dividing line between Russian and Chinese spheres of influence.

When other "border tribes" began to petition China for protection from this new invader, who demanded that tribute be paid to Moscow instead of Beijing, the emperor responded with a series of military maneuvers against those he referred to as the *Luo cha* (a derogatory transliteration for Russia meaning "devils" and used to refer to the Cossacks). The situation remained extremely volatile. Like other Western nations, Moscow was lured by the prospect of huge profits from the China trade and sent its first official embassy in 1653, but the Amur conflict was never mentioned. China did not make the connection either, and the Lifan Yuan received this representative of the *Chahan kan* ("white khan" in Mongolian) from *E luo si* (a more neutral transliteration for Russia) as the envoy of a new tributary nation "far away in the northwest" (Fu 1966, 1:15–16).

The ambassador, however, Feodor Baikoff, proved unwilling to obey the protocols for tribute bearers. He had been instructed by the tsar, for example, not to hand over his letter to anyone but the emperor himself, and to refuse to perform any genuflection perceived to be humiliating to Russian superiority (Baddeley 1919, 2:134). Even a cup of tea from the emperor's table was rejected on the grounds that the ceremony occurred on the day of a Russian Orthodox fast. In so many ways, this was a familiar story of Sino-Western confrontation, but even though Baikoff was subsequently asked to leave without being granted an official audience, Russian caravans were still permitted to come to the capital, including one that was informally entertained by the young Kangxi emperor in 1669 (Baddeley 1919, 2:167–68; Mancall 1971, 56–60). It was a freedom that did not last long, however, since continued border troubles led the Qing court to conduct new investigations, and the situation became particularly serious in the late 1660s, when a powerful chief of the Tungus tribe switched his allegiance from China to Russia and fled across the border to the Russian stronghold at Nerchinsk, some two hundred kilometers away from Chinese territory. Other defections followed. China lodged a formal complaint with the governor of Nerchinsk, and when the result was a Cossack named Milovanoff who arrived in Beijing with a message from the tsar, it began to dawn upon Qing officials that the unruly *Luo cha* and the tribute-bearing representatives from *E luo si* were governed by one and the same "white khan."

The Treaty of Nerchinsk

The Milovanoff embassy is particularly noteworthy for including an audacious letter from the governor of Nerchinsk demanding that the Chinese emperor become a tributary of the tsar. It was probably left untranslated or translated in an inoffensive way, since it appeared to produce no adverse effects, but when Milovanoff was sent back to Nerchinsk in 1670, he was given a letter informing the tsar that the prospect of continued trade would henceforth be linked to the peace and security of the Amur region (Wang 1936, doc. 1; Mancall 1971, 61–62; Baddeley 1919, 2:195–203; Pavlovsky 1949, 127–44). While this message was plain enough, it produced little change at first, partly because no one in Russia was able to translate the emperor's letter. Yet even though officials in Moscow would have been well aware of the ongoing conflicts near the Amur, when the tsar decided to send a second embassy in 1675, more elaborate than the first, border issues were once again completely ignored. The Chinese side had naturally assumed that this mission would include a response to the emperor's demands of 1670, but what they found instead was another ambassador, Nikolai Milescu (a Romanian by birth), who steadfastly avoided any questions about the Sino-Russian frontier, and especially the fate of the Tungusic leader who had become (or was soon to become) a Russian subject.

Although quibbling over tribute procedures continued, a formal audience was eventually granted. Still focusing on trade, Milescu then tried to put forward a list of commercial and diplomatic proposals regarding such matters as free access for merchants and the appropriate forms of address for the two sovereigns, but he was dismissed without a detailed reply. The official record stated that this was because he had not learned to pay proper homage, but the real grounds for the embassy's failure, as it was elaborated in the next sentence, was that Russia had not sent back the fugitive chief. Only then, the entry concluded, "will we consider granting your request for trade" (Fu 1966, 1:49–50; Baddeley 1919, 2:403–4).

A new Chinese policy, linking trade and border security, was thus born, even if Moscow remained slow to take action. But once Kangxi had consolidated his power and that of the still fledgling Qing dynasty in the early 1680s (after rebellions in the south and in Taiwan were successfully put down), he shifted his attention northward and ordered attacks on the Russian fortress at Albazin on the Amur river. Owing to the difficulty of supplying such a remote outpost, as well as to the tsar's preoccupations

with military campaigns in other areas of his empire, Russia was forced to enter talks to end the hostilities (Mancall 1971, 111–40). A new ambassador was named, Feodor Golovin, the highest ranking of any thus far, and although he was still instructed to push for greater trade, he was also for the first time empowered to work out border disputes.

The discussions that followed led to the Treaty of Nerchinsk in 1689, which as a mutual pact between empires represented China's greatest departure to date from its customary insistence on the strictures of the tribute system. Even the choice of the site for negotiations was highly unusual, as it lay outside of Chinese territory, perhaps because Kangxi did not want to call too much bureaucratic attention to it (only a short summary is given in the *shi lu* or Veritable Records) (Fu 1966, 1:100–1; *Kangxi shi lu* 1964, 143:14b–17a). Yet its importance was signaled by the fact that he also sent a large army to accompany the delegation, which consisted of men of unusually high status and included some of his own relatives. Another peculiarity was the use of Latin as the official language of communication, which required the services of the Jesuits as negotiators and go-betweens. According to their own testimony, the entire process was conducted according to thoroughly Western notions of mutuality and the "Law of Nations," at the time a relatively new concept in Europe as well. Most strangely of all, if we can trust the record preserved in Du Halde's Jesuit compilation from 1735, Kangxi had given orders to his representatives to swear to the treaty by the Christian God in order to convince the Russians of his sincerity (Sebes 1961, 111–13; Du Halde 1735, 4:203).

"Mutual commerce"

Although couched in the language of equality and reciprocation, it is important to note that the Treaty of Nerchinsk did not represent a change in China's foreign policy, either toward Russia or any other Western power. If on this occasion the Qing government was willing to negotiate creatively with an aggressive neighbor, it was because of a desire to work out a solution to a particular domestic problem, namely, the need to provide security for China's northern border. This is not to say that the treaty itself was mere window dressing, since there was a genuine attempt to establish a frontier along the Argun river, a tributary of the Amur, although details remained vague since the region was largely unknown to both sides. The Russian fort at Albazin was to be destroyed, and the

fugitive problem was resolved by allowing those on either side to remain where they were. As for trade, which was Moscow's main concern, the official Latin text noted that all those with proper passports would be allowed to carry on "mutual commerce." The text published in Du Halde was more grandiose about the "reciprocal union between the two crowns" and the "reciprocal" liberty of those carrying credentials, but the Chinese and Manchu versions simply stated that all travelers, provided they carried passports, would be allowed to trade (*Treaties* 1917, 12; Du Halde 1735, 4:202; Fu 1966, 1:101; Fuchs 1940, 576).

While the promise for Russia was great, this aspect of the treaty was equally vague in terms of how "mutual commerce" might actually occur. Moreover, the trade provision was apparently added to the treaty only after Russian insistence, since according to a diary by one of the Jesuit go-betweens published in Du Halde, when the Russian negotiators had first brought up the issue, their Chinese counterparts responded that the matter was of such little consequence that it had no place in a treaty about borders. In fact, all commercial endeavors remained highly regulated, even if Russian caravans became more frequent (every year during the first decade, and more or less every two years until about 1720). The same diary recorded how numerous merchants began to appear in the capital under the pretext of various diplomatic missions, and that Kangxi had specifically announced that his benevolence toward them, which included paying for their food and lodging, was not to be regarded as a new precedent (Du Halde 1735, 4:197–98, 233, 287).

After the treaty had been signed, the first officially sponsored caravan set out from Moscow three years later in 1692, led by a Danish diplomat called Evert Ides. Although some tribute rules were still broken (the tsar's name was listed before the emperor's, for instance), the court dealt with Ides with much greater flexibility and granted him numerous audiences as well as additional freedoms. The fact that this was really a trade delegation did not make much difference, as the emperor was anxious to remain on good terms with all representatives from Moscow (and, after 1713, from the new capital at St. Petersburg). The Ides mission was by far the best known in Europe, too, as influential versions of its progress were published in numerous Western languages and in several popular anthologies and adaptations (Ides 1704, 1706; Brand 1698a, 1698b). The narratives provided entertaining anecdotes and much new information about the Central Asian peoples encountered along the way, but the real interest for Europe lay in the possibility of a faster and less treacherous overland route

that might circumvent the Portuguese monopoly and the restrictions imposed upon all maritime trade via Macao and Canton. One further effect was the beginning of the codification of rules relating to Russian caravans, which were specifically not classified as tribute missions. According to a revision of the Veritable Records published in 1818, it was determined in 1694 that Russia would be permitted a caravan once every three years and consisting of no more than two hundred men, who could remain in Beijing for a maximum of eighty days (*Jiaqing shi lu* 1964, Lifan Yuan 3a–4b; Mancall 1971, 191–92). These rules, however, were not always enforced.

Tulišen

Another sign of China's keen interest in Russian affairs was a highly unusual delegation sent in the other direction from Beijing in 1712. A caravan due to return to Moscow spurred Kangxi to send five high-ranking Chinese envoys to meet with the chief of the Torghuts, a Western Mongol tribe that during the seventeenth century had migrated to a region deep in Russian territory along the Volga river near the Caspian Sea. The embassy was ostensibly in response to the chief's request for the return of a nephew who had become stranded in China, but the real reason for the delegation was Kangxi's constant concern about Central Asia and the danger of new alliances, particularly between Russia and the Dzungars (also known as the Kalmucks), a major rival of China and closely related to the Torghuts. And just as Russian ambassadors were regularly instructed by the tsar to compile as much political and commercial information as possible, the Qing envoys were given similar directives and told that they should even proceed to the Russian capital to meet the tsar if requested. Once there, they should assure him that China would uphold the Treaty of Nerchinsk and that Russian troops could be deployed safely elsewhere. Furthermore, the delegation was reminded to obey all local ceremonies to show that they were superior to the Russian ambassadors (and Milescu was specifically named), who had so boorishly refused to comply with the time-honored rules of the Middle Kingdom (Fu 1966, 1:116–17; Tulišen 1821, 11–13; Stary 1976, 25).

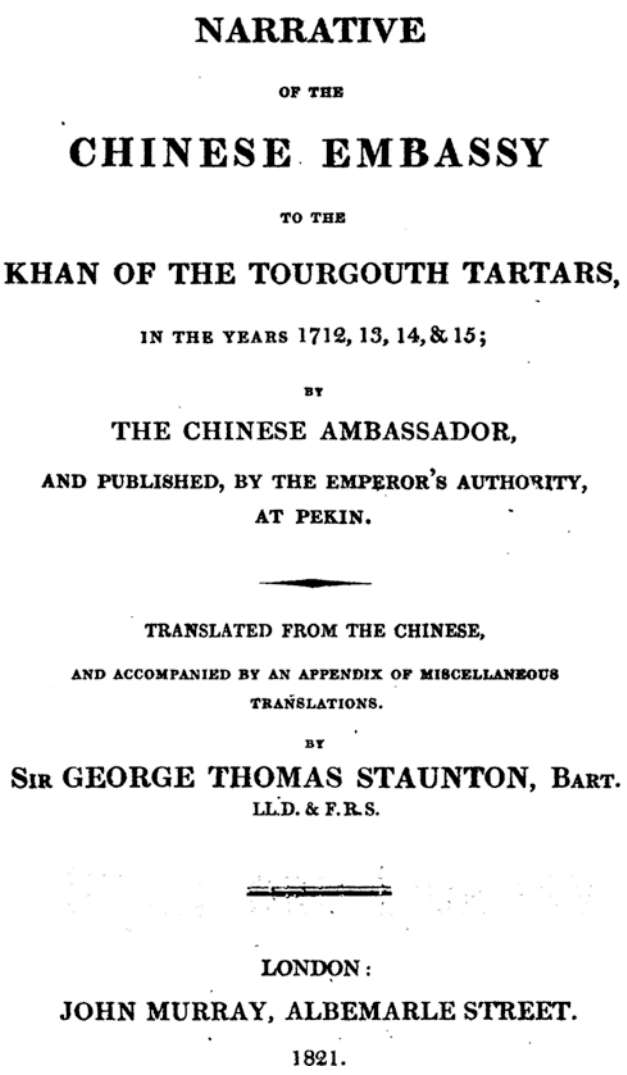
We are privy to so much information about these travelers because of a report composed by one of the embassy party, a Manchu official called Tulišen, whose *Yi yu lu*, or Record of Foreign Lands, was published in both Manchu and Chinese and then translated into English in the early

nineteenth century. When the next Russian ambassador arrived in 1720, by the name of Lev Izmailoff, Tulišen met him at the border and personally escorted him to the capital. Izmailoff was then granted a dozen audiences as well as freedoms and honors never before awarded to a foreign dignitary. Even though he had been instructed to obey all court ceremonials and to hand over his letter of introduction to lower-level officials, the emperor chose to receive the document directly because, as a Russian archival source put it, he considered Peter the Great as "his neighbor and friend of equal rank." Tulišen even referred to him as a *guo wang* or king, a far cry from his customary appellation as "the white khan of the Russian border tribe" (Cahen 1912, 164 n. 2; Fu 1966, 1:131) (Fig. 6.1).

In addition to a new request for annual caravans, one of Izmailoff's most important proposals was permission for Russian merchants to travel anywhere within the Chinese empire, amounting to what today might be called a giant free trade zone. At the same time, he was empowered to ask about the construction of an Orthodox church at the tsar's expense, as well as the establishment of a permanent representative who would reside in the capital to deal with Russian trade and to act as mediator between the two empires. According to the Russian version of these events, after much discussion the Qing court responded that the only point it was prepared to consider was the installation of a trading agent, who would be supported by the emperor rather than by the tsar, probably because it was the only way to ensure that the office could still be subsumed under existing tribute rules (Bantysh-Kamenskii 1882, 95–98, 425–32; Unverzagt 1725, 105–6).

Lange

Of all the Russian exceptions we have mentioned thus far, China's willingness to permit a foreign representative to remain in its capital was certainly the most surprising. Even a "model" tribute nation like Korea, which during various points in its history had sent as many as four embassies per year to the Chinese court, had never been awarded such a privilege (Chun 1966). To make matters even stranger, absolutely nothing is mentioned of the arrangement (or, indeed, of the 1720 embassy as a whole) in any Chinese bureaucratic document – as if, like the Treaty of Nerchinsk, these were concessions that were meant to go as unnoticed as possible. The only reference that survives in the Veritable Records is a



NARRATIVE

OF THE

CHINESE EMBASSY

TO THE

KHAN OF THE TOURGOUTH TARTARS,

IN THE YEARS 1712, 13, 14, & 15;

BY

THE CHINESE AMBASSADOR,

AND PUBLISHED, BY THE EMPEROR'S AUTHORITY,
AT PEKIN.

TRANSLATED FROM THE CHINESE,

AND ACCOMPANIED BY AN APPENDIX OF MISCELLANEOUS
TRANSLATIONS.

BY

SIR GEORGE THOMAS STAUNTON, BART.
LL.D. & F.R.S.

LONDON:

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET.

1821.

Fig. 6.1 Title page from Tulišen, *Narrative of the Chinese Embassy to the Khan of the Tourgouth Tartars in the Years 1712, 13, 14, & 15* (1821). National Taiwan University Library

statement, made in passing in 1720, that a Russian envoy had arrived and presented a map of his country that included a "sea of ice." Far more important is the record of conversations with both the ambassador and his "vice envoy" (*fu shi*) that were added to Tulišen's report on his mission to the Torghuts, but this appendix was not included in the canonical version of the text and was rediscovered only in the mid-twentieth century (Fu 1966, 1:128–31, 133–36; Tulišen 1964).

In this particular case, however, we are fortunate that in addition to scanty Chinese sources, as well as archival materials in Russian, we possess a remarkable diary kept by the trading agent himself, a Swedish engineer in the employ of the Russian court by the name of Lorents Lange. The original journal, now lost, was evidently written in German, but a French version was published in 1726 and 1727, followed by an English translation in 1763, which was in turn translated into Dutch and (back into) French by 1770 (Lange 1715–27, 1726; Bell 1763, 2:169–321). It is unclear how Lange had originally left his native land to become a servant of the tsar, but it was not unusual during this period for embassy delegations to include a wide variety of staff with different skills and from many nations, and in Russia's case the ambassador himself (as we have seen) was not necessarily a native Russian either. Lange had been in China once before, in 1715, having been sent by the tsar to learn how to construct a stove made from Chinese porcelain. He had accompanied an English doctor who had come at the request of the aged Kangxi, who frequently sought advice from Western physicians (Weber 1721, 72–116; 1722–23, 2:3–36). Now an experienced diplomat with China experience, Lange, was appointed the chief secretary for the new embassy and designated as the trade representative should the ambassador's request be approved (Fig. 6.2).

