

## THE CHINESE CHRISTIANS FIGHTING FOR THE MING DYNASTY, THE STORY OF AN EMBASSY

Monika Miazek-Męczyńska

Historians fix the year of 1644 as the final date of Ming Dynasty and the start of Manchu Qing Dynasty reign in China. The Manchu fully conquered the Middle Kingdom only twelve years later. These twelve years saw many fights and hysterical efforts by the last Ming to restore domination of the country and save the perishing Dynasty. On 18 December 1646, the last adult pretender to the throne, Zhu Youlang (1623-1662), Prince of Yongming, was proclaimed the Yongli Emperor. His most loyal supporters happened to be Christians: Thomas Qu Shisi (1590-1651), Lukas Ding Kuichu (?-1647), Lukas Jiao Lian (?-1651) and the Great Chancellor Pang-Achilleus Tianshou (?-1657).<sup>1</sup>

I would like to focus on the person of the last one, because I believe that his political position, but first of all his strong neophyte belief, all resulted in numerous baptisms at the imperial court. In turn, these events rose the hope in the hearts of Jesuits living in China that conversion of the entire Middle Kingdom to Catholicism was imminent. By the intervention of Pang-Achilleus, too, the Emperor agreed to send messengers to the Holy See. I would therefore like to base my paper on two documents written by the Polish Jesuit Fr. Michael Boym.<sup>2</sup> He became entangled in the history of the last years of Ming Dynasty as its ambassador to Europe, its faithful servant and also its historian in some way.

<sup>1</sup> N. Standaert (ed.), *Handbook of Christianity in China*, Vol. 1: 635-1800 (Leiden-Boston-Köln, 2001), p. 440.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Boym (1612-1659), born in Lvov, joined the Society of Jesus on 13 August 1631 in Krakow (Poland), where he took a humanist education (philosophy, theology, pedagogy). In September 1641 he received his ordination in Krakow. With the personal blessing from Pope Urban VIII, Boym went to Lisbon, where in 1643, he boarded a ship for Macao. He stayed in Macao for a couple of months learning Chinese, and teaching at the local Jesuit college. He then was sent to the new missionary outpost in Tingan (Hainan) where he spent a lot of time on researching Chinese flora. By the end of 1649 he was sent by father Alvaro de Semedo to the Yongli Emperor's court to help Fr. Andreas Koffler. In 1650 he started a voyage as an official ambassador of the Ming Dynasty to Pope Innocent X, and other Christian rulers in Europe. On 18 December 1655, after three years of waiting, Boym was given an audience by Pope Alexander VII, who had given letters and gifts for the queen mother Helen and Grand Chancellor Pang-Achilleus. On 30 March 1656, Boym left Lisbon for his second journey to China. He arrived at Goa on 6 November 1656. He tried to get to the court of the Yongli Emperor, but failed. Michael Boym died at the Chinese border on 22 August 1659.

*Empress Helena, Queen – the Emperor’s Mother Maria, Queen – his Wife Anna, son – the Crown Prince Constantinus, and also the Commander-in-chief, Vice-king and the Great Chancellor send p. Michael Boym to manifest their obedience to the Holy See.* I would like to use this text as a kind of guide, which will help to outline the profiles of the main *dramatis personae* – first and foremost of Pang-Achilleus.

Biographical information about Pang Tianshou may not be confirmed: his date of birth is unknown, with 1657 assumed as the year of his death. It is known that he was a minister and Great Chancellor at the Yongli court. He was baptised sometime before 1630 by father Niccolò Longobardo (1565-1655), a Jesuit who was staying at the imperial court in Beijing. During baptism he chose the name of Achilleus.<sup>6</sup> At the court of Emperor Yongli he worked as an advisor and enjoyed the Emperor’s confidence. This explains why he exercised great influence among court members. What is more, he was castrated so he could contact women from the Emperor’s family and the ladies-in-waiting. It is also possible that Pang was made responsible for security and calm in the Emperor’s harem (in his letter to the Pope he calls himself: ‘I, Achilles, [...] the guardian of the Emperor’s harem’ – *Ego Achilleus [...] penetralium Imp(eratoris) Custos*).<sup>7</sup> At his instigation the Empress and Queens started to show interest in the teaching of the incoming Western missionaries wishing more to know about it. For this purpose Pang-Achilleus introduced to the Yongli court a Jesuit missionary Andrew Xavier Koffler (1603-1652)<sup>8</sup>, who in 1647 baptised the Emperor’s wife, and named her Anna, followed by the Emperor’s mother (Maria – Maliya), the legal wife of his deceased father (Helena – Liena) - and a few days later – by the Emperor’s son, the Imperial Prince Cixuan, who was named Constantinus. Some 50 concubines, 40 officials and an unknown number of eunuchs were also

<sup>6</sup> Cf. A.W. Hummel, *Eminent Chinese of the Ch’ing period (1644-1912)*, vol. I (Washington, 1943), p. 193.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, *Jap.-Sin.* 77, f. 93.

