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Matteo Ricci as an Islamicate informant. Two moments of connection in the Persian afterlives of a Latin account of China

Nile Green

Faculty of History, UCLA, Los Angeles, California, United States of America
Email: green@history.ucla.edu

Abstract

Three centuries after the Mongol-era historian Rashid al-Din (1247–1318) wrote his influential account of China, an émigré Christian convert from Islam translated Matteo Ricci's book on China into Persian in Mughal Delhi. In doing so, he provided a remarkably detailed depiction of the rulers, religions, and regulations of the Ming empire that greatly updated, and superseded, Rashid al-Din's celebrated account. Nonetheless, by the very virtue of its triangulated origins—between China, Europe, and India; between Chinese, Latin, and Persian—this was a fraught endeavour. For Chinese cultural traditions had to be rendered into Islamicate Persian terms that were approximate equivalents for Latin Christian terms which themselves inevitably misrepresented Confucian terms that in turn provided biased depictions of Buddhist and Daoist beliefs. By looking at two moments of the transmission of Ricci into Persian—in the early modern era of manuscripts and amid the colonial ascent of Indian print—this article uses translation as a lens through which to observe both the reach and limits of the cross-cultural connections that have captivated global historians in recent decades.

Keywords: India; Persian; China; early modern; Latin; Jesuits; Mughal empire; Ming empire; global intellectual history; translation

If the names be not correct, language is not in accordance with the truth of things.
Confucius

The history of the Jesuit encounters with early modern China, India, and Persia has long fascinated historians, with an important corpus of scholarship tracing how Catholic missions served as mechanisms of intellectual and religious exchange.¹

¹ The most relevant contributions of this older historiography include A. Camps, 'Persian works of Jerome Xavier, a Jesuit at the Mogul Court', *Islamic Culture* 35.3 (1961), pp. 166–176; *idem*, *Jerome Xavier S.J. and the Muslims of the Mughal Empire: Controversial Works and Missionary Activity* (Schöneck, 1957); H. Chick, *A Chronicle of the Carmelites in Persia and the Papal Mission of the XVIIth and XVIIIth Centuries* (London, 1939); Father P. Du Jarric, S.J., *Akbar and the Jesuits: An Account of the Jesuits Missions to the Court of Akbar* (London, 1926); G. Levi Della Vida, *Documenti intorno alle relazioni delle chiese orientali con la S. Sede durante il pontificato di Gregorio XIII* (Vatican City, 1948); Sir E. Maclagan, *The Jesuits and the Great Mogul* (London, 1932); and A. T. Wilson, 'History of the Mission of the Fathers of the Society of Jesus, established in Persia by the Reverend Father Alexander of Rhodes', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental Studies* 3.4 (1925), pp. 675–706.

This article adopts a triangulated approach to this topic by examining the Persian afterlives of Matteo Ricci's famous account of China as it made its way from Beijing to Augsburg then Delhi, where, in around 1650, it came into the hands of a similarly itinerant translator. Yet this was only the first of Ricci's bibliographical reincarnations into Persian. For two centuries later, this forgotten Persian manuscript was rediscovered and published in colonial India's two major printing centres.

By examining the Persian afterlives of Ricci's account of China, the following pages consider the linguistic and informational legacy of the early modern Islamic manuscript ecumene in the modern era of print. As a contribution to Francis Robinson's *Festschrift*, in this way the article responds to two of his most influential publications: 'Ottomans-Safavids-Mughals: Shared Knowledge and Connective Systems' and 'Technology and Religious Change: Islam and the Impact of Print'.²

Here, Ricci's Persian afterlives are used as a test case for asking two questions that explore the ramifications of Robinson's insights with regard to the rise of global history during the quarter of a century since they were written. The first question, focusing on Ricci's afterlife in Persian manuscript form, is whether Robinson's model of 'shared knowledge and connective systems' can be taken further afield—pace early modern global history—to include the Ming empire and Catholic Europe. Turning to Ricci's afterlife in Persian print, the second question asks how 'the impact of print' affected the geographies of knowledge of this prior 'connective system' at the height of British power in the nineteenth century. Holding these questions together is a focus on that most complex mode of textual reincarnation: translation. Following the cultural data Ricci tried to transfer from Mandarin to Italian, into Latin then Persian—between the Ming, Habsburg, Safavid, and Mughal empires—will help us recognise an important but largely overlooked distinction between enduring 'connective systems' and more transient mere connections.

Between 'Ottomans-Safavids-Mughals' and Jesuit Eurasian networks

Closing his survey of common madrasa curricula across the three early modern Muslim-ruled empires, Robinson concluded that 'a world of much shared knowledge has been revealed... This shared knowledge, moreover, was constantly renewed in most, although not all, of the region by the travels of scholars and mystics and the connections of teachers and pupils, masters and disciples.'³ Yet, as Robinson was undoubtedly aware, the same period saw the arrival of Catholic missionaries—Capuchin and Augustin as well as Jesuit—in each of the empires he scrutinised. Selected for their erudition as much as their zeal, these missionaries studied Persian and Arabic so as to break into—and challenge—the 'system' of learning that upheld the Islamic knowledge promoted by the ulama and Sufis on whom Robinson focused. The outcome was a small corpus of Catholic Christian texts in Arabic and Persian—scripture translations, hagiographies, polemics—produced in a bid to use the linguistic basis of that 'connective system' to undermine its Muslim foundations.

² F. C. R. Robinson, 'Ottomans-Safavids-Mughals: shared knowledge and connective systems', *Journal of Islamic Studies* 8.2 (1997), pp. 151–184; and *idem*, 'Technology and religious change: Islam and the impact of print', *Modern Asian Studies* 27.1 (1993), pp. 229–251.

³ Robinson, 'Ottomans-Safavids-Mughals', p. 171.

Over the past decade or so, these texts—and the locals who either contributed or responded to them—have become the focus of increasing interest.⁴ Consequently, we have a better understanding of the concerns, collaborations, and constraints that shaped such Persian works as the *Mir'āt al-Quds* ('Mirror of Holiness') and *Dāstān-i Masīh* ('Story of the Messiah'), produced around the Mughal court through the joint efforts of the Spanish Jesuit Jerónimo Xavier (1549–1617) and the court litterateur 'Abd al-Sattar Lahawri (fl. 1610–1620).⁵ A generation later in Safavid Persia, Aimé Chézaud (1604–1664)—Xavier's French fellow Jesuit—built on the Persian output of his predecessor via a series of original compositions and revisions.⁶ We also have occasional glimpses of parallel translations from Latin into Persian taking place under Muslim rather than Christian sponsorship. One example is *Samarat al-Falāsifa* ('Fruits of the Philosophers'), an account of Greek and Roman philosophers compiled at the request of the emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1605) by the aforementioned 'Abd al-Sattar, who had learned his Latin from Xavier.⁷ Still, imported Latin books did not always find interpreters at the Mughal court. When the British emissary Sir Thomas Roe presented Jodocus Hondius's 1613 Latin printed edition of Mercator's atlas to Akbar's successor Jahangir (r. 1605–1627), the emperor returned it to Roe two weeks later. For Jahangir 'had shewed it to his Mulaies [mullahs] and no man could read nor understand it'.⁸ This was perhaps all the more unfortunate insofar as the atlas also included a remarkably detailed map of China.⁹

In the Ottoman empire, Latin occasionally formed part of the linguistic toolkit of professional imperial interpreters, since Ottoman control of the Morea and Rumelia afforded a more linguistically diverse—or, at least, more European—recruitment base. One such

⁴ C. Adang and S. Schmidtke (eds), *Contacts and Controversies between Muslims, Jews and Christians in the Ottoman Empire and Pre-Modern Iran* (Frankfurt, 2020); M. Alam and S. Subrahmanyam, 'Frank disputations: Catholics and Muslims in the court of Jahangir (1608–11)', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* 46.4 (2009), pp. 457–511; S. Babaie, 'Case study: missionary effects and messianic aspirations at the court of Shah 'Abbas', in *Toward a Global Middle Ages*, (ed.) B. C. Keene (Los Angeles, 2019), pp. 137–147; Seyed A. R. Khezri, A. Fooladi-Panah and F. Alvandi, 'Interaction and contradiction between Carmelite missionaries and Shiite clerics in Iran during Safavid dynasty', *People: International Journal of Social Sciences* 3.3 (2017), pp. 66–75; J.-P. Ghobrial, 'The life and hard times of Solomon Negri: an Arabic teacher in early modern Europe', in *The Teaching and Learning of Arabic in Early Modern Europe*, (eds) J. Loop, A. Hamilton and C. Burnett (Leiden, 2017); D. Halft, 'The Arabic Vulgate in Safavid Persia: Arabic printing of the Gospels, Catholic missionaries, and the rise of Shi'i anti-Christian polemics' (PhD dissertation, Freie Universität Berlin, 2016); Y. Martini, *Akbar e i Gesuiti: Missionari cristiani alla corte del Gran Moghul* (Trapani, 2018); R. Matthee, 'Christians in Safavid Iran: hospitality and harassment', *Studies on Persianate Societies* 3 (2005), pp. 3–43; *idem*, 'Safavid Iran and the Christian missionary experience: between tolerance and refutation', *Mélanges de l'Institut Dominicain d'Études Orientales* 35 (2020), pp. 65–100; M. Moazzen, 'Institutional metamorphosis or clerical status quo? New insights into the career and work of Sayyid Mir Muhammad Baqir Khatunabadi', *Studia Iranica* 45.1 (2016), pp. 65–88; F. Richard, 'Le Père Aimé Chézaud Controversiste et ses Manuscrits Persans', *International Iranian Journal for Research into Islamic Manuscripts* 6–7.1–2 (2005–2006), pp. 7–18; and A. Tiburcio, 'A cycle of polemics and translation projects', in *Muslim Christian Polemics in Safavid Iran* (Edinburgh, 2020), pp. 38–65. On earlier Mediterranean-based interactions, see K. Mallette, *Lives of the Great Languages: Arabic and Latin in the Medieval Mediterranean* (Chicago, 2021).

⁵ Alam and Subrahmanyam, 'Frank disputations'; and A. Kollatz, "'Abd al-Sattār", in *Christian-Muslim Relations, 1500–1900*, (ed.) David Thomas (Brill, 2009); http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2451-9537_cmrii_COM_26515 (last accessed 12 August 2021).

⁶ Richard, 'Le Père Aimé Chézaud'; and, in the broader context, *idem*, 'Catholicisme et Islam chiite au "grand siècle": Autour de quelques documents concernant les Missions catholiques au XVII^e siècle', *Euntes Docete* 33.3 (1980), pp. 339–403.

⁷ Alam and Subrahmanyam, 'Frank disputations', pp. 469, 471–475. The Persian text was apparently completed in 1012/1603.

⁸ I. Habib, 'Cartography in Mughal India', *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 35 (1974), pp. 150–162, with a quotation from Roe (in Purchas His Pilgrimes) on pp. 154–155.

⁹ T. Zadeh, *Wonders and Rarities: The Marvelous Book that Traveled the World and Mapped the Cosmos* (Cambridge, MA, 2022), p. 271 and fig. 9.3.

figure was Yunus Bey (d. 1551), a Greek convert to Islam who rose to the rank of chief dragoman (*baş tercüman*).¹⁰ Participating in the conquest of Hungary, Yunus Bey happened upon several Latin works (most likely an epitome of Pompeius Trogus's *Historiae Philippicae* and Thuróczy János's *Chronica Hungarorum*) that he selectively translated, and adapted, to produce the *Tarih-i Ungurus* ('History of Hungary'). Despite this title, the opening third of the text dwelt on the conquests of Alexander the Great, which Yunus then wove into his account of Hungary's medieval rulers, thus linking the new Ottoman territory to the sultans who saw themselves as the heirs of 'Iskender'.¹¹ Here was the *tercüman* as creative cultural interpreter more than passive plain translator.

Another Ottoman linguistic go-between was the Greek Alexander Mavrocordato (1641–1709), who studied medicine via Latin in Padua before being appointed chief dragoman in 1673. But perhaps the closest counterpart to Ricci's Persian translator to emerge from the Ottoman empire was Pedros Bedik, an Armenian born near Aleppo in 1643, who at the age of 16 was sent to study in Rome, where he became a Catholic. After extensive travels in the Safavid realms (whither he later returned as a diplomat), in 1678 he published in Vienna a Latin description of Persia, which included a printed introduction in Persian.¹² But Bedik, like Yunus Bey and other Ottoman dragomans, was born around the Mediterranean, where Latin remained an important language of learning, not least through the Catholic outreach to Greek and Armenian Christians that saw the founding in Rome of the Pontificio Collegio Greco in 1577 followed in 1627 by the Pontificio Collegio Urbano (where Bedik himself studied). But further east of the Mediterranean, such Latin skills remained extremely rare: what Robinson called the 'connective systems' of the Safavids and Mughals were, after all, based on Arabic and Persian. Thus, when the Safavid ruler Shah Sultan Husayn (r. 1694–1722) commissioned his foremost scholar, Sayyid Mir Muhammad Baqir Khatunabadi (d.1715), to make a Persian translation of the Gospels to replace those disseminated by the missionaries, for want of knowing Latin, Khatunabadi had to work from the Arabic Vulgate issued in Rome by the Medici Oriental Press rather than the Latin Vulgate on which the Arabic version was based.¹³

Nonetheless, as recent scholarship has shown, the same period also saw the strengthening of diplomatic and commercial ties between Catholic (especially Habsburg) Europe and the Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal realms.¹⁴ Here too there was a bibliographical harvest as emissaries sent to or from Europe produced a series of travelogues, geographies, and histories.¹⁵ While these works were generally more informational than polemical, they nonetheless

¹⁰ T. Krstić, 'Of translation and empire: sixteenth-century Ottoman imperial interpreters as Renaissance go-betweens', in *The Ottoman World*, (ed.) C. Woodhead (Abingdon, 2012).

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Pedros Bedik, *A Man of Two Worlds: Pedros Bedik in Iran, 1670–1675*, (trans) Colette Ouahes and Willem Floor (Washington DC, 2013).

¹³ Moazzen, 'Institutional metamorphosis'; and Halft, 'Arabic Vulgate', pp. 161–171, with the identification of the Medici Arabic Vulgate on p. 168.

¹⁴ For example, S. Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: The Global Trade Networks of Armenian Merchants from New Julfa* (Berkeley, 2011); S. Chaudhury and K. Kévonian (eds), *Les Arméniens dans le commerce asiatique au début de l'ère moderne* (Paris, 2007); and R. Matthee, 'Iran's relations with Europe in the Safavid period: diplomats, missionaries, merchants, and travel', in *The Fascination of Persia: The Persian-European Dialogue in Seventeenth Century Art and Contemporary Art of Tehran*, (ed.) A. Langer (Chicago, 2013), pp. 6–39.

¹⁵ J. F. Cutilas Ferrer, 'Las Relaciones de don Juan de Persia: una imagen exótica de Persia narrada por un musulmán *shii'* convertido al cristianismo a principios del S. XVII', *Sharq al-Andalus* 16–17 (1999–2002), pp. 211–225; *idem*, 'Armenians, diplomats, and commercial agents of Shah 'Abbās: the European journey of Khāja Safar (c.1609–14)', *Journal of Persianate Studies* 11.1 (2018), pp. 1–28; J.-P. Ghoarial, *The Whispers of Cities: Information Flows in Istanbul, London, and Paris in the Age of William Trumbull* (Oxford, 2013); and H. R. Shapiro, 'Falling out of love with the Franks: the life and writings of an Armenian Catholic diplomat in the service of late Safavid Persia', *Iranian Studies* 54.3 (2021), pp. 573–603.

frequently emerged from the intellectual nexus of the Catholic missions, for their authors were often converts, whether from Armenian Orthodoxy or Shi'i Islam. One such figure was Uruch Beg (1560–1604; better known as 'Don Juan de Persia'), who converted in Rome during an embassy sent by Shah Abbas (r. 1588–1629). After settling in Habsburg Spain, he penned his *Relaciones*, detailing the history, geography, and ethnography of the Safavid dominions, along with other 'cosas notables de Persia'.¹⁶ In 1604, his Castilian text was published in Valladolid, addressed to King Felipe III (r. 1598–1621). A century later, the Armenian Catholic convert Elia of Erzerum (1689–1750?) made similar use of his language skills—in Armenian, French, Persian, Turkish, and Armeno-Turkish—to work as an intermediary between the Safavids and Habsburgs, as well as the British, French, and Dutch East India companies.¹⁷

As we will see, all of these figures held much in common with Ricci's Persian translator. For to the east of the Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal domains lay that other early modern empire—the Ming—that Catholic missionary networks had similarly linked to Europe, producing a set of translations between Chinese and Latin that paralleled those between Arabic, Persian, and Latin.¹⁸ Yet these were indeed *parallel* rather than *intersecting* lines—or 'networks'—of intellectual transmission: between Latin and Arabic, or between Latin and Chinese; but not, say, between Latin, Arabic, and Chinese. But in one case at least, the disjunctures of geography, personnel, and language that separated this Eurasian informational traffic were overcome. The person who achieved this was in many respects a classic middleman, like the figures mentioned above: he was a Muslim convert to Christianity, who added Latin to his mastery of Persian; he travelled from Safavid Persia to Rome, then Mughal India; and by combining these linguistic skills with social access to Jesuit circles, he made a Persian translation of the most important text to emerge from the Jesuit missions to China.¹⁹

He also had an appropriately cosmopolitan clutch of names: he was Muhammad Zaman; also known as Paolo Zaman and Farangi Khan ('the Frankish Khan') and sometimes Farangi *Khwan* ('Reader of Frankish').²⁰ The book he translated was *De Christiana expeditione apud Sinas suscepta ab Societate Jesu* ('On the Christian Mission among the Chinese by the Society of Jesus') by Matteo Ricci (1552–1610).²¹

¹⁶ Ferrer, 'Las Relaciones'; and *idem*, 'Don Juan de Persia', in *Christian-Muslim Relations*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/2451-9537_cmrii_COM_27088 (last accessed 11 August 2021). The Castilian text is well-known in translation: G. Le Strange (ed. and trans.), *Don Juan of Persia: A Shi'ah Catholic, 1560-1604* (London, 1926).

¹⁷ Shapiro, 'Falling out of love'.

¹⁸ Amid a vast secondary literature, see M. Laven, *Mission to China: Matteo Ricci and the Jesuit Encounter with the East* (London, 2012); D. E. Mungello, *Curious Land: Jesuit Accommodation and the Origins of Sinology* (Honolulu, 1989); and Z. Ben-Dor Benite, "'Western gods meet in the East": shapes and contexts of the Muslim-Jesuit dialogue in early modern China', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 55.2/3 (2012), pp. 517–546.

¹⁹ See also F. Calzolaio and S. Pellò, 'A Persian Matteo Ricci: Muḥammad Zamān's 17th-century translation of *De Christiana expeditione apud Sinas*', in *Global Perspectives in Modern Italian Culture: Knowledge and Representation of the World in Italy from the Sixteenth to the Early Nineteenth Century*, (ed.) G. Abbattista (Abingdon, 2021). My thanks to Stefano Pellò for sharing an advance version of the chapter. However, having happened on the Zaman-Ricci text separately, note that Calzolaio and Pellò's chapter and this article draw primarily on different editions of the Persian text, as detailed below.

²⁰ On the sobriquet 'Farangi Khwan', see Muhammad Zaman Khan, *Tārīkh-i Chīn* (Calcutta, 1864), title page ('Muhammad Zaman Khan ma'rūf bih Farangi Khwan'), cited henceforth as Zaman, *Tārīkh-i Chīn*. Albeit without reference to the Aligarh edition, this version of the name is used in A. A. Ivanov, 'The life of Muhammed Zamān: a reconsideration', *Iran* 17.1 (1979), pp. 65–70, at pp. 67–68; and Calzolaio and Pellò, 'Persian Matteo Ricci'.

²¹ Matteo Ricci, *De Christiana expeditione apud Sinas suscepta ab Societate Iesu*, (ed.) N. Trigault, S.J. (Augustae Vind. [Augsburg], 1615), and Muhammad Zaman Khan ('Farangi Khan'), untitled and unattributed translation of Ricci, in Mirza Muhammad Malik al-Kuttāb Shirazi, *Mirāt al-Zamān dar Tārīkh-i Chīn u Machīn u Jāpān* (Bombay, 1893), pp. 2–73, cited henceforth as Zaman, *Mirāt al-Zamān*. In focusing on Ricci's Persian afterlives in the Indian public sphere, this article is primarily based on this lithographic edition. However, I have also provided citations from the more recent edition: Muhammad Zaman, *Chīn-nāma*, edited by Lu Jin with an introduction by Bakhtiyar Muzaffar (Tehran, 2008), cited henceforth as Zaman, *Chīn-nāma*.

Muhammad ‘Paolo’ Zaman and his book on China

The little we currently know about Ricci’s translator Muhammad Zaman comes from Niccolao Manucci (1638–1717), that Italian counterpart at the Mughal court.²² According to Manucci—who met ‘Muhamedzama’ in person—Zaman was raised in Persia (placing him in the period when Catholic missionaries were making their presence known in the Safavid capital at Isfahan). In view of Zaman’s great intelligence, he was sent to Rome by Shah Abbas with the goal that he should acquire sufficient understanding of the Christian faith, and its languages of learning, to refute the Jesuit missionaries (whom we have seen learning to debate, and write, in Arabic and Persian, of course with local help). As far as Manucci could gather, Zaman had been dispatched to Rome by Shah Abbas ‘early in his reign’.²³ While this apparently points to the 1590s, as Manucci’s own translator, William Irvine, noted over a century ago, the timing of the meeting with ‘Muhamedzama’ (seemingly around the time of Awrangzeb’s ascent in the late 1650s) would suggest that the journey to Rome instead took place early in the reign of Shah Abbas II, pointing to the 1640s instead. This would have coincided with the heightened Safavid response to the missionaries through the efforts of Sayyid Ahmad Alavi early in that decade.²⁴

Be that as it may, according to Manucci, contrary to the intentions of his courtly sponsors, Zaman came to love the religion he studied and so converted to Christianity, assuming the name ‘Paolo’ in lieu of ‘Muhammad’. However, after returning home to Persia, he became fearful of being executed as an apostate (several Muslim converts had already been executed by the Safavid authorities).²⁵ Consequently, Manucci continued, Zaman followed the (by-then well-trodden) path from Isfahan to Delhi, seeking refuge at the court of Shah Jahan (r. 1628–1658). Being well received, he was granted the rank of *mansabdār* (placing him among the many other *Īrānīs* given similar positions in the Mughal hierarchy).²⁶ And so, Manucci concluded, Zaman settled in Delhi, where he made friends with various European Christians, particularly a ‘Father Buzeo (Busée)’, with whom he discussed theological questions and by whom, most tantalising of all, he was shown ‘several Latin books’.²⁷

From this point, we can draw on Zaman’s own testimony, which he inserted as a preface to his translation of Ricci.

The sages (*hukumā*) of China invited the Christian fathers (*pādriyān*) to China and gave them very good living places. The fathers eventually learned the Chinese language, writing system (*khūtūt*), sciences (*‘ulūm*), and customs (*rusūm*) Later, Father

²² Niccolao Manucci, *Storia do Mogor; or, Mogul India, 1653–1708*, (trans.) W. Irvine, 4 vols (London, 1907), vol. 2, pp. 17–18, with biographical information also summarised in N. Hadi, *Dictionary of Indo-Persian Literature* (Delhi, 1995), pp. 172–173. My thanks to Calzolaio and Pellò for pointing me to Manucci directly.

²³ Manucci, *Storia do Mogor*, vol. 2, p. 17.

²⁴ On the issue of whether this was Shah Abbas I or II, see Irvine’s footnote in Manucci, *Storia do Mogor*, vol. 2, p. 17, n. 1. On the anti-missionary activities of Alavi (d. between 1644 and 1650), see Halfit, ‘Arabic Vulgate’, pp. 98–142.

²⁵ On the executions, see Khezri et al., ‘Interaction and contradiction’, pp. 68–69. Also L. Mirot, ‘Le séjour du Père Bernard de Sainte-Thérèse en Perse (1640–1642)’, *Études carmélitaines, mystiques et missionnaires* 18 (1933), pp. 213–236.

²⁶ On these many other *Īrānī* émigrés at the Mughal court during this period, see (with caution) A. Dadvar, *Iranians in Mughal Politics and Society, 1606–1658* (New Delhi, 1999). Also, C. Lefevre, ‘Jahāngīr et son frère Šāh ‘Abbās: compétition et circulation entre deux puissances de l’Asie musulmane de la première modernité’, in *Islam in the Indo-Iranian World during the Early Modern and Modern Periods*, (eds) D. Hermann and F. Speziale (Berlin, 2010), pp. 23–56.

²⁷ Manucci, *Storia do Mogor*, vol. 2, p. 18.

Īksūs, who was the leader (*pešhwā*) of the fathers, wrote a book containing reports and facts about China, then sent the book to Europe (Farangistan), where it was published then sent to all quarters. By chance, a copy reached me, the untutored (*bī-zibān*) Muhammad Zaman, known as Farangi Khan, in Jahanabad [i.e. Delhi] via Father Buzeo, who is the leader of the Christian fathers residing in Delhi. Thus, it occurred to me to translate it into Persian, and the father (*pādri*) also encouraged and helped me. And so, I compiled this book in ten chapters (*fasl*).²⁸

What is immediately striking about Zaman's account—at least as it appeared in the form translated above from the first printed version of 1864—are its glaring problems. For he referred to the text's original author not as Matteo Ricci, or some rendering thereof, but as 'Pādri Īksūs'; and to his Delhi-based intermediary not as Manucci's 'Buzeo', but as 'Pādri Būrnū'. The latter problem is the easiest for which to pose a solution by way of a scribal error: a simple misreading of underdots and overdots in the manuscript used by the copyist could transform بوزيو (Būziyū) into the بورنو (Būrnū) of the imprint cited, thus reconciling Manucci's testimony with that of Zaman himself. As for the origins of the mysterious 'Pādri Īksūs', here too the likeliest solution seems to be a scribal orthographic slip over an unfamiliar name. Thus, Lu Jin's critical edition of the text proposes a scribal misreading of ر as ړ and therefore replaces the original 'Īksūs' with 'Rīksūs'.²⁹ This takes us a step closer to the Latin version of Ricci's name as 'Riccius': two lost dots under the ر of 'Rīksūs' would finally return us to 'Rīkiyūs'. Be that as it may, these reconstructions are all long after the fact, for when the text reached the new public of print in the mid-nineteenth century the repeated use of 'Īksūs' instead of 'Ricci' would conceal its true origins.

However, Zaman's testimony does allow us to reconstruct the broad contours of the transmission of Ricci's writings from his death in 1610—when his original notebooks, written in Italian dialect, were left in the Ming capital of Beijing—to Zaman's encounter with what was apparently a 'published' (*mushtahar*) version in the erstwhile Mughal capital of Delhi.³⁰ In the interim, Ricci's notebooks had been recovered by the Dutch Jesuit Nicolas Trigault (1577–1628), who edited them, translated them into Latin, and in 1615 published them in Augsburg under the title *De Christiana expeditione*. Although various digests and translations into the European vernaculars soon followed, the regular appearance of loanword Latinisms in Zaman's Persian translation makes it clear that it was the Latin version which he accessed in Delhi.

As to when this happened, Zaman's mention of Father Buzeo helps us establish a time range. For as Vladimir Ivanow established almost a century ago in his catalogue of Persian manuscripts of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, Buzeo was the Flemish Jesuit Hendrik Busi, born in Nijmegen in 1618 with the name Hendrick Uwens. Since Buzeo arrived in Agra in 1648, where he became associated with Dara Shikuh, and died in Delhi in 1667, Zaman probably encountered him—and thence Ricci's book—at some point during this 20-year period.³¹ As to why Buzeo carried a copy of Ricci's book to Delhi, the answer seems to lie with Buzeo's original plan and ambition to follow his celebrated Jesuit forebears to

²⁸ Muhammad Zaman Khan, untitled preface, in *idem*, *Tārīkh-i Chīn* (Calcutta, 1864), pp. 1–2; and Zaman, *Chīn-nāma*, pp. 1–2. *Apropos* the earlier discussion of Zaman's moniker, the modern edition by Lu Jin has 'Farangi Khwan' in place 'Farangi Khan'.

²⁹ See Zaman, *Chīn-nāma*, p. 1 and footnote 1.

³⁰ Zaman, *Tārīkh-i Chīn*, p. 1; and Zaman, *Chīn-nāma*, p. 1. Given the undeveloped vocabulary for printing in early modern Persian, I have taken some licence with translating the term *mushtahar* ('proclaimed') as 'published', since it clearly makes sense in this context.

³¹ Vladimir Ivanow, *Concise Descriptive Catalogue of the Persian Manuscripts in the Curzon Collection of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* (Calcutta, 1926), pp. 96–97. On Buzeo/Uwens' own intellectual activities in Mughal India, see N. Castel-Branco, 'From Flanders to Lisbon to the Mughal empire: Hendrick Uwens and the mathematical backstage of a Jesuit missionary's life', *Early Science and Medicine* 25.3 (2020), pp. 224–249, especially pp. 239–247.

China, with India only serving as a staging or training post along the way.³² Since as early as 1647 Buzeo reported that he ‘knew the Persian language quite nicