Polish Jesuits and Their Dreams about Missions in China, According to the *Litterae indipetae*

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Abstract

From the very beginning, Polish Jesuits were aware of the fact that the general of the Society of Jesus required them to focus on completely different missionary areas than the Far East. Nevertheless, in the Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu one can find more than two hundred so-called *indipetae* (shortened version of *Litterae ad Indiam petentes*)—letters sent by Polish Jesuits to their general asking for foreign missions, especially in China. They were written by 114 Jesuit fathers and brothers but ultimately only four (Andrzej Rudomina, Michał Boym, Jan Mikołaj Smogulecki, Jan Bąkowski) ever preached the word of God in the Middle Kingdom. By analyzing the content of Polish *indipetae* letters, this paper underlines the most important sources of missionary vocations among Polish Jesuits, through comparison with similar letters from the fathers and brothers of other Jesuit provinces.

Keywords

Polish Jesuits – *Litterae indipetae* – missions – Jesuits in China – missionary vocation

There were only four Polish Jesuit missionaries¹ preaching the word of God in China in the seventeenth and the eighteenth century. Despite their small

1 The term “Polish Jesuit missionaries” is a mental shortcut, describing the Jesuit missionaries from the Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania, i.e. from the Jesuit Polish (created in 1576) and Lithuanian provinces (created in 1608). Defining the nationality of these Jesuits according to modern geographical or political criteria seems completely irrelevant. For example, Michał Boym was born in Lviv (Lwów, now Ukraine), but his grandfather had

number, Polish priests left their mark on the history of the religious, scientific, and even political relations between Europe and Asia. Each of them individually contributed to the work of evangelization by their faith, utmost sacrifice, determination, and dedication to Christianity.

Andrzej Rudomina (1595–1631),² as a participant in the conference in Kiating, was involved in the creation of the Chinese liturgical and theological terminology, even though he spent only few years in China. Michał Piotr Boym (1612–59)³ in addition to several maps of Chinese provinces and scientific works on Chinese medicine and botany, left manuscripts describing the miraculous conversions to Catholicism that took place at the court of the last Southern Ming Emperor and delivered a letter from the Chinese Dowager Empress Helena to the Pope Alexander VII. Jan Mikołaj Smogulecki (1610–56),⁴ a great mathematician and astronomer, taught the Chinese *literati* logarithms. Finally, Jan Bąkowski⁵ (1672–1732), whose pastoral work was interrupted by the

arrived there from Hungary. Despite that, he always signed his manuscripts with the word “Polonus” (Pole). Another case, Andrzej Rudomina, born in the territory of modern Lithuania, did not know the Lithuanian language (as evidenced in his correspondence), and wrote in Polish.

- 2 Wojciech Męciński, S.J. was the first author to recount the life and death of Andrzej Rudomina, and his reputation among the Chinese Christians. His letter from Macau in 1638 was published several times—most recently in Marcin Czermiński S.J., *Życie X. Wojciecha Męcińskiego T.J. umęczonego za wiarę w Japonii* (Cracow: Redakcja “Missyj Katolickich,” 1895), 155. An unpublished biography of Rudomina was written by Bento de Matos (Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu [hereafter ARSI], *Lus.* 58 II, f. 307–8). For modern studies of Rudomina's life, see Duc Ha Nguyen, *Polscy misjonarze na Dalekim Wschodzie* (Warsaw: Neriton, 2006), 35–44; Jan Konior S.J., *Historia polsko-chińskich kontaktów kulturowych w XVII w. (na przykładzie misji jezuickich)* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo WAM, 2013), 219–42.
- 3 For more detailed information about Boym's life, see Robert Chabrié, *Michel Boym Jé suite Polonais et la fin des Ming en Chine (1646–1662): Contribution à l'histoire des Missions d'Extrême Orient* (Paris: Pierre Boussuet, 1933), 283; Edward Kajdański, *Michał Boym: Ambasador Państwa Środką* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1999); Monika Miazek, “Michał Boym: Polish Jesuit in the Service of the Ming Dynasty,” *Chinese Cross Currents* 5, no. 2 (2008): 80–101.
- 4 For the most comprehensive biography of Jan Mikołaj Smogulecki, see Edward Kosibowicz S.J., “Jan Mikołaj Smogulecki SI, Mu Ni-ko Żu-tō, zapomniany polski misjonarz w Chinach w XVII w.,” in *Gdy Europa szukała Azji*, ed. Félix-Alfred Plattner (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Apostolstwa Modlitwy, 1975), 324–45.
- 5 Officially, Bąkowski belonged to the Austrian province of the Jesuits as he entered the Society in Graz or Vienna, where he began his studies and was ordained a priest. In 1706, he departed from Lisbon to become a missionary in China, where he initially worked in Macau, and then in the southern provinces. The persecution of Christians started in these regions in 1709, and Bąkowski often worked at the risk of his own life. He was carrying out his missionary

imperial persecutions, provoked by the so-called Chinese Rites Controversy. He was forced to leave China and died in Manila, Philippines.