<sup>8</sup> Andreas Wolfgang (Xavier) Koffler (1603-1651) was born in Krems (Kaems) (Austria), in a rich Protestant family. After his father’s death he moved to Ratisbone (Bavaria), where he and his brothers and sisters became Catholics. In 1627 he joined the Jesuits. He studied theology and mathematics. He started his journey to China from Lisbon in 1639 (or 1640). He arrived in Goa in January 1642 and in 1643 he was in Macao, where he spent two years to learn the language and customs. In 1643 he changed his name from Wolfgang into Xavier. In 1645 he found himself at the Yongli court, where he easily got accepted because of his mathematic knowledge. In 1648 he baptized almost the entire imperial court. In January 1649, on the request of the Emperor, he went to Macau to ask the Portuguese for help against the Manchu invaders from the North. On his return, when his ship was probably stopped by a Manchu patrol, he got killed. 12 December 1651 is assumed as the date of his death. Cf. A.W. Hummel, *op. cit.*, vol. II, p. 772.

baptised.

All these events were accompanied by miraculous circumstances, described by Boym in his *Brevis Relatio*.<sup>9</sup> According to this text, in her dreams, Empress Helena saw a little baby who said that if she did not obey his law he would punish her with death. When soon after, the Empress saw the picture of the Virgin Mary with Child given to the Emperor by Fr. Andreas Koffler, she recognised the baby in her dream and soon she besought the Emperor for permission to receive baptism. He gave his assent, though, Chinese customs dictated that women from the imperial court could not meet with foreigners. At first the Empress wanted Pang Achilles to baptise her, but he refused and threatened her with torments in hell after death. The added news about the political situation drove her to such despair that she almost committed suicide. Finally, the Chancellor managed to convince her together with the Queens and ladies-in-waiting to be baptised by Fr. Koffler. Pang-Achilleus would be their godfather.

The Emperor reacted happily hearing the news about the conversion of Empress Helena, his mother and wife, but despite his respect for the Catholic religion he did not want to be baptised himself. The biggest fear was the need to give up his harem. Fr. Koffler criticised such custom and advised the Emperor to be faithful to his baptised first wife Anna. She, as Boym writes in *Brevis Relatio*, asked God night and day that, through mediation of the guardian Angel, a successor who was desired so much by all members of the imperial court, would be given to her. [...] So it happened that after she had prayed for it one afternoon, in the Emperor's presence in front of the picture of Jesus Christ, twelve hours later at midnight she gave birth to a beautiful prince and the whole court was very happy because of that.

Fr. Koffler convinced the Emperor to have the baby-boy baptised as soon as possible and teach him the rules of the Catholic Faith. He also tried to persuade the Emperor to promise that the prince would marry only one wife. The Emperor and his ministers refused to agree till the prince seriously fell ill. As soon as possible Fr. Koffler was asked for help, and he baptised the prince giving him the name Constantinus. When he poured water over the prince laying in Chancellor Pang's hands, the baby

<sup>9</sup> I used the Polish version of *Brevis Relatio*, entitled: *Relacya Xiędza Michała Boyma, Societatis Jesu, Missyonarza z Prowincji Polskiej w Chinach o stanie chrześcijaństwa w tamtych krajach uczyniona w Rzymie rok 1653*, in: M. Juniewicz, *Listy różne ku chwalebney ciekawości y chrześcijańskiemu zbudowaniu służące z Azyi, Afryki y Ameryki. Niegdyś od Missyonarzów Societatis Jesu w rozmaitych językach pisane teraz dla pragnących wiedzieć o pomnożeniu wiedzy naszej w tamtych krajach jako też y obyczajach owych narodów po polskiemu przełożone przez Jednego Zakonnika Societatis Jesu w Warszawie w Drukarni J.K.M. y Rzplitej w Collegium Societatis Jesu rok 1767*, pp. 70-81.

immediately recovered miraculously. The overjoyed Emperor soon sent messengers (Catholic mandarins) to Macao to thank God for the amazing recovery of his son.

The miraculous atmosphere among the new converted Christians at the imperial court stirred the idea of sending envoys to the Holy See in Rome. During his stay in Beijing, Pang-Achilleus had got to know from the Jesuits about the great authority and power of the Roman Pope. He understood that this visible Head of the Catholic Church required obedience from all European kings who asked for his blessing at the start of their reigns because only then, their kingdoms would be allowed to fully blossom.<sup>10</sup> He informed Empress Helena and they asked the Emperor for arrangement of an embassy. It would notify His Holiness about the faith of the Chinese Catholics and get the blessing for authority of the Ming Dynasty in the Middle Kingdom, which had come under threat. The Christians at the Yongli court were convinced that the only hope left for the diminishing Ming Dynasty would be a marvellous intervention by God with the military help of the Holy See and those Christian countries in Europe which respected papal authority.

Pang-Achilleus planned at first to be an ambassador himself but because of objections by the Emperor who did not want to be separated from his faithful advisor for such a long time, alternatives were formulated. The idea was to choose Chinese dignitaries who, equipped with rich gifts, would represent the imperial court in Europe. This idea turned out impossible out of fear for sending in anybody of noble birth for such a long, unknown and dangerous journey which would come to great dissatisfaction of their families. It remained unclear how they would be treated in Europe – lacking all knowledge about European customs and languages, they would not know how to behave in a foreign world. Moreover, rigorous laws of the ancient emperors prohibited any dignitaries from leaving the Chinese Empire to set out for foreign kingdoms.