When reading Lange's diary, however, as well as the detailed set of instructions issued to him by the Ministry of Commerce, it is at once clear that the Russian side perceived him to be far more than a "vice envoy." The diary's published title page identified him as "agent of his imperial majesty," and even more ostentatiously, throughout his instructions he was explicitly referred to as "consul," which is to say not just a trading agent but a representative of the Russian government, who would be empowered to issue passports, collect debts payable to Russian merchants, and handle Russian lawsuits, deportations, inheritances, and criminal cases according to Russian rather than Chinese law (Bantysh-Kamenskii 1882, 508–11; Cahen 1912, xliii–iv, 158–59). The depth and breadth of these


JOURNAL
de la
RESIDENCE
DU SIEUR
LANGE,
AGENT
de
SA MAJESTÉ IMPERIALE
de la
GRANDE RUSSIE
à la Cour
de la
CHINE;
Dans les Années 1721. & 1722.

A LEYDE
Chez ABRAHAM KALLEWIER. 1726.
Aux dépens de l'Auteur.

Fig. 6.2 Title page from Lorenz Lange, *Journal de la résidence du sieur Lange, agent de sa Majesté Imperiale de la Grande Russie à la cour de la Chine* (1726). National Taiwan University Library

powers was certainly wishful thinking on Russia's part, not simply because the office of consul differed so markedly from Chinese traditions, but because it presumed concepts of international law and extraterritoriality that would not be fully developed even in Europe for at least a century. And yet, interestingly enough, a careful perusal of the diary also shows that at least some of these duties did not really present a problem. He did issue passports, for example, and on one occasion the emperor personally asked him to grant passage to four Chinese officials wishing entrance into Russian territory (Bell 1763, 2:240–41; Cahen 1912, l–li).

Lange as "consul"

In other words, despite China's very different conception about the status – and indeed the existence – of foreign representatives within its borders, Lange did in some ways serve as a consul during his seventeen-month stay, which began in March 1721. While there were constant struggles over provisions and the maintenance of the building in which he was housed, and while communications with the nearest Russian outpost at Selenginsk were regularly met with suspicion about what the messages actually contained, Lange did oversee Russian commerce, and when problems arose, he did represent the Russian empire and its various policies, particularly toward Central Asia. But exactly what was he? As is so interestingly revealed in the narrative of his diary, there simply was no place for him in the traditional bureaucratic system. Even on the first page, his troubles had already commenced: he was supposed to begin his tenure as consul but could not even accompany the Russian ambassador back to the border without a passport and the express permission of the emperor (Bell 1763, 2:179–80). Later, he was instructed by a high official not to come to court during Chinese New Year celebrations because he "could not be ranked" and would have nowhere to sit (Bell 1763, 2:270).

Despite such obvious obstacles, Lange seemed to believe that all his difficulties could be rectified if the emperor simply agreed to receive his credentials (his instructions stated that his salary would commence on the date that his consulship was recognized) (Bantysh-Kamenskii 1882, 511). But his attempts to present this "letter of credence" were repeatedly thwarted, and each time with a different excuse. The Lifan Yuan at first replied that they would "put the Emperor in remembrance [of the letter] when occasion should offer" (Bell 1763, 2:195), but one week later,

Lange was told that it was improper for anyone to ask such a question to the emperor directly (Bell 1763, 2:197–98). Still waiting after another two weeks, he learned that the emperor was preparing to leave for the summer and hurriedly called on the president of the Lifan Yuan to see if his credentials might be received before Kangxi's departure. Once more, he was informed that the emperor "would know himself when he would have time to receive" the letter, and that "if his Majesty had resolved not to receive my letter of credence, he would not have consented to my residing at his court in quality of agent" (Bell 1763, 2:202). This exchange elicited one of many angry responses, in which Lange insisted that his "public character" warranted him better treatment, and that envoys from European monarchs were not used to such evasions and unnecessary delays (Bell 1763, 2:194, 202–3). But by the same token, the president had summarized Lange's indeterminate status quite succinctly, since he was indeed already residing in China "in quality of agent" with or without any official document.

Later that same week, Lange met an unnamed Jesuit who informed him how angry senior officials were that he had been allowed to stay, implying that the entire arrangement was simply a whim of the emperor (the Jesuits' status, of course, was strikingly similar). Perhaps, the missionary added, officials would become used to his presence little by little (Bell 1763, 2:204). But the situation worsened when the next Russian caravan arrived in September 1721, as so many obstacles were placed in the way of the bustling and profitable trade that both Lange and the Russian court had hoped for. The Russian "consulate" was in a state of great disrepair, and when trading was finally allowed to begin, the entire process was highly regulated, monitored, and full of accusations of Chinese bribery and self-interest. This continued for about three months, until one day in early 1722, at a banquet given by the Lifan Yuan, Lange was asked whether he would return to Russia when the current caravan had finished trading. Surprised and wondering whether the matter had already been settled without his knowledge, he replied that he had been sent to China by the tsar and that only the tsar could recall him (Bell 1763, 2:270–71).

Things deteriorated still further when, in early April, Lange was accused of having sent and received secret messages across the border (Bell 1763, 2:274–75), and the following month he was pulled from his bed for a late-night visit to the president of the Lifan Yuan, who demanded information about seven hundred Mongol families who had recently deserted into Russian territory (Bell 1763, 2:278–80). The president then produced a

still-sealed letter addressed to Lange from Siberia, ordering him to open it and to have it translated on the spot. Lange indignantly refused, insisting that this was "directly contrary to the rights of nations" and stormed out, leaving the letter behind him (Bell 1763, 2:283–84). For the next two days he maintained his position, until, on the third day, the letter was returned to him unopened, with the president claiming that the whole thing was merely a joke; Lange responded by unsealing the letter and voluntarily communicating its contents to the officials who were then present (Bell 1763, 2:285–86).

Hardly putting an end to the matter, he was informed the next day that the emperor had decided to terminate all commerce with Russia until border issues were sufficiently resolved, and that Lange himself would have to depart with the present caravan. Once trade resumed, he would be permitted to return (Bell 1763, 2:286–87). Still insisting that only the tsar could recall him, his demands for a fuller explanation were rebuffed, leading him the following week to force his way into the home of the "first minister," whom he does not identify, and remind him that regular caravan trade was an essential part of all agreements between the two nations (Bell 1763, 2:295). "Having been once admitted by [the emperor] to reside at his court in quality of agent," he concluded, "it was a maxim practiced by all the civilized nations in the world not to send away in a manner so indecent a person vested with a public character" (Bell 1763, 2:297). The first minister heatedly replied that it was necessary to stop the caravan trade so long as the tsar continued to ignore border problems, and that without Russian trade, Lange's presence was unnecessary. And as for the practices of so-called civilized nations, the emperor "was tired of receiving the law in his own country from foreigners" (Bell 1763, 2:298–99).

Realizing that there was not much more to be done, Lange prepared for his departure, and his narrative, likewise, concluded rather quickly. In July, he had a final meeting with the president of the Lifan Yuan, who had promised to give more details about his expulsion and to provide something in writing (Bell 1763, 2:312). Their discussion began politely enough, with the president complimenting Lange for his capable management of the caravan, but then Lange demanded to know why all traders had been expelled from the Mongolian city of Urga (an earlier name for Ulan Bator), a subject he had first learned about the month before (Bell 1763, 2:276–77). The president answered that it was because of the bad behavior of the Russian merchants, and when Lange tried to press the

matter, the president impatiently replied that everything might be resolved when the Mongol deserters had been returned (Bell 1763, 2:314–16). The following week, on his way to Selenginsk, Lange had his last audience with the emperor, about which he gives no information, and one short paragraph later his journal comes to an abrupt end (Bell 1763, 2:321).

Permanent or Temporary?

Such is his story as he presented it to the world in the pages of his diary, and overall it reads as an earnest and valiant effort, in spite of many bureaucratic and cultural impediments, to carry out his instructions as an "agent" or the "consul" of the Russian state, with the primary responsibility of overseeing the caravan trade that had been officially sanctioned by the Treaty of Nerchinsk. His recurring attempts to have himself recognized can be seen as part of this same resolve, which continued even after he was informed that he would have to leave: when the Lifan Yuan refused to see him, he was permitted to submit a petition in writing, and the first point he sought to clarify was once again a confirmation of his status. Was the emperor willing, he demanded, "before my departure to receive and to answer the credentials which I was charged with from his Czarish Majesty?" (Bell 1763, 2:288–89).

