

(Re)imagining Asian Rulers in Athanasius Kircher's *China Illustrata*: The Agency of Interiors

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Résumé de l'article

Cet article porte sur les portraits gravés de l'empereur moghol Jahangir (reg. 1605–1627) et de l'empereur Kangxi de Chine (reg. 1661–1722), qui figurent dans *China Illustrata* de Athanasius Kircher, publié en 1677. Par le biais d'une lecture attentive de ces deux images, l'auteur examine comment, plutôt que de représenter précisément ces souverains inconnus, lointains et exotiques, elles réinventent les espaces intérieurs habités par Jahangir et Kangxi en palais royaux fidèles aux normes européennes. Dans ces images, les intérieurs, leur matérialité et leur représentation deviennent des agents de traduction visuelle — des espaces où les figures peuvent s'acquitter de leurs fonctions selon une série de conventions avant tout comprises par le public cible de Kircher : les Européens.

Figure 1. Anonymous, *The Kangxi Emperor*, 1667. Engraving. From Athanasius Kircher, *China Illustrata*. Photo: Getty Research Institute.



Figure 2. Athanasius Kircher, *China Illustrata*, 1667, title page. Photo: New York Public Library Digital Collections.

(Re)imagining Asian Rulers in Athanasius Kircher's *China Illustrata*: The Agency of Interiors

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Cet article porte sur les portraits gravés de l'empereur moghol Jahangir (reg. 1605–1627) et de l'empereur Kangxi de Chine (reg. 1661–1722), qui figurent dans *China Illustrata* de Athanasius Kircher, publié en 1677. Par le biais d'une lecture attentive de ces deux images, l'auteur examine comment, plutôt que de représenter précisément ces souverains inconnus, lointains et exotiques, elles réinventent les espaces intérieurs habités par Jahangir et Kangxi en palais royaux fidèles aux normes européennes. Dans ces images, les intérieurs, leur matérialité et leur représentation deviennent des agents de traduction visuelle—des espaces où les figures peuvent s'acquitter de leurs fonctions selon une série de conventions avant tout comprises par le public cible de Kircher: les Européens.

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*“Quare adhuc iudico imaginem eam reformandam esse
(Therefore I still think that this image must be corrected).”*¹

These words, penned by Father Johannes Grueber (1623–1680) a few days before Christmas in 1670, were directed to his fellow Jesuit Athanasius Kircher (1602–1680) and concluded a small but important disagreement between the two. A few months earlier, in March, Grueber commented on the portrait of the Kangxi Emperor of China | fig. 1 | included in Kircher's last book, published in Amsterdam in 1667: *China, Illustrated with Monuments Both Sacred and Profane, and Various Spectacles of Nature and Art, and Proofs of Other Memorable Matters*.² | fig. 2 | Grueber pointed out that the iconography was inappropriate and planned to publish an amended and more faithful image of the emperor in his own book on China.³ However, his plan never came to fruition, and eventually Kircher's image of the Emperor proved to be successful and influential. A copy of this print, for example, was included in Alain Manesson Mallet's *Description of the Universe*, | fig. 3 | published in 1683, where several other non-European rulers were represented according to Westernizing principles in terms of bodily posture and insignia.⁴ Furthermore, in 1688, Eberhard Werner Hapfel included a simplified and slightly modified version of Kircher's print as an illustration in his *Thesaurus Exoticorum*, with a clear acknowledgment in the text mentioning the prototype coming from the Jesuit Order in Rome.⁵

The problem with Kangxi's portrait, Grueber argued, consisted in how the ruler was represented. He explained that this image would have been an insult for the Chinese viewers, and probably a portrait of the ruler sitting at a desk with mathematical books would have been more appropriate.⁶ Grueber had a specific traditional Chinese iconography in mind, as a hanging scroll portraying the young Kangxi Emperor at a desk, | fig. 4 | with a brush and several books, shows. This prototype could have provided a faithful and meaningful portrait of the Emperor,⁷ because such attributes were quite customary in Chinese portraiture, as a *Portrait of an Unidentified Nobleman* | fig. 5 | demonstrates: in this painting, a member of the highest ranks of society is sitting in front of an elaborate desk populated by writing instruments and books, as well as by other luxury objects.⁸ From Grueber's observations, as well as from these Chinese scrolls, we understand that the spatial, architectural, and material contexts were crucial to define the ruler, in addition to the attributes and body posture. The problem in a transcultural reading of such images was the correct interpretation of each element in a portrait: what was appropriate

1. Archivio Storico della Pontificia Università Gregoriana, Rome, 560, fol. 112r (Digitized, Athanasius Kircher Correspondence Project, Stanford University), Letter to Athanasius Kircher, partially transcribed in C. Wessels, *Early Jesuit Travellers in Central Asia 1603–1721* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1924), 169.

2. Athanasius Kircher, *China Monumentis, Qua Sacris quâ Profanis, Nec non variis Naturæ & Artis Spectaculis, Aliarumque rerum memorabilium Argumentis Illustrata* (Amsterdam: Joannes Janssonius van Waesberge, 1677). The English translation of the title is the one proposed by

Figure 3. Anonymous, *The Kangxi Emperor*, 1683. Engraving. From Alain Manesson Mallet, *Description de l'Univers*. Photo: Antiqua Print Gallery/Alamy Stock Photo.



Florence Hsia, "Athanasius Kircher's *China Illustrata*: An Apologia Pro Vita Sua," in Athanasius Kircher: *The Last Man Who Knew Everything*, ed. Paula Findlen (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 367. For the quotations in this essay I will use the English translation Athanasius Kircher, *China Illustrata*, transl. Charles D. Van Tuyl (Muskogee: Indian University Press, 1986).

3. Archivio Storico della Pontificia Università Gregoriana, Rome, 559, fol. 79r (Digitized, Athanasius Kircher Correspondence Project, Stanford University), Letter to Athanasius Kircher, mentioned in Wesels, *Early Jesuit Travellers*, 169.

4. Alain Manesson Mallet, *Description de l'Univers, contenant les differents systemes du Monde, les Cartes generales & particulieres de la Geographie Ancienne & Moderne: Les Plans & les Profils des principales Villes & des autres lieux considerables de la Terre; avec les portraits de Souverains qui commandent, leurs Blasons, Titres & Livrees: Et les Moeurs, Religions, Gouvernements & divers habillemens de chaque Nation* (Paris: Denys Thierry, 1683), Vol. 2, 43.

5. Eberhard Werner Happel, *Thesaurus exoticorum: Oder eine mit ausländischen Raritäten und Geschichten wohlversehene Schatz-Kammer*

for a European viewer was not necessarily adequate in Qing China, and vice versa. More importantly, this controversy between the two Jesuits, followed by Kircher's clear unwillingness to align himself with Grueber, shows that the "errors" in *China Illustrata* were probably intentional—a strategy to translate alterity into something easier to understand in Europe.