Under these circumstances the Emperor decided that if Chinese could not be sent as envoys, than a foreigner – for example some of the fathers from the Society of Jesus – would be sent to the Holy See with letters. Pang-Achilleus presented the Emperor's wish to the fathers in Macao saying: "There is nobody in our country more dignified than the teachers of the Holy Faith [...] and nobody can be better for the Holy See than people who were sent to propagate the Christian Faith in Chinese Kingdoms and

<sup>10</sup> "Olim cu[m] Pam Achilleus esset/ Pekini a Patribus Soc. Iesu de Romani Pontificis auctoritate et pote/state supra universam Ecclesiam Christi probe cognoverat, im[m]o obedientia[m]/ ac submissionem a Regibus Europaeis eidem visibili capiti Ecclesiae// praestari intellegerat, benedict[i]o[n]emq[ue] du[m] regnere inciperent, postulari, indeq[ue]/ florere regna inaudiverat.", M. Boym, *Brevis Sinarum Imperii Descriptio*, ff. 63v-64.

who are staying at our imperial court. Anyone of the Fathers, the teachers of the Holy Faith, should go and would be able to relay to the Holy See our faith, royal obedience and devotion. When we will send him, we will evade all inconveniences and we will get what we want by him and by our letters".<sup>11</sup> The Jesuits from Macao agreed with the suggestion and offered to choose somebody from their group for this honourable function. Pang-Achilleus suggested that it would have been improper for the Empress and Queens to send somebody who had never been in China to represent them. He said that they preferred to send a person who had been at the imperial court, who was familiar to the Emperor and Empress and could therefore more easily explain in Europe the current situation of the Chinese Empire. The Empress and Queens decided that this great task should be entrusted to Fr. Michael Boym and with help of Pang-Achilles they asked the Polish Jesuit in the name of God not to refuse this ardent mission.

From the report of Boym, who obviously agreed to take part in such honourable embassy, we can read that the news about the planned mission caused quite a stir at the imperial court. There were many frantic discussions among the dignitaries about the Catholic religion, about the Church and its Greatest Superior, during which they talked with enormous respect about the Pope, his authority and power over the whole Christian world. It is hard to suspect Michael Boym's reporting not to have been flawed with some exaggeration, when he writes that everybody at the imperial court extolled and admired God's Law ("*laudari ab omnibus et aestimari lege[m] Dei*"). There is no doubt that amongst the new baptised people, with whom the Jesuits maintained a close relationship, a great and joyful excitement did exist. Boym says that some tried to persuade the Emperor in different ways to allow them to join the envoy (but the Polish Jesuit believed that the next embassy would be organised soon after the Emperor's baptism).<sup>12</sup> Finally, when Pang-Achilleus irrevocably decided that any person of noble birth would not be allowed to leave the empire, Chinese Christians secretly started to solicit Fr. Boym. When he had to refuse, they insisted that at least he would ask the Pope for resolving all their sins in the hour of death as well as for medallions, relics, crosses and other holy things, which he could bring back for them from Europe. They

<sup>11</sup> "*Personas digniores Magistris S. Legis in nostro Imperio non/ habemus [...]/ et nullos posse esse gratiores Sedi Apostolicae neq[ue] illos qui ab eade[m] ad predicanam fidem Christi in Sinaru[m] regna fuerunt amandati commoranturq[ue]/ in nostra Imperatoria aula. Pater igitur Mag[iste]r S. Legis quicumq[ue] abierit nostram fidem et regiam subiectionem atq[ue] devotione[m] S.Sedi Apostolicae referre poterit, illoq[ue] emisso omnia incommoda evitabimus, ac ea quae/ postulamus per illu[m] ac nostras literas consequemur.*" *ibidem*, ff. 64-64v.

<sup>12</sup> "*Nonnulli etia[m] Imperatorem/ ipsum Catechumenoru[m] ad instituenda[m] simul legatione[m] (quam ille post susceptu[m] deo dante/ baptismum expedire meditatur) inducere moliebantur*", *ibidem*, f. 64v.

only gave up their requests after they had learnt that they would be able to take part in the next embassy and go to Europe in all their glory and dignity after the Emperor's baptism.

On 4 November 1650, Empress Helena dictated a letter to Pope Innocent X (1574-1655) and another to the General of the Society of Jesus, Francesco Piccolomini (1582-1651), in which she asked for prayers and benediction for the Emperor's family and the Middle Kingdom. These letters, written on yellow silk in the name of Empress, Queens and the crown prince, displayed a great emotional involvement.<sup>13</sup> The Empress confesses with humility to her dignified addressees that for a long time she had been living with the disgraceful sin of disbelief, but endowed with the grace of baptism by Fr. Andreas Koffler, she had tried very hard to convert other people at the imperial court to the true Catholic religion. In both letters, she asks for sending many missionaries from the Society of Jesus, who would propagate the Christian Faith all over the Middle Kingdom (*"Demum postulam[us] Te S[ANCTISSIMUM] PATREM, ut plurimos submittas Soc[ietatis] IESU Viros, qui longe lateque S[anctam] Fidem divulgent."*<sup>14</sup>; *"Summe etiam desideramus Venerabilis Societatis Vestrae meritorum, et laborum participationem. Multosq[ue] Doctores, qui fidem praedicent in hoc Imperium submitti."*<sup>15</sup>).