But Lange's version (as well as my own presentation thus far) has also failed to mention a number of important details that might enable us to view these troubles in a somewhat different light. For according to summaries included in the archives of the Russian Foreign Ministry, almost a month before the approval of Lange's residency, Izmailoff had to agree to return the Mongol fugitives as a precondition for the caravan to proceed to Beijing at all (it had been refused entry and stuck at Selenginsk since 1719) (Bantysh-Kamenskii 1882, 97; Cahen 1912, xliv–xlv, 167). Border issues, and the question of the Mongol deserters in particular, took center stage in embassy negotiations from the very beginning. Lange, however, claimed to have heard about this only after the fact, and that, in any case, deserters were a very trivial issue and common on both sides (Bell 1763, 2:279, 290–91). Similarly, he spoke throughout as if regular trade were an already well-established procedure, despite the fact that the "mutual commerce" promised by the Treaty of Nerchinsk had never been implemented in any detail. For example, the rules stipulated that a caravan might come once every three years, but they were being permitted much more frequently than that and had given rise to numerous complaints, mostly

about the bad behavior of the merchants. In January 1720, the new governor of Siberia pleaded on behalf of the stalled caravan and promised a reform of Russian conduct (Wang 1936, doc. 17; Fu 1966, 1:129–30; Tulišen 1964, appendix 7b). This, too, had occurred well before Lange was permitted to stay.

But a much more revealing omission concerns the terms of Lange's position itself, for he willfully seemed to ignore (as it was once again stated in the Russian archives) that the ambassador had negotiated to allow him to stay only until the present caravan had finished its business, at which time he would have to return to Russia. Moreover, it was specifically mentioned that trade would be allowed by special permit rather than by treaty, at least while the problem of Chinese fugitives remained unsettled (Bantysh-Kamenskii 1882, 97). It is hard to imagine Lange being unaware of these conditions, especially since in one of his arguments with the president of the Lifan Yuan, he claimed that he was privy to all of Izmailoff's deliberations as well as his correspondence with the Qing court. But when the president reminded him that his term would soon expire, he insisted that Kangxi "had given his consent to the residence of an agent at his court without any mention regarding the time, directly or indirectly" (Bell 1763, 2:281–82). Others knew better, such as a different member of the Izmailoff entourage who had stayed on with Lange and published an account in 1725. He, too, was much clearer about the fact that the fugitive problem came up very early in the discussions (Unverzagt 1725, 106–7, 115–17). Similarly, the anonymous editor of Lange's own text included a footnote explaining that he had been permitted to stay only to coax Russia into complying with China's demands regarding fugitives, and that if these demands were not met, then the caravan trade would be interrupted and he would be sent away (Bell 1763, 2:305).

"Mr. Agent"

This is not to say that Lange was deliberately misrepresenting his situation, either to Chinese officials or to the implied readers of his journal, since he clearly thought of himself *as* a consul, which is to say a representative appointed by the tsar and not the emperor of China, and that he had assumed this role not because of a temporary concession but as part of a formal treaty that guaranteed free trade and could not be altered or canceled simply because some border questions needed to be ironed out. But the problem was that these actions assumed that the Western idea of consulship

(not to mention free trade) had actually been approved by the Chinese side, but not only had it not been approved, but the office itself didn't even have any meaning in terms of Chinese bureaucracy. Similarly, Lange assumed throughout that Western notions of international law would apply in China, yet the Middle Kingdom's relationship with outsiders was based on an entirely different tradition as well (and even the concept of "law" was not the same). Just because Kangxi's negotiators had met with Russian representatives to sign an agreement, this did not mean that other concerns might not make that treaty subject to change, or even make it invalid.

I believe that these forms of conceptual distance might be better understood by returning to Lange's climactic confrontation with the president of the Lifan Yuan, because it was the first and only time that someone on the Chinese side was described as adopting Western terms to describe Lange's position. I have mentioned before that we have no record in Chinese about his residency other than a brief statement included in Tulišen's report, where Lange was referred to using the very general term "vice envoy." But in the heat of their argument, according to Lange's diary, the president addressed him as "Mr. Agent," and it is this phrase that I find particularly interesting. I realize that we have no idea what Chinese words were actually used, but I would argue that when the Western notion of consulship was put into the mouth of a Chinese official, it took on an entirely different and very revealing tone. The purpose of their meeting, once again, was for the president to deliver a written document outlining the reasons for Lange's expulsion, but the conversation quickly turned to the cessation of trade at Urga, with Lange demanding to know (once more, as a government representative) whether the decision had come from the Mongolian khan or, as he suspected, directly from the emperor.

Whichever was the case, Lange insisted, even the khan was "obliged to conform himself to the engagement stipulated by treaty between the two empires" (Bell 1763, 2:314–15). The president responded that Russian merchants had "affronted the lamas, as well by words as deeds," and that it was for this reason that the khan "was in the right to remove them from his territories" (Bell 1763, 2:315). But as Lange protested that the khan's verdict had punished the innocent along with the guilty, and that it had "infringed the treaty of peace in so essential an article [that his] judgment cannot be regarded but as a manifest act of violence" (Bell 1763, 2:316), the president cut off all further discussion with a smile and addressed him (sarcastically?) as "Mr. Agent":

> finding me insist so strenuously for an inquiry into this affair, [the president,] smiling, told me: "Mr. Agent you do well to make so much work about this affair, but I do not know how to explain myself more precisely upon it at present; all that I can say to you is that all of it will be easily accommodated when we shall receive a satisfactory answer upon the affair of our deserters." (Bell 1763, 2:316)

Despite all his efforts, Lange was able to go no further. Even threats of war had no effect, and he blamed the president's obstinacy on a familiar Chinese stereotype: that once an official answer had been given, "whether essential to the affair…or not," it would never be changed no matter how long or how hard one had tried to dispute it (Bell 1763, 2:316). But what Lange had failed to realize was that trade was just as trivial for the Chinese side as the Mongol deserters were to him.

At the risk of overreading this fascinating passage, it seems as if the president had seized upon Lange's self-described role as a Russian "agent" and threw it back in his face. Lange's constant appeals to the Treaty of Nerchinsk – and to his place as the chief administrator of its "mutual commerce" – were continually thwarted, since from the Chinese point of view, trade was neither the center of that treaty nor the focus of relations with Russia as a whole. We will recall that Kangxi's negotiators didn't even want a trade clause included at first, but like their willingness to uphold the agreement by swearing to the Westerners' God, they sanctioned the caravans as a means to negotiate something quite different: border disputes. Trade, unlike in the West, was never an end in itself. Similarly, if Lange was permitted to serve as an agent, it was not because a treaty had been signed, much less that a consulate had been created. What difference would it make if the emperor had accepted his credentials? Would it really have created the office of consul?

The Treaty of Kiakhta

For want of a better term, it seems to me that the real crux of this debate centered on the concept of what the West called "diplomatic affairs" (and, by the end of the eighteenth century, "diplomacy"), both of which were new terms stemming from the Greek word *diploma* ("doubled" or "folded over"), which originally meant an official folded document or a letter of privilege carried as a symbol of one's office, but was now coming to be used almost exclusively with regard to international relations. Yet Western diplomacy, like Lange's consulship itself,

did not always function in ways that the West wanted or expected: Western-style negotiation might be allowed to function at certain times and under certain circumstances, but it was still based on China's long-standing assumption that foreigners were subservient tribute bearers, not equals. The Russian tsar may have received more from China than his European competitors did (frequent trade, a peace treaty, a "consul"), but this was only because his involvement was needed in Central Asia. Similar concessions had been granted temporarily to Holland in the 1660s, when the Qing military sought Dutch assistance in fighting the rebellion of Zheng Chenggong. The Treaty of Nerchinsk, however, along with a second treaty known as the Treaty of Kiakhta (a town near Selenginsk) in 1727, lasted until the period of the Opium Wars in the middle of the nineteenth century, largely because both documents attempted to work out the central issue from China's point of view: how to ensure its continued separation from barbarian outsiders, in this case the "Russian border tribe."

The Kiakhta treaty was the result of a new embassy sent out only three years after Lange had returned to Russia – not to St. Petersburg but to Selenginsk, where he continued to serve as a government liaison. Barely a year had elapsed before two visiting Chinese officials arrived to get an update on the question of the deserters, and they were overjoyed to learn that concrete action had finally been taken. They assured Lange that cross-border trade might soon be renewed (Bantysh-Kamenskii 1882, 434–35). A new Russian delegation was organized, the largest and most elaborate to date, and led by an experienced diplomat, Sava Vladislavich. Kangxi had died at the end of 1722, and after Peter the Great had also passed away in early 1725, a convenient pretext was found for an announcement that the new tsarina, Catherine I, was interested in reopening negotiations, as well to congratulate the emperor Yongzheng on his ascension to the throne. Trade was still the main preoccupation, but the Russian government also took steps to help fix the frontier with the help of specially commissioned Siberian surveyors. Lange was appointed one of the ambassador's chief assistants, and should the Qing court allow it, he was to serve once again as a consul and be given new credentials (Bantysh-Kamenskii 1882, 444, 452–53; Cahen 1912, liv).