As this essay argues, Kircher understood this portrait as an image articulating the agency of architectural interiors in defining a European ruler's public persona. Kircher, a Jesuit living in seventeenth-century Rome, had great familiarity with rulers inhabiting a peculiar and highly ritualized typology of domestic interiors: palaces, where the boundaries between private and public lives were blurred, and where everything—architectural plan, decoration, and furnishings—contributed to define status and regulate hierarchies and social relations.⁹ As much as the ruler's body pertained to the public sphere and encapsulated his or her status, the architecture inhabited by the ruler had a public and symbolic dimension.¹⁰ Interiors represented in portraits mirrored such functions and had a quintessentially symbolic role in terms of defining the sitter's status. The early modern palace's interior was therefore a representational space, where domesticity existed only in relation to, and as function of, the public performance of those who inhabited such spaces.¹¹ The interior's materiality and the objects on display activated the symbolic dimension and function of such space: for this reason it was important, in Kircher's book, that the Kangxi Emperor inhabited a space that the reader of *China Illustrata*

could decode, to the detriment of architectural and material verisimilitude.

Focusing on the portraits of the Kangxi Emperor (fig. 1) and the Mughal Emperor Jahangir | fig. 6 | published in Kircher's *China Illustrata*, this article explores how images reinvented these unfamiliar, distant, exotic rulers according to parameters, devices, and materiality that configured their personae and the interiors they inhabited as royal palaces according to European standards. As much as the ruler's bodies or likenesses, the interiors became semantically charged and functioned as spaces where the figures could perform according to a series of conventions that could be understood primarily by Kircher's intended audience: his European readers. By addressing how and why Kircher manipulated his sources to represent Jahangir and Kangxi, this essay argues that the two portraits should be considered as acts of translation that entail a negotiation of meanings and visual vocabularies to meet the expectations of Kircher's Western audience.

Members of the Jesuit Order had been welcomed at the court of the Mughal Emperors, as well as by the Kangxi Emperor.¹² It is therefore not surprising that Athanasius Kircher, a Jesuit, included illustrations of these two rulers in his book. Although recent historiography has challenged the traditional "from the top down" interpretation of Jesuit conversions primarily directed to the elites of Asian societies for a more nuanced view that takes into account how evangelization included all social groups,¹³ both Kangxi and Jahangir's portraits—displayed in full folio prints—reminded the readers of the privileged status that the Jesuits enjoyed at the Mughal and Qing courts. At the same

fürstellend die asiatische, africanische und americanische Nationes der Berser, Indianer, Sinesin, Tartaren, Egypter, Barbarn, Libyer, Nigriten, Guineer. Hottentotten, Abyssiner, Canadenser, Virgenier, Floridaaner, Mexicaner, Peruaner, Chilenser, Magellanier und Brasilianer etc. Nach ihren königreichen, Polliceyen, Kleydungen, Sitten und Gottes-Dienst (Hamburg: Gedruckt und Verlegt durch Thomas von Wiering, 1688), 27.

6. Wessels, *Early Jesuit Travelers*, 169.

7. For this work see Evelyn Sakakida Rawski and Jessica Rawson, eds., *China: The Three Emperors, 1662–1795* (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2005).

8. Jan Stuart and Evelyn S. Rawski, *Worshipping the Ancestors: Chinese Commemorative Portraits* (Washington, DC and Stanford: Smithsonian Institution and Stanford University Press, 2001), 133.

9. Patricia Waddy, *Seventeenth-Century Roman Palaces: Use and the Art of the Plan* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990).

10. On the king's body and its political and ritual dimension see Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957) and, more recently and more importantly for our argument, Sergio Bertelli, *The King's Body: Sacred Rituals of Power in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania University Press, 2001).

11. For early modern domestic interior see Erin J. Campbell, Stephanie R. Miller, and Elizabeth Carrol Consavari, eds., *The Early Modern Italian Domestic Interior, 1400–1700: Objects, Spaces, Domesticities* (Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013). On palaces and their interiors, especially in the Roman context, see Waddy, *Seventeenth-Century Roman Palaces*; Marcello Fantoni, George Gorse, and Malcolm Smuts, eds., *The Politics of Space: European Courts, ca. 1500–1750* (Rome: Bulzoni, 2009); and Feigenbaum with Freddolini, *Display of Art*.

12. For the Jesuits at the Mughal court see Gauvin Alexander Bailey, *The Jesuits and the Grand Mogul: Renaissance Art at the Imperial Court of India, 1580–1630* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1998); Gauvin Alexander Bailey, *Art on the Jesuit Missions in Asia and Latin America, 1542–1773* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 112–143; and Mika Natif, *Mughal Occidentalism: Artistic Encounters between Europe and Asia at the Courts of India, 1580–1630* (Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2018), esp.

48. For a more general overview



Figure 4. Anonymous Court Artist, Portrait of the Kangxi Emperor in Informal Dress Holding a Brush, Hanging Scroll, 1662–1722, Beijing, The Palace Museum. Photo: The Picture Art Collection / Alamy Stock Photo.



Figure 5. Anonymous artist, Unidentified Nobleman in Front of a Table, Hanging Scroll, Qing Dynasty, eighteenth to nineteenth century. Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC: Purchase. Smithsonian Collections Acquisition Program and partial gift of Richard G. Pritzlaff, S1991.126.

Figure 6. Anonymous, Jahangir, 1667. Engraving. From Athanasius Kircher, *China Illustrata*. Photo: New York Public Library Digital Collections.



of the Jesuit role in global transcultural artistic exchanges see Bailey, *Art on the Jesuit Missions*. For the Jesuit mission to China see Liam Matthew Brokey, *Journey to the East: The Jesuit Mission to China, 1579–1724* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), and for the Jesuits and Kangxi see Arthur K. Wardega and Antonio Vasconcelos de Saldanha, eds., *In the Light and Shadow of an Emperor: Tomás Pereira, SJ (1645–1708), the Kangxi Emperor and the Jesuit Mission to China* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012).

13. Brokey, *Journey to the East*, 45–46.

14. For the concept of incommensurability in early modern transcultural relations, see Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Par-delà l’incommensurabilité: pour une histoire connectée des empires aux temps modernes,” *Revue d’histoire moderne et contemporaine* 54, no. 4 bis (2007), 34–53; Idem, “A Roomful of Mirrors: The Artful Embrace of Mughals and Franks, 1550–1700,” *Art*

time, by being visual agents of transcultural connections through their function as visual translations for the European readers, these portraits positioned the Jesuit Order as a key “actant” in negotiating the incommensurability of cultures with different visual strategies to define the status of a ruler.¹⁴

Before delving into the analysis of the portraits, an overview of the publication of Kircher’s *China Illustrata* helps us understand the context for the production of these prints. In 1668 the *Journal des Sçavants* introduced Father Kircher’s book with a statement stressing the author’s serious intention to verify his sources.¹⁵ This review, promptly translated into Italian for the *Giornale de’ Letterati* and certainly part of a well-orchestrated advertising campaign, touched upon an important point: Kircher’s credibility.¹⁶ The German Jesuit and Polymath Athanasius Kircher was a celebrity in seventeenth-century Europe for his encyclopedic knowledge and capacity to produce publications on virtually every field of knowledge. However, being “the most famous, or infamous, of scholars” as Paula Findlen has defined him, Kircher was often criticized for experiments and statements that could not be verified, and for publications that made bold claims based on fabricated evidence.¹⁷ Already in 1643 René Descartes had defined him a “charlatan”¹⁸ and, despite Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz’s initial enthusiasm for the Jesuit’s work on China,¹⁹ his reputation was so controversial that in 1677 Kircher’s pupil Gioseffo Petrucci published a book to defend the work of his mentor.²⁰ The book, printed the same year of the *China Illustrata* and by the same publisher, Joannes Jansson van Waesberge, was part of a campaign to promote and advertise his work on China, and respond to the growing criticism against Kircher.

China Illustrata, written towards the end of a prolific career, represented the culmination of long-standing interests and aspirations for Athanasius Kircher.²¹ Articulated into six sections, the book covered a breathtaking gamut of topics including religious history, geography, ethnography, and linguistics (with a final chapter devoted to Chinese writing). However, no first-hand knowledge or research informed the writing of the book: even though he asked twice to be sent to China as a missionary, Kircher never left Europe and, after some peregrinations in Germany and France during the first years of his career, he spent most of his life in Rome.²² He was first appointed Professor of Mathematics at the Jesuit *Collegio Romano*, and later in his career abandoned the teaching activity to devote his entire time to his research and fervent publication activity.²³

Working from Rome, Kircher drew on previously published texts such as Martino Martini’s *Novus Atlas Sinensis*, published in 1655, Nicolas Trigault’s edition of Matteo Ricci’s journals (1615), and Alvaro Semedo’s *Imperio de la China* (1642).²⁴ Furthermore, he relied on information provided to him by missionaries that had travelled through Asia and had provided him with manuscript information, objects, and drawings. In the text he acknowledged his debts to fellow Jesuits, such as the Austrian Johannes Grueber, with whom he exchanged many letters throughout the years.²⁵ However, as Grueber’s letters

Orientalis 39 (2010): 39–83. As the author explains in the introductory section of the article (39–41), he elaborates especially on Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970) and Paul K. Feyerabend, *Against Method* (London: New Left Books, 1975). See also Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters: Translating Courtliness and Violence in Early Modern Eurasia* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2012), 4–6, 23–24, 155. For a review of the theory of incommensurability, see Howard Sankey, “Kuhn’s Changing Concept of Incommensurability,” *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science* 44, no. 4 (1993): 759–74; and for an interpretation of the concept in relation to translation, see Howard Sankey, “Incommensurability, Translation and Understanding,” *The Philosophical Quarterly* 41, no. 165 (1991): 414–26. For the term “actant,” see Bruno Latour, “On Actor-Network Theory: A Few Clarifications,” *Soziale Welt* 47, no. 4 (1996): 373.

15. *Journal des Sçavants*, September 17, 1668, 73: “Ceux qui ont fait des Relations de la Chine en ont écrit des choses si extraordinaires q’on a eu de la peine à les croire. Le P. Kircher ayant eu la curiosité de s’en éclaircir, non seulement a consulté plusieurs personnes qui avoient long-temps demeuré en ce pays, mais mêmes a donné à quelques-uns qui y allaient, des instructions pour examiner ce qu’il a jugé de plus considerable; les mémoires qu’il a eus d’eux, il a composé ce Liure, où l’on trouvera des remarques très curieuses.”

16. *Giornale de’ Letterati*, October 28, 1668, 141. On Kircher’s advertising strategies see Pamela Findlen, “Introduction: The Last Man Who Knew Everything... Or Did He?,” in *Athanasius Kircher*, 2.

17. Findlen, “Introduction,” 9.

18. Findlen, “Introduction,” 20.

19. Findlen, “Introduction,” 6.

20. Gioseffo Petrucci, *Prodomo apologetico alli studi Chircheriani: opera di Gioseffo Petrucci, romano, nella quale con un’ apparato di saggi diversi, si dà prova dell’ esquisito studio ha tenuto il celebratissimo padre Atanasio Chircher, circa il credere all’ opinioni degli scrittori, sì de’ tempi andati, come de’ presenti, e particolarmente intorno a quelle cose naturali dell’ India, che gli furon portate, ò reserte dá quei, che abitarono quelle parti* (Amsterdam: Joannes Janssonius van Waesberge, 1677). For an overview of Kircher’s career in Rome see Ingrid D. Rowland, *The Ecstatic*



Figure 7. Abu 'l-Hasan or Dawlat (?), *Portrait of Jahangir*, first half of the seventeenth century. Private Collection. Courtesy of Bonhams.



Figure 8. Manohar and Abu'l Hasan (attributed to), *Darbar of Jahangir*, ca. 1620–1624. Ink, opaque watercolor and gold on paper, 35 × 20 cm. Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Photo: Niday Picture Library / Alamy Stock Photo.

Journey: Athanasius Kircher in Baroque Rome (Chicago: University of Chicago Libraries, 2000), and for Kircher's reputation as a scholar, see Tina Asmussen, *Scientia Kircheriana: Die Fabrication von Wissen bei Athanasius Kircher* (Affalterbach: Didimos-Verlag, 2016).

21. The Bibliography on *China Illustrata* is quite vast. See Baleslaw Szczesniak, "Athanasius Kircher's *China Illustrata*," *Osiris* 10 (1952): 385–411; Dino Pastine, *La nascita dell'idolatria: L'Oriente religioso di Athanasius Kircher* (Florence: La Nuova Italia 1978); Valerio Rivoecchi, *Esotismo in Roma Barocca: Studi sul Padre Kircher* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1982), 79–98; Haun Saussy, "China Illustrata: The Universe in a Cup of Tea," in *The Great Art of Knowing: The Baroque Encyclopedia of Athanasius Kircher* (Stanford: Stanford University Libraries, 2001), 105–114; Hsia, "Athanasius Kircher's *China Illustrata*," 383–404; J. Michelle Molina, "True Lies: Athanasius Kircher's *China Illustrata* and the Life Story of a Mexican Mystic," in *Athanasius Kircher*, 365–381; and Fernando Pérez Villalón, "Sombras chinas: de la Piedra a la página: Imagen, escritura e ideograma e la china monumentis illustrata," in *La curiosidad infinita de Athanasius Kircher: Una lectura a sus libros encontrados en la Biblioteca Nacional de Chile*, ed. Costana Acuña (Santiago: Ocho Libros, 2012), 167–191.

22. John Edward Fletcher, *A Study of the Life and Works of Athanasius Kircher 'Germanus Incredibilis,' With a Selection of his Unpublished Correspondence and an Annotated Translation of his Autobiography*, ed. Elizabeth Fletcher (Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2011), 21.

23. Findlen, "Introduction," 26.

24. Hsia, "Athanasius Kircher's *China Illustrata*," 367.

25. See for example Kircher, *China Illustrata* (trans. Van Tuyll), iv, 43, 44, 46, 58–59, 60–70.

26. Hsia, "Athanasius Kircher's *China Illustrata*," 380. A contract between Waesberge and Meurs concerning the plates for the *China Illustrata* that Meurs rented for 3450 Guilders in order to print his own edition is mentioned in Friederike Ulrichs, *Johan Niehuofs Blick auf China (1655–1657): Die Kupferstiche in seine Chinabuch in ihre Wirkung auf den Verleger Jacob van Meurs* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2003), 128, and Paola von Wyss-Giacosa, "Investigating Religion Visually: On the Role and Significance of Engravings in Athanasius Kircher's Discourse on Idolatry," *Asdiwal: Revue Genevoise d'Anthropologie et d'Histoire des Religions* 7 (2012): 123.

mentioned above show, his use of the information provided by those who had first-hand knowledge was often inaccurate, if not intentionally altered.

Notwithstanding the controversial reputation of its author, *China Illustrata* became a bestseller across the continent, shaping the perception of Asia in late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Europe. After the first Latin edition by Joannes Jansson van Waesberge, who had signed a contract with Kircher to have the exclusive publishing rights for all his books, an identical Latin edition was published by Jacob van Meurs in the same year, and soon translated into Dutch and French (1668 and 1670, respectively).²⁶ Furthermore, parts of the volume were included in John Ogilby's *An embassy from the East-India company of the United Provinces, to the Grand Tartar Cham, emperor of China*, published in London in 1669.²⁷

Illustrations in Kircher's books were never just decorative elements, nor were they simply subordinate to the text.²⁸ As Paola von Wyss-Giacosa has observed, Kircher had a remarkable "understanding of the role of the image as an integral part of the cognitive process."²⁹ Kircher was therefore thinking along the lines of the naturalist John Ray (1627–1705), who maintained that an illustration has an "advantage of a verbal description that it conveys speedily to the mind with ease & pleasure a clearer & truer *Idea* of the thing delineated, then the understanding can with much labour & in a long time form to itself in a description, be it never so exact."³⁰ Prints, in Kircher's books, had an epistemological function: rather than simply visually demonstrating a verbal statement, they added extra information, as we will see with the two portraits of Jahangir and Kangxi. Images in Kircher's books were therefore as important as the material evidence of the museum he assembled at the *Collegio Romano*, where objects on display articulated narratives of wonder, exoticism, antiquarianism, and science.³¹ This was even more evident and true for this specific book, entitled *China Monumentis ... Illustrata* (*China Illustrated ... with Monuments*) (fig. 2), because the sophisticated use of Latin syntax in the title established a hierarchy of words in which the monuments—embodiments of visual and material evidence—occupied a prominent place in the sentence, right after the word "China."³²

Furthermore, even if the prints used as illustrations in his books were made by anonymous artists, we can postulate that Kircher himself had a firm control over them. Grueber's letter, criticizing Kangxi's portrait, clearly implied that Kircher had orchestrated the iconography of that illustration, and could have changed it—if only he wanted to do so. Kircher's authority on (and role in) defining the print's iconography is particularly important for the portraits of Kangxi and Jahangir, especially if we engage in a close reading of these prints representing emperors dwelling in interiors that did not belong to their traditions. How did these images, and the interiors represented in those images, construct visual discourses about royalty?

Both portraits reveal a similar strategy in the reconfiguration of the architectural space and its materiality, and the portrait of Jahangir in particular enables us to reflect on this issue because we know its prototype. A comparison with the original work reveals omissions, additions, and changes that were obviously intentional. Kircher himself explained in *China Illustrata* that Jahangir's portrait was based on a painting that had been sent to Rome by

27. Hsia, "Athanasius Kircher's *China Illustrata*," 380.

28. For an overview of early modern book illustrations, see Rodney Palmer and Thomas Frangenberg, eds., *The Rise of the Image: Essays on the History of the Illustrated Art Book*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2003).

29. Von Wyss-Giacosa, "Investigating Religion Visually," 49.

30. Robert Gunther, ed., *Further Correspondence of John Ray* (London: Ray Society, 1928), 99. For this quote and its relevance for seventeenth-century illustrated books, see Benjamin Schmidt, *Inventing Exoticism: Geography, Globalism, and Europe's Early Modern World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 121–122, and Thomasz Grusiecki, "Michał Boym, the Sum Xu, and the Reappearing Image," *Journal of Early Modern History* 23 (2019): 299.

31. On Kircher's collection at the Collegio Romano, see Adalgisa Lugli, "Inquiry as Collection: The Athanasius Kircher Museum in Rome," *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 12 (1986): 109–124; Silvio A. Bedini, "Citadels of Learning: The Museo Kircheriano and Other Seventeenth-Century Italian Science Collections," in *Enciclopedia in Roma barocca: Athanasius Kircher e il Museo del Collegio Romano tra Wunderkammer e museo scientifico*, ed. Mariastella Casciato, Maria Grazia Iannello and Maria Vitale (Venice: Marsilio, 1986), 249–267; Eugenio Lo Sardo, ed., *Athanasius Kircher: Il Museo del Mondo* (Rome: Palazzo Venezia, 2001); Paula Findlen, "Science, History, and Erudition: Athanasius Kircher's Museum at the Collegio Romano," in Stolzberg, *The Great Art of Knowing*, 17–26; Mark A. Waddell, "Magic and Artifice in the Collection of Athanasius Kircher," *Endeavour* 31, no. 1 (2010): 30–34; and Angela Mayer-Deutsch, *Das Musaeum Kirerianum: Kontemplative Momente, historische Rekonstruktion, Bildrhetorik* (Zurich: Diaphanes, 2010).

32. See footnote 2 above for the complete title.

33. Kircher, *China Illustrata* (trans. Van Tuyl), 71.

34. On this painting, see Rosemary Crill and Kapil Jariwala, *The Indian Portrait, 1560–1860* (London: National Portrait Gallery Publications, 2010), 76; Heike Franke, "Emperors of Śūrat and Ma'nī: Jahangir and Shah Jahan as Temporal and Spiritual Rulers," *Muqarnas* 31 (2014): 123–149.

35. Kircher, *China Illustrata* (trans. Van Tuyl), 71.

36. For Mughal's Occidentalizing taste in the seventeenth century, see Natif, *Mughal Occidentalism*.

Jesuit missionaries: "The fathers sent to Rome a picture or likeness of him in the dress which he used for public audiences. I thought it would be valuable to reproduce that here to satisfy the reader's curiosity."³³ A painting in a private collection is almost certainly the one mentioned by Kircher. [fig. 7] The portrait, unusually large for the Mughal tradition (210 cm × 141 cm) and painted on canvas, has been attributed to Abu 'l-Hasan or Dawlat and shows remarkable similarities with the print in *China Illustrata*.³⁴ In addition to the print included in the book, Kircher's literary portrait of the emperor was clearly inspired by this painting as well, rather than being based on verbal narratives obtained from fellow missionaries: "Few monarchs had dress of similar beauty, for he exhibited himself to view adorned with a diadem made of gold, pearls, and precious stones of great price, and shining like that of a divinity. His throne was likewise adorned. In his hand he held a sphere, through which he showed himself to be the lord of the world and the greatest power. According to the custom of his ancestors, he sat with bare feet, and they were washed from time to time by his servants with an expensive liquid. Near him was a precious vase containing liquid for him to drink in warm weather, or whenever he wanted."³⁵

The chair covered in gold leaf and decorated with floral motifs, the sophisticated garments, the vessels on the floor, as well as the globe held by Jahangir are all equally present in the painting, the print, and the text. At first sight it seems that Kircher had been extremely faithful to his source. After all, this painting showing Jahangir on a European-style throne and showcasing the painter's command of the three-dimensional space in the positioning of all objects, was visually intelligible for the European viewer.³⁶ Despite the exotic robes, even some attributes such as the globe seem potentially quite familiar to European observers, who could establish a connection with the imperial orb.³⁷ This painting was, in other words, a clear attempt to adopt an Occidentalizing visual culture.³⁸ We might even speculate that this painting's format and iconography were specifically intended for a European consumption. We know that major global centers such as Amsterdam were significant hubs for the import of art from the Indian subcontinent during the seventeenth century.³⁹ Furthermore, the rooted and long-standing presence of the Jesuits at the Mughal court had fostered initiatives of artistic exchange, and it is therefore not surprising that this portrait was in Jesuit hands when Kircher was writing *China Illustrata*.⁴⁰

Heike Franke, in her analysis of the portrait, has noted only one missing element in Kircher's ekphrastic words and in the print—the cartouches with verses composed by Jahangir on the four edges of the painting—and has highlighted the addition of a dog as well as several attendants.⁴¹ The omission of the cartouches probably occurred because they were considered as a frame by the viewers at the *Collegio Romano*, and this is particularly important for our argument: once deprived of its frame, this painting was ready to be included into a completely new and implausible larger interior—almost like a quotation in a new context.

The exclusion of the cartouches was not simply an iconographical or formal change; it generated a conceptual shift, situating the protagonist within new narrative threads and adding new elements. Jahangir's role within the composition—and the narrative that such framework generated—changed: originally occupying almost the entire painting's surface, in the print he is reduced

Figure 9. Hyacinthe Rigaud, *Portrait of Louis XIV*, 1701. Oil on Canvas. Paris, Louvre. Photo: Photo 12/Alamy Stock Photo.



Figure 10. Agostino Tassi, *Appointment of Taddeo Barberini as Prefetto of Rome*, 1631–1633. Oil on Canvas. Rome, Museo di Roma, MR 5700. © Roma – Sovrintendenza Capitolina ai Beni Culturali, Museo di Roma.



Figure 11. Workshop of Jean Lefebvre after Charles Le Brun, *The Audience with Cardinal Chigi*, 1665–1672. Wool, silk, and gilt-metal-wrapped thread. Paris, Louvre. © RMN-Grand Palais/Art Resource, NY.



37. On the significance of the globe for the Mughal Emperors, see Sumathy Ramaswamy, "Conceit of the Globe in Mughal Visual Practice," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 49, no. 4 (2007): 751–782. On the orb in Western culture see Yojiro Utsunomiya and Rudolf Schmidt, "Terrestrial Globes Depicted in Images—The globe as a communicative instrument of information and allegory/Erdgloben auf Bildern - Der Globus als Übermittler von Information und Allegorie," *Der Globusfreund*, 47/48 (1999/2000): 89–124.

38. For the term occidentalism, see Ian Buruma and Avishai Margalit, *Occidentalism: a Short History of Anti-Westernism* (London: Atlantic Books, 2004); Kristina Kleughten, "Chinese Occidenterie: The Diversity of 'Western' Objects in Eighteenth-Century China," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 47, no. 2 (2014): 117–35 (especially 117–8); and Natif, *Mughal Occidentalism*.

39. See for example Subrahmanyam, *Courtly Encounters*, 174–207, and Stephanie Schrader, "Rembrandt and the Mughal Line: Artistic Inspiration in the Global City of Amsterdam," in *Rembrandt and the Inspiration of India*, ed. Stephanie Schrader (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2018), 5–28.

40. For the Jesuits at the Mughal court see note 6 above.

41. Franke, "Emperors," 123.

42. For the *darbar* see Jorge Flores, *The Mughal Padshah: A Jesuit Treatise on Emperor Jahangir's Court and Household* (Boston and Leiden: Brill, 2016), 58. For the jharokha see Jeremiah, P. Losty, "The Carpet at the Window: A European Motif in the Mughal Jharokha Portrait," in *Indian Painting: Themes, History and Interpretation: Essays in Honour of B.N. Goswamy*, ed. Mahesh Sharma and Padma Kaimal (Ahmedabad, India: Mapin, 2013), 52–64, and Zain Zulfquar, "Tracing the Origin of Jharokha Window Used in the Indian Subcontinent," *Journal of Islamic Architecture* 5, no. 2 (2018): 70–76.

43. Ebba Koch, "The Wooden Audience Halls of Shah Jahan: Sources and Reconstruction," *Muqarnas* 30 (2013): 359.

44. Ebba Koch, "Diwan-i 'Amm and Chihil Sutun: The Audience Halls of Shah Jahan," *Muqarnas* 11 (1994): 143–165, and Koch, "The Wooden Audience Halls of Shah Jahan," 351–389.

45. Stephanie Walker, "Toward a Unified Interior: Furnishing and the Evolution of Design," in *Display of Art in the Roman Palace 1550–1750*, ed. Gail Feigenbaum with

in scale and pushed back to the middle ground, making space for a new interior that evoked a royal palace populated by attendants interacting with Jahangir and among themselves. What was previously an iconic image of the ruler, devoid of specific spatial coordinates, had become a portrait embedded in the narrative space of a courtly palace, where the throne and the baldachin suggested an audience chamber, at least to European viewers.

In such space, and in its materiality, lies a major difference with traditional Mughal painting. Mughal paintings representing Jahangir's public audience (*darbar*), such as the one attributed to Manohar and Abu'l Hasan, | **fig. 8** | show a completely different narrative strategy, a very different articulation of the space, as well as a different materiality of the architecture and the objects populating it. In this painting Jahangir does not sit on a throne, but is positioned in the *jharokha* (a window framing the emperor during his public appearances), overlooking a courtyard and physically isolated from the attendants.⁴² As Ebba Koch has observed in relation to such painted records of the *darbar*, in these Mughal paintings "architecture is not represented for its own sake, but to provide a frame for the court event."⁴³ The architectural framework, systematized by Jahangir's successors, Shah Jahan, with monumental audience halls covered and decorated with wood, and later with marble, was very different from the one presented in Kircher's illustrations.⁴⁴

The print made for *China Illustrata* shows the Emperor sitting on the throne, elevated but still occupying the same room as the attendants. More importantly, instead of being in the *jharokha*, the Mughal ruler is sitting under a baldachin, the quintessential device defining the ruler in the European tradition. This canopy-like textile structure was ubiquitous in seventeenth-century state apartments, and marked especially important spaces for representational purposes: rulers appeared under the baldachin during official audiences.⁴⁵ These textile structures were physically present in the domestic interior and were also often included in state portraits, as Hyacinthe Rigaud's canonical *Portrait of Louis XIV* | **fig. 9** | demonstrates. In *China Illustrata* Jahangir acts in the architectural interior much like Louis XIV, under a baldachin and on an elevated platform covered with a carpet that functions as a floor counterpart to the hanging canopy, generating a space that can only be occupied by the King's sacred body.⁴⁶ Climbing that step and crossing the threshold marked by the carpet and baldachin was simply inconceivable, unless instructed by the ruler to do so. The materiality of the interior, both in the real and in the represented spaces, produced spatial relations and regulated bodily distances that, to the European eye, instantiated social hierarchies.

Similar strategies based on proxemics (the relations between social hierarchies and bodily distances) were also used at the Mughal court to mark the sacred status of the Emperor and establish hierarchies at court.⁴⁷ However, they took place in spaces very different from the interior depicted in Kircher's *China Illustrata*. For example, a letter in the Jesuit Archive in Toledo shows that a "captain" who used to stand close to Jahangir's *jharokha* was humiliated by the Emperor by making him stand below the *jharokha* for many audiences, and then called closer only during a rainy day, when the ruler received other people below the captain's rank.⁴⁸ This document is extremely important for our argument: it describes how the *jharokha* functioned in a courtly space

that was liminal between interior and exterior (with courtiers exposed to the elements, while the ruler and his attendants were sheltered), and shows how the ruler's space in Kircher's print was apparently oblivious of it, by transporting Jahangir within the rooms of a palatial interior, sitting on an elaborate chair elevated by a platform, and under a baldachin.

More importantly, this letter proves the intentionality of such misrepresentation of Jahangir's space. The missive, sent by a Jesuit Father to his superior, was part the Order's network of knowledge and exchange of information and, along with many other texts, proves that the Jesuits were well aware of Mughal courtly rituals, and had a thorough knowledge of Mughal architecture. The Jesuits had established a regular presence at the Mughal court, and Manohar and Abu'l Hasan's painting of *Jahangir's Darbar* (fig. 8) included the Jesuit missionary Francesco Corsi. By being at the center of such network of information, Athanasius Kircher was certainly well aware of the darbar and its rituals, and yet the Mughal Emperor's body was transported into a European interior. The choice of avoiding a truthful representation of Jahangir's court life was, in other words, deliberate.

The baldachin and the platform elevating Jahangir's chair were not the only elements of interior materiality in the print aimed at configuring the palace's interior as a familiar architectural space for Kircher's western audience. The walls are also covered with textiles decorated with floral patterns, repeated in a pattern of vertical bands, and a drawn curtain marks the door on the left, offering a glimpse to another room. Furthermore, the floor and the platform for the chair are also covered by carpets with similar decorative motifs. Such a presence of textiles seems a clear reference to the quintessential tradition that Kircher experienced daily in seventeenth-century Rome: the domestic interior had to be dressed, covered with textiles in order to be viewed in public.⁴⁹ No portion of bare walls is visible in the print, and the entire interior is wrapped by wall hangings that cover the architectural structure and enshrine the space in an extremely expensive—and therefore socially distinctive—textile medium that marked the material experience of seventeenth-century European interiors.⁵⁰ Agostino Tassi's *Appointment of Taddeo Barberini as Prefetto of Rome* | fig. 10 | is a prime counterpart to Kircher's print: in this painting all the walls are covered with two registers of hangings and the baldachin protrudes from the wall as a "textile microarchitecture"⁵¹ that separates Pope Urban VIII (Maffeo Barberini) and his nephew Taddeo from the rest of the courtly society surrounding them.

The interior of the illustration in *China Illustrata* is quite complex, since a drawn curtain on the left shows a second room, also covered with wall hangings, where two attendants observe the central scene from a distance—separated from the protagonists, in a different space, just like us. The separation is marked by a balustrade, another device that establishes tangible boundaries between spaces that could be crossed according to the social rank.

This manifold interior space, where physical obstacles become indexes of social status and devices to socially activate the space, is very different from the interior-exterior space of the darbar described above. It rather functions along the lines of the courtly space illustrated in the Gobelin tapestry showing *Louis XIV's Audience with Cardinal Chigi*.⁵² | fig. 11 | Made in 1665–1672, this tapestry is almost contemporary to Kircher's print. It shows the king in profile, sitting on a throne

Francesco Freddolini (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2014), 51.

46. For the concept of the King's body, see Ernst Kantorowitz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Mythology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), and Sergio Bertelli, *The King's Body: Sacred Rituals of Power in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, trans. Robert Burr Litchfield (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001).

47. For the concept of proxemics see Edward T. Hall, *The Hidden Dimension* (New York: Anchor Books, 1969), and on its application as a theory to understand the social implications of interpersonal space in early modern court societies see Marcello Fantoni, *La corte del Granduca: Forme e simboli del potere mediceo fra Cinque e Seicento* (Rome: Bulzoni, 1994).

48. Letter from Jerónimo Xavier to Father Juan Ximenez de Oco, quoted and discussed in Flores, *The Mughal Padshah*, 60–61, note 65.

49. During the seventeenth century, the vocabulary describing textiles used to cover interior spaces was the same employed to describe bodies: palaces were "dressed." See Tristan Weddigen, "Textile Spaces, Interior and Exterior," in Feigenbaum with Freddolini, *Display of Art*, 162–165, and Alessandra Rodolfo and Caterina Volpi, eds., *Vestire i palazzi: Stoffe, tessuti e parati negli arredi e nell'arte del Barocco* (Vatican City: Edizioni Musei Vaticani, 2014). For early modern textiles for domestic interiors see also Catherine Richardson and Tara Hamling, "Ways of Seeing Early Modern Decorative Textiles," *Textile History* 47, no. 1 (2016): 4–26.

50. Caterina Volpi, "Dressing the Palace: Parati and their Role in Display," in Feigenbaum with Freddolini, *Display of Art*, 166–177.

51. For this phrase see Weddigen, "Textile Spaces," 163. For Tassi's painting, see Patrizia Cavazzini, *Agostino Tassi (1578–1644): Un paesaggista tra immaginario e realtà*, exh. cat. (Rome: Iride per il Terzo Millennio, 2008), 102.

52. For this tapestry see Thomas Campbell, ed., *Tapestry in the Baroque: Threads of Splendor*, exh. cat. (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2007), 378–379.

Figure 12. Anthony van Dyck, *Charles I at the Hunt*, ca. 1635. Oil on canvas. Paris, Louvre. Photo: agefotostock/Alamy Stock Photo.



in front of his baldachin bed, on a carpet slightly elevated on a platform, where the ambassador has been admitted because he represents the Pope. Moreover, a balustrade provides a physical obstacle separating the King and the Ambassador from the crowd of attendants. Even if mixed in slightly different order, these are the elements of interior materiality that appear in Kircher's print.

Now that we have considered the complexity of the print's spatial representation, we can also further reflect on how both space and perspective—added by the artist working for Athanasius Kircher—did not simply epitomize a stylistic translation into Western visual culture; rather, they produced a semantic variance. In other words, the perspectival representation of space in the print became a means to *make space*, to generate the interior where Jahangir and his attendants perform. And although their garments were still a mark of alterity, the architectural interior and the way the figures interact with the things populating the space were, ultimately, a reflection of a seventeenth-century European palace.

A similar narrative emerges from the portrait of the Kangxi Emperor, a print where the interior and its materiality convey ideas of wealth, as well as of courtly rituals regulating the life of the palace. We can assume that Kircher did not have an original image to use as inspiration for this print, other-

wise Johannes Grueber would have referred to it in the correspondence (if not Kircher himself in *China Illustrata*). Indeed, if Kircher's paragraph on Jahangir quoted above showcased a close relation to the image, no similar description of the print was included in *China Illustrata*. Without an image to describe, the Jesuit simply referred vaguely to courtly rituals such as those of the attendants in front of the throne: "Those admitted to the king's presence stand before the throne with their arms at their sides, since the Tartars think it is wrong to look at His Majesty or to move the hands or feet, which would be an insult."⁵³ This passage doesn't bear any real relation to the print, except, as we will see, the reference to avoiding any eye contact with the emperor. It even contradicts the image, where attendants are shown sitting on cushions in front of the Emperor, in the background of the print, instead of standing as Kircher explained. This discrepancy further confirms that Kircher penned the text without an image in mind, and probably only at a later stage decided to commission a portrait of Kangxi to be included in his book.

Kangxi performs like a European ruler in the illustration for *China Illustrata* that Grueber criticized so overtly. Engaging the viewer with a kind gaze and a smile, arm akimbo and walking stick in his right hand, the young Chinese emperor seems to mirror *Charles I at the Hunt* in the famous portrait by Anthony van Dyck.⁵⁴ | fig. 12 | This seemingly informal and approachable ruler, identified by the inscription in the cartouche as the "supreme monarch of the

53. Kircher, *China Illustrata* (trans. Van Tuyl), 100.

54. For the arm akimbo in early modern culture, see Joaneath Spicer, "The Renaissance Elbow," in *A Cultural History of Gesture from Antiquity to the Present Day*, ed. Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 84–128. On Van Dyck's painting see Susan J. Barnes, Nora de Poorter, Olivier Millar and Horst Vey, *Van Dyck: A Complete Catalogue of the Paintings* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), 467–8

Figure 13. Anonymous Qing Dynasty Court Painter, *Portrait of the Kangxi Emperor in Court Dress*, late Kangxi period. Hanging scroll, colour on silk. Beijing, The Palace Museum. Photo: Album/Alamy Stock Photo.



Figure 14. Athanasius Kircher, *China Illustrata*, 1667, frontispiece. Photo: New York Public Library Digital Collections.



Sino-Tartar empire” and accompanied by the same dog that was included in Jahangir’s portrait, is nonetheless wearing robes that convey his status, especially by showing the dragon on the chest of the emperor. Even if the garments are not accurate, as comparisons with Chinese paintings demonstrate, | fig. 13 | Kircher described at length and in various parts of the book the dragon as a symbol of both secular and religious power in China.⁵⁵

The spatial organization of the composition functions as a narrative stratum in this print, since Kangxi appears twice in a sequence of two rooms: the complex architectural interior becomes a device for a *mise-en-abyme* of the emperor that multiplies and complicates his iconographical presence. He is standing in the foreground, and in the background we find a much more formal and ritualized iconography, with Kangxi sitting under a baldachin with drawn curtains, elevated by three steps and surrounded by five attendants that seem to have their gazes directed towards the floor—the only element in common with the text cited above.

Once again, the agency of the interior’s materiality is crucial to define Kangxi as an emperor for Kircher’s European readership. In the foreground, the emperor is standing by a column, an obvious reference to power, and his presence is revealed by a drawn curtain—a quintessentially baroque compositional strategy that was ubiquitous in state portraits and is epitomized by the above-mentioned portrait of Louis XIV (fig. 9).⁵⁶ Textiles are, as in Jahangir’s portrait, omnipresent, with a curtain decorated with floral motifs that forms a backdrop for Kangxi and a cushion partially visible on the left, behind the emperor. The balustrade—almost identical to the one in Jahangir’s portrait, demonstrating how the artist used the same elements in both prints—separates the scene in the foreground from the one in the background, where textiles cover all architectural surfaces.

As it happened with Jahangir’s portrait, the baldachin does not correspond to any Chinese traditional object. It is, indeed, a purely European baldachin with all the typical elements: the elevation above the floor, the use of textiles, and even the presence of a stylized sun in its ceiling. This iconographical detail duplicates the sun in the room’s ceiling, thus configuring the baldachin as a micro-architecture within the room’s architecture, and at the same time isolating the ruler in his own sacred and ritual space, just like any European king. Moreover, the presence of the sun would have looked familiar to any viewer in seventeenth-century Rome—the place where Kircher wrote his *China Illustrata*—since the ceiling of the baldachin was often called “cielo” (sky) in archival documents describing such objects.⁵⁷

Johannes Grueber’s comment on this print—a potential insult for an emperor who would not have recognized himself in this image—was probably not surprising for Athanasius Kircher, who certainly knew that the iconography and narrative were not faithful to any contemporary Chinese representation of Kangxi. Even if obtaining an image of Kangxi in late seventeenth-century Europe was not easy, as Marco Musillo has recently demonstrated,⁵⁸ descriptions of the emperor’s court and its rituals were well known in Europe, and especially among Jesuit networks. Kangxi had welcomed Jesuit priests at his court, and the missionary and astronomer Johann Adam Shall von Bell (1551–1666) had, notably, achieved a high social status and became

55. Sheng-Ching Chang, *Natur und Landschaft. Der Einfluss von Athanasius Kircher »China Illustrata« auf die Europäische Kunst* (Berlin: Reimer, 2003), 143–151, and esp. 148–151 in relation to Kangxi’s robes in this print.

56. A comparison between Kangxi and Louis XIV became a recurrent rhetorical practice in late seventeenth-century France and was exemplified especially by the Jesuit Joachim Bouvet (1656–1732), who published a book entitled *Portrait Historique de L’Emperor de la Chine* (Paris: Estienne Michallet, 1697) and dedicated to Louis XIV. See Christopher S. Johns, *China and the Church: Chinoiserie in Global Context* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016), 93–94.

57. For the *cielo*, see Weddigen, “Textile Spaces,” 163, and Stephaner, “State Beds,” in Feigenbaum with Freddolini, *Display of Art*, 157.

58. Marco Musillo, “The Chinese Fata Morgana of Cosimo III: Giovanni Gherardini and the Portraits of Kangxi,” in *Art, Mobility, and Exchange in Early Modern Tuscany and Eurasia*, ed. Francesco Freddolini and Marco Musillo (New York and London: Routledge, 2020), 168.

Director of the Imperial Observatory.⁵⁹ Kircher was well aware of this, and extensively celebrated Shall von Bell in *China Illustrata*, with images and words: he included two portraits of the fellow Jesuits, in the frontispiece of the book | fig. 14 | and as a full-page illustration.⁶⁰ | fig. 15 | If the Jesuits knew so much about the Chinese imperial court, what was the reason for Kircher's inaccuracies? I argue that these were not mere mistakes, or naïve misrepresentations of exotic rulers. As with the portrait of Jahangir, Athanasius Kircher made an attempt to translate potentially illegible or misleading iconographies, rituals, and garments that articulated rulers' sacrality in terms that could have been difficult to grasp for a European audience.

The concept of translation can be extremely relevant for images that aimed to articulate knowledge about foreign cultures, such as these ones included in Kircher's *China Illustrata*. By reflecting on how these images reinterpreted foreign cultural frameworks, conventions, and knowledge, we can better address their epistemological intention and validity. Much work has been done in terms of exploring translations of texts in the early modern global world, and especially studies conducted by Peter Burke and R. Po Cha Hsia have cast fresh light on how European cultures translated (and therefore construed, or manipulated) foreign cultures on a global scale.⁶¹ Umberto Eco argued that translations always entail varying degrees of "negotiation"⁶² that inevitably have an impact on the meaning of the message, and reminded us that a successful translator must, in some circumstances, be "literally unfaithful" to the original text.⁶³ Reflecting on Eco's arguments and on the potentially controversial issue of faithfulness, Peter Burke highlighted how translators "learn to live with a dilemma: should they be faithful to the original text from which they are translating, or intelligible to the readers of the text they are writing?"⁶⁴ Transcultural exchanges, in other words, always entail a shift in vocabulary and a semantic negotiation.

If we consider these two images as acts of translation, then we can better frame the disagreement between Grueber and Kircher discussed at the beginning of this essay as a divergence of opinion on the translator's dilemma posited by Peter Burke. Spectatorship lay at the core of this dispute between the two Jesuits: while Grueber understood the print in relation to Qing canons of portraiture, Kircher conceived it as an illustration within a book intended for a European public. Therefore, the motives and the strategies that led Kircher to instruct the printmaker to situate Jahangir and Kangxi within European interiors were connected to the objectives of translating the social performance of rulership in European terms.

If we consider Kircher's readership—a European public reading in Latin, French, Dutch, and English—these images were sophisticated ways to represent rulers to convey their status as Emperors. Images completely faithful to the actual rituals, costumes, and architectural interiors would have conveyed notions of alterity and exoticism, but would have probably been less effective in articulating a visual and material vocabulary of power and social status. What would the European viewers think of Jahangir's bare feet, without Kircher's explanation in the text discussed above, and without a context reassuring them of the emperor's status as powerful and—no less important—well-mannered ruler?⁶⁵ Kircher's text played a crucial role in clarifying this

59. On Johann Adam Shall von Bell see Claudia von Collani, "Johann Adam Schall von Bell und die Naturwissenschaften in China," *Verbum SVD* 33 (1992): 25–39; Eadem, "Two Astronomers: Martino Martini and Johann Adam Shall von Bell," in Martino Martini: *Man of Dialogue*, ed. Luisa M. Paternicò, Claudia von Collani and Riccardo Scartezzini (Trento: Università degli Studi di Trento, 2016), 65–92.

60. For Kircher's frontispiece illustrations see Lucia Tomasi Tongiorgi, "Il simbolismo delle immagini: i frontespizi delle opere di Kircher," in Casciato, Iannello and Vitale, *Enciclopedismo in Roma Barocca*, 165–175.

61. Peter Burke and R. Po-chia Hsia, eds., *Cultural Translation in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). See also Jane Tylus and Karen Newman, eds., *Early Modern Cultures of Translation* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

62. Umberto Eco, *Mouse or Rat? Translation as Negotiation* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2003), 6.

63. Eco, *Mouse or Rat*, 5 (emphasis in the original).

64. Peter Burke, "Translating Knowledge, Translating Cultures," in *Kultureller Austausch: Bilanz und Perspektiven der Frühneuzeitforschung*, ed. Michael North (Cologne, Weimar, and Vienna: Böhlau, 2009), 71.

65. Kircher, *China Illustrata* (trans. Van Tuyl), 71.

66. I am currently developing an open-access on-line database of early modern portraits of non-European Rulers and dignitaries, produced in Europe ca. 1500–1750, and preparing a volume on this subject.

Figure 15. Anonymous, Johann Adam Schall von Bell, 1667. Engraving. From Athanasius Kircher, *China Illustrata*. Photo: New York Public Library Digital Collections.



Figure 16. Anonymous, Abbas II of Persia, 1634. Engraving, from Thomas Herbert, *A relation of some yeares travaile, begunne anno 1626*. Photo: Wellcome Library.



67. Thomas Herbert, *A relation of some yeares travaile, begunne anno 1626. Into Afrique and the greater Asia, especially the territories of the Persian monarchie: and some parts of the Oriental Indies, and lles adiacent. Of their religion, language, habit, discent, ceremonies and other matters concerning them. Together with the proceedings and death of the three late Ambassadors: Sir D[odmore] C[otton], Sir R[obert] S[herley] and the Persian Nogdi-beg: as also the two great monarchs, the King of Persia, and the Great Mogol* (London: Printed by W. Stansby, and J. Bloome, 1634), 128. On Herbert's book, see R.W. Ferrier, "The First English Guide Book to Persia: 'A Discription of the Persian Monarchy,'" *Iran* 15 (1977): 75–88.

68. For Giambologna, Pietro and Ferdinando Tacca's equestrian monuments, see Dietrich Erben, "Die Reiterdenkmäler der Medici in Florenz und ihre politische Bedeutung," *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes in Florenz* 40, no. 3 (1996): 287–361, and Franca Falletti, ed., *Pietro Tacca: Carrara, la Toscana, le grandi corti europee* (Florence: Mandragora, 2007); for Rubens see Walter A. Liedtke and John F. Moffitt, "Velázquez, Olivares, and the Baroque Equestrian Portrait," *The Burlington Magazine* 123, no. 942 (1981): 528–537, and John F. Moffitt, "Rubens's Duke of Lerma, Equestrian Amongst 'Imperial Horsemen,'" *Artibus et Historiae* 15, no. 29 (1994): 99–110; and for Van Dyck's equestrian portraits, see John F. Moffitt, "Le Roi à la crosse?": Kings, Christian Knights, and Van Dyck's Singular 'Dismounted Equestrian-Portrait' of Charles I," *Artibus et Historiae* 4, no. 7 (1983): 79–99.

69. Clifford Geertz, "Centers, Kings, and Charisma: Reflections on the Symbolics of Power," in *Culture and Its Creators: Essays in Honor of Edward Shils*, ed. Joseph Ben-David and Terry Nichols Clark (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 150–171, and Saen Wilentz, ed., *Rites of Power: Symbolism, Ritual, and Politics since the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985).

70. Subrahmanyam, "A Roomful of Mirrors," 77.

specific detail, but prints were often observed independently from the text and it was imperative, for their legibility, to function without the exegetical support of verbal statements.

The two prints explored in this essay are certainly not isolated episodes. On the contrary, they belong to a widespread tradition of representations of non-European rulers and dignitaries that early modern Western artists reinvented according to Western iconographical parameters.⁶⁶ The portrait of Abbas I of Persia (1571–1629), included in Thomas Herbert's *A Relation of Some Yeares Travaile, Begunne Anno 1626*, is a case in point, | fig. 16 | with the ruler represented in profile, arm akimbo, riding a rampant horse and wielding a sword.⁶⁷ The print, rather than providing a credible image of Safavid Persia, was clearly reminiscent of the long-standing western tradition of equestrian monuments and—more precisely—provided Thomas Herbert's readers with an eloquent allusion to the many painted and sculptural equestrian monuments that became so popular in early seventeenth-century Europe, from the Giambolognesque tradition in Italy, France and Spain, to Rubens's and Van Dyck's equestrian portraits in Spain and England.⁶⁸

The European tradition of state portraiture provided parameters of interpretation, highly developed theoretical frameworks, and a widely accepted system of iconographical conventions for the representation of rulers—in other words, a visual vocabulary shared by most of the European courts, where monarchs, state officials, and ambassadors acted according to a choreography of rhetorical gestures, wore semantically charged garments, and followed a rigorously ritualized etiquette.⁶⁹

In the two portraits of Jahangir and Kangxi, the interiors and their materiality played a crucial role in instantiating the palace's magnificence and in regulating social rituals. Textiles dressed the walls, baldachins provided micro-architectures for the sacred body of the ruler, balustrades organized space, decoration articulated a wide gamut of narratives. The palace was a space where the interaction between people and things defined hierarchies and produced a framework for social distinction. The portraits of Jahangir and Kangxi show how Kircher attempted to transport these two rulers into such framework.

Such interiors responded to (and even anticipated) viewers' expectations, and enabled Kircher's readers to imagine these rulers, to construe them as powerful emperors. The things that populated such interiors—baldachins, wall hangings, thrones, balustrades, carpets—became primary agents of translations and, therefore "acts that produced commensurability" across cultures.⁷⁰ Moreover, the tension between the material culture of Westernizing interiors and the Asian rulers inhabiting them became a key agent regulating the oscillations between inventing exoticism and imagining familiarity. ¶

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