The literature on the subject sometimes mentions another Polish missionary in China, Jan Ignacy Lewicki (1608–46), who arrived in Macau in 1640, where he stayed until at least 1645 to study to prepare himself for missionary work in Tonkin. Unfortunately, the ship sailing from Macau to Tonkin sank with Lewicki on board on February 26, 1646. Two other Polish Jesuits who obtained the superior general's consent to travel to China were Konrad Terpiłowski (1654–1714) and Ignacy Franciszek Zapolski (1645–1703). They tried to reach their destination by land through Russia. Unfortunately, neither was permitted to complete the journey: Terpiłowski turned back to his home country and Zapolski settled as a missionary in Persia.⁶

Eventually, only four Polish Jesuits began evangelizing work in the Middle Kingdom. They carried out their activities in the course of one century, hoping, together with other members of the Society of Jesus, that the entire Chinese Empire would be converted to Catholicism. Looking at this list, in light of the *Litterae indipetae*,⁷ through which several Polish Jesuits⁸ requested that the superior general of the Society send them on missions to the Far East, preserved in the Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (hereafter ARSI), a question must be raised as to whether in the case of Jesuits coming from the territory of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, a state which was not involved in colonial

work when the patriarch of Antioch, Thomas Maillard de Tournon (1668–1710), was sent to China by Pope to end the “Chinese Rites Controversy.” Unfortunately, this visit ended up aggravating the conflict: persecutions of Christian missionaries intensified after 1717, but Jan Bąkowski—like many of his confreres—continued his mission in secret until he was arrested and imprisoned in Guangzhou in 1730 or 1731. From there he was sent to Manila in the Philippines, where he died soon afterwards.

6 See Konior, *Historia polsko-chińskich kontaktów*, 184.

7 The term *indipetae* (shortened version of *Litterae ad Indias petentes*) means all letters sent to the Jesuit general asking for foreign missions. In the context of these letters, “Indiae” symbolizes all extra-European missions. Most of the preserved Polish letters are currently kept in ARSI, *Pol.* 79. This file contains 229 letters written by 114 Jesuit fathers and brothers, dated between 1627 and 1724. A detailed description of all Polish *indipetae* concerning missions to the Far East was presented in Monika Miazek-Męczyńska, *Indipetae Polonae: Kołatanie do drzwi misji chińskiej* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2015), where the author elaborates some of the theses presented in this article.

8 The sixty letters including a request for permission to go to China constitute twenty-four percent of the total preserved collection. Several authors applied for such permission many times. For more detailed statistical information about Polish *indipetae*, see Nguyen, *Polscy misjonarze*, 126–33.

policy and which had no political⁹ or economic connections with the Far East, this was a large or a small number.

In doing so, statistical account should be taken of the participation of representatives of other nations in the Jesuit mission in China. Out of 1,714 Jesuits who had left Lisbon by 1725, 1,093 (approximately 64%) were Portuguese,¹⁰ which means that all the other provinces of the Society of Jesus participated in missionary work in the Far East in substantially reduced numbers. Christoph Nebgen, analysing 1,387 *Litterae indipetae* written from the Upper German Province, the Upper Rhine Province and the Lower Rhine Province (that is, three out of the five German-speaking provinces of the Society) by 612 Jesuits, calculated that only 11% of the candidates successfully went through the selection procedure, out of whom 15% never reached their destination because they died en route, due to diseases, maritime disasters, or pirate attacks.¹¹ Noël Golvers, who analyzed *Litterae indipetae* from the Flanders-Belgian Province, noticed that although the superior general gave his consent to ten percent of applicants, eventually only half of that group, which is to say four people, left the country.¹² If we also take into consideration the fact that Polish letters constitute only 1.5% of all the *Litterae indipetae* preserved in ARSI, we should consider this yield a real success, because in addition the Portuguese, the Italians, the Spaniards, the Germans, the Austrians, the Belgians, and the French, some Polish Jesuits did reach the Far East, even though there were so few of them.¹³

- 9 For information about the establishment of direct connections between King Jan III Sobieski of Poland (1673–96) and the Kangxi Emperor (1662–1722), through Ferdinand Verbiest, see Stanisław Bednarski, “Chiński list króla Jana III,” *Przegląd powszechny* 50 (1933): 533–34; Józef Włodarski, Zhao Gang, “Kontakty Polski z Chinami od XIII do końca XVIII wieku—próbą ponownego spojrzenia,” *Gdańskie studia Azji Wschodniej* 5 (2014): 14–32.
- 10 Anton Huonder, *Deutsche Jesuitenmissionäre des 17. und 18. Jahrhunderts: Ein Beitrag zur Missionsgeschichte und zur Deutschen Biographie* (Freiburg in Breisgau: Herder, 1899), 9.
- 11 Christoph Nebgen, *Missionarsberufungen nach Übersee in drei Deutschen Provinzen der Gesellschaft Jesu im 17. und 18. Jahrhundert* (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 2007).
- 12 Noël Golvers, “*Litterae indipetae* from the Jesuit Provincia Flandro-Belgica 1640/1660–1700,” in *Light a Candle. Encounters and Friendship with China: Festschrift in Honour of Angelo S. Lazzarotto P.I.M.E.*, ed. Roman Malek and Gianni Criveller (Sankt Augustin: Institut Monumenta Serica, 2010), 225–43, here 226.
- 13 A comprehensive list of missionaries working in China was published for the first time by Philippe Couplet in *Catalogus Patrum Societatis Jesu, qui post obitum S. Francisci Xaverii primo saeculo, sive ab anno 1581 usque ad 1681 in Imperio Sinarum Iesu Christi fidem propagarunt* (Paris, 1686). Each of the 105 names is accompanied by information on the nationality of each missionary, the date of his arrival in China, the area of his activity, his published works and important achievements, as well as his date of death and place of burial. One Polish Jesuit, Jan Lewicki, is missing from this list. The entry concerning