The Russian entourage arrived in 1726 and stayed for six months, with Vladislavich's skill and careful preparation allowing him to negotiate very favorable terms for border areas, which were worked out with much greater specificity than before. All past deserters, it was also determined,

could stay where they were – including, presumably, the seven hundred Mongol families that had been such a sticking point for Izmailoff and Lange. But in terms of trade, the embassy was less overtly successful, as caravans were allowed once every three years just as before; they were to pay their own expenses but would be free from import duties (*Treaties* 1917, 29, 32). The office of consul was not mentioned, but we know from Vladislavich's subsequent report that Russia's request for a permanent commercial office, with Lange as head, was expressly denied, although he was permitted to come and serve as the head of the next caravan (Cahen 1912, 215).

In place of a consulate, the treaty included a new provision that the "Russian house" in Beijing, long the center of both ambassadorial delegations and the caravan trade, would become the site of a Russian "temple" (*miao*) where "lamas" would be allowed to live and worship. The house would also accommodate Russian pupils for the purpose of studying Chinese languages (*Treaties* 1917, 33). These may have seemed like unusual concessions, too, but some kind of Orthodox church or chapel was allowed in the capital as early as the late 1680s, when the siege of Albazin had led to a small group of Russian fugitives coming to Beijing, and other "border tribes" had been authorized to build similar places of worship. The language school, which probably dates from the late 1680s as well, was a much more pragmatic gesture, since it would allow the two sides to circumvent relying on the participation of the Jesuits, whose influence at court, especially since the death of Kangxi, was distinctly on the wane (Pavlovsky 1949, 145–64; Mancall 1971, 206–7; Widmer 1976, 103–12).

The Caravans Depart

However, the most significant trade stipulation did not concern caravans at all: it was the addition of what the treaty called "lesser" or "incidental" (*ling xing*) commercial centers to be established at Kiakhta and Nerchinsk, both of which would be garrisoned by soldiers and officers from both sides (*Treaties* 1917, 32–33). The triennial caravan trade in Beijing, in other words, was now supplemented by permanent market towns, which for Russia had the distinct advantage of being continuous, easier to control, and less expensive to operate. But for China, too, border markets were also preferable. They kept the foreigners at bay: not only outside the capital but completely outside of Chinese territory. For a variety of reasons, including oversupply,

competition from other sites such as Urga, and Russia's unsuccessful attempts to establish government monopolies, the caravans themselves became steadily less profitable, and in 1762, the Beijing market was finally closed. It was not forgotten, however, since when the Macartney embassy arrived thirty years later, one of the ambassador's many requests was for English merchants "to have a warehouse at Pekin for the sale of their goods, as the Russians had formerly." When the Qianlong emperor rejected this proposal along with so many other demands, he pointed out that the Russians were simply given a house to live in and that it was never more than a temporary measure. Now that border trade with Russia had been established, he continued, the situation was very similar to British arrangements at Macao and Canton (Cranmer-Byng 1957–58, 173–175).

The caravans themselves limped along after 1727, with Lange continuing to serve in at least three of them over the next decade, where he was referred to as "head" or "chief" (*tou mu*) or simply as "Lange of Russia" (Fu 1966, 1:152, 165; *Yongzheng shi lu* 1964, 62:10a; 110:9b). At the conclusion of the first of these journeys, in 1728, he reported having a special audience with Yongzheng, who told him that it was not the custom to bestow such an honor on "a stranger who had come to the capital only for commercial affairs." Yet since his father had always held him in special favor, the emperor added, he refused to let Lange return to Russia without some sort of acknowledgment. But as a sign of the dismal future of all Russian trade in the capital, Lange was then granted permission to take back the many items that had remained unsold during the caravan's stay (Pallas 1781–96, 2:157). According to this version of what the West called diplomacy, the Chinese side pitied the strangers and gave them leave to depart.

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CHAPTER 7

Epilogue

"Embassies" to Europe

One might wish to argue that China had managed to keep the upper hand in its exchanges with the West because all of them occurred within Chinese territory. Would it have been different if a Chinese ambassador had been sent to Lisbon, Amsterdam, Paris, or Rome? Would the Chinese then be forced to accommodate themselves to European ways? Perhaps so, but it is difficult to answer this question because until China was coerced into Western patterns of international diplomacy in the middle of the nineteenth century, there were almost no examples of any official delegations sent to the outside world. In the Ming and early Qing periods, the only time an envoy might be sent abroad was to perform a ceremony of investiture, in which the ruler of a "border state" would be formally recognized as the leader of a tribute nation and be presented with a special seal (Nagel 2001, 446–48; *Ming shi* 1956, 56.14b–15b). This was one of the functions of Zheng He's overseas explorations in the early fifteenth century, which we examined in Chapter 3. The biggest exception, as in so many other things, was Russia, which as we saw in Chapter 6 was treated more as an enemy state than as a tributary one. Special missions were dispatched there before signing peace treaties in 1689 and 1727, and we also saw that in the second decade of the eighteenth century, a high-ranking delegation led by Tulišen was sent deep into Russian territory to visit a Mongol tribe living near the Caspian Sea.

Yet it is debatable whether any of these expeditions could be called embassies in the Western sense of that term, since while on occasion

M. Keevak, *Embassies to China*,
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Chinese representatives may have been sent abroad for specific purposes and to pursue particular domestic aims, it was not because the Middle Kingdom had suddenly adopted a new concept of diplomatic reciprocity or had altered its stance toward barbarian outsiders, who remained (potential) tributaries and not partners in trade or peace or empire. To make the point even more clear, I would like to conclude this book by examining several lesser-known instances in which envoys were sent from China to the West rather than the other way around, but in nearly all of these cases, revealingly enough, it was not Chinese or Manchu bureaucrats who were chosen but Jesuit missionaries instead, under the pretext that they were more familiar with Western languages and Western customs.

All but one of these were envoys of the Kangxi emperor, whose attitude toward Western countries, as we have repeatedly seen, was unusually open. Most of the time it was for relatively simple errands or messages that he wished to convey, such as a letter to Moscow carried by an Italian Jesuit in 1686 (Witek 1999, 320–23). Four more were dispatched to Rome, as we mentioned in Chapter 5, to present Kangxi's position on the Rites Controversy. Two Jesuits were also ordered to go to Europe in connection with the Mezzabarba embassy of 1720: one to deliver additional documents concerning the rites question, and the other to travel with Mezzabarba, who was returning to Rome via Lisbon, to thank the Portuguese king for his gifts to China (Witek 1999, 333–37). This last mission was unusually successful, as João V in turn sent a new ambassador to Beijing in 1725, who was also well received (Saldanha 2005). But by this time Kangxi had died, and his successor, Yongzheng, was much less predisposed toward Western contact; the steady stream of Jesuit envoys came to an end.

We will return to Yongzheng in a moment, but first we must pause to consider the only other Chinese leader to send an envoy to Europe during this period, although this time it was out of pure desperation. The Ming dynasty had fallen in 1644, but in the ensuing years the family of the last emperor continued to control parts of the country and to claim legitimate rule of the entire empire. In 1650, the last of this line, known as Prince of Gui or the Yongli emperor of the Southern Ming dynasty, chose a Polish Jesuit, Michael Boym, to represent his government in exile and to journey to Rome to beg for aid in fighting the Manchu conquest. It was an action spurred forward by a number of senior members of the emperor's entourage who had been converted to Catholicism, including his Grand Chancellor (a eunuch with the Christian name Achilles Pang), as well

Yongli's wife and mother and the Empress Dowager. Even the infant heir apparent had been christened Constantine, as if all of China were on the brink of a historic conversion (Boym 1654) (Fig. 7.1).