The special respect, which the Empress showed for Jesus Christ, the Catholic Faith and the Pope, was reflected in the letters' contents and form. She requested – contrary to the customs of the imperial office – that every time when words like 'Christ', 'Holy Law' or 'Pope' would be used, they should be distinguished by more elegant characters or some extra free space in between.<sup>16</sup> Her wish was also realised in the Latin translation of the letters made by Fr. Koffler and Fr. Boym who used capital letters in the

<sup>13</sup> The original letters of the Empress and Pang-Achilles can be found in the Vatican Library, and their Chinese and Latin translations are in fondo *Jap.-Sin. 77* in Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu. Description of the letters of the Empress can be found in E.H. Parker, "Letters from a Chinese empress and a Chinese eunuch to the Pope in the year 1650", *Contemporary Review* 101 (1912), pp. 79-83; Lynn A. Struve, "My Complete Devotion: An Empress Appeals to the Pope", in *Voices from the Ming-Quing Catechism: China in Tigers' Jaws*. (Yale: Yale Univ. Press, 1993), pp. 235-238.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, *Jap.-Sin. 77*, ff. 77-77v (Latin version of the letter of Empress Helen to the Pope Innocent X).

<sup>15</sup> Ibidem, ff. 79-79v (Latin version of the letter of Empress Helen to the General superior of the Society of Jesus, Francesco Piccolomini).

<sup>16</sup> *"Imperatrix in serico flavo literas ad Rom[anum] Pontifice[m] nomine suo, Reginae et Prin/cipis heredis conscribi iussit, in illis ubicunq[ue] Christus ac eius lex sancta aut Pontifex nominantur, characteres illi significantes sublimiori loco vel relicto unius literae/ spatio reverentiae gratia exarari voluit, contra omnem consuetudinem Cancellariae/ Sinaru[m] Imperij."*, M. Boym, op. cit., f. 65v.

words of 'Christ', 'Holy Law' or 'Pope'. Letters from Chancellor Pang dating from 4 November of the same year were edited in a similar way.<sup>17</sup> But Achilles did not want to write on silk because he thought it was a symbol of pride. That is why he commanded a secretary to write the letters on red paper.<sup>18</sup> He paid careful attention as to whether the secretary did not change anything in the text and checked the correctness of particular characters, telling him: "Look, it has been 20 years since I have wished to do it, I have already entrusted you [that means – to write a letter to the Pope] and I would prefer this letter to be correctly written rather than to become a ruler of the Chinese Empire or any other kingdom".<sup>19</sup> In the description made by Michael Boym of the writing of Pang's letters, he emphasises the excitement of Pang-Achilleus and his strong devotion for the Pope, which became even more visible during the ceremony of presentation of the letters to the envoys. When during the ceremonial mass, the Great Chancellor offered his and Empress Helena's letters to Fr. Boym and the young Chinese dignitary Andreas Cheng, in the presence of the entire imperial court and all dignitaries, Pang-Achilleus fell down on his knees in front of the envoys and inclined his head to the ground, hereby greatly stressing that he gave them the honours usually extended only to the Emperor. He confessed doing so because Andreas Cheng, who was chosen as his replacement in the embassy, showed much happier than Pang himself. Indeed, Andreas would be able to do something what the Great Chancellor had been dreaming about for many years: to kiss the Holy Father's feet and show respect to the General of the Society of Jesus.<sup>20</sup>

In both letters sealed with Pang-Achilleus' stamp we can see the Chancellor's sadness because it was impossible to personally go to Rome. In these writings, Pang is shown as a Christian but also as a statesman and politician. In the Empress' letters, political accents were introduced only very subtly (in both writings, only a few refer to the Empress' hope for peace, which would make the Chinese Empire more powerful). The Great Chancellor shows in a more direct way the situation of the Ming Dynasty and asks for support, even if his writings received a very official character

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Appendix.

<sup>18</sup> "At verò Don Pam Achilleus in serico scribere noluit, superbiae inquit nota[m] incurerem si ego homo peccator ad Universalem Ecclesiae Christi Doctore[m] in serica audere[m]/ vela scribere. Igitur in rubra papyro epistola[m] Sinica[m] perscribi iussit.", *ibidem*.

<sup>19</sup> "Vide viginti et amplius anni sunt ex quo desideravi hoc agere quod/ modo tibi commisi, et magis opto ipsas literas esse bene perscriptas, quam si/ Sinaru[m] Imperij et nescio quoru[m] regnoru[m] Dominus constituer", *ibidem*.

<sup>20</sup> "Facio tibi istu[m] honorem et reverentiam quam optime nosci, nulli/ me nisi Imperatori exhibere, eo quod longe sis meipso fortunator, viginti/ namqlue/ et amplius anni sunt praeterlapsi, ex quo optavi osculari pedes Vicarij/ Christi et revereri R[evere]nd[issimum] Praepositu[m] G[e]n[er]alem Soc[ie]tatis Iesu Patru[m] Nostru[m]/ nec tamen hoc sum assecutus", *ibidem*, f. 66.

and had been edited in accordance with diplomatic rules. Pang-Achilles asked the Pope and the General of the Society of Jesus to pray to God for keeping a gentle eye on the Chinese Empire, showing mercy to the Emperor and his subjects, who lacked in bravery and armed forces, and for supporting the Middle Kingdom and saving its future and unified borders to be created during times of peace under Emperor Yongli. The subtle way of showing the situation of a country plagued by war, which the Emperor had tried very hard to consolidate and strengthen, suggested what should be done by the addressees of the letters. Without the possibility of asking for any military intervention more directly, the Great Chancellor made sure that all his intentions and plans were known to the ambassador, Fr. Michael Boym, who could more carefully describe the situation of the Chinese Empire and all its needs. I do not doubt that Boym's mission had a spiritual but also political character. Moreover, the letters to the leaders of the Catholic Church were accompanied by a writing to the Portugal king João VI. Some information about this unusual embassy was also sent to Austria and after his arrival to Europe, Michael Boym established connections with diplomats from France and the Republic of Venice. *Post factum* it turned out that all these attempts and efforts did not yield any results. The plans of Pang-Achilleus to gather support from Christian Europe for the Ming Dynasty, because of the promise of baptism of the Chinese Emperor, were doomed from the very start. No doubt, though, at the moment of making the decision about sending the envoys, all people involved deeply believed in its effectiveness. In this atmosphere, full of optimism and religious ecstasy, the mission of Fr. Michael Boym as an ambassador of the Ming Dynasty to the Holy See started in November 1650.

It is worth adding that despite earlier decisions about any Chinese possibly joining the embassy, Pang-Achilles finally chose a young dignitary Andreas Cheng, an officer in the rank of *yu-chi*, as a companion and servant for the Polish Jesuit. First of all, Cheng had to observe all what he would see in Europe and send to the imperial court detailed reports. On the first leg of the journey to Macao, another young Chinese Christian, Joseph Ko, accompanied them, but only as a witness to the authenticity of Boym's mission. Andreas Cheng would spend almost nine years with Michael Boym travelling from China to Europe and back again. He became the first Chinese ever to visit Europe in the capacity of an official envoy from the Middle Kingdom. Cheng has aided Boym also in his research work as an expert in Chinese language, for example with the translation of the inscription on the Xi'an monument, which was later edited in Athanasius Kircher's *China illustrata*<sup>21</sup>. This young man had not been chosen by accident for sure. For Michael Boym, as it turned out, he proofed a real blessing, because Andreas would faithfully accompany him over the whole troublesome journey. Cheng proofed to be an ardent

<sup>21</sup> A. Kircher, *China illustrata* (Amsterdam, 1667).

Catholic, and by the end of his stay in Europe he got the permission to join the Society of Jesus as a brother through Boym's intercession.<sup>22</sup>

The official envoy of the imperial court, Boym, arrived in Macao, where on 23 November 1650, some accompanying dignitaries from the Ming court certified at the Church notary the authenticity of Boym's mission and of the letters he had brought. The General Supervisor of China and Japan Sebastião de Maya (1599-1664) confided Boym with open letters which confirmed his identity as an envoy from the Chinese vice-province to the General of the Society of Jesus.<sup>23</sup>

At the time, Boym met some first serious problems because the civil authorities of Macao opposed his journey. The uncertain political situation did make the Portuguese realize how fast the Manchu domination of China had been proceeding.<sup>24</sup> Concerned about their own business interests, they showed reluctant to take any side in the political conflict out of fear for loosing good trade contacts with the Middle Kingdom. Only the threat of Sebastião de Maya to excommunicate the governor of Macao, forced the former to give up.<sup>25</sup> Michael Boym left Macao for Goa (probably, on 1 January 1651). There, he met with strong resistance from the local superiors of his order, who forbade him to continue to Europe boarding a Portuguese ship. Obedient to this decision, Boym decided to go to Rome over land and received permission to do so. On 8 December 1651, he set out on a journey with Andreas Cheng through India, Persia, Armenia and Turkey. At the beginning of December 1652, they would reach Venice.

Once he had arrived in Europe, Boym unceasingly and in many different ways fulfilled his ambassadorial duties. In Venice he delivered a speech as the official emissary of Emperor Yongli and provided the audience with information about the state of Christianity in China. This speech initiated in Europe an action of support for the Ming. His next step was to quickly prepare *Brevis Relatio*, which was readied for printing in Smyrna by the end of November 1652. The text was supposed to prepare Europe for all actions by Boym, who had already encountered some difficulties due to some own faults. In Venice, he asked for help from the ambassador of France, René de Voyer de Paulmy, the second earl of

<sup>22</sup> Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, *Jap.-Sin.* 162, f. 15.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *Jap.-Sin.* 77., f. 19r.

<sup>24</sup> On 25 November 1650, the Manchu had conquered Canton, and the imperial court had to find new shelter once more. While most likely Boym knew about that event, he continued his journey to inform Europe about the chances of Yongli to regain full control over the Middle Kingdom. Paul Pelliot concludes that Boym's mission was "mort-né" ("dead in the time of birth"), but as he writes, "le malheureux Boym tenait à 'sauver la face' de sa 'légation'." Cf. P. Pelliot, *op. cit.*, p. 114.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. P. Pelliot, *ibidem*.

d'Argenson. Thanks to his support, a performance at the Senate of the Saint Marco Republic could take place.<sup>26</sup> This French support proved profitable to the Polish missionary only for a short time. Putting himself under the protection of the French ambassador had offended the Pope's nuncio, who next sent a report to Rome in which he advised the Holy See to remain sceptical towards the envoy. At the same time, the Polish missionary jeopardised himself in the eyes of the Spanish ambassador, because Spain and France acted as hostile states. In Rome, he lacked support because of his dire escape from Goa. Moreover, some serious flaws against the discipline of his religious order – when he published about the relations with China without permission of the General, and did send to the rectors of European universities his work *Ratio eorum* in which Boym praised Confucius and defended the missionary methods of Fr. Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) – made the General of the Jesuits to reprimand Boym, and the Holy See even more suspicious to welcome him. An anonymous letter by some 'kind' of *Servus Ecclesiae*, too, accused the Polish missionary of only pretending to be an authentic envoy of the Ming.<sup>27</sup> As a result, the Ming ambassador was sent away from Rome to Loreto, where he had to wait for a change of situation for several more months.

