CHAPTER 1

Litterae Indipetae

1.1 Purpose, Structure, and Instructions

In the last decades, litterae indipetae have become the focus of attention for an increasing number of historians. Borrowing a term from the theologian Daniel Chamier (1565–1621), Emanuele Colombo defined gesuitomania as the recent explosion of studies on the Society of Jesus.¹ This “mania” inspired the study of the Jesuit order and its activities from many different perspectives: cultural studies, family histories, early modern understandings of emotions and masculinity, as well as art history, rhetoric, and psychology.² One of the strength of Jesuit sources is the sheer number of documents in general, and of indipetae letters in particular: more than twenty thousand of them are preserved in the Roman archive of the Society of Jesus, written by over six thousand religious from the sixteenth to the twentieth century.³

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³ The indipetae letters from the Italian assistancy are mostly preserved in ARSI, Fondo Gesuitico [FG] 732–751, and dated from 1589 to 1770; other Italian indipetae are in Ital. 173 (1580–1765)
Writing an *ad hoc* petition to Rome was the standard practice since the 1580s. As Aliocha Maldavsky remarks, the superior general was “an important part of the cycle of selecting missionaries,” being in contact with all the parts involved in it. Camilla Russell notices how “Europe at the turn of the seventeenth century was awash with accounts from the Jesuit missions in the Indies, while young Jesuits in colleges and novitiates eagerly sought a place on the missions, especially in the East.”

During the years covered in this book, i.e. the two generalates of Thyrso González de Santalla (1687–1705) and Michelangelo Tamburini (1706–30), Italian Jesuits were generally asking for what their companions had been requesting from the foundation of their order in about 1,500 *indipetae.* Some of them followed a pre-established format (as periodically suggested by the generals), but others were lengthy, written quite freely, and included secrets for the generals’ eyes alone.

Availability, detachment, and obedience have always characterized the Society of Jesus, so that mobility and missions were—and are—cornerstones of the order. Ignatius’s original ideas about missions had been influenced by the medieval chivalric values he treasured, but apostolic work had characterized the Church since its earliest decades. The Council of Trent (1545–63) and in *Ven.* 99 (1638–1754). As for the *indipetae* from other assistancies, see the table in Maldavsky, “Pedir las Indias.” There are two catalogs of *indipetae* in ARSI: *Indipetae (732–759)* and *Indipetae extra FG.*


6 Moreover, some of the letters were lost. On this period, see Anna Rita Capoccia, “Le destin des *Indipetae* au-delà du XVIe siècle,” in Fabre and Vincent, *Missions Religieuses Modernes,* 89–110 and “Per una lettura delle *indipetae* italiane del Settecento: Indifferenza e desiderio di martirio,” *Nouvelles de la république des lettres* 1 (2000): 7–43.

reshaped and institutionalized every aspect of religious life; missions became more formalized and related to religious orders than to charismatic individuals acting quite autonomously. The Council promoted a certain continuity and uniformity of action, but many Jesuit petitioners for the Indies kept imagining a missionary land in which they were the main actors, chasing a “crown of tribulations” in the most distant and neglected vineyards of the Lord. They wanted to leave as soon as possible, being aware that every minute of delay condemned thousands of souls whose only sin was not having heard of the word of the Lord.

As _indipetae_ indicate, Jesuits were ready to leave their residences with a short notice, carrying only the clothes they were wearing, and even without giving a formal notice to the spiritual and natural families they left behind. They were not afraid of suffering or dying; what they feared was the “bureaucracy” of the Jesuit curia, responsible for selecting among hundreds of volunteers for the missions. Even before Rome’s approval, however, Jesuits needed the approval of their local superiors: the latter did not want to send (all of) their best and brightest subjects to the overseas missions. European schools constantly needed good teachers, and this was a high priority because they were an effective means not only to recruit new Jesuits, but also to reach every social class. Usually, every Jesuit (except temporal coadjutors, that is domestic helpers) was supposed to work in schools, at least for a few years: they taught classes, revised homework, often managing large groups of students with different levels of education. Petitioners understood that teaching, though not as thrilling as the mysterious Indies, was a primary task of the Society, and they wrote their _indipetae_ letters mindful of that context.

### 1.1.1 How to Write Good _litterae indipetae_: Instructions from Above

All the petitions were written by people belonging to the same “emotional community.” The medievalist Barbara Rosenwein uses this term to define all groups of people sharing the same “systems of feeling: what these communities

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8 Among the many titles on the Council of Trent, see the classic reference by John W. O’Malley, *Trent: What Happened at the Council* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013). Some Jesuits, like Peter Canisius, had influential roles at the council: Ignatius designated Diego Laínez and Alfonso Salmerón to be theologians there; Pierre Favre was also appointed but died on his way to Trent. However, “in an age in which political, intellectual, and religious leaders consistently and vociferously demanded ‘reform of the church,’ the Jesuits spoke of it seldom,” as O’Malley explains in *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), esp. 321. On Jesuit ideas about the missions, see also Pizzorusso, “Le choix indifférent.”

(and the individuals within them) define and assess as valuable or harmful to them; the evaluations that they make about others’ emotions; the nature of the affective bonds between people that they recognize; and the modes of emotional expression that they expect, encourage, tolerate, and deplore.”

Men of different social and geographic origins shared a similar vocabulary, from the first three centuries of the Society of Jesus until its suppression (1773)—and also later (post 1815).

Almost all the petitioners for the Indies expressed inflamed feelings: fervor, desire, hearts on fire, burning and consuming emotions. Many of them admitted being obsessed by the object of their desires: overseas missions. *Litterae indipetae* are such a unique type of document that they can be described as a literary genre *per se*, with specific tropes of the *ars dictaminis*. These letters often exhibit a predetermined format: in the opening, the author recognizes his unworthiness and humbly seeks the general’s attention. In the *narratio* (the main part), he summarizes the circumstances that led him to write the documents, the sum of which was in the *petitio* (the petition), containing the request to be sent to the missions (with more or less indifference as for timing and destination). The document ends with a formal and conventional conclusion, and final greetings (*conclusio* and *salutatio*). Many *indipetae* through centuries employ this framework; many others begin *in medias res* with an inflamed *petitio*.

What did the petitioners know of the superior general and his selection policy? Some of them were aware that his secretaries were very busy, sorting out the dozens of petitions that arrived in Rome each day. Nevertheless, as the Jesuit Giuseppe Maria Amendola was assured, receiving *indipetae* was for the general more “consolation than tedium.” It was rare for petitioners to summarize what they thought were the steps for an appointment for the Indies: this happened with the Roman Francesco Corsetti (1704), who was convinced that, “in order to more easily succeed in my plan” (leaving for the missions), he had to address to the general a complete “memorial.”

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11 On the educational system of Renaissance Italy, see Paul F. Grendler, *Schooling in Renaissance Italy: Literacy and Learning, 1320–1600* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1989) and Robert Black, *Humanism and Education in Medieval and Renaissance Italy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
12 “consolazione che tedio,” ARSI, FG 751, fol. 61 (Termini, January 5, 1719). Chapter 3 will show how the generals’ answers validated this belief—even if sometimes the generals had to invite petitioners not to be too insistent and write that frequently.
Roman College (not physically far from the general), Corsetti felt the need to remind him of his missionary vocation also in writing. In 1720 Giovanni Battista Aggiutorio begged the general “to inscribe me in the Catalog where you take note of the names of everyone who wants to reach the place where my desires aspire to.”

Giovanni Domenico Pozzobonelli oscillated in 1727 between two opposing attitudes: on the one hand, he did not want to receive the “license” for the missions only “for importunity.” On the other hand, he would also have regretted “not to obtain it because Your Paternity forgot the desire God kindly granted me;” thus he took up the quill and wrote.

Over time, generals invited Jesuits to apply and contextually also gave some instructions on how to do it. Such communications contained the names of the missions more in need, and which elements the applications should possess to help the Roman secretariat in making its choice. Even if the archival preservation of indipetae does not necessarily match their production, it is clear that these letters influenced the number of petitions of certain years. Shortly before the period taken into consideration in this book, Giovanni Paolo Oliva (in office 1664–81) wrote to the French superiors to encourage missionaries for the Antilles to step forward: immediately afterwards, more and more indipetae requesting this destination reached Rome. A few decades later and in Italy, the petitioner Maurizio Zaffino remembered how around 1691 general González issued a circular inviting missionaries to the Chinese missions; the Milanese Jesuit had never applied before because he believed that destination impossible to reach. Similarly, Paolo Faraone wrote from Palermo his fifth petition in 1700, on the occasion of the “fervent letter addressed last year by Your Paternity to this Province in a special way, to urge its members to the apostolic missions of America.”

14 “a scrivermi nel Catalogo dove registransi tutti coloro che, giusta g’Ordini di Vostra Paternità, devono incaminarsi colà dove aspirano i miei desiderii,” ARSI, FG 751, fol. 82 (Naples, February 24, 1720).

15 “per importunità […] non ottenerla, perché Vostra Paternità si sia dimenticato il desiderio ch’Iddio s’è degnato benignamente concedermi,” ARSI, FG 751, fol. 327 (Milan, January 22, 1727) and FG 751, fol. 339 (Milan, December 17, 1727).


17 “la lettera circolare di Vostra Paternità, con la quale esorta ciascuno ch’habbia tali desideri ad esporli,” ARSI, FG 749, fol. 369 (Milan, August 22, 1691). It was not possible to find the original notice by the general.

18 “fervorosa lettera indirizzata da Vostra Paternità l’anno trascorso, in modo speciale a questa Provincia, per animare i suoi sudditi alle apostoliche missioni di America […] missioni delle galle e carceri […] appreso piú lingue,” ARSI, FG 750, fol. 86 (Palermo, July 20, 1700). Faraone was never destined to the missions, and died fifteen years later.
As Claudio Ferlan noticed, 1722 was a “crucial moment for the definition of a real indipeta genre.”\(^{19}\) At the beginning of that year, Michelangelo Tamburini addressed to all provincials the circular *De mittendis ad Indias novis operariis* (*About Sending New Workers to the Indies*). The communication was to be publicly read in the Jesuit residences to promote the vocations for the Indies, and invited the aspiring missionaries to list in their letters age, health condition, time spent in the Society and performed tasks. After Tamburini’s letter, there was an “explosion” of indipetae in the Italian assistancy: there were thirty-seven in 1721, and they almost tripled a year later.\(^{20}\)

The influence of Tamburini’s document was not only quantitative, but qualitative too: from then on, indipetae were strictly modeled on his instructions. In the first months after his exhortation, almost all the letters were diligently written according to the framework provided by the general; moreover, many indipetae listed just the required data. This concision and “objectivity” greatly reduces their interest from a cultural-historical point of view: there was no more space for creativity, childhood memories, miracles, and dreams. Most letters were brief, stereotypical, showing none of the passion which transpired from the indipetae of the previous months. In these circumstances, the letters of long-term petitioners are even more relevant exceptions: how did react those Jesuits already used to write to the general, after the new directives? Finally, in 1722 and 1723, new and una tantum petitioners were more frequent than repeated letters: as suddenly as they appear, these first-timers’ names disappear from the senders’ lists very soon.

Many (but not all) of the indipetae written after Tamburini’s epistle mentioned his exhortation. As soon as the end of January 1722, Stanislao de Marco wrote from Naples “in conformity with the order of Your Paternity.”\(^{21}\) The letter did not get him with what he wanted, and the Jesuit died in his city fifteen years later. In March of the same year, Giovanni Saverio Bongiardina listed his

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\(^{20}\) See Appendix.

\(^{21}\) “in conformità dell’ordine di Vostra Paternità, manifestatoci per mezzo d’una lettera al Padre Provinciale circa la vocazione alle missioni dell’India,” *Arsi*, *FG* 751, fol. 150 (Naples, January 29, 1722). For de Marco’s death, see Fejér, *Defuncti secundi saeculi*, 25.
personal data, “obeying to what your Paternity demands in his letter.”

In the same spring Nicolò de Martino noticed how, after “Your Paternity’s exhortation letter was read in our Refectory,” the many Jesuits already interested in the missions “felt an even more burning fire as for their Holy wish.”

De Martino “experienced this same effect” in himself, therefore wrote his one and only petition. Antonino Sinatra, who likewise had never applied before, testified how, after the general’s letter was “read a little while ago in our common refectory,” it had “rekindled in me the desire I had since (I was) a Novice, to apply for the Indies.” After listening to these words, wherever he went Sinatra felt an “inner voice that tells me: It is impossible for you to beg the general, without being satisfied with your demands.” Although Giuseppe Cacace felt “not […] worthy for now of that grace,” he implored the general to “inscribe me in that very fortunate book which registers the names of those who seek the Indies,” hoping that “sooner or later I will go there.”

About the same time, Mauro Berarducci felt a great vocation after “the last communication of Your Paternity, which exhorted and invited us Jesuits to give an answer to the many requests of evangelical workers which constantly arrive here.” The forty-four-year old man, a Jesuit for twenty-eight years, had already presented his requests in 1699 and 1705. In this case, Tamburini’s letter refreshed an old and almost dormant vocation but did not guarantee any fulfillment to it: Berarducci died in Naples a decade later. From the same city, Giovanni Chiavacci wrote a typical letter for the year 1722, beginning in medias res announcing in the first line the “most
ardent desire” born in him even before becoming a Jesuit, “to end my life among the Infidels.” This idea was “so revived by your sweet and fatherly exhortations,” that he could not but write his own plea. He was ready to “learn and do everything,” and to “overcome any obstacle that someone […] could raise to prevent the fulfillment of my resolution.” Chiavacci probably thought that his local superiors might not agree with his departure. He concluded his letter listing the data requested by Tamburini: “my age is about twenty-seven years, with seven years of Religious life; my Nation is Tuscany and my Fatherland Pistoia; I am not robust, but have perfect health.”

Tamburini’s exhortation about *litterae indipetae* were integrated and reaffirmed later by Franz Retz (1673–1750, in office 1730–50), who in 1734 addressed to all provincial superiors an instruction on the basic information needed from petitioners for the Indies. First of all, Rome needed to know the candidates’ name, homeland, age, grade in the Society, studies and tasks: the investigation was “rather detailed, and was intended to allow the general and his helpers in the decision.” Provincials needed to inquire if the aspirants had enough strength and health, if they had prudence and talents for missionary life, if they were moved by the right intentions, if they were good-natured and finally whether they would have easily accommodate to the new customs of the missions, being able to endure difficulties and dangers. The ideal candidate had to be devout, humble, tame, charitable, disposed to love mortifications and poverty, obedient, indifferent about the destination and the assignment. He had to have sufficient zeal for the countless hardships and inconveniences he would have met.

These were the few explicit and written rules for a successful application to the Jesuit missions, but what other criteria guided the general and his secretaries

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27 “il desiderio ardentissimo […] di andare una volta a terminar la vita tra gli Infedeli […] con le dolci Paterni esortazioni talmente ravvivato […] apprendere et esercitarmi in qual-sivoglia altra cosa […] superare qualunque ostacolo che da qualcuno […] fosse addotto per impedire l’adempimento della mia risoluzione […] la mia età è d’anni ventisette meno alcuni giorni, e anni sette di Religione; di Nazione Toscano e di Patria Pistoiese; di complessione non robusta, ma di perfetta salute,” ARSI, FG 751, fol. 154 (Naples, February 7, 1722).

28 “Capita informationis de iis, qui petunt Missiones transmarinas,” ARSI, Ep. NN. 9, fol. 151. This was the kind of information Jesuit Provincials had to send about the candidates living in their territories. See *Synopsis historiae Societatis Iesu* (Lovanii: Typis ad Sancti Alphonsi, 1950, column 306).

29 “l’indagine era piuttosto dettagliata e aveva lo scopo di consentire allo stesso generale, e a chi lo affiancava nella decisione sulla eventuale destinazione missionaria, di essere adeguatamente informato su qualità fisiche e morali, nonché doti intellettuali, disponibilità e motivazioni di ogni candidato alle Indie,” Ferlan, “Candidato alle Indie,” 32.

30 ARSI, Ep. NN. 9, fol. 153.
when deciding whom to send among hundreds of available candidates? As for the sixteenth- and seventeenth centuries, Alessandro Guerra remembers how the Constitutions underlined the importance of selecting “people who can be fully trusted. For places where more physical work is needed, [choose] the healthiest and most robust people. For places with spiritual dangers, the most experienced in virtue and trustworthy people.”

The general intervened at all stages of the operation: for instance, in the Spanish assistancy at the beginning of the seventeenth century, Aliocha Maldavsky concludes that the concrete organization of the journey was negotiated by the single provinces and the secular power (the crown and its administration), but the choice of personnel was ultimately up to him. He was assisted in the task of recruiting mainly by the procurators: Charlotte de Castelnau L’Estoile studied a few personnel lists that Rome and Lisbon used to exchange when departures were approaching. These documents contain the same personal data that were available in the indipetae: place of birth, years spent within the order, experience in studying and teaching, health.

On the other side, what were the criteria guiding the petitioners in their application? The majority of them, first of all, asked in a generic way for “the Indies.” Very frequent references to Francis Xavier (1506–52) suggest that Asia might be implied, but sometimes petitioners mentioned him and at the same time asked for the West Indies: the link between the Apostle of the East and the “real” East was not so exclusive. The “Indies” were what petitioners aspired to, and the Society of Jesus was their way to reach them: this desire often started even before their entrance into the Society. Cesare Filippo D’Oria, for instance, had felt a “vocation to the Indian missions” since he was a lay person, and this

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31 “si devono inviare persone scelte e delle quali maggiormente ci si possa fidare. Per le attività in cui vi è più da lavorare fisicamente, le persone più sane e robuste. Per le cose che presentano maggiori pericoli spirituali, persone più provate nella virtù e più secure,” Costituzioni della Compagnia di Giesù, par. 624, quoted in Guerra, “Per un’archeologia della strategia missionaria,” 150.


33 Departures took place from Lisbon, usually in March or April for climatic reasons. Apparently, in Portugal it was more common to speak with local superiors or procurator, than to write to the general concerning the missionary appointment: this is the reason why there are not many indipetae from the Portuguese assistancy, as explained in Charlotte de Castelnau L’Estoile, “Élection et vocation: Le choix de la mission dans la province jésuite du Portugal à la fin du XVIe siècle,” in Missions Religieuses Modernes: “Notre lieu est le monde,” ed. Pierre-Antoine Fabre and Bernard Vincent (Rome: École française de Rome, 2007), 21–43; see also Lamalle, “L’archivio di un grande ordine,” 102–3. Many Portuguese families destined their sons to the Society of Jesus, thus missionary lives were a natural outcome.

34 As chapter 4 shows.
“was one of the main reasons that led me to choose the Society of Jesus” in the 1710s. After twelve years in the order, this desire still persisted and was “very alive” in him.35 The Milanese Maurizio Zaffino confessed in 1692 that “it was so ardent” in him the “desire for the missions in the Indies” that “always, even as a child, not even knowing what the Indies were,” he had coveted them. After entering the order, he felt in his soul “the increasing desire to employ every part of me in the missions among the Infidels.”36 Similarly, the twenty-two-year-old Antonio Calcaterra openly admitted that it was precisely to go overseas that he had turned to the Society of Jesus. This vocation was born one year before he became a Jesuit, and “this was always the only reason why I put the Society before any other religious order: because I hoped to find in it, after some time, what I crave so ardently.”37

Petitioners for the Indies are the best testimonials of the fact that the Society of Jesus has always been associated with the global Catholic endeavor. Its name was inextricably associated with the far and unexplored territories: to reach them, the Jesuit order offered a “preferential route,” when compared to other religious orders. Girolamo Lombardi confirms this connection in his letter dated 1725: he wanted to “offer to the barbarians the life God gave to me” and felt a desire for the Indies “with great eagerness, since my childhood [...] one of the first desires I ever had, as soon as I reached the age of reason.” Lombardi was making plans to reach the Indies by himself: “even as a secular person, I would have tried to put this desire into practice.” He heard, however “certain things about Jesuits, and they convinced me it would be easier to pursue them in this religious order than elsewhere.” After pondering his options, he decided “to put on this robe, in which I find myself very happy.”38 Even clearer was Domenico Sorrentino in 1716: “for no reason but seeing its commitment in sending subjects to the Indies, did I grow fond of the Holy Society

35 “vocazione alle Missioni dell’Indie [...] fu uno de’ principali motivi che mi spinsero a chiedere la Compagnia [...] vivissimo,” ARSI, FG 750, fol. 314 (Genoa, January 14, 1716).
36 “si ardente il desiderio delle missioni dell’Indie [...] sempre, fino da Fanciullo quando anche non sapevo cosa si fussero Indie [...] sempre più crescere questa brama d’impiegarmi tutto nelle missioni degli’Infedeli,” ARSI, FG 749, fol. 480v ( Milan, August 6, 1692).
37 “il Signore si compiace chiamarmi nell’Indie [...] questo fu sempre l’unico motivo per cui anteposi la compagnia ad ogn’altra religione, sperando in questa trovarne col tempo quello che si ardentemente bramavo,” ARSI, FG 751, fol. 211 (Nice, May 11, 1722).
38 “con somma avidità fin dalla mia fanciullezza [...] uno de’ primi desideri che concepissi dopo che hebbi uso di ragione [...] dare tra barbari la vita per quel Dio che me la diede [...] per certo ancor secolare avrei messo in esecuzione un tal desiderio [...] per fama alcune cose de’ Gesuiti, che mi fecsero credere più facile una tale essecuzione in questa Religione che altrove [...] di vestirmi di questo habito, di che mi ritruvo sommamente contento,” ARSI, FG 751, fol. 299 (Piacenza, September 23, 1725).
of Jesus.”\(^{39}\) He also added that, “before knowing such a precious zeal in the Ignatian Religion, I did not feel any inclination for the Society of Jesus.” What convinced him to “commit all my heart” in it, was “because I hoped to be one of those lucky ones”—that is, those sent to the overseas territories. A few months after this letter, Sorrentino was granted the missionary license.\(^{40}\)

What exactly were “the Indies” for an early modern Jesuit? Roscioni believes that, more than a real place, they could be described as a “mental landscape.”\(^{41}\) The destinations that petitioners had in mind included the Far East and the Americas first of all, but also the Near East or Africa.\(^{42}\) What was important for them was to cut off every bond with Europe, as soon as possible and forever, with no contact with their old life anymore. After the early modern geographic expansions, the imagination of many Europeans traveled even further, and with new “rivals:” not only the familiar Jews and Muslims, but new peoples, imaginary and real, of whose existence nobody was aware before. The Catholic and therefore “universal” message had to be delivered to every one of them. Many Jesuits could not find any rest thinking about the thousands of men, women, and children dying without any knowledge of the “true faith,” and thus destined to eternal damnation: they could not but apply to save these souls. Superiors tried, but with little success, to oppose to the “real Indies” the “Indies here” or “our Indies”—that is to say, Europe. The adventurous journeys into an unknown and “desert” (without any Christians) territory guaranteed an existential turn which could hardly be compared to an “ordinary” life on the Old Continent.

Maldavsky highlights the “imprecision of the allusions to missionary places” as expressed by petitioners for the Indies.\(^{43}\) This was caused in the first place by the “indifference” requested of Jesuits in their religious life, and consequently reverberated also in their missionary choice. *Litterae indipetae* seem

\(^{39}\) “non per altro mi sono affezionato alla Santa Compagni, che per vederla impegnata di inviare soggetti all’Indie […] prima di conoscere questo zelo si pretioso nella Religione del Santo Padre, il mio genio non era punto inclinato alla Compagnia, ma tutto il mio cuore s’impegnò a volerla con la sola speranza di poter essere uno di quei fortunati,” ARSI, FG 750, fol. 357 (Naples, July 9, 1716).

\(^{40}\) ARSI, FG 750, fol. 258 (Naples, July 20, 1723).


\(^{42}\) For some Jesuits, also the areas suffering with plagues could become a valid alternative to overseas missions. However, they were as dangerous and potentially deadly, sometimes even more: Jesuit schools were always in need of personnel, and the superiors did not want to lose precious resources.

\(^{43}\) “necesaria indiferencia por el destino geográfico […] carácter impreciso de la evocación de los lugares de misión por los redactores,” Maldavsky, “Pedir las Indias,” 166–67.
to imply either a certain geographic-cultural ignorance, or in any case a consistent vagueness in expectations. They can hardly be used to assess the extent and the quality of the circulation of information from the missionary countries to Europe in general, and to Jesuit colleges in particular. Jesuit schools, in fact, also taught geography of the newly discovered areas, as several sentences from *litterae indipetae* confirm. Maldavsky concludes that there was “quite an unawareness between the real situation of a mission, and what petitioners aspired to.”

Jesuits living in the main European cultural centers had access to books (in Latin, but also in vernacular languages) describing the new geographical discoveries; and all Jesuits shared a basic education, but almost all of them expressed rather vague ideas of their missionary future. *Indipetae* were not meant to inform the general about the lives and conditions in missionary countries, but to petition successfully to be sent there. The thousands of Italian candidates writing from the end of the seventeenth to the beginning of the eighteenth century do not include any general detailed expectations or information on the historical or geopolitical context of the required country. More than ignorance, Ignatian “indifference” played a fundamental role in this trend.

There are a few exceptions: for instance Attilio Antonio Luci had heard in 1695 “such good news from China, where there is now freedom to preach the Gospel and build Churches and Colleges.” He referred to the edict by the Kangxi emperor dated 1692 but, despite these optimistic updates, Luci died in Naples three years later. *Indipetae* showed more frequently their writers’ vagueness of expectations on the required destination: Niccolò Longo, for example, asked in 1721 for Madurai as a destination which guaranteed the greatest suffering. He was however ready to go anywhere else: “either among the Heretics or the Schismatics or the Gentiles, in the East or in the West: ecce ego, mitte me.”

Similarly, Emanuel Querini was “very ready to go to both Indies, or

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44 “una gran inconsciencia de la realidad de la misión a la que aspiraban [...] un índice de la circulación y de la apropiación de la información acerca de las zonas de misión y de la experiencia misionera” (Maldavsky, “Pedir las Indias,” 155).


47 Fejér, *Defuncti secundi saeculi*, 190.

48 “sia tra gli Eretici, sia tra gli Schismatici, sia tra i Gentili nell’Oriente o nell’Occidente; ecce ego, mitte me,” *ARS*, FG 751, fol. 130 (Genoa, November 16, 1721). Longo left for East Asia in
to the countries of the Heretics or to Tartary, and to the Turks [...] to spill my sweat and blood.” Francesco Corsetti wanted in 1715 to be sent “immediately, barefoot, without any baggage to Germany, then in Moscow, then to Batavia [Java], then to China, or to any other part of the Indies, both Eastern and Western, that you desire, and you will immediately hear that I am executing your orders.”

Salvatore Saverio Marino, in one of his sixteen indipetae dated 1716–17, explained how he wanted to leave his “homeland and native kingdom, to devote to the cultivation of souls among either barbarians and gentiles, or heretics, or Mohammedans.”

Even if the Sicilian focused on the Philippines, he remained open to any destination: if the general intended to send him to Japan, he invited him to “notify me of your will with the slightest sign, and I will go there swimming, if a ship is not available.”

If his superiors wanted him to “instruct children in the less valued/basic schools, I will do it.” Even if he would have been destined to work as a temporal coadjutor: “I will deem it the greatest good fortune of my life, because I would be doing God’s will.” Marino’s desire was partially fulfilled: he actually left for the East Indies, but died at sea in 1734.

Indipetae, therefore, can surprise for the absence—and not the presence—of any information on missionary lives, but what really matters in these sources are the motivations to be sent there as listed and vividly described by their authors, together with the reason to be chosen as “the perfect missionary.”

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49 “prontissimo ad andar nell’una e nell’altra India, o ne’ paesi degl’Eretici o nella Tartaria, e ne’ Turchi [...] a spargere i sudori ed anche il sangue,” ARSI, FG 750, fol. 285 (n.p., August 7, 1712). Querin’s name does not appear in the Jesuit defuncti catalog.

50 “subito a pie’ scalzi senz’alcun viatico per la Germania, indi in Moscova, indi in Batavia, indi alla Cina; o per qualsivoglia altra parte dell’Indie, o orientali o occidentali, che desideri, e subito mi udirà porre in esecuzione i suoi comandi,” ARSI, FG 750, fol. 308 (Florence, May 9, 1715).

51 “patria e regno natio, per attendere alla coltura delle anime o in mezzo a’ barbari e gentili, o hereti, o Maomettani,” ARSI, FG 750, fol. 358 (Palermo, July 20, 1716). Marino died in 1734 at sea (Fejér, Defuncti secundi saeculi, 235).

52 “mi notifichi la sua volontà con minimo segno che io, in mancanza di barche, a nuoto mi porterò in quelle isole [...] addottrinare fanciulli nelle più infime scuole di grammatica, lo farò [...] ne’ ministeri de fratelli coadiutori, io stimerò somma somma mia fortuna il servire la Compagnia in questo stato, facendo la volontà di Dio,” ARSI, FG 750, fol. 422 (Palermo, January 8, 1717).
1.2 A “Typical” Petitioner?: Health and Age

Health conditions could—but did not always—play a crucial role among the decisive factors to be taken into consideration for a missionary appointment. On the one hand, it was not enough *per se* because an aspiring missionary could be the healthiest person of his college, but also have negative characteristics like mediocre intellectual virtues, lack of prudence, or a shaky vocation. On the other hand, if petitioners were admittedly not particularly robust, they could try to put a favorable spin on it. They could claim that their superiors and families were exaggerating their health problems, or that a miracle had recently cured them, or that the only way they could have really recovered their well-being was putting it to test in the missions. If they had undeniably bad health, they still tried to depict it in a favorable way: Giovanni Andrea Ghersi, for instance, was sad because he did not deserve the Indies for his “great demerits” and his “insufficient health, of which perhaps Your Paternity received not entirely favorable accounts.” He assured the general, however, that the situation was under control and not as serious as it seemed: “if in the past I suffered because of blood problems, I am doing well now.”

Poor physical conditions—real, or as such presented by their “rivals”—could be a last-minute obstacle to an already planned departure. For example, in 1721 Francesco Cappella had already “embarked on the long-awaited journey to the Indies;” suddenly, his superiors ordered him to “desist.” The Neapolitan provincial then told him that the “reason for this change of mind was the clear weakness of my health,” which troubled Cappella’s direct superiors. The petitioner was sorry, and refused to corroborate such a complaint: “it has been many years since I even visited an infirmary, and moreover I successfully endured

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53 “era uno fra i più severi criteri di selezione fra i candidati, anche se non assoluto: la sola salute non bastava di per sé quando era accompagnata da altri gravi difetti,” Guerra, “Per un’archeologia,” 153.

54 “grandissimi demeriti […] la pocha sanità, di cui forse potrebbe Vostra Paternità havere non del tutto favorevoli relationi […] se per il passato l’abbondanza del sangue mi diede qualche fastidio, hora mi lascia riposare,” ARSI, FG 749, fol. 355 (Genoa, March 3, 1691).

55 “quanto mi abbia rammaricato il nuovo arresto in punto, che già mi era imbarcato per il sospirato viaggio alle indie […] motivo di tal cambiamento […] l’esposta fiacchezza di mia salute […] molti anni né pur son comparso per il minimo che all’Infermeria, ed ho potuto reggere alla fatica di viaggi ancor disastrosi […] pretesti, affacciati dall’umano affetto di chi altre volte pur s’ingerì, acciò i Superiori mutassero sentimento circa la mia persona […] tal uno presso i due Padri Provinciali, passato e presente, giunse fino ad insinuare che io, già pentito, mal volentieri partissi […] che di nuovo mi v’accordi la Grazia tanto bramata,” ARSI, FG 751, fol. 139 (Naples, December 30, 1721). It is not known whether the Sicilian was sent to the Indies nor even if he died as a Jesuit.
the fatigues of the most disastrous journeys.” What his relatives and superiors depicted as sickness, were nothing else than “pretexts, born out of the human affection of those who in other occasions as well intruded, trying to change the superiors’ mind about me.” His family apparently had intervened before, begging the local superiors to give general false and misleading information about his health. Further aggravating this situation, “someone insinuated to two provincials, this and the former one, that I already regretted my petitions and would have left against my will.” The aspiring missionary denied these as false accusations, and with his poignant letter warmly appealed to the general: “please, once again, give me that longed-for grace.” It is likely however that his family’s operation was successful and Cappella never left for the Indies. As for age, there are no statistics about how old Jesuit petitioners for the Indies were: such a study would require a long time and a meticulous analysis not only of indipetae (because petitioners quite rarely specified their age), but also of the registers containing the basic biographical data of Jesuits (Catalogi Triennales) and multiple repertoires (bibliographies, catalogs of dead Jesuits etc), which is not the aim of this book. It is possible however to shed some light on the topic through a dozen examples on the age at which men from the Italian peninsula entered the Society of Jesus, applied for the missions, saw their request accepted, left for the Indies and finally arrived there—or not. These examples are taken from some of the Jesuits who, between the timespan considered in this book, distinguished themselves for their persistence and passion in requesting the missions, especially in the Far East.56 

Giovanni Berlendi, born in 1664 in Bari, entered the Society of Jesus in Naples when he was twenty years old. From there, he wrote his first petition for the Indies a decade later, aged thirty, immediately showing a vehement obsession with Japan. Berlendi renewed his interest in that destination (alternatively proposing England or China) twice. He never left Italy and the order of St Ignatiu, and died at the age of eighty-one. Agostino Cappelli, born in 1679 in Ascoli, joined the Society of Jesus aged sixteen. He wrote his first request from Viterbo four years later, asking to be sent to the Indies and reiterating this desire until, when he was twenty-five, he was sent to East Asia. In 1706 he reached Malabar, where he died ten years later. Giovanni Battista Federici was born in 1693 in Sicily. He sent his first petition from Palermo at the age of

56 All the following biographical information is based on the Schedario unificato available in ARSI, looking sub nomine, on the Catalogi Triennales, on the repertoires of Jesuits sent to the East Indies and on the catalogs of the Defuncti. The aim of this section is just to show how age varied during the various stages of a Jesuit’s life: when he entered the order, when he wrote the first petition, when he professed the fourth vow, when he left for the Indies, when he died or exited the order.
twenty-two. He later renewed his appeals for the East Indies several times until finally, in 1721, he was accepted for that destination. Sent the following year to India, he died there after three years of missionary work and health problems. Filippo Maria Furnari, born in Sicily in 1680, wrote a dozen *indipetae* starting when he was twenty-one years old. After fifteen years of insistence, his hopes finally came true. In 1718 he was sent to the province of the Philippines, where he died around 1746. Ludovico Gonzaga, born in Mantua in 1673, joined the Society of Jesus in Bologna when he was seventeen. He was twenty-six years old at the time of his first letter, in which he showed a clear interest for the East Indies, and in particular for the Chinese mission. At the age of thirty-three he was sent there. He professed the four votes in Beijing in 1708, and died in Macau a decade later. Nicolò Migliaccio was born in Palermo in 1670. A Jesuit since sixteen, he started sending his petitions to Rome when he was thirty-two. His Sicilian superiors described his health condition as poor and prevented his departure, and he desisted from sending letters at the age of thirty-four. After professing the four vows in Messina, he died in Rome before turning fifty.

Francesco Antonio Riccardi, born in 1670, became a Jesuit aged twenty-four. He wrote his first petition from Turin when he was thirty-two years old, mentioning a similar (but lost) request made eight years before. A year later, he received the “license” to leave and, after some delays, headed for Malabar in 1708. After becoming fully professed in the province of Goa, he died there aged sixty-five. Francesco Maria Riccio was born in Palermo in 1693. He entered the Society aged sixteen, and wrote his first petition for the Indies seven years later. He renewed his pleas several times in the following two years but, for unknown reasons, he left the order when he was about thirty. Carlo Sarti, born in Cremona in 1706, became a Jesuit when he was nineteen. Three years later, he wrote his fervid first petition, soon after followed by another one in which he made the destination he wanted explicit: it was China. He applied one last time at the age of twenty-three. One year later, as a student who had not been ordained a priest yet, Sarti left the order. Giovanni Battista Vignoli, born around Rome in 1682, entered the Society of Jesus when he was twenty-five. He sent his first petition at the age of thirty-two, underlining how he had chosen the religious order precisely because it would give him more chances to realize his missionary dream. He repeated his pleas first for Madurai, then for Tibet, and finally for any mission but died in his own province almost eighty years old.

These examples clearly show how petitioners for the East Indies (and, more in general, petitioners for any overseas mission) usually entered the Society before their twenties. Their missionary zeal was the consequence and often also the premise of this life choice. Some started applying for the Indies as soon as they became Jesuits (during their early twenties), others waited until
the end of their *curriculum studiorum* (at the end of the said decade). Most were accepted as missionaries around their thirties. With overly young petitioners, the superiors could reasonably suspect that their missionary desire was an adolescent’s whims. Thus, when young Jesuits applied, they tried to emphasize how their vocation had already been tested for a long time, and how their superiors and spiritual fathers had positively evaluated it. Francesco Saverio Farugi wrote in 1727 about his ardent vocation to the mission, already foreseeing that his young age could be considered not mature enough. Being nineteen years old, it was precisely on his youth that he relied: according to his words, a young man had greater “ease to accommodate himself to so many sufferings and disasters, such as learning languages, getting to know the way of the missions.”57 Salvatore Saverio Marino wrote to the general in 1717, presenting himself as an ideal candidate for the East Indies and assuring the general that “I am not that young, as it seems from my face, because I am twenty-two already.”58

As for the ideal age to surrender and stop sending petitions, Jesuits acted differently: some of them insisted for a few years, others for decades. As a matter of fact, it was not implausible for a general to appoint as missionaries men over thirty, who had asked for the Indies for more than half of their lives. Older petitioners, moreover, had qualities their younger competitors did not have—and which they accurately underlined in their letters. Elder aspiring missionaries usually had completed their studies and had some experience in teaching and preaching. On the one hand, they could already master foreign languages, but on the other they admitted it was more difficult for them to learn them anew. They were less likely to survive long journeys but, since they mostly were ordained priests, they would have had experience in giving the last rites to the crew and their brothers.

In 1700, fifty-three-year-old Giovanni Lainez longed for the mission. He did not want to travel to the “distant” Indies, but was satisfied with being sent to Tunis, “spending the rest of my days closely assisting those very needy souls.”59 He died in Palermo, Sicily, a dozen years later. Another Jesuit not worrying about old age was Giuseppe Scapecchi, asking in 1717 for “the most laborious

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57 “facilità d’accomodarsi a tanti patimenti e disastri, come imparar le lingue, impratichirsi del modo delle missioni,” ARSI, FG 751, fol. 338 (Rome, December 5, 1727).
58 “Né a ciò può ostare quello, mi disse Vostra Paternità d’esser io molto giovane, mentre non non [sic] son tanto giovane, quanto alla faccia dimostro, havendo ventidue anni già mesi son compiti,” ARSI, FG 750, fol. 521 (Frascati, October 27, 1717).
and most horrid Indies.” Even if this was his first request, he had been nurturing this desire for years, but never applied simply because until then he had not received any “special impulse” to do so. Afraid that the general might consider him too old for such a task, he asked him “not to regard my age of fifty-six years, because I enjoy good health, thanks to the holy Grace [...] I do not have any headaches or stomachache, I am used to every kind of food, and have also been able to resist a stormy Sea.” He argued with the general about the advantages of accepting the petition of an aged Jesuit like him: “I have completed my studies already; although unworthy, I am a professed father and have also taught Philosophy; besides, I have taught Humanities for many years, Rhetoric for eleven years [...] I also worked in local Missions, without any inconvenience." The general’s secretary however did not seem convinced of this reasoning, because he wrote on the back of the letter a neutral “asks for the Indies albeit aged 56.” Scapecchi never left and died in Rome in his seventies.

Italian applications at the turn of the eighteenth century show how, in general, the strategy of repeated applications was often rewarded by success. The general’s secretaries seemed to appreciate Jesuits who fiercely resisted familiar opposition or the superiors’ intrusions, never abandoning hope despite the current political and diplomatic situation. The general’s collaborators selected the missionaries not only based on indipetæ, but also according to the information received by local superiors and the preferences expressed by the procurators. One petition could be enough in some cases, while other Jesuits applied dozens of times: many elements were involved in order for an application among hundreds to become “successful.”

As for the average longevity in early modern age, Jesuits had a significantly higher life expectancy (up to thirty percent more) than the European aristocrats with whom, for cultural and economic conditions, it is possible to compare them. According to Dauril Alden’s monumental study focused on the timespan 1525–1700, the Jesuits working in the province of Portugal lived a little less (to the age of about fifty-four years) than their confreres in the East and

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63 “le più laboriose e più orride che si trovino [...] impulso speciale [...] non riguardare l’età mia di 56. anni: perché io per la divina Grazia [...] mi sento con buona sanità, senza dolor di testa né di stomaco, accomodato a ogni sorte di cibo, che ha retto anche al Mar burascoso [...] si può metter a risparmio dell’età gli studi già fatti; essendo io, benché indegnamente, un Professo e avendo letto anche Filosofia; oltre a molt’anni di lettere umane e ora mai undici anni di Rettorica in Firenze; avendo fatto anche alle volte delle Missioni senza incomodo [...] dimanda le Indie benché in età di 56 anni,” ARSI, FC 750, fol. 441 (Florence, February 16, 1717). Scapecchi died in Rome in 1734 (Fejér, Defuncti secundi saeculi, 43).
West Indies (to about fifty-nine). Jesuits had a longer life first of all thanks to the vow of chastity, which prevented them from contracting the venereal diseases responsible for the deaths of many people, in Europe as well as in the Americas or the Indies. Likewise, lay people frequently died because of duels and violent fights, which were forbidden to Jesuits. A missionary life, made of oceanic crossings, raids of pirates, and storms was not as deadly as one could think. Moreover, many Jesuits lived in these harsh conditions just for a short time: most of their activities took place in the urban residences of the new country, less dangerous and forged on the familiar European models. Out of necessity and economic reasons, Jesuits often were skilled masters of medicines: they cured not only their confreres, but also nobles and natives turning to them to heal or improve their health condition. Finally, the balanced diet and the general moderation on which the Constitutions insisted, kept Jesuits away from the excesses that caused the premature deaths of many lay people of the time. Nonetheless, not few Jesuits perished at sea, while others died due to diseases contracted during navigation or exhaustion in the first period of stay in the missionary country. In some cases, the decision of the general not to send a petitioner was clearly motivated by his bad health. Many of the candidates reported as sick by their superiors died just a few years later in their province of origin, but other fervent and sickly petitioners who were not accepted as missionaries reached remarkable ages in their own province. On the other side of the world, the situation did not change, so, in conclusion, different conditions of life in missionary territory did not necessarily affect the average lifespan of a Jesuit during the early modern age.

1.2.1 Linguistic and Scientific Skills
Petitioners could not keep their narration distant from reality in the case of health conditions and age, but they did enjoy more freedom when writing about their personal talents and skills. On the one hand, they could proclaim themselves incompetent, just a weight for their province, someone to let go as soon as possible. On the other hand—and less frequently—they admitted and underlined specific abilities: speaking different languages or having a special gift for them, being able to play musical instruments, or possessing advanced knowledge in science and mathematics. Being polyglot could be a key-feature

62 Not so many Jesuits died in the route for China: many were simply redirected to other Asian destinations. See Frederik Vermote, “Travellers Lost and Redirected: Jesuit Networks and the Limits of European Exploration in Asia,” Itinerario 41, no. 3 (2017): 484–506.
and give a fundamental value to a candidacy, as the case of Giuseppe Bobadilla shows. He wrote in 1704 that he was told to inform the general about his missionary desire, adding that the procurator Medel said to him that “he would have gladly appointed me to his Mission in the Philippines, because my Father and Mother are native Spaniards, and I know the Castilian language, which educated people mostly use there.”

Jesuits had practiced *accommodatio* in China since the 1580s, that is adapting to the local customs of the population they encountered. This far-sighted strategy employed not only exterior aspects like adapting to local clothes and food, but also theoretical education. In the case of the Chinese empire, Jesuit actively collaborated with indigenous scientists, astronomers and mathematicians: with the Chinese calendar’s reformation, the introduction of new technological tools (the telescope, new measurement systems, more precise geographical maps), and the decennial direction of the Imperial Observatory and the Tribunal of Mathematics. Aspiring missionaries were aware of the connection of China with Mathematics, a subject which the Society of Jesus always proudly promoted (and sometimes exaggerated), and they sought to exploit it in their petitions—with different outcomes.

From Sicily, Antonino Porzio expressed his desire to serve in China as a missionary in at least a dozen letters, dated 1705–18. Born in 1682 in Messina, Porzio dreamed of putting his advanced scientific mathematical knowledge to good use at the Qing court. In his first letter, he emphasized his diligence in high scientific studies: “Oh, how happy would I be, if I would be lucky enough to work until death in those areas in East Asia [...]”. This was one of the reasons

63 “tra l’altre cose che, per essere io Figlio di Padre e Madre spagnuoli nativi e possedendo la lingua castigliana, mi avrebbe volentieri assegnato alla sua Missione delle Filippine, ove la gente colta si serve assai di questa lingua,” ARSI, FG 750, fol. 173 (Genoa, July 16, 1704).

See on this regard also the following petitioner: “Questo mio desiderio [delle Indie] mi si accresce per esser sano, per saper la lingua spagnola et per havere qualche abilità a qualche lingua straniera, per haver appreso in breve tempo la spagnola senza molto aiuto né metodo,” ARSI, FG 733, fol. 11/1 (Naples, June 23, 1599), quoted in Guerra, “Per un’archeologia della strategia missionaria,” 151.

64 Before missionary developments in China, as long as Jesuits could operate in Japan they had some success with Japanese lords interested in science but most of all technological innovations like firearms. On this topic see Adriana Boscare, *Ventura e sventura dei gesuiti in Giappone* (1549–1639) (Venice: Cafoscarina, 2008). Nonetheless, the Chinese were generally more eager than the Japanese to learn from Europeans and Jesuits, and this interest led to the systematic translations, adaptations, and publications of many European classics, an activity which involved not only Europeans but also Chinese scholars’ work. See Nicolas Standaert, “Christianity Shaped by the Chinese,” in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, ed. Ronnie Po-chia Hsia (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 558–76.
for me to apply myself particularly to Mathematics, because I heard of them being in some way necessary there.”65 The Jesuits' leadership was not indifferent to this detail, because on the verso of the epistle it was noted that Porzio “studies Mathematics because he heard they are of some use there.”66 Less than one month later, Porzio received a letter from Rome, explaining that the general was “very comforted by your petition, and by the Mathematical studies you are skillfully devoted to.”67 Porzio was invited to “persist with these holy desires, and with this scholarly work—which I suppose is carried on together with the practice of the holy virtues and the attention for the other sciences of the Society.”

After a decade of silence because of health problems, Porzio contacted the general again in 1715. In his view, God had healed him so that he could become a missionary in China: even during those years of suffering, Porzio thought of nothing else.68 In one of this second phase's letters, Porzio commented on a recent visit to Sicily of the procurator of the Chinese province, explaining how he wholeheartedly hoped to join him in his return to Asia.69 Porzio's frequent letters all yielded replies from Rome: the general often just invited petitioners to wait, giving them a vague hope but without any promises, but Porzio was repeatedly assured that he would soon leave for China. The general confirmed that he was “very favorable” to Porzio's “Indian desire,” and that the aspiring missionary's hopes were “now closer to certainties.”70

During the following year, Porzio wrote three other petitions to Rome, afraid that his previous correspondence had been lost. He was panicking because some of his companions were receiving the “license” for the Indies while he was not, but the general reassured him again and depicted as “closer

66 "studia le matematiche perché sente esser ivi giovevole," ARSI, FG 750, fol. 206º.
68 ARSI, FG 750, fol. 307 (Messina, February 19, 1715).
69 ARSI, FG 750, fol. 309 (Messina, July 26, 1715).
70 “La speranza che Vostra Reverenza concepì dalla mia risposta assai favorevole al suo desiderio dell'Indie, può sperare che sia vicina a maturarsi," ARSI Sic. 46, fol. 175 (Messina, August 26, 1715). Similar answer a few months later: ARSI Sic. 46, fol. 188 (Messina, October 18, 1715).
Nothing happened however, and Porzio was desperate: his last two petitions, dated 1717, were entirely written with blood. This way, he showed his commitment for the vow he made to go to the Indies—but also his despair: he feared he was missing his last chance to leave for China. Porzio was teaching Philosophy and Mathematics at the prestigious College of Messina, and his superiors reported his talents “ad Mathematicam”—a rare note, certainly attesting his skills in the subject. He really was an ideal candidate to send to the imperial court in China.

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t, at the age of forty, Porzio received from Rome a reply he surely never wanted to read: “Consider yourself fully satisfied with the repeated petitions you sent me. Your age now does not allow me to grant you what you want. Simply, consecrate yourself to serve God and the Society in our Provinces, with your spirit free from any remorse.”

Porzio had no choice but to accept this unwanted decision.

Like Porzio, other Jesuits committed to Mathematics in order to reach the East Indies: Domenico Caraccioli was one of them. In 1705 he wrote he was studying “Physics and advanced Mathematics with pleasure, especially because it helps in the conversion of the East Indies.” To ensure his departure, Federico di Massarano declared in 1691 he would take his own money for his travels but also “things that, according to Father Grimaldi’s news, I understood to be much more useful to Missionaries in China than money.” The Milanese Filippo Grimaldi (1638–1712) was the procurator of the Chinese province, and the precious items were scientific books. Like di Massarano, Giovanni Francesco Musarra had studied “a little bit of Mathematics” and promised that, if the general sent him where those skills were needed—clearly having China in mind—he would set sail with something very important. Once again, books of mathematics: “as many as a Missionary is allowed to bring without any

71 “mi consola il veder non lontana l’opportunità di renderla contenta col compimento di questa sua brama,” ARSI, Sic. 47, fol. 9v (Messina, February 3, 1716).
72 See the Catalogi Triennales: ARSI, Sic. 104, fol. 61 and Sic. 105, fol. 61.
73 “Con le replicate istanze che Vostra Reverenza mi fà di essere destinato alle Missioni dell’Indie ella hà sodisfatto a pieno alla fedeltà dovuta alle divine chiamate. Ma giacché la sua età ora non mi permette di esaudirla, Vostra Reverenza attenda à servire Dio e la Compagnia con l’animo libero da ogni rimorso in coteste Provinciale,” ARSI, Sic. 50, fol. 44 (Messina, April 20, 1722).
74 “studio della Fisica, avanzato in quello della Matematica, preso con gusto specialmente perché giova alla conversione dell’Indie Orientali,” ARSI, FG 750, fol. 21v (Palermo, June 12, 1705).
75 “cose che, conforme alla notizia havuta dal Padre Grimaldi, ho inteso essere nella Cina molto più utili a Missionarii di quel che sia il denaro,” ARSI, FG 749, fol. 348 (n.p. [January 31, 1691]). On Grimaldi, see also chapter 3.
burden for the ship, since it seems incredible that it is almost impossible to find this kind of books there.”

Another ability mentioned by petitioners for the Indies could be musical skills. In 1717, Francesco Maria Luciani started his letter underlining his demerits and uselessness: the Roman province would have hardly noticed his absence, even benefitting from it. On the other hand, however, Luciani could not conceal that he had received from God “the gift of playing the Violin” and wanted to use it fruitfully. His talent as a violinist, combined with “some music practice,” would have helped him more “easily to acquire the benevolence of those Barbarians, and thus greatly promoting the expansion of the Holy Faith.” Luciani was not afraid to say that “such a gift would go lost in this Province:” his musical talents would have been much more appreciated in China than in central Italy where he operated. His rare “gift” was actually noted on the back of the letter, but it was not enough to guarantee him the desired departure for the Qing empire. A few years later, the Jesuit died in his province. Were his skills too good to let him go?

1.2.2 Virtue and Rhetoric
As a matter of fact, the Society of Jesus could not send all of his best men to the Indies. Depriving Europe of educated and efficient Jesuits and diverting them to uncertain futures was an investment, and as such a risk. It seems that some petitioners for the Indies were aware of it: this was, according to Alessandro Guerra, one of the reasons why, from the beginning of the seventeenth century on, candidates for the missions started to underline their demerits, more than their worthiness. The analysis of Italian indipetae written a century later does not bring to the same unequivocal conclusions: some Jesuits exalted their qualities, others their lack of them, others did both.

A testimonial of the second strategy is Domenico Maria Ferrara, who sold himself in 1722 as “the most vile and useless of your pupils […] for sure, a miserable and mean scum.” Nonetheless he could still be redeemed, with God’s help:

76 “quel poco di Matematica […] per quanto a un Missionario sia permesso recarne senza aggravio della Nave, poiché mi pare incredibile che colà eziandio appresso i Nostri sia per trovarne che quasi niente,” ARSI, FG 749, fol. 636 (Mazara, March 5, 1695).
77 “l’ornamento del suono del Violino […] qualche prattica di Musica […] facilmente acquistar la benevolenza di quei Barbari, e così promuovere molto la dilatazione della Santa Fede […] un tale ornamento per me in questa Provincia sarebbe perduto,” ARSI, FG 750, fol. 502 (Città di Castello, July 25, 1717). On the verso of the letter, the secretary wrote: “Sa di violino supra mediocritatem.” Luciani died in Recanati in 1722 (Fejér, Defuncti secundi saeculi, 189).
78 “poveri d’ogni virtù […] evidenziare un qualche aspetto positivo […] si è nella Compagnia,” Guerra, “Per un’archeologia,” 163–64.
“omnia possum in eo, qui me confortat.” 79 Once again from Sicily, Francesco Saverio Cellesi depicted himself in 1713 as “miserable and lacking any virtue.” 80 He underlined his many faults: “I have offended my Lord so much and so severely, that I do not know how to repay the holy justice but by bringing those souls to the eternal deliverance [...] and giving my life for God’s sake, amidst a thousand hardships and dangers.” When he joined the Society, he brought “so many bad habits from my secular life, and my vocation is so tepid,” that the missions were essentially the only way to save his soul. Giovanni Battista Bussone felt in 1716 much “apprehension” because so many souls were left abandoned in the Indies, and the fault was all on him: “I was not able to acquire the talents necessary for such a vocation.” 81 Bussone succeeded in convincing the general and was sent to Peru, where he died in 1729. Another Jesuit insisting on being a burden for his province was Nicolò Contucci. The general did not have to be worried about depriving the Roman Province of “a subject anyway unable to serve it” like he was, and if any “little damage” would have come from his departure for the Indies, Contucci listed the name of a confriere who could substitute him, and with “even greater advantages.” 82 Similarly acted Filippo Lucentini, who in 1716 assured the general that no one would have minded his departure. In his only known petition for the Indies, he contextually tried to refuse his appointment as a rector of the college of Terni. He did not want this office for just one reason: the “hope, already given to me, to receive the grace to be sent to the Indies.” 83 Lucentini felt even more urgency because “my age cannot bear longer suffering nor delays.” He had however to surrender and accept his new office, and died in Rome ten years later. In 1717, thirty-four-year-old Francesco Maria Luciani underlined the many reasons to send him to China.

79 “il più vile ed inutile dei suoi allievi [...] al certo una carogna miserabile e meschina [...] omnia possum in eo, qui me confortat,” ARSI, FG 751, fol. 172 (Palermo, February 29, 1722). Ferrara died in Modica, Sicily, in 1725 (Fejér, Defuncti secundi saeculi, 116).
80 “miserabile e privo d’ogni virtù [...] havendo tanto e si gravemente offeso il mio Signore Gesù Cristo non so come sodisfare in qualche parte alla sua divina giustizia se non con ridurre alla salute eterna quelle anime ricomprate con il suo preziosissimo sangue, e dar la mia vita per amor suo tra mille stenti e pericoli [...] con tanti abiti cattivi portati dal secolo e con tanta tiepidezza,” ARSI, FG 753, fol. 288 (Rome, December 3, 1713).
81 “apprezzione [...] perché non mi sono industriato di fornirimi di que’ talenti, che per altro son necessari a chi ha una tal vocazione,” ARSI, FG 750, fol. 337 (Turin, May 20, 1716). Bussone died in Peru in 1729 (Fejér, Defuncti secundi saeculi, 191).
82 “piccolo danno della Provincia con altrettanti vantaggi maggiori,” ARSI, FG 750, fol. 291 (n.p., August 14, [1713]).
83 “speranza già datami intorno alla grazia di andare all’Indie, di ordine alla quale andata la mia età non patisce più dilazione,” ARSI, FG 750, fol. 320 (Terni, March 11, 1716). Lucentini died in Rome in 1726 (Fejér, Defuncti secundi saeculi, 189).
Among them, his “scarce ability to serve the Society of Jesus in my Province, where you can find better teachers for any subject.” Luciani was not able to convince the general either, and died in the Roman province five years later.

Some Jesuits were very detailed in highlighting their unworthiness and their being totally replaceable. Bernardo Zuzzeri humbly described himself as a mediocre teacher, interchangeable with anybody—and therefore ready to leave for the missions. He wrote from Rome in 1719, ready to move as soon as possible to Dalmatia. He was sure that his superiors were “boycotting” his application because they wanted to employ him as a professor of Theology at the Roman College. Zuzzeri was instead more concerned with the “extreme need of the many souls almost entirely abandoned in Dalmatia.” He was sure the general had been informed on this issue “by many bishops via letters:” Dalmatia needed Jesuits. Zuzzeri suggested the names of a few confreres suitable for his position in Rome, and was very detailed in explaining virtues and vices of the teachers he recommended to the general, almost describing them like a Human Resources employee. One Jesuit, for instance, was better “for his age, and for the classes he already taught [...] for his doctrine:” he was “much more apt than me for the aforementioned office.” Another candidate was “well known by everybody here as a very considerate and skilled person.” Rome was filled up with excellent professors, and after a proper analysis the general would have seen it “very reasonable” to send Zuzzeri to Dalmatia. If his superiors had depicted the Roman College situation with more pessimistic words, the general should have been aware that “the need for missionaries that Ragusa and the Dalmatian colleges suffer has to be taken into much deeper consideration.”

Applying for the overseas missions required many skills, a far-sighted strategy, and good rhetoric. Pierre-Antoine Fabre described the writing of indipetae as “a major ritual of the Society of Jesus, a self-presentation to the general, a humble self-portrait for his attention.” The future of a Jesuit could depend

84 “la mia poca abilità a servir la Compagnia nella Provincia, dove da per tutto posso trovarvi ottimi Maestri miei in ogni impiego,” ARS I, FG 750, fol. 502 (Città di Castello, July 25, 1717). Luciani died in 1722 (Fejér, Defuncti secundi saeculi, 189).

85 “estremo bisogno di tante anime poco meno che abbandonate in tutta la Dalmazia, notificatole dalle lettere di tanti vescovi [...] per l’età e per gli insegnamenti già fatti [...] per la sua dottrina [...] molto più abile di me al sopradetto impiego [...] sogetto, come ogni uno sa, riguardevolissimo ed abilissimo [...] ragionevolissimo [...] il bisogno di missionari che ha Ragusa e dei collegi dalmati è da tenere più in considerazione,” ARS I, FG 751, fol. 72 (Rome, July 11, 1719).

86 “un rituel majeur de la Compagnie de Jésus [...] une présentation de soi au Général,” Pierre-Antoine Fabre, “Un désir antérieur: Les premiers jésuites des Philippines et leur indipetae (1585–1605),” in Missions religieuses
on this document: drafting it was a great concern—and sometimes also a pain for the candidates. They were not afraid to admit all the problems they faced while transposing their vocation on a piece of paper: Ignazio Maria Conigli, for instance, confessed in 1722 that he had repeatedly “picked up the quill, to ask this grace from your Paternity.” Every time he finished the letters, however, he was “not able to mail them, because of the Devil’s work or I do not know why.” In his case, the demonic intervention could ironically act as a deus ex machina: a solution to justify the lack of other petitions from him prior to Tamburini’s exhortatory epistle dated that same year. On his own admission, Francesco Santi had always looked with little interest at the overseas missions, even looking down upon his confreres for having them in mind. Suddenly, one day, God changed his mind not only with respect to the Indies, but also with respect to those who asked for them. In 1724 he wrote to the general that “God surprised me with this unexpected mutation: earlier, I always persecuted those who sought it [the mission], but soon after I became one of those who wanted it.” This new perspective made Santi uncomfortable, also because he needed to understand who had put this desire in his soul. Was it a gift “from God to test me, or from the Devil to prevent me from reaching it and distressing my whole life?” In addition to his interior doubts, the Santi family were also intruding: “they showed me they want to remove me [from the Society], because they want to have me back at home, for their earthly interests and other minor issues.” Santi was clear with them: if they would have proposed “similar ideas” again, he would have “asked to be sent as far as possible, not to see them anymore.” Santi wrote just this petition, essentially aimed at moving him away from his relatives, and after Tamburini’s circular.

Many petitioners for the Indies were anxious and unsatisfied, because they considered the written instrument not able to accurately reflect what


\[\text{87 “ripigliato la Penna per chiederne la grazia da Vostra Paternità ma, terminate le lettere, o per opera del Demonio o che so io, non gliele ho inviate,” ARSI, FG 751, fol. 149 (Palermo, January 22, 1722). Coniglio wrote just this petition, and his name does not appear in the Jesuit defuncti catalogs.}\]

\[\text{88 “Dio mi eccitò allora con quella mutazione inaspettata facendomi diventare, di un persecutore di quelli che la cercavano, uno di quelli che la desideravano […] nell’animo non so se da Dio per provarmi, o dal Demonio per impedirmi e disturbare il tutto […] han mostrato con alcuni segni la loro pretenzione di rimuovermi e di desiderarmi alla loro casa, per alcuni interessi loro temporali e questi di poco conto […] simili sentimenti […] fatto istanza di portarmi per sempre il più lontano che mi fosse permesso, per non più vederli,” ARSI, FG 751, fol. 272 (Monreale, April 4, 1724). Santì’s name does not appear in the catalogs of the dead Jesuits, and this could mean he left the order.}\]
happened in their souls.\textsuperscript{89} They could not conceal a certain—more or less rhetorical—apprehension for the inappropriateness of this \textit{medium}, when it came to express what they really felt.\textsuperscript{90} For instance, Giovanni d’Aquino could not introduce himself to the general in the way he wanted. He cried out: “Oh, if I were allowed to send to Your Reverence, instead of this sheet, my heart! Perhaps, you would see there is enough desire to move your tender charity, to have compassion for my unworthiness, and please me!”\textsuperscript{91} Even if D’Aquino’s poetic solution was not practicable, he had at least the cultural means to put it into paper. What about the Jesuit who did not study and could not use more sophisticated rhetoric tools to convince the general?

1.2.3 \textbf{The Strategies of Temporal Coadjutors}

Among the petitioners for the Indies, in fact, temporal coadjutors often stand out, and for multiple reasons. First of all, their lack of education and capacity for spontaneity led them to write even more original and heartfelt petitions than their more educated confreres, this way allowing a better understanding of the many facets of a vocation to the Indies. Secondly, many of them had very specific practical skills, and used this resource to apply for the missions. Once again, \textit{litterae indipetae} bring to light the thoughts and desires of people belonging to social classes otherwise mostly silent. Also known as domestic helpers, temporal coadjutors were lay brothers who carried out the most diverse tasks for the Society, working as “tailors, cooks, shoemakers, barbers, masons, carpenters, apothecaries, painters, and bakers.”\textsuperscript{92} They relied on their talents to be chosen as missionaries, because they were aware that, beyond the spiritual tasks, also very practical ones were indispensable in the Indies.

In general, the Jesuit curia did not send many European temporal coadjutors to the Indies. It was not too difficult for Jesuits to find in any missionary country indigenous help to carry out the tasks related to the maintenance of a Jesuit residence—like cooking, cleaning, and doing some errands. Moreover, temporal coadjutors might not behave in an exemplary way, sometimes even

\textsuperscript{89} Amélie Vantard, “Les vocations missionnaires chez les Jésuites français aux XVII\textsuperscript{e}–XVIII\textsuperscript{e} siècles,” \textit{Annales de Bretagne et des Pays de l’Ouest} 116, no. 3 (2009): 9–22, here 15.

\textsuperscript{90} Russell, “Imagining the ‘Indies’,” 183–84.

\textsuperscript{91} “O, se mi fossi permesso di mandare, in cambio di questo foglio, a Vostra Reverenza il mio core, forse vedrebbe in quello desiderii tali che moverebono la tenera sua carità ad haver dalla mia indiginità compassione e compiaceri,” \textit{ARSI}, \textit{FG} 750, fol. 188 (Naples, December 1, 1704).

jeopardizing the good name of the order. In the overseas missions, the distance from European superiors and their instructions could be risky in the case of proud and independent helpers: some of them dressed and behaved like ordained priests, working as preachers or confessors without having the required skills. They could deal too closely with women, deny obedience to the superiors, have their own close group in competition with their ordained confreres, and in general neglect the practical activities of daily life that were their real task. This could happen both in the West and East Indies: the more distant from Rome and its direct control, the more some of them felt free to act. This could also happen because some of them, once arrived in the missionary territories, could feel bitterness: did they cross the ocean just to do the same “humble” work as in Europe? As Giancarlo Roscioni noted, “the gap between the dreamt India and the real one was almost unbridgeable” especially for temporal coadjutors. They left inspired by the accounts written by their confreres’ adventures, but their daily life was as prosaic as before.

The dreams, hopes, and talents of temporal coadjutors appear in litterae indipetae. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the temporal coadjutor Domenico Maria Riccardi applied for the Indies thrice, ready to work “as a tailor and then in the kitchen, the infirmary and the sacristy.” Despite his efforts, he died about fifteen years later in the Roman province. Francesco Maria Scalise petitioned for Chile in 1705, specifying that he was “a trained surgeon,” had “some practice of nursing and pharmacy,” and was “very ready to be employed in any worthless task.” Ignazio Maria Vincenzi sent in 1716 one of his four petitions, after learning “from an authoritative person, that someone with some knowledge about medicines is needed in the Indies.” The general

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93 Some of the Milanese coadjutors sent in the seventeenth century to the Americas confessed the indigenous people, taught Christian doctrines, and debated with “heretics”—all of it without any authorization from Rome (Rurale, “La Compagnia di Gesù,” 36–37). They also: “risolvevano i casi di coscienza, insegnavano la dottrina cristiana, disputavano pericolosamente con eretici [...] scambiati per sacerdoti [...] un’uguaglianza affettata con sacerdoti e scolastici nel vitto, nei vestiti e nell’attività di ricreazione [...] negavano apertamente l’obbedienza ai superiori, fomentavano polemiche nei collegi, si radunavano da soli quasi congiurando” (37).

94 “divario tra l’India sognata e l’India reale [...] quasi incolmabile,” Roscioni, Il desiderio delle Indie, 129.

95 “la sartoria e poi la cucina, infermeria e sagrestia,” ARSI, FG 750, fol. 139 (Orvieto, July 3, 1703). Riccardi died in 1718 (Fejér, Defuncti secundi saeculi, 234).

96 “di professione chirurgo [...] pratttica d’Infermeria ed aromatario [...] prontissimo ad impiegarmi in qualunque minimo officio,” ARSI, FG 750, fol. 224 (Palermo, October 13, 1705). His destiny remains unknown.

97 “viene scritto a persona autorevole esservi bisogno per le Indie d’un soggetto che sappia di speziaria [...] buone speranze [...] impiegato a servire l’amalati con sommo mio gusto
had previously given him “good hopes” of leaving, and Vincenzi recollected how for the past five years he had been “employed, and with great pleasure, to serve the sick in this College’s Infirmary.” He then practiced some pharmacy, and devoted himself to the “service and care of the sick,” at the same time trying “with every attention to learn the best I could about how to manipulate medicaments.” He also committed to “some study in this field, as much as I am allowed.” He was “just” a temporal coadjutor but presented himself at his best, as a competent person, who would bring useful and hardly available knowledge in the Indies—a destination he probably never reached.

Beside pharmacy, coadjutors had the most diverse talents: at the end of the seventeenth century, the thirty-six-year old Attilio Antonio Luci applied for Japan, a desire he had “from the first years I had the privilege of living in this Holy Society.”98 His brother Isidoro was leaving for China and Attilio Antonio wanted to follow his footsteps, but he was discouraged to do so by his superior, who considered him “unsuitable” for this destiny and for a very clear reason: “because I do not have any particular skill.” The general was looking, among the applicants for the Indies, for “people who have some knowledge of farms,” but no one could be better than Luci, who had worked for eleven years in some farms in the Kingdom of Naples.99 Not receiving any positive answer, two years later Luci reapplied, changing the destination and aiming at the Chinese empire.100 Unfortunately his prayers remained unheared, and the Jesuit died in Naples three years later.

Giovanni Battista Verzi was a domestic helper, who lived in the Kingdom of Naples. He wrote in 1699 in a naive but very vivid style his only petition, whose aim was to inform the general of the “will and desire I held since the beginning of my Vocation […] I would go to the Indies with great satisfaction.”101 This “good
intention” of his grew year by year, and he had not applied before just because he was afraid of “being answered that I should stay in these Indies where I find myself already” (the Neapolitan province). One day, however, Verzi decided to act, without any previous consultation with his superiors—which was a quite rare circumstance. He was very secretive with the general: “I will tell this to someone, only if I will be appointed by Your Paternity.” He did not explain the reasons for this discretion, but his words show his fear that his superiors would have tried to dissuade him, or would not have approved his decision.

The most interesting part of Verzi’s letter is on its verso. After writing his application, he evidently thought it was a good idea to add a small autobiography, in case the general wanted to “know the circumstances of my will and desire, and to have some information about me.” In the majority of cases, Jesuits did not include any references to their secular lives. This is true especially in the case of temporal coadjutors, who were poorly educated and less able to explain themselves than their more educated confreres. Domestic helpers often used their brothers’ help to have their letter written, and simply signed it. On the contrary, Verzi described himself very well and with more details than “standard” petitioners. He was “Venetian, born precisely in Venice,” and when he turned twenty he moved to Naples: “not to become a Jesuit, but to take care of my worldly business.” His profession was “writing-desk carpenter, in other words cabinet-maker.” Looking for a place to work, he learned by chance that the Jesuits were looking for someone to work in the “Chapel of Saint Francis Xavier, in the college’s infirmary where the miracle of Xavier with Father Marcello Mastrilli took place.”

Marcello Mastrilli (1603–37) was a Jesuit, a carpenter, and an aspiring missionary—precisely like Verzi. Mastrilli had become a model for many petitioners for the Indies after a serious accident happened to him while he was working on the decorations of a Jesuit church in Naples in the 1630s. While convalescing, Mastrilli saw Xavier at his bed, who gave him his health back to fruitfully employ it in the Japanese missions. Verzi’s vocation was born while

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102 "saper le circostantie do[v]ute per aver qualche Condizione de Me [...] di nascita Venetiano, nato proprio in Venetia [...] ma non per farme Gesuita, ma per tender alli Negoti del Mondo; il Mio Mistiero erra di scritoriario ovvero ebenista [...] che lavorase alla Capella di Santo Francesco Saverio in Coleggio alla infermari, dove sucesse il Miracolo di detto Santo col Padre Marcello Mastrilli” (ARS I, FG 750, fol. 63 (Castellammare, February 20, 1699)).

being in the same environment in which Mastrilli had worked, both having the “good luck of serving our fathers.”\textsuperscript{104} Shortly thereafter, twenty-one-year-old Verzi entered the Society of Jesus and started first working “in the infirmary, and then as a helper for many activities.” Although he carried out his tasks “with the greatest satisfaction,” health problems forced him to move from Naples (whose air was “too thin”) to Castellammare (in the same Jesuit province), where he died a dozen years later. Verzi concluded his indipetae by inviting the general to gather further information about him from two confreres who knew him before he entered the Society. Although in his life he may have not achieved anything “exceptional,” with his letter Verzi left a unique and intimate testimony of his life and desire to leave for the missions.

In addition to these “real” temporal coadjutors, there were several Jesuits who did not perform that office, but offered themselves as such in order to be chosen. Was this humility a rhetorical strategy, or were they really willing to work as helpers just to be sent to the missions? Domenico Stanislao Alberti certainly possessed culture and intellectual competence, because in his petition dated 1703 he apologized with the general for not having completed the second part of his historical treatise Istorìa della Sicilia. Nonetheless, he proclaimed himself ready for “any employment [...] for the rest of my life, in any college but not in Sicily” where he wrote from.\textsuperscript{105} His desire to leave his native island was not satisfied, and the Jesuit died there in 1730. Similarly, Francesco Pepes applied at the end of his Philosophy course “to go to the missions as a Brother Coadjutor, to serve the Poor in every vile and neglected task.”\textsuperscript{106} The same availability was given by Niccolò Maria Bell’Assai, who begged the general to be sent “if not as a worker, for I am not worthy of it, at least as an apprentice of our Fathers in my beloved Indies.”\textsuperscript{107} Their destinies, as in the case of many other Jesuits, remain unknown.

\textsuperscript{104} “buona fortuna di Poterli Servire [...] alla Spitiaria, poi per Suplimento in vari altri Ofizi [...] con grande mia Satisfazione [...] quella aria che erra tropo sutille,” ARSI, FG 750, fol. 63. Verzi died in 1716 in the Neapolitan province (Fejér, Defuncti secundi saeculi, 262).

\textsuperscript{105} “qualunque impiego [...] per tutto il rimanente della mia vita in qualunque Collegio, purché non sia della Sicilia,” ARSI, FG 750, fol. 146 (Palermo, November 13, 1703). There are no other indipetae under this name, and Alberti died in Palermo in 1731 (Fejér, Defuncti secundi saeculi, 15).

\textsuperscript{106} “sul fine della Filosofia [...] per andare a quelle missioni per Fratello Coadiutor, per servire i Poveri in ogni più vile e negletto ufficio,” ARSI, FG 750, fol. 197 (Naples, January 20, 1705).

\textsuperscript{107} “se non operario, perché di tanto non son degno, almeno garzone de' nostri nelle da me bramatissime Indie,” ARSI, FG 750, fol. 220 (Palermo, August 10, 1705).
Conclusions

Many young men joined the Society of Jesus because of its global scope and the missionary identity, to travel overseas and become “workers” in the most distant of “vineyards of the Lord.” The genre of *litterae indipetae* has certain characteristics that can be found in *every* letter: the most evident being the goal to *Indias petere*. There are more than 22,000 *indipetae*, written by thousands of men during four hundred years: and yet, it is almost impossible to find two identical letters. Their authors filled them with their most intimate desires and self-representations, especially in the case of repeated applications during a long time span.

As for the data and characteristics to include in a missionary petition, this chapter demonstrated that in the eyes of petitioners *everything* could support their cause. Health, for instance: a strong complexion was the right complement of a virtuous soul, but also sickly Jesuits could underline their weak health when applying, because illnesses and fevers could be sent by the Lord to show his will and intention. The same happened with age: being too young could leave the general with doubts about the solidity of a vocation, thus petitioners highlighted how they only *seemed* young, and how their desire had already been tested by themselves and their superiors. Being too “old” was theoretically a disadvantage as well, but Jesuits tried to put it under a positive light, focusing on the maturity, sturdiness, and resistance coming out of it. As for personal skills, sending too many and too talented Jesuits overseas meant “wasting” many years of (and economic resources spent for) education. The Society of Jesus could not send *all* of its best members to overseas appointments, first of all because European schools, residences, and institutions could not be deprived of too many resources, but also because the need for missionaries could absolutely not meet the demands of petitioners for the Indies. This is one of the reasons why, apparently, petitioners for the Indies usually did not insist on their unique characteristics, on the contrary silencing them in the name of a sort of “invisibility.” Rhetoric was, in the end, the real “weapon” that petitioners for the Indies had at their disposal to try to negotiate their departure. Many elements were involved in their cause, however, as the following chapter will show.