Evidently, Pang wanted to participate in the embassy personally, which would have been an absolutely unique occurrence, but the idea was rejected as he could not be missed for such a long time (Malatesta 1995, 358). Boym set out in his place, armed with pleading letters in Chinese from Pang and the Empress Dowager, both of which still survive in the Vatican archives (Parker 1912). Arriving in Venice in 1652, he was formally welcomed by the doge and senate even though Jesuits were banned from the republic during this period. He was accompanied by a young Chinese Christian who caused quite a stir (being one of the first Chinese ever to visit Italy), but the novelty soon wore off when the pair reached Rome and had to wait three years before attaining an audience with the pope, who eventually responded to their appeals with little more than a letter offering spiritual sympathy. Boym was not able to return to China until 1659, by which time Yongli's situation had become much more dire: both Pang and the Empress Dowager were dead, and the exiled court, formerly based in Canton, had been forced to flee further and further west until it had crossed the border into Burma. Boym was never able to reach it.

Boym's attitude while in Italy was full of bravado, and he must have thought that the supposedly imminent Christianization of the entire empire would add to the urgency of his mission, but what he encountered instead were numerous obstructions that had little to do with religion or even with China. Other Europeans were hesitant to support the Ming loyalists when they saw their business interests with the new Qing government jeopardized. Current sentiment in the West favored neither the Jesuits nor their position regarding the Chinese rites, and the situation in Rome was similarly divisive. Boym's insistence, finally, that he traveled as a "grand ambassador of the king of China" (Girard de Rialle 1890, 112) didn't get him very far either. His credentials were repeatedly questioned (Dunne 1962, 345–46), and when he ceremoniously requested to be met at the gates of Rome by members of the papal court, the Jesuit Father General chastised him for his pretensions and ordered him to proceed to the capital as an ordinary Jesuit (Malatesta 1995, 361; Miazek-Meczynska 2011, 44).

Similar problems about status must have plagued all of Kangxi's Jesuit envoys, since to be appointed an imperial legate or *qin chai* meant to be


BRIEFVE
RELATION
DE LA NOTABLE
CONVERSION
DES PERSONNES ROYALES,
& de l'eſtat de la Religion Chreſtienne en la Chine.
Faicte par le tres R. P. MICHEL BOYM *de la Compagnie de* IESVS, *enuoyé par la Cour de ce Royaume là en qualité d'Ambaſſadeur au S. Siege Apoſtolique, & recitée par luy-meſme dans l'Egliſe de Smyrne, le 29. Septembre de l'an 1652.*
A PARIS,
Chez SEBASTIEN CRAMOISY, Imprimeur ordinaire du Roy & de la Reyne, & GABRIEL CRAMOISY.
M. DC. LIV.
Auec Priuilege de ſa Maieſté.

Fig. 7.1 Title page from Michael Boym, *Briefve relation de la notable conversion des personnes royales, & de l'estat de la religion chrestienne en la Chine* (1654). National Taiwan University Library

given considerable powers within China (free transport, lodging, and provisions), but it was an office that had no meaning when traveling outside the borders of the empire. The court Jesuits had always embodied a curiously hybrid nature anyway, as both Western evangelists and imperial Chinese functionaries, but once they were made official envoys and then dispatched back to Europe, their dual nature faced many new challenges. We are particularly well informed about these discrepancies in the case of another of Kangxi's Jesuit messengers whom we have not yet mentioned, Joachim Bouvet, who had first come to China in 1687 as one of a small group of highly skilled French missionaries known as the "mathematicians of the king," sent by Louis XIV for both religious and scientific purposes. One result of this influx was a rise in tensions between the French and the Portuguese Jesuits, who still retained official control of the China mission. But a variety of services from the new group, including helping to cure the emperor of a serious illness in 1693, led Kangxi to take a greater interest in the French and to order Bouvet to proceed to Paris at once to initiate more scholarly exchanges between the two countries.

For Bouvet, however, this was not merely an opportunity to establish an academy of arts and sciences in Beijing that might cooperate with its Parisian counterparts. It was also a chance to increase the French missionary presence in China, and, perhaps, even to convert the emperor himself, who already seemed so interested in Western learning. After journeying to Canton as the emperor's *qin chai* (Du Halde 1735, 1:95–104; Bouvet 2005, 117–20), and then a long and circuitous voyage from Canton to France that took four years (such were the risks of traveling without the sanction of the Portuguese), he arrived in Paris in 1697 and immediately set about drumming up support for his cause with two volumes that helped to create a China furor in the last years of the seventeenth century. One was a sumptuous hand-colored picture book of Chinese and Manchu costumes that created something of an artistic sensation, and the other was an extremely flattering biography of Kangxi addressed to Louis XIV, with whom the Chinese emperor was favorably compared as the greatest monarch on the other side of the world (Bouvet 1697a, 1697c). These books helped pave the way for an hour-long audience with the king at Versailles, who seemed equally enthusiastic about the possibility of establishing further religious and scientific ties (Fig. 7.2).

But before any action could be taken, there were many things that needed explaining, as is shown by a fascinating written address to the king preserved in the French colonial archives at Aix-en-Provence. As its title

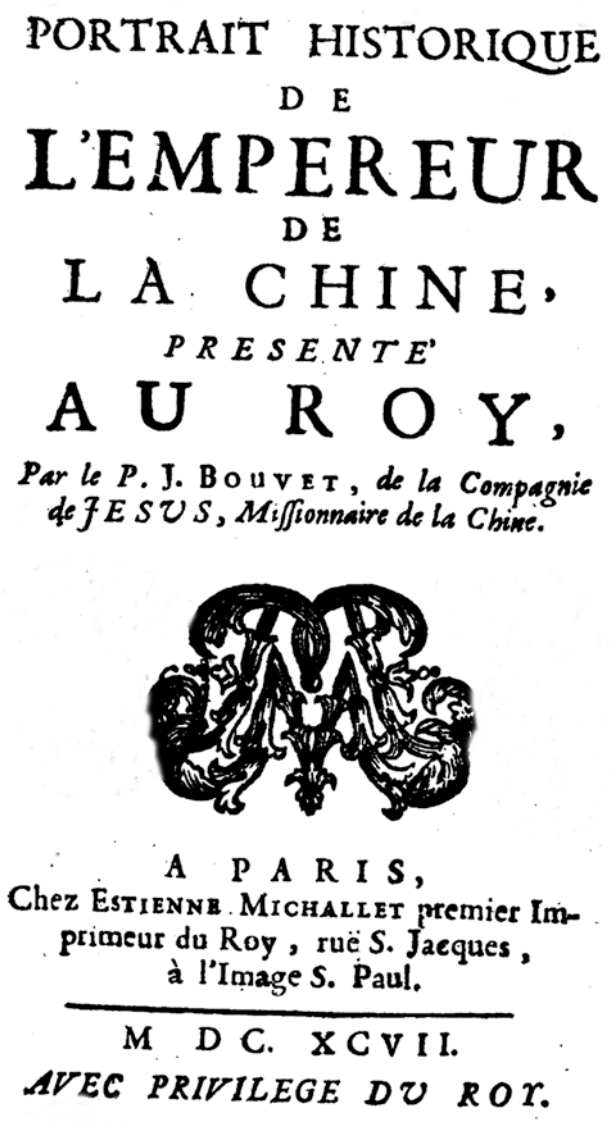
PORTRAIT HISTORIQUE
DE
L'EMPEREUR
DE
LA CHINE,
PRESENTE'
AU ROY,
Par le P. J. BOUVET, de la Compagnie de JESUS, Missionnaire de la Chine.
A PARIS,
Chez ESTIENNE MICHALLET premier Imprimeur du Roy, ruë S. Jacques, à l'Image S. Paul.
M DC. XCVII.
AVEC PRIVILEGE DU ROY.

Fig. 7.2 Title page from Joachim Bouvet, *Portrait historique de l'empereur de la Chine* (1697c). National Taiwan University Library

indicates, Bouvet's main problem was to "justify the status given him by the emperor of China" before he could expect any favorable response. First, he had to apologize for the fact that Kangxi had sent him rather than one of his own officials. Next, he had to clarify why he had brought so few gifts (apparently, just some ginseng and several pieces of gold brocade with a dragon motif [Bouvet 2005, 120]). He replied that the emperor had chosen him because he wanted to show his admiration for France and for the French Jesuits in particular. And as for the presents, these were only a small part of what had been collected, but Kangxi's enthusiasm for the embassy was so great that Bouvet was rushed off before they could all be loaded. Much more serious, however, was the fact that he seemed to carry no formal letters of introduction from the emperor or the Chinese court. This time the excuse was more subtle: if I bring no letters of credence, he said, it is because Chinese custom dictates that an emperor cannot write to a foreign ruler except to give him orders, and all such communications would have to be worded in terms that marked the foreigner's subordination as a tributary vassal. "This prince," he concluded, "bound by the unjust custom of his nation that he could not write to your majesty as he would have liked, in the end wishes to establish credence through the one he has sent [i.e., me], and to offer this authentic deputation [i.e., me], not neglecting to find the means that could convey at least as much faith as a letter written on his behalf" (Bouvet 1697b, fol. 65–65v) (Fig. 7.3).

In other words, I am even better than a written message. Whether anyone was willing to accept such an explanation is unknown, but things must have gone from bad to worse when, after announcing at some length that he had been accorded the singular honor of becoming the emperor's *qin chai*, Bouvet said he couldn't even prove it because he had to leave his credentials behind when he left China (Bouvet 1697b, fol. 66–67). Instead, attached to his address was a long list of missionaries and merchants whom he had met along the way who could testify to the veracity of his appointment (Bouvet 1697b, fol. 72–72v). This defense is particularly curious, since according to several narrators who accompanied him on his return journey, Bouvet was able to present his patent to border officials as soon as he arrived at Canton (Pelliot 1928–29, 3:266 n. 2).

But by far the biggest rhetorical sleight of hand, and which surely settled things in Bouvet's favor with the French court, was his insistence that unlike the Portuguese or the Dutch or the Russians, the French were now so favored that they could come to China every year "for the liberty

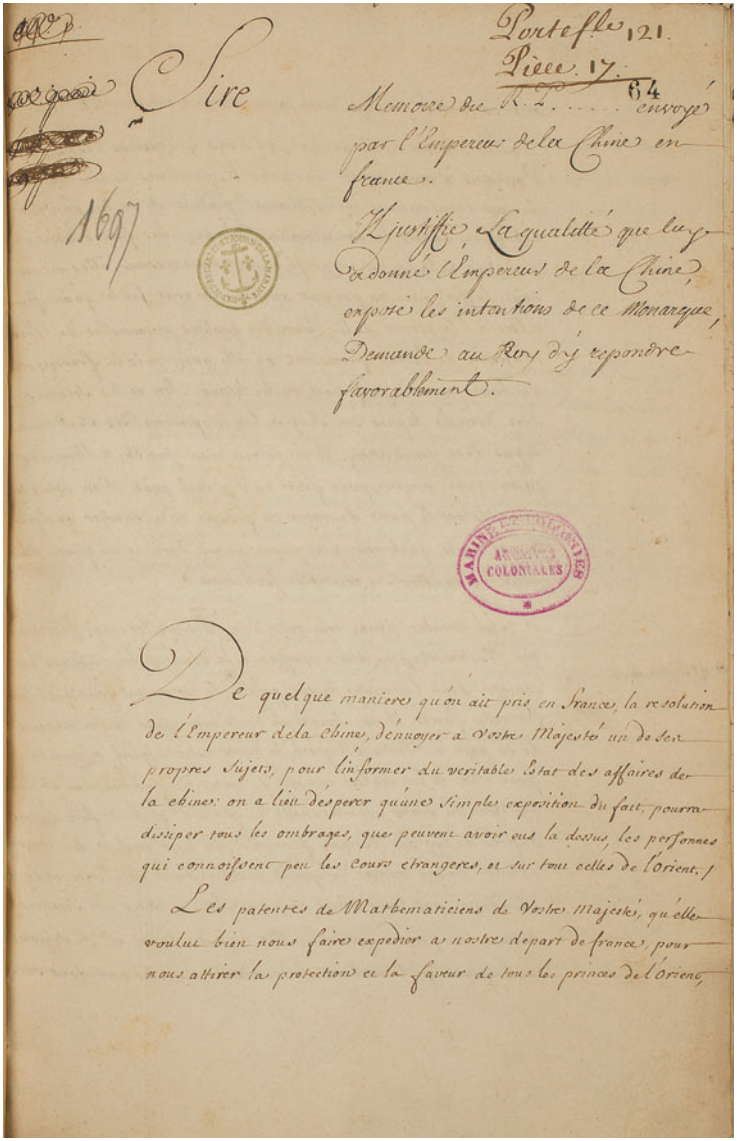

Fig. 7.3 Joachim Bouvet, "Mémoire de R. P.—, envoyé par l'empereur de la Chine en France" (1697b), from Archives nationales d'outre-mer (ANOM France), FR ANOM $C^{1}8$ folio 64. Courtesy Archives nationales d'outre-mer (ANOM France)

and advantage of commerce" (Bouvet 1697b, fol. 65) – the dream of every European prince since the days of Marco Polo! In his travel journal, a copy of which he also presented as part of his accreditation, Bouvet claimed that Kangxi's instructions to him were not very specific (Bouvet 2005, 107), but I think we can safely say that when the emperor ordered a French Jesuit to present himself in Paris, it was not because he wanted to exempt France from tribute or to award them the privileges of a permanent trade.

Bouvet had thus turned Kangxi's basic intention, which was to thank the French Jesuits and to enhance his court with more European astronomy, engineering, mathematics, art, music, and medicine, into a much more complex amalgam of Western preoccupations with religion, commerce, colonialism, and national pride. But even more, Bouvet had managed to negotiate between two rival diplomatic traditions and to turn his journey to the West, which was in reality a mission to a barbarian prince of a potential tributary nation, into an "embassy" between equals. Kangxi's gifts, similarly, were not really an acknowledgment of French equivalence or of Louis XIV's power in relation to any other European government; they were a response to France's earlier gifts of manpower and scientific knowledge, which, in the so-called tribute system, were classified as "native gifts" that customarily resulted in even more valuable presents being offered in return.

Louis XIV, however, understood his relationship to China quite differently, and while he agreed to send more presents (not "tribute") as well as more missionaries, he was not prepared to finance a ship expressly for this purpose. The French East India Company had been in existence only thirty years; it had enjoyed very promising relations with Siam in the previous decade, including the exchange of several embassies (Cruysse 2002), but as of 1697 a China venture was much more ambitious and presented too many risks. Ever resourceful, Bouvet managed to find a private businessman interested in the project, and a ship called the *Amphitrite* was purchased from the crown and loaded with luxury items (including mirrors, draperies, amber, coral, woodwork, and firearms) to sell in the Chinese market. In 1698 it became the first vessel to sail directly from France to China, with a fascinatingly motley assemblage of captain and crew, artisans, clerks, Jesuits, and French East India Company officials (Pelliot 1928–29).

Even more motley, however, was the *Amphitrite*'s status when it actually arrived in China, since while it carried the emperor's *qin chai* and the

group of new missionaries that the emperor had requested, Louis ordered the ship to present itself as a private merchant vessel only. His instructions to the captain clearly indicated that the primary goal was to gather as much information as possible about winds, currents, ports, and trading regulations in order to assess future commercial prospects. There was to be no royal "salute" of any kind (Pelliot 1928–29, 2:116–17). In other words, this was specifically *not* an embassy. But then what was it? If it was a commercial venture, then the ship would have to pay customs duty like any other trading vessel, but Bouvet refused to do this as he was returning to China as an official envoy. If, on the other hand, it was not a merchant ship, then it would have to be a tribute vessel; it would indeed be exempt from import duties but then its representatives would have to proceed at once to the capital to present their tribute. Only then might they be allowed to engage in trade.

But Bouvet, much to the confusion of customs officials, proudly proclaimed that the *Amphitrite* was, according to a diary kept by one of the ship's officers, "a ship of honor that the king had given him to return to China," or, more succinctly, "a ship of the king" (Froger 1926, 70–71, 83; Bannister 1859, 109–10). But what was a "ship of the king" if not a tribute ship? This category was entirely unknown to Chinese bureaucracy, as it assumed a certain equivalence between China and other nations, which was of course impossible. The numerous gifts that Bouvet had brought raised similar problems of terminology, beginning with a large portrait of Louis XIV on horseback (Madrolle 1901, 143). From the French point of view, these were presents from the most powerful European monarch to his peer in the East; yet in Chinese, the gifts were always called "tribute," just as the *Amphitrite* was a "tribute ship" (Pelliot 1928–29, 3:265–66). Only the emperor gave gifts (*li wu*); everyone else presented tribute (*gong wu*) (Pauthier 1859, 184 n. 2). The Macartney embassy would face exactly the same difficulties a century later, with Macartney even referring to himself (in a translation of his list of presents) as George III's *qin chai*, much to the displeasure of the Qianlong emperor, who angrily responded that the ambassador was nothing more than a "conveyor of tribute," whatever his pretensions (Peyrefitte 1992, 88; Qin 1996, 40).

Bouvet, on the other hand, was an authentic imperial envoy and was thus treated with considerable deference (Ghirardini 1700, 73–75 [misnumbered]). Kangxi was so pleased that he wanted him to go back to Paris immediately to thank Louis once again. But Bouvet was exhausted, and

Jean de Fontaney, another French missionary at court, was appointed instead. Traveling with the *Amphitrite* on its return journey to France in 1699, Fontaney then sailed back to China in the following year on the ship's second voyage, with yet more French Jesuits, more gifts, and more items for sale (Madrolle 1901, 61–267). This time things were not quite so felicitous, beginning with the fact that the ship was plagued by storms as it neared China, causing numerous delays. Fontaney was still greeted with great fanfare when he landed in southern China in 1701 (*Lettres édifiantes* 1780–83, 17:39–42, 63–69), but for reasons that are still unclear, he seems to have had a falling out with the emperor and may even have been dismissed from his service (Witek 1999, 326–28; Visschers 1857, 44).

My point here is that Kangxi's Jesuit envoys were especially honored when they had *returned* at the conclusion of their missions – when they had, in other words, come back into the Chinese bureaucratic system. As far as the Chinese were concerned, these were the successful expeditions, as compared to those of Boym, who found himself completely swallowed up by European politics, or of Kangxi's four envoys to Rome, who had either perished on their way to Europe or died before they could come back to China. Bouvet, on the other hand, as well as the Jesuit envoy to João V mentioned earlier, had actually reported back and had thus completed the circuit that affirmed the Westerners' tributary status, whether the kings of France or Portugal had recognized it or not. These were not journeys of reciprocity or mutual diplomacy, as Western embassies purported to be. They were gestures of a hierarchical relationship between suzerain and vassal, symbolized by the emperor's "gifts" and his expression of "thanks."

China, in other words, sent no "embassies." Or did it? I would like to close this brief epilogue by returning to Yongzheng, who despite being so much more openly hostile to the wider world than Kangxi, in 1729 and 1731 initiated the most Western-like embassies ever seen in premodern Chinese history – although, much like Zheng He's activities of three centuries earlier, their memory has all but disappeared from the official records (Mancall 1955). Once again, it was Russia that was the object of such exceptional behavior, and also once again, China's real aim in engaging with Moscow was to control the Mongol tribes that threatened the northern and western borders of the Chinese empire. Peter the Great had died in 1725, and when his grandson, Peter II, took the throne in 1727 it became a convenient pretext for Yongzheng to send a delegation with

lavish gifts to congratulate the new tsar – in return, he said, for the Russian embassy that had come two years previously to recognize his own ascension. A group of five Manchu officials with thirty attendants was dispatched, as well as another group of five delegates with twenty-eight attendants who were to split off from the main embassy and visit the displaced Torghuts, just as Tulišen had done in the previous decade.

So far, nothing seemed too unusual, aside from the fact that Jesuit go-betweens were no longer being used. Even the numerous gifts that Yongzheng offered could still be categorized, as we have just seen, according to traditional tribute rules. But once the embassy had arrived at the Russian border in early 1731, more anomalies began to appear. First, according to Russian sources, when the ambassadors learned that Peter II had suddenly died and that tsarina Anna Ivanovna was now on the throne, they asked their hosts to delay making any official announcement until the embassy had reached Moscow, by which time it would be too late to turn back to Beijing for new instructions (Mancall 1955, 86–87). Perhaps this was just a matter of political expediency, since all that was required was a change in the letters of introduction addressing the new monarch, but once Yongzheng had received the news of the tsar's death, he decided at once to dispatch an entirely new delegation with full attendants (as well as another contingent that would proceed to the Torghuts) while the first embassy was still in Moscow.

Clearly, these missions were serious business, and beneath all the gifts and the congratulations, Yongzheng's real motives were revealed in the first ambassador's letter to the Russian senate, which asked the tsarina to cooperate (or at least to remain neutral) during an upcoming Chinese campaign against the Dzungars, some of whom might attempt to flee into Russian territory. Anna, for her part, agreed to allow troops to cross the border if necessary, but they were not permitted to extradite any Mongol fugitives by themselves. Yongzheng's request to contact the Torghuts was also approved, but as the tribe were now Russian subjects, she insisted, such a journey could be carried out only once and only with a Russian escort (Mancall 1955, 88–89; Stary 1976, 162–64). The senate may well have wondered what this tribe, who lived thousands of kilometers away near the Caspian Sea, had to do with a war against the Dzungars, but from the Chinese point of view both groups were key players in an intricate web of Mongol alliances that remained a major governmental preoccupation (Cahen 1920, 87–88; Mancall 1955, 83–84). It is telling that Yongzheng's second embassy, which was already

largely superfluous, also included a separate delegation destined for the Torghuts, although this time that part of the embassy was turned away at the Russian border. The main group, however, bypassed Moscow and proceeded directly to an audience with the tsarina at St. Petersburg.

Each of the two embassies was granted an initial audience as well as an "audience of dismissal," and most unusual of all, several narrators have informed us that the Manchu ambassadors did not hesitate to kowtow before the Russian throne when presenting their messages from the emperor, an unprecedented sign that Russia was not being considered as a tribute nation (Bantysh-Kamenskii 1882, 176; "Diplomaticheskaya" 1889, 287, 452; Müller 1732–64, 1:47–48, 52, 61, 68). It may have seemed like a Chinese ceremony was simply being transferred onto Russian soil, but it appears that the kowtow was common in Russian state ritual as well (Mancall 1955, 95). Moreover, according to one member of the Russian embassy of 1720, the Russian ambassador had agreed to conform to all Chinese court customs after being assured that any Chinese ambassador sent to Moscow would do the same (Bell 1763, 2:4–5). But judging from China's routine insistence, as we have seen so many times in the course of this book, that all outsiders could only be recognized if they had assumed a position of subservience, it is utterly remarkable that Yongzheng's emissaries were willing to prostrate themselves before the tsarina in this way. Little wonder that these ceremonies captured the imagination of numerous eyewitnesses, and in addition to archival documents in Russian, which form our main knowledge about the embassies in general, a detailed record of each audience was published in German in 1732 (Müller 1732–64, 1:34–74). A French text of the first one was also forwarded to London by the secretary to the British consul-general at St. Petersburg, who rightly remarked that "this is the first embassy from [the Chinese] court to any prince in Europe" ("Diplomaticheskaya" 1889, 281–82, 283–87).

In so many ways, these two legations seem indistinguishable from those that the West had been sending to China since the beginning of the sixteenth century: they were diplomatic operations initiated by Beijing rather than from the outside; they included a series of requests to a foreign government couched in a mission of thanks; they attempted to convince the other side of their sincerity through elaborate gifts and by observing all necessary protocols; and they operated under the premise that both sides should be able to

negotiate as equal partners. It was clear that a Western-style embassy could be mounted when it was convenient to do so, and that a mutual alliance with a foreign nation could be sought when it served a purpose. In this case, however, the results were mixed. China failed to receive full cooperation from the Russian government (and lost even more ground with respect to the Torghuts), but Yongzheng's fears over Russian meddling in the Dzungar war were also unfounded, since Moscow's attention was heavily preoccupied by other conflicts.

It is tempting to suppose that records of these embassies were suppressed precisely because they departed so much from Chinese tradition. All standard tribute procedures had been suspended, much as they were during the voyages of Zheng He, but so far as we know this experiment in Western diplomacy was never repeated, and, at any rate, the Russian envoys who continued to come to Beijing were treated according to Chinese rules, not Western ones. For a brief moment, two systems of international relations appeared to coincide, but it was merely a surface similarity and remained very much in Chinese control. As a final example of this sort of manipulation, the Russian archives have preserved another surprising letter from 1732, in which the Lifan Yuan announced that a large quantity of gifts (mostly silk and other fabrics) were being sent to the common people in Russia for having assisted in the reception of the Manchu ambassadors (Mancall 1955, 91; Bantysh-Kamenskii 1882, 187–88). Owing to standard practice, both in China and in Russia, that all expenses of a visiting embassy would be borne by the receiving nation as a matter of courtesy, this particular form of largesse is decidedly unexpected. But at the same time, it was also in keeping with China's paternalistic attitude toward all outsiders, who were regularly presented with gifts as part of what was, in the end, always categorized as a tribute relationship. A Western monarch like Louis XIV could be regarded with respect and honor and munificence, and the tsarina of Russia could even be treated with all the symbols of equality and reverence. Yet it would take another century before the terms of these interactions would be radically changed because they would be imposed by others. Until the middle of the nineteenth century, China had little trouble distancing itself from foreigners by means of its Board of Rites and its Lifan Yuan; there was nothing like a Ministry of Foreign Affairs in China until 1861.

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