During that time the *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* gathered four times to reconsider Boym's case (on the 1st April, 22nd July, 16th September in 1653, and on the 24th August in 1654). Nothing important happened till 1655, when positive identification of the Polish missionary had been sent from Goa and Macao. Moreover, the same letters informed that more than one third of China remained ruled by the Ming while other territories of China rebelled against the Manchu Dynasty. The *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* set up a special committee which prepared a short term report of Boym's case for the Pope, and this time agreed to support him and his mission. Finally, on 24 September 1655, they decided to reply to the letters of the Ming court. A change at the Holy See had also come to influence that decision. Pope Innocent X had died. His successor Cardinal Fabio Chigi, who had taken the name of Alexander VII (1599-1667), was more willing to compromise than his predecessor – and significantly – showed more personal interest in the case as a friend of Athanasius Kircher (1601-1680), the Roman protector of Boym. After three years of waiting, on 7 December 1655, the envoy of the Ming Dynasty finally got an audience with the Pope. After a short talk, Alexander VII commanded Boym to return to China with letters and gifts for Empress Helena and the

<sup>26</sup> At that time, Jesuits were not allowed to enter the Town of Saint Marco – so Boym arrived there *persona non grata*.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, *Jap.-Sin.* 77, ff. 118-120.

Great Chancellor Pang-Achilleus.<sup>28</sup>

The Pope's responses did not entirely match the expectations of the noble Chinese addressees. Alexander VII stated in poetic, but firm words his happiness about the conversion of Empress Helena and her relatives and reminded them about the need of promoting Catholic religion in China. Finally, he extended his blessing and ensured about his prayers for the divided Chinese Kingdom so that it could stay united in faith and spirit with the Holy See ("*Deum ardentem precamur, ut disiunctissimum Regnum unum tandem faciat et animo et fide Nobiscum.*"<sup>29</sup>) That last remark had absolutely no political meaning – it was only an expression of religious care by the Pope for the spiritual state of his distant flock. The response to the letter of Pang-Achilleus seems to be very lapidary – the Pope encourages the Chancellor to finish the work of Christianisation of China and expresses his joy because of the extended teaching of Jesus Christ. But it contained no such promise of sending new missionaries to the Middle Kingdom – as Empress Helena and the Great Chancellor had been asking for – and moreover nothing was said about any form of military or political support. There is a kind of distance shown in both papal letters, though, which while cordially formulated, did keep some conventional way of addressing: the letter to the Empress Helena begins with the words: "*Charissime in Christo filiae nostrae Helенае Tamingae Sinarum Reginae*" – "To our dearest daughter in Christ Helena, Queen of China", and the letter to Pang-Achilleus begins with: "*Dilecto filio Pang Achilleo Eunucho Sinarum Regis Terrae, Mariq[ue] Generali Praefecto, et c[etera].*" – "To beloved son Pang-Achilles, castrate, the prefect of the land and the sea [belonging to] the King of China". Diplomatic understanding and knowledge of the political situation did not allow the Pope to take a more decisive stance and give the Ming more than just verbal support.

A far bigger cordiality can be observed in several letters (all dating from 25 December 1655) written by the General of the Society of Jesus, Gosvinus Nickel (1584-1664). He sent separate letters not only to Empress Helena and all Queens, but also to Crown Prince Constantinus, to Chancellor Pang and even to the Yongli Emperor. In those letters, in accordance with traditional contacts between the Chinese imperial court and the Jesuits, as initiated by the Wanli Emperor (1572-1620) and Fr. Matteo Ricci, the General promises to give any necessary help from the Society of Jesus. He assures Empress Helena about the incessant prayers of the whole Society for her, the royal family and the entire country. He

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, *Jap.-Sin.* 77. The letter of Pope Alexander VII to Empress Helen: ff. 133-133v, 138; The letter of Pope Alexander VII to the chancellor Pang-Achilles – ff. 135, 137.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, *Jap.-Sin.* 77, f. 133v.

writes about the hope that soon the Yongli Emperor would be baptised and God would bring back peace to the Middle Kingdom.

Michael Boym and Andreas Cheng started their journey back to the Middle Kingdom to give the letters to the addressees. They set out for the Far East from Lisbon, where Boym got permission to see the King of Portugal, Joaõ IV, who he gave the writings from the Chinese court requesting for help in the struggle against the Manchu. The answers – two letters addressed to Emperor Yongli and Chancellor Pang – included more concrete promises than the Pope's, for example of military support.<sup>30</sup>

On 30 March 1656, Boym set out for China from Lisbon for the second time. The journey would be full of hard labour and danger. On 6 November 1656,<sup>31</sup> the ship reached the port of Goa, where Boym received information about the worsening situation of the Yongli Emperor whose armies were left in control of only small parts of the south-western provinces of the empire. Reading Boym's letter, local authorities in Macao informed him that because of the trade contacts established between the Portuguese and the Manchu, the arrival of the Ming ambassador in Macao was regarded as highly undesirable. Despite the refusal, and looking for a way back to the Yongli imperial court, Boym, together with Andreas Cheng, started the journey over land to Ajutthai, the capital of Siam, where they received notice – this time from the senate of Macao – not to further proceed to the city.