All of them had to face many adversities before their dream of missions in the Far East was fulfilled. It was possible only after obtaining permission from the superior general of the Society. As we discover in the letters, Polish Jesuits first had to answer a very simple but important question: “Why have you chosen the Far East as your destination, when you could be much more useful closer, in Europe, in your own province, or in your neighbourhood?” In looking for a reasonable answer to this question, we should present both perspectives: the global perspective of the Society of Jesus operating in Poland in the seventeenth century and the personal perspective of Polish Jesuit candidates for missions in the Far East. The combination of these two points of view will explain why the group of Polish Jesuits approved by the general was so small, and which factors were crucial in the choice of fathers.

Those applying for the work in the “Lord’s vineyard” in the Far East were fully aware that their desire did not fully reflect the policy of the order, but they made every possible effort to fulfil their dreams. The best proof of their determination comes in the words of Jan Sapałeczki, written to the general on November 11, 1627: “I must confess, I don’t miss India in Poland, but I feel divine inspirations pushing me to the Indies and Japan. That’s why I would like to follow the call of God.”¹⁴

The Missionary Background of Polish Jesuits in the Seventeenth Century

The words of Sapałeczki show that from the very beginning Polish Jesuits were aware of the fact that the order required them to focus on completely different missionary areas. In this situation, it is essential to ask why so many Polish Jesuits nevertheless requested for permission to work in the missions in the Far East. Research generally indicates three main sources of such inspiration: (1) reports sent by missionaries already working on different continents, (2) the cult of St. Francis Xavier, and (3) Jesuit theater.¹⁵

Undoubtedly, the biggest influence on the decision to apply for missions in the Far East were the reports of Jesuits in the region. In the first half of the seventeenth century, books and brochures describing foreign peoples and their customs, emphasizing the important, difficult, challenging, and even

Andrzej Rudomina is incorrect as to his nationality—claiming that he was Portuguese (“Lusitanus”), see Couplet, *Catalogus*, 23.

14 ARSI, *Pol.* 79, f. 2^r.

15 Nguyen, *Polscy misjonarze*, 137–82.

martyr-making work of the missionaries in Asia and the New World were published by the Society of Jesus almost every year. The Jesuits were pioneers in this field, using a wide range of materials: missionaries' correspondence, reports, and annual letters (*annuae litterae*) to recruit followers and successors. Most of these materials were translated from the original languages (Portuguese, Italian, Latin or Spanish) into Polish and published (mainly in Cracow) to maximize their accessibility and enable the fathers of the region to understand the messages sent from China, Japan, the Philippines, Tonkin, and so on.

A majority of the mission-related publications in the seventeenth and eighteenth century described Japan as a place of spectacular missionary achievements and of the bloodiest persecutions. Therefore, it is not surprising that the stories of the arrival of young Japanese nobles who came as emissaries with the visitor of the province of the East Indies, Alessandro Valignano (1539–1606), were published in Poland by 1585, when the group was just reaching Rome.¹⁶ The stories presented Japan as a country with people of great faith, who were willing to learn. They left readers with the impression that the conversion of the entire kingdom to Christianity would be swift. Undoubtedly, the fact that Wojciech Męciński (1598–1643), the first Polish Jesuit in Japan, died a martyr's death in Nagasaki (23 March 1643) also contributed to the increased number of Poles applying for a mission in the Far East.¹⁷ Between 1640 and 1650 the number of Polish *Litterae indipetae* increased rapidly. In this period Jesuits addressed forty-seven letters to the general asking to be sent to "India," while between 1630 and 1640 there had been only four such letters.

One of the most active exponents in Poland of the Asian missions was Szymon Wysocki (c.1546–1622), a translator of the reports and annual letters. In his works, including approximately thirty books and translations, readers could find the letters of great Jesuit missionaries, such as Matteo Ricci, Juan Rodriguez, and Nicolas Trigault. These works mainly described the beginning of the Catholic mission in China. They whipped up missionary enthusiasm in the

16 The first of these relations was *Iaponiorum regum legatio Romae coram summo pontifice, Gregorio XII 23. Martij habita: anno: 1585. Addita etiam brevis in calce descriptio insulae Iaponicae* (Rome: Apud Franciscum Zannetum, 1585). The second was *Epistola de legatorum Iaponicorum orientalium adventu ad Gregorium XIII pontificem maximum, paucos dies ante quam moreretur. Cum actis consistorij publice exhibiti, die 23. Martij 1585. Addita brevis epistola, de miraculo divinitus edito, in illmo marchione Badensi, ad eadem D. Virginis Lauretanae. Preterea illustria quaedam martyria, quae in oriente, ob fidem christianam aliqui subierunt* (Vilnius: Ioannes Veli Censis, 1585).

17 See Monika Miazek-Męczyńska, "Indipetae Boyminae: On Boym's Requests to the Jesuit General for a Missionary Appointment to China," *Monumenta Serica: Journal of Oriental Studies* 59 (2011): 229–42, here 232.

next generations of the Polish Jesuits with the resonating reminder from the Gospel of Luke: "The harvest is abundant but the labourers are few" (Lk 10:2).

The most luminous example for all fathers and missionaries working in the Far East was St. Francis Xavier, perceived as an unquestionable role model in his preaching and in his methods for missionary work. The story of his life was known to every Polish Jesuit, as well as to ordinary people, as Piotr Skarga (1536–1612) wrote about him in his *Lives of the Saints*, the most popular Polish literary work of the time.¹⁸ Many other books (including his letters), novenas, and volumes of sermons and prayers related to St. Francis Xavier were repeatedly published, indicating his great popularity in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.¹⁹ The books published in Polish and Latin describing the missions in the Far East, as well as the letters of St. Francis Xavier, were probably compulsory reading for seventeenth-century students of Jesuit colleges, especially the members of Polish probation houses. As indicated in the preserved catalogues of Jesuit libraries,²⁰ every "must read" collection for novices included (among others) *Litterae Indicae* that described Jesuit missions in the East Indies, a number of historical works, and lives of the martyred missionaries in the Far East. These texts fired the imaginations of young members of the Society and were often transcribed into plays for the Jesuit theatres.

Plays with oriental subjects were often performed as a part of the celebrations of St. Francis Xavier's feast day (December 3), but issues related to missionary work and the martyrdom of converts (especially in Japan) were also mentioned on other occasions. Among a sample of eighty-three of the preserved plays, thirty-five refer to Japan, thirty-one to the missionary activity of Francis Xavier, and seventeen to China. They were written mostly by professors at Jesuit colleges, who gained their knowledge from historical sources

18 First published in Vilnius (Wilno) in 1579, the *Lives of the Saints* was reprinted fifteen times over the next two hundred years. In that period, it was surpassed only by the Holy Bible in its popularity in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. The life of Francis Xavier was first recounted in its pages in 1603, in a chapter appended to the end of the book. After Xavier's canonization in 1622, his hagiography was transferred to the main text of Skarga's work.

19 For this reason Jesuits often wrote their *indipetae* on Xavier's feast day. In ARSI, *Pol.* 79 there are eleven letters written on December, 3 or a few days sooner or later, see ARSI, *Pol.* 79, ff. 14^r, 70^r, 85^r, 90^r, 91^r, 106^r, 110^r, 142^r, 150^r, 157^r, 254^r. For more on the veneration of Francis Xavier in Poland, see Ludwik Grzebień, "Św. Franciszek Ksawery i jego kult," *Studia Bobolanum* 1 (2007): 41–55.

20 See Ludwik Grzebień, "Organizacja bibliotek jezuickich w Polsce od XVI do XVIII wieku, cz. 2," *Archiwa, biblioteki i muzea kościelne* 31 (1975): 225–81.

(for example, authors of *argumenta* frequently referred to *De bello Tartarico* and *Sinicae historiae decas prima* by Martino Martini).²¹ Young Jesuits played the roles of Japanese converts and their spiritual guides—Jesuit missionaries. Such personification allowed them to deeply, almost physically, experience the fate of the presented characters. These efforts were reflected in the increased number of vocations.

However, the religious authorities of the Polish province, obeying the guidelines set down in Rome, did not undertake wide-ranging measures to increase the number of missionaries in East Asia. Their main missionary destination was the Orthodox East, mainly Rus, but also other “spiritually neglected” countries (Lithuania, Livonia, Samogitia) or areas under Islamic influence (Crimea, Moldova, Constantinople, and Persia).²² The superiors of the Society tried to convince younger members that a career in Europe, demanding tasks for the Society, education of socially excluded groups, and other duties were equally valuable for a Jesuit: they were to be a different kind of martyrdom.

This argument, together with the candidate’s (young) age, was probably the most frequently repeated in the general’s responses to Polish *indipetae*. The Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu preserves these responses as *Germ.* 124²³ and *Germ.* 125.²⁴ This file includes eighty eight letters to Jesuits from Poland and Lithuania. Analysis of these letters, which were often quite perfunctory and usually very short (sometimes identical copies was sent to several persons with instruction to change the name of the addressee), shows that the superior encouraged monks to focus their missionary perspective on their own province, or at most on Europe. Such answer was sent, for example, to Jerzy Franciszek Wolff, who was ordered by the general to work toward the salvation of souls in his own province, as European nations needed the support of missionaries in the same extent as people in India or China.²⁵ Similarly, Jakub Bartsch was instructed to recognize that the evangelization work could be fruitful both in own province and on overseas missions.²⁶ In the letter to Albert Łochocki, dated February 10, 1691, the general stated: “people in India do not need you more than those in Europe in your own province.”²⁷ Another

21 Nguyen, *Polscy misjonarze*, 282.

22 *Encyklopedia wiedzy o jezuitach na ziemiach Polski i Litwy 1564–1995*, ed. Ludwik Grzebień (Cracow: Wydawnictwo WAM, 2004), 428–29.

23 *Litterae ad eos, qui missiones transmarinas petiverunt, 1678–1699*.

24 *Litterae ad eos, qui missiones transmarinas petiverunt, 1699–1719*.

25 ARSI, *Germ.* 124, f. 148.

26 *Ibid.*, f. 237.

27 *Ibid.*, f. 154.

Jesuit, Stanisław Starkowiecki, received a response including a list of tasks and duties for Jesuits working in Europe, to make him aware of the equal importance of missionary work all around the world.²⁸

Sometimes, the negative answer to the request for missions in India was sent by the general along with words of encouragement, suggesting that the candidate should continue their efforts in self-improvement, as this would help him to achieve this goal in other circumstances. Occasionally, the general refused his approval for the mission to the Far East but granted his *nihil obstat* to a departure to geographically closer regions.²⁹ Nevertheless, the negative responses sent from Rome (which commanded obedience due to the religious vows) did not always bring about the intended effect. Polish Jesuits usually continued to send requests for missions in the Far East. And although Polish *indipetae* contain a number of requests for missions in geographically closer regions (including Protestant lands in Europe), the distant “India” remained the most desired missionary destination.

Missionary Motivation of the Polish Jesuits According to *Litterae indipetae*

Even a brief reading of Polish *indipetae* reveals the basic sources of inspiration that encouraged Jesuits to strive to become missionaries. These sources included all kinds of supernatural interventions, e.g. revelations from saints, inspiration by the Holy Spirit, miraculous healings, and the like. The role models for the future missionaries were mainly St. Francis Xavier and St. Paul—the Apostle of the Gentiles—whereas St. Ignatius of Loyola was mentioned mostly in the context of practising his *Spiritual Exercises* that strengthened the decisions already taken by the Jesuits.³⁰ The most common arguments used in letters included concerns for salvation, both for the souls of missionaries and

28 Ibid., f. 155.

29 This answer was sent to Mikołaj Skąpski, who was assured by the general in the letter dated on June 2, 1696, that it would be better for him to start the evangelization work closer to the place of his studies as so many monks apply for missions in China. The general also promised to support such efforts by sending a letter to the superior of the province. Ibid., 243.

30 In the preserved *indipetae*, only one reference was made to St. Francis of Assisi (see ARSI, Pol. 79, f. 28^r). Szymon Perovius wrote about St. Francis in his second letter, mentioning that despite Pope's initial refusal to establish a new Order, St. Francis obtained the approval in his second attempt. Perovius hoped that in his case, similarly the second request would not be rejected – unfortunately, he was wrong.

those of the thousands of pagans who had had no chance to recognize the true God. For many Jesuits, the vision of martyrdom also seemed to be as tempting as the daily duties of preaching the Gospel. Consequently, many letters included assurance of readiness to die in God's service and to sacrifice one's own life for the true faith.

However, since the majority of requests written in this mode were rejected by the general, it seems particularly interesting to analyze the letters written by Polish Jesuits *approved* for the Far East missions. Fortunately, the ARSI preserves the *indipetae* of three successful missionaries: Andrzej Rudomina,³¹ Jan Mikołaj Smogulecki,³² and Michał Piotr Boym.³³ It seems that the most efficient response to the doubts of superiors was provided by Andrzej Rudomina, who clarified why Polish Jesuits could serve abroad in the best way to increase the glory of God. Rudomina's letter in some ways draws together all the threads appearing in the other Polish Jesuits' letters. Through it, we can follow most of the arguments they used to obtain their superior's consent for going on a mission trip.

In his letter to Superior General Mutio Vitelleschi (1563–1645), Rudomina compared the pros and cons of staying in Poland (which was also his family's desire) and departing for the Far East.³⁴ He used his rhetorical skills gained in the Jesuit schools to introduce arguments in a way similar to putting weights on the scale to achieve an objective judgement. In fact, from the very beginning he knew the result of his deliberations and he strove to achieve it. First, Rudomina listed the arguments in favor of staying and working in the country. He found only two. The first one was the real need for priestly ministry in neighboring countries, especially in Livonia, Lithuania, and Rus, where dedicated laborers of God were as needed as in India. The second argument related to Rudomina's personal qualifications, specifically his knowledge of Slavic customs and languages (he already knew Polish and Russian), which would greatly facilitate his work in these regions and would ensure better service to those in need.

However, Rudomina mentioned only these two arguments for staying in Poland, while the list of potential benefits of his missionary work in the Far East was much longer. First of all, he stated that separation from his family, home, friends, and country would facilitate total dedication to the work for God. This perfect isolation from distracting human affairs would give him the opportunity to focus on spiritual matters and fully sacrifice his life to God, including even martyrdom. At the same time, Rudomina was aware that this path was more

31 ARSI, *FG* 732, 403, and 405.

32 ARSI, *Pol.* 79, ff. 22^r–23^r.

33 ARSI, *Pol.* 79, ff. 7^r–18^v, 26^r–v.

34 ARSI, *FG* 732, 403.

difficult and demanding, but he would choose it with full readiness after the approval of the superior general. The Jesuit was convinced that his separation from his loved ones would be rewarded by God's kindness, which compensates any losses. A similar therapeutic effect would be ensured by the record of passionate work by other missionaries in those regions, which would encourage him to make equally intensive efforts.

The third argument related to the help needed by people dwelling in the darkness of sin and superstitions. They could only be saved by faith brought by someone who would give them a helping hand. In that time, many countries had opened to the Gospel, promising an abundant harvest, but still "the laborers were few." The beautiful evangelical metaphor of Christ as the lord of the harvest, and his priests as laborers with their harvest of newly converted believers,³⁵ was quoted by Rudomina with full deliberation. By doing this, he presented the Indies first as waste lands, uncultivated and drowning in darkness without any hope of salvation. In contrast, he ended his argumentation with the image of wide fields, white with ripened grain, ready for harvest.³⁶

An encouraging promise of crops produced by previously infertile lands was the best argument in favour of the Polish Jesuit as a candidate for missionary work. He stated that since the time of the sending out of the apostles, little had changed—the laborers were still too few. Rudomina also reminded the general that the promise of an abundant harvest in the land of China was inspired by Francis Xavier, who taught that Christ's followers should not linger in one place waiting for the conversion of all non-believers, but that they should go further and further, taking the Gospel to new locations. Another argument used by Rudomina was the belief expounded by early modern Jesuits that God opened the doors of the New World for missionaries to compensate the losses of the Catholic Church suffered in Europe due to the Reformation. Therefore more missionaries should be sent to lands where the harvest would be greater. Particularly—according to Rudomina—when "there is no shortage of those who would willingly carry out the work at home."³⁷ He supported this statement by citing Luke: "Nemo propheta acceptus est in patria sua"³⁸ which clearly proves that every Jesuit is more useful working away from his own country. The crowning argument in this seven-point list was his opinion that his native province would benefit even more from his service abroad—as his success would encourage even more fruitful hard work, both from those

35 Lk 10:2; Mt 9:32.

36 ARSL, *FG* 732, 403.

37 Ibid.

38 Rudomina referred to Lk 4:27, but indicated that these words were quoted by other Evangelists (Mt 13:57, Mk 6:4, J 4:44).

who would like to follow his footsteps and from those who would prefer to stay in the country. Missionary work, according to the Jesuit, could even spark an increase of vocations.

The evident disparity in the number of arguments for and against work in China spoke in favor of the missionary journey. Nevertheless, Rudomina decided to strengthen the persuasive effect by refuting the two arguments for staying in Poland listed at the beginning of the letter. As in a classic legal oration, he sought to invalidate these arguments. This was a very bold step, as in so doing he would contradict with the views of his superiors, including the general of the Society.

Discussing the first point, Rudomina pointed out that the religious situation in Europe and Asia could not be compared. His homeland and its neighboring countries belonged mostly to the family of Christian nations and did not suffer due to a shortage of religious or priests, whereas countries in the Far East did not have basic knowledge of Christianity and the number of preachers was very low. Rudomina adverted to the relations of the Orthodox Churches with Rome and the admonition of Pope Urban VIII, who ordered Jesuits in Poland and Lithuania not to encourage the members of the Greek Catholic Church to change their liturgy to the Latin rite and, in fact, prohibited any such change. In this situation, missionary activity among people of the Orthodox faith seemed truly pointless.

Moreover, the spiritual needs of Lithuanians or Livonians were easily fulfilled by the Jesuits already working there; the Lithuanian province was able to deal with its current religious tasks without Rudomina's help. Moreover, Livonia at that time was troubled by war and evangelizing activities were impossible. At the end of this letter, Rudomina stressed with modesty that his part of the local work could be easily performed by many other brothers, far better than him (*"Et pro uno amisso, praesertim tali occasione, Dominus Provinciae plures et multo meliores rependet"*).³⁹

Rudomina used the same modesty to negate the second argument for staying in Poland. With humility, he declared that his linguistic talents or other advantages were nothing exceptional among the confrères, so his departure would not bring any special harm to his province (*"nihil peculiare in me Provincia amittere possit"*).⁴⁰ Moreover, the statement that every religious is needed primarily in his own country (due to language skills and cultural background) would prevent any missionary work abroad—Italian and Portuguese members, too, could easily work in their own countries instead of China.

39 ARSI, *FG* 732, 403.

40 Ibid.

In his reflections, Rudomina used the Jesuit motto “ad maiorem Dei gloriam.” He started the letter with it and cited it in almost every argument in favor of the missionary journey. It was also present in the request ending the letter. By so doing, Rudomina underlined that his personal desires or ambitions were (as he was himself) just tools that could be used in God’s plan of salvation. And although this letter did not fully convince the general and Rudomina had to write another, repeating his arguments, ultimately, he was the first Polish Jesuit sent to China as a missionary.

Rudomina’s arguments placed their emphasis primarily on the spiritual, theological, and missionary aspects—which were central to superiors’ decisions when considering a particular candidate.⁴¹ However, it was also necessary to indicate practical virtues such as good health, gift for languages, or knowledge of science and natural sciences, which some applicants invoked—justified by the past experience of Chinese missionaries. The French Jesuit Emeric Langlois de Chavagnac (1670–1717), after his three-month stay in China, explained in one of his letters what personal qualities a perfect candidate for a missionary in the Middle Kingdom should have. He mentioned total commitment to Christ’s love; the ability to adjust to a completely different climate, customs, clothes, and food; a calm nature; patience; and the ability to bear the casual lifestyle typical of these regions and natural indolence of the local population, as well as linguistic competence, because for the first few months missionaries had to spend eight hours a day learning Chinese.⁴² These were some observations from a person who experienced every possible difficulty confronting European missionaries in the Middle Kingdom.

De Chavagnac’s observations fully coincided with the superior general’s expectations for missionary candidates. Zeal and devotion to missionary activity had to be combined with theoretical, practical, and physical preparation. The most important criteria included the candidate’s state of health and age—candidates were expected to be men between twenty-five and forty-six.⁴³

41 *Constitutions* [624].

42 Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia, “Language Acquisition and Missionary Strategies in China, 1580–1760,” in *Missions d’évangélisation et circulation des savoirs: XVI^e–XVIII^e siècle*, ed. Charlotte de Castelnau-L’Estoire et al. (Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2011), 211.

43 Liam Brockey, who analysed formation of Jesuits from the colleges of Coimbra, emphasizes that most Portuguese missionaries left Europe when they were about twenty-five years old. There were several who left their homeland even before they had completed theological studies. They could continue their academic formation in the colleges of Goa or Macau. Jesuit formation ended after they had completed a four-year speculative theology programme so they were about thirty years old when they were ready to start their overseas ministry (“most of them were in their late twenties or early thirties at the time

Consent was given to men who were mature enough to be able to manage the task of bringing the faith in Christ with dignity, yet still young enough to be able to bear the inconveniences of the journey and everyday life in another country. This rule is reflected in the Polish *indipetae*, because the average age of the authors at the time of their first letter was thirty-four.

As far as missions in China were concerned, the criterion of age had been particularly important since the very beginning of the Society's involvement in the Middle Kingdom. As early as 1579, Alessandro Valignano, asking the superior of the Indian Province to send suitably qualified missionaries to Macau so that they could learn Chinese, mentioned Michele Ruggieri by name, emphasizing his age as the most important quality. At that time Ruggieri was thirty-five and he was the oldest of the Jesuits in the Far East at that time. Valignano was convinced that a mature missionary would be more willingly accepted by the Chinese than a young person.

Another quality important in China was the intellectual potential of the future missionaries. The vertical form of evangelization, from elites to the lower classes, as has already been shown, required some missionaries to be able to enter into meaningful dialogue with Chinese scholars (*literati*). Knowledge of astronomy, useless in missionary outposts in a remote Chinese province, became absolutely essential in the capital, where Jesuits ran an astronomical observatory under imperial decree. Not without reason did the superior of the Chinese mission, Niccolò Longobardo (1559–1654), when sending Nicolas Trigault (1577–1629) as a procurator to Europe, order him to bring back a few outstanding mathematicians, whereas in the case of other Jesuits a general knowledge of this scientific discipline, such as was acquired in Jesuit colleges, was sufficient. Ferdinand Verbiest (1623–88), the head of the Beijing observatory, also placed a heavy emphasis on knowledge in the field of mathematics when he selected the candidates for missionaries in China, and when he looked for his assistants and successors in Europe.

Undoubtedly, a lot of Jesuits held the appropriate qualifications, as the applicants who wanted to pursue missionary work in China included monks who had graduated from prestigious European universities, performed public functions, and held government offices before they joined the Society of Jesus to ultimately resign from all earthly privileges and dedicate themselves totally to Christ—frequently meeting with strong opposition from their families. They brought their knowledge, experience, and extraordinary gifts as part of their dowry. Jan Mikołaj Smogulecki is an outstanding example of such a Jesuit. And

they were ready to join the mission.”). See Liam Matthew Brockey, *Journey to the East: The Jesuit Mission to China, 1579–1724* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 213.

it is hard to understand why Smogulecki gave a particular emphasis in his *indipeta* to the fact that he lacked academic qualifications, stressing that he did not rise above mediocrity, which could be confirmed by his professors (“ingenium mediocre et alia dona, doctrina vero etiam infra mediocritatem quod ipsi professores fatebuntur”).⁴⁴ And yet, before he wrote that letter in Rome on June 6, 1641, Smogulecki had studied at the Lubrański Academy in Poznań and the University in Freiburg, where he had attained great achievements in the sciences and published a dissertation on sunspots titled *Sol illustratus ac propugnatus* (Freiburg, 1626). In Rome, before joining the Society, he had studied philosophy at the Collegium Romanum and graduated after defending his thesis in public, which got a lot of publicity in the Eternal City. Later, during his stay in China, he demonstrated his knowledge of mathematics and astronomy, cooperating with other Jesuits like Giulio Aleni (1582–1649) and Adam Schall von Bell (1591–1666), and Chinese scholars such as Xue Fengzuo (1600–80), who became Smogulecki’s follower and published two astronomical treatises under the Chinese name of his master (Mu Ni-co).⁴⁵

A tendency to keep things in order and to be organized, so typical of scientific minds, can be also seen in the letter of the Polish Jesuit referred to above, in which his arguments were numbered and listed in a hierarchical order—from the ones concerning spiritual issues to the ones related to the mundane realities of life (such as covering travelling expenses). Why then did Smogulecki deprecate his knowledge in such an explicit manner? It seems that the only explanation may be the context in which the sentence was used. In this way Smogulecki wanted to prove that he would be of no considerable use in his native province. He also did not want to return to his homeland for family reasons, as his parents had already passed away and he did not have very strong bonds with other members of his family. Therefore, to obtain consent for working outside Poland, he had to prove that he was not needed in his home country. This was probably one of the reasons he characterized his skills and abilities as average.

The question of whether discrediting his own talent could be viewed positively by the superior general is ultimately left open. It is likely that the formula used by Smogulecki became part of the author’s topos of modesty and was interpreted as the amplification of the applicant’s humility. However, the general formed his own opinion of Smogulecki’s talents during a direct

44 ARSI, *Pol.* 79, f. 23^{r-v}.

45 In his works entitled *Tianbu zhenyuan* (“Calculation of the Eclipses according to European Astronomical Practice”) and *Tianwen shiyong* (“About Unification of the Chinese and European Astronomical Calculations”) he introduced logarithms to China.

conversation with him, as the Pole was staying in Rome at that time to complete his theological studies. He was chosen to become a missionary probably due to the fact that at that time the procurator of the Jesuits in China was staying in the Eternal City and Smogulecki was ready to set off on a mission trip and he undertook not to put the assistancy or the procurator to any travel expenses. Or maybe the fact that Smogulecki was fully aware that by choosing the mission as his way of life he would gain a sense of self-fulfilment and confidence that he had made the right choice, which developed in him not day by day but hour by hour, was a decisive factor.⁴⁶ Regardless of the general's motives, he chose Smogulecki to carry out evangelization in China, and the latter joined a long list of erudite missionaries who promoted the Catholic faith and European science in the Middle Kingdom.

When comparing the *indipetae* written by Polish Jesuits with similar letters from other provinces, one can conclude that their tone, emotional message, and arguments are broadly consistent. In each of these collections of letters we find the same missionary zeal, readiness to die a martyr's death, and references to the intercessory prayers of Francis Xavier and the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola. When we read the conclusions of Amélie Vantard concerning *indipetae* from France (approximately 370 letters written between 1607 and the suppression of the Society)⁴⁷ or those of Laura Vilela Souza and Marina Massimi on the letters of Spanish Jesuits from the years 1582–1600,⁴⁸ we notice exactly the same phenomena as appear in the Polish *indipetae*. Vantard enumerates among the most frequent issues mentioned in the French letters include a desire to be a missionary from early childhood, missionary work as a reason for joining the Society of Jesus, a desire for God that grows over time, the image of a vineyard deprived of laborers, supernatural powers (e.g., the visions of Francis Xavier), willingness to use the gifts received from God (e.g., language skills) in a responsible manner, impatience, and inability to wait for a long time, missionary work as a path to self-improvement, and a desire for suffering, difficulties, and death.⁴⁹

Similarly, the most common reasons to go on a foreign mission mentioned in the Spanish *indipetae* included salvation of one's soul, an opportunity to

46 ARSI, *Pol.* 79, f. 23^r: "Quia post diuturnam deliberationem circa hoc negotium institutam, profusis plurimis orationibus et mortificationibus tam a me quam ab aliis ad hunc finem praestitis, in dies magis in proposito confirmor, imo in horas violentius ac validius trahor."

47 ARSI, *FG* 757.

48 ARSI, *Hisp.* 758.

49 Amélie Vantard, "Les vocations missionnaires chez les Jésuites français aux XVII^e–XVIII^e siècles," *Annales de Bretagne et des Pays de l'Ouest* 116, no. 3 (2009): 10–15.

help other people, the greater glory of God, gratefulness for all the kindness and worldly goods received from God, spreading and protecting Catholic doctrine, a willingness to sacrifice one's life in Christ's name, and achieving self-perfection. Many were written during the procurator's stay in Europe. Jesuits were motivated to write their letters by letters from current missionaries, the lives of saints and martyrs, and the desire was lasting, incessant, and increasing in strength and intensity. At the end of their letters the authors frequently declared their readiness to set off as soon as possible.⁵⁰ We will find similar themes in *Litterae indipetae* from Germany, Italy, or Portugal.⁵¹

As we have seen, due to their spiritual formation, education in the spirit of the *Ratio studiorum superiorum Societatis Iesu* and the constant stream of letters and accounts coming from the Far East, Jesuits from most provinces had the same dream of carrying out their missionary activity in areas beyond Europe and in particular in the Middle Kingdom. And although in the seventeenth-century Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which was very distant from the problems of colonial policy and which was confronted with numerous conflicts on its eastern and northern borders, this dream was not of a mass character, it came true in several cases. It was undoubtedly influenced by the determination, personal qualities, and deep faith of those who were sent to China, and maybe in some cases also a bit of luck—as suggested by Liam Matthew Brockey, who emphasized that the missionaries sent to the Far East distinguished themselves from other religious only because they had “successfully persuaded their superiors of their vocation for missionary work.”⁵² Regardless of the reasons that led the Superior General of the Society of Jesus to give Rudomina, Boym, Smogulecki, and Bąkowski his permission to start missionary work in China, this allowed them to fulfil their dream, which they carried out with great devotion until they died, far away from their homeland—always *ad maiorem Dei gloriam*.

50 Laura Vilela Souza and Marina Massimi, “Il desiderio dell’oltremare nelle litterae Indipetae: Le condizioni psicologiche per l’azione nella narrativa di giovani gesuiti del sedicesimo secolo,” *Memorandum* 3 (2002): 59, 55–71, 68–69.

51 See Aliocha Maldavsky, “Pedir las Indias: Las cartas *indipetae* de los jesuitas europeos, siglos XVI–XVIII, ensayo historiográfico,” *Relaciones: Estudios de historia y sociedad* 132 (2012): 147–81. Some differences can be noted in the letters written by Jesuits from the Province of Portugal and Spain who, in many cases, declared low educational level (or even illiteracy) and who had more practical skills than academic qualifications, and their number included tailors, cooks; see Pierre-Antoine Fabre and Bernard Vincent, “Presentation,” in *Missions religieuses modernes: “Notre lieu est le monde”*, ed. Pierre-Antoine Fabre and Bernard Vincent (Rome: École française de Rome, 2007), 1–17, here 3.

52 Brockey, *Journey to the East*, 209.