Monika Miazek-Męczyńska

Indipetae Polonae: Kołatanie do drzwi misji chińskiej. Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza, 2015. Pp. 196. Hb, 25 zł.

The life and martyrdom of missionaries like Francis Xavier (1506–52) inspired scores of young Jesuits across Europe to write thousands of letters petitioning to be sent to the Indies. These letters—the *indipetae*—have become an indispensable source for anyone wishing to study the missionary activities of the Society of Jesus around the globe and their impact at home. While the vast majority of these letters to the superior general met with rejection, a select few received permission to embark on missions around the world with little to no chance of ever returning home. Most of these Jesuits engaged in overseas missions were Spanish and Portuguese along with sizable numbers from the Italian peninsula, France, and the German lands. Figures like José de Acosta (1540–1600), Jacques Marquette (1637–75), and Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) stand tall in historical scholarship for their work in New Spain, New France, and China, respectively. Yet, those Jesuits from places like Poland-Lithuania who took part or sought to participate in missionary activities abroad remain either largely unknown or marginal figures.

Monika Miazek-Męczyńska has helped rectify this scholarly gap with her first monograph by exploring how Polish Jesuits sought to participate in the global missionary drive to evangelize China. She explores the efforts, aims, and motivations of Polish Jesuits through a close reading and contextualization of 237 Polish *indipetae* written from 1627 to 1724 and located at the ARSI (primarily Pol. 77–79). A classicist and neo-Latinist by training, Miazek-Męczyńska utilizes her remarkable philological and rhetorical toolbox to argue that we cannot treat the *indipetae* of Polish Jesuits as a formulaic and derivative body of texts that simply convey information. Instead, she insists rightly that we should see the Polish *indipetae* as sources providing personal insights about their authors. In particular, Miazek-Męczyńska analyzes the religious fervor of Polish Jesuits wishing to go to China and how they sought to convey and convince their superiors to let them leave. At the heart of Miazek-Męczyńska's methodological approach to the Polish *indipetae* is exploring how their authors interact with the conventions and intertextuality of Latin epistolography in order to persuade the superior general to send them to China in spite of frequent rejection.

Methodologically, Miazek-Męczyńska organizes the chapters of her book around the genre and conventions of the letter from antiquity up to the late humanism of the Jesuits. This approach allows her to compare and contrast the Polish *indipetae* with others written across Europe. It also enables her to

place these Polish Jesuits within the larger system of communication which Jesuit letter writing and exchange created in the seventeenth century. In taking such an approach, Miazek-Męczyńska does an admirable job of engaging with and building upon the most important and newest scholarship on Jesuit letter-writing, education, communication, missionary work, and spirituality. For her, the Polish *indipetae* ultimately reveal that their authors wove aspects from each of these areas to create a power private and public tapestry of their religiosity irrespective if they were sent to China or not.

Miazek-Męczyńska's monograph as a scholarly contribution to our understanding of the Society of Jesus has three overarching strengths. First, she has brought attention to a highly-neglected source base within the rich epistolary collections of the Jesuits. Though not the most numerous among all *indipetae*, these Polish ones offer many rich avenues of insight into the place of Poland-Lithuania in the Society's missions around the world as well the reception of those missionary activities in a multi-confessional polity. Even Poland-Lithuania could go global without overseas colonies. The second strength of the book is Miazek-Męczyńska's examination of how Polish Jesuits navigated local concerns at home and universal demands of the order. Perhaps the most enlightening and pithy example of this negotiation comes from the briefest letter of the Polish *indipetae*—a single sentence by Andrzej Borysowicz (1614–56), in which he offered himself “for a mission to Moscow or wherever satisfies my superiors” (11). In short, the Polish *indipetae* represented the quintessence of Jesuit education and spirituality. Yet, Miazek-Męczyńska points out how the characterization of Poland-Lithuania as a local “India” given its multi-religious landscape could produce a powerful rhetorical and even creative tension for Polish Jesuits to wrestle with. The third strength of Miazek-Męczyńska's work is revealing the cross-cultural ramifications of the Polish *indipetae* if a petition succeeded. By revealing the various levels of intertextuality present in the *indipetae* of prominent Polish Jesuits in China, Miazek-Męczyńska highlights the important cross-cultural impact that Jesuit travelers like Andrzej Rudomina (1594–1632), Jan Mikołaj Smogulecki (1610–56), and Michał Boym (c.1612–59) had not only on their Jesuit counterparts (e.g. Martino Martini, 1614–61) in China and Europe but also prominent figures among the Chinese political and learned elite.

Still, there are less persuasive aspects of Miazek-Męczyńska's study of Polish *indipetae*, namely her broader conclusions. First, she claims that the Jesuit ideal of combining education with inner spiritual development helped these Jesuit missionaries become Europeans in their encounter with China—both real and imagined. Although she does provide ample evidence of historical background through her work, it would have been helpful to see more contextual analysis

of what notions of Europe and European could have meant to the Jesuits, especially in the Polish case. Secondly, it would have been interesting to explore in more detail how Sarmatism as a cultural movement influenced and even hindered the textual and contextual dynamics at play in the Polish *indipetae*. Thirdly, the author might have provided some comparisons between Polish Jesuits and non-Jesuit Catholic missionaries. This would have provided a better sense of what was unique and even European about Polish Jesuits seeking to travel to China. In this respect, Miazek-Męczyńska's book should be read together with Duc Ha Nguyen's more quantitative work ("Polscy misjonarze na Dalekim Wschodzie w XVII–XVIII wieku" [PhD diss., University of Warsaw, 2006]) in order to receive a fuller picture of Polish missionaries to East Asia in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

In sum, Miazek-Męczyńska's book is a superb new contribution to the field of Jesuit studies that reveals a group of long-neglected actors seeking a part in the Jesuit missionary activities around the world, regardless of whether they left home or not.

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