The Polish Jesuit knew that his mission had become dangerous for his modest own person<sup>32</sup> as well as for the entire Society of Jesus and the connecting interests of the Crown of Portugal. However, as soon as he got information that the Ming court stayed in Guangxi province bordering Tonkin, he decided to go over there. After a dramatic journey of two months on a small ship around the Indochinese peninsula, Boym and his inseparable companion reached Tonkin on 10 August 1658. They stayed there till February 1659, when they crossed the border with China with

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, *Jap.-Sin.* 162, f. 21.

<sup>31</sup> This date is given by E. Malatesta, "The Tragedy of Michael Boym", in *Actes du VI<sup>e</sup> Colloque International de Sinologie, Chantilly, 1989* (Taipei, Paris, 1995), p. 363. Based on the relation of Ignatius Hartoghvelt SJ, companion of Boym during the journey. Whereas Edward Kajdański writes that Boym arrived in Goa in middle 1657. Cf. E. Kajdański, *Michał Boym Ambasador Państwa Środką* (Warszawa, 1999), p. 113.

<sup>32</sup> Boym himself wrote in one of the letters sent from Loretto to Gosvinus Nickel, "I am ready to go to Rome at the first sign or immediately go back to China, even if it would cost my reputation and health". Cf. G. H. Dunne SJ, *Generation of Giants. The Story of the Jesuits in China in the Last Decades of the Ming Dynasty* (Indiana, Notre Dame, 1962), p. 345.

permission of the local governments. During that journey, Boym received the message that annexation of another part of the Chinese Empire by the Manchu had cut off the travellers from the Yongli court. The Polish missionary decided to return to Tonkin from where he travelled through Burma in a new effort to reach his final destination. The news about the deaths of father Koffler (1651) and Chancellor Pang (1657), and a ban on any return to Tonkin, added even more to his troubles.

Exhausted by the efforts of the journey lasting for over more than three years, Michael Boym died on 22 August 1659. The only witness of his death was Andreas Cheng, the inseparable companion on the Polish missionary's journey. Three Chinese Christians, sent with help by Onoforio Borgers, superior of the Jesuits in Tonkin, did not manage to arrive on time. The body of Michael Boym was buried near the royal road, which leads from Hanoi to Nanning, the capital of Guangxi province. The tomb has never been found. The fate of Andreas Cheng remained a mystery. Onofrio Borgers suggested that he had taken the Pope's writings and valuable things and had hidden in nearby woods or mountains in fear of the Manchu. Borgers expected a letter from Andreas but never got it. It is not known what happened to the writings of Pope Alexander VII and the General of the Society of Jesus Gosvinus Nickel to Emperor Yongli, Empress Helena and Great Chancellor Pang-Achilleus. Undoubtedly they never reached the addressees. Pang-Achilleus had died and the rest was to die soon in Manchu captivity (1662). The death of Michael Boym removed all hope for a continuous reign of the Christian Ming Dynasty and the changing of China into a Catholic country. It does not alter the fact that, according to the words of Edward Malatesta, Boym's "great adventure and its ideal still live as one of the most dramatic episodes in the Jesuit penetration of the Middle Kingdom."

APPENDIX<sup>33</sup>

## JAP.-SIN. 77, ff. 93-93v

INTERPRETATIO LITERARUM SINICARUM.

A Cancellario Imperii Sinici Pam Achilleo Sina-Christiano.

Ad Sanctissimum Dominum Nostrum.

Per Patres Andream Xavier, et Michaellem Boym Societatis Iesu, in aula  
Imperatoris Sinensis pro tempore assistentes, facta.

Clarissimi Imperii Sinici de Imperatoris mandato Universalis Prorex  
Regnorum et Provinciarum Quam tum, Quam si, Fokien, Commissarius  
Militiae in terra et mari, Quam si Regulorum Dux, Thesaurarius reddituum,  
et Solicitator, absente Imperatore absolutus, et solus Decisor causarum,  
Imperatoriae custodiae supremus Praefectus, Equitum Magister, Magnus  
Cancellarius, Intimus Imperatoris Secretarius et Cubicularius, Pam  
Achilleus Christianus, genibus flexis, capite ad terram deiecto, se sistente  
ante Thronum Vicarii DEI IESU in terris, Universalis Doctoris Catholicae  
Ecclesiae, Veri Domini, SANCTISSIMI PATRIS INNOCENTII DECIMI.

Ego Achilleus expendo mecum, quod penetralium Imperatoris Custos  
ex officio, ductus errore simul ago curam militiae. Unde me ipsum  
diminui, et absque luce et disciplina, peccatorum multitudinem auxi. Olim  
in Aula Septentrionali, DEO auspice, incidi in Viros Societatis IESU, qui  
aperto calle duxerunt me rudem, errantem exhortati, ut sequerer Fidem.  
Quare, cum reverenti expiatus sacro lavacro, tunc orsus sum intelligere  
Sanctae Doctrinae Documenta, eiusque reconditam excellentiam altamque  
profunditatem. Tum vero immersus huic studio die noctuque fidei corde  
sum prosecutus viginti et amplius annis, nec asus sum quidpiam remittere.  
Ita consecutus sum Coelorum Regis auxilium, cui qua ratione respondeam,  
non invenio modum. Saepe animus fuit ipsemet adeundi Sanctissimum  
Thronum, atque oculos cum veneratione satiandi sanctissimo vultu, sed  
Imperii causae tam variae, Regiae res tam perplexae, non admisere intimi  
mei sinus exequi desiderium. Quare summopere contristor. Nunc  
peccatoris unica cogitatio medullitus in hoc est, quod Imperii calamitas  
necdum quieverit. Ideo ex industria petii Societatis IESU Virum P[atrem]  
Michaellem Boym, ut abitura nave repeteret Magnum Occidentem, supplex  
accessurus ad Te Summum PONTIFICEM, SANCTISSIMUM PATREM,  
ut ante Altare Sanctorum Petri et Pauli, cum totius Mundi Oecumenica  
Ecclesia elevatis ad Caelum oculis ores DEUM, ut cum misericordia  
respiciat hanc Imperatoriam Domum; adiuvet, et conservet Imperium,  
erigendo limites subiturae pacis, una faxit, ut noster Sapientissimus  
Imperator, qui est huius Regiae Domus decimus octavus Successor, et a  
primo Imperii et Familiae Fundatore duodecimus Nepos; Ipse scilicet

<sup>33</sup> Transcription of the both letters was made by Krzysztof Dziedzic.

Dominus cum subditis adoret Coelorum Dominum IESUM. Ista demum erit nostri Sinici Imperii integra beatitudo. Et in praesenti quidem Integerrima, Sapientissima, Clementissima, Venerabilis, Imperatrix Christiani nominis Helena, Regina Imperatoris Mater Christiani nominis Maria, Regina eius Legitima Coniunx Christiani nominis Anna, Filius Imperatoris Princeps et Heres Christiano nomine Constantinus omnes humili corde credunt et colunt Sanctam Doctrinam; una habent Sermonis verba, quae mittunt ad Sanctissimum Thronum. Quod me rudem peccatorem attinet, peto suppliciter Te Sanctissimum PATREM, ut pro mea ex hoc saeculo discessus hora, peccatorum poenae integram remissionem largiaris, ac plurimos Societatis Viros submittas in hoc Sinarum Imperium, qui sua doctrina convertant universos saeculi homines, et cum poenitentia animadvertant colere et venerari Sanctam Legem, neque in vacuo transitu, raptio pedum pulvere dimittantur. Ita demum mihi spes est assecuturum me felicitatem vere interminabilem. Cum veneratione modicum his explicui ignarae mentis arcana. Pronus ad terram me totum abiicio, expectando misericordem intuitum. Nec plura.

Ium Lie Anno quarto, in ordine revolutionum Litterarum Annualium Kem yn, Luna decima, die octavo, qui fuit Anni millesimi sexcentissimi quinquagesimi, Novembris dies primus. Ultra nil legendum.

In principio

Locus [ ] Sigilli. In quo pro more Sinico (non enim solent aliter subscribere suum nomen) insculpta sunt haec verba: Fortissimi Generalissimi armorum, Universalis Proregis Sigillum.

## JAP.-SIN. 77, f. 137.

ab Alexandro VII ad Pam Achilleum

Dilecto filio Pang Achilleo Eunucho Sinarum Regis Terrae, Mariq[ue]  
Generali Praefecto, et c[etera].

ALEXANDER PAPA SEPTIMUS.

Dilecte fili salutem et Apostolicam benedictionem.

Gaudium magnum annuauerunt Nobis epistolae tuae. A solis enim ortu et occasu, ab Aquilone et Mari fecit Nobiscum misericordiam suam Deus, quique olim multa gaza atq[ue] opibus potentatem Regium Eunuchum, baptismi unda et gratia derepente illustravit, nunc te Dilecte fili Regni istius, et mundi curis implicitum, inter quas nunquam fere locus Christi doctrinae, quae a saeculi huius sapientibus stultitia habetur, in sortem filiorum suorum, hoc est in alterius et veri Regni haereditatem immortalem, ac nunquam perituram vocavit: Cuius beneficii magnitudo, ut immensa laetitia affectit cor Nostrum, ita quid pro eo a te debeatur plane intelliges, si ad illum subinde respicias, qui Nobis suae disciplinae factus est in exemplum. Enitere vero et adlabora, ut consummetur hoc opus, quod inceptum est in amplissimo isto Regno, ut sit et laus tua in Evangelio. Nulla enim debet esse tanta terrarum vastitas et longitudo, quae obstet fidei, quae Montes transfert, aut charitati, quae nunquam excidit, omnia sustinet, atq[ue] operatur. Hac te in Nostrum sinum admittimus, cuius erga te ac gentes istas ardor nec aquarum, quae inter Nos intercedunt, multitudine extinguetur, nec ulla unquam difficultate aut periculo refrigescet. Quam autem tibi petis benedictionem peramanter impertimur.

Datum Romae apud Sanctum Petrum sub Annulo Piscatoris die XVIII.  
Dec[embris] MDCLV. Pontificatus Nostri Anno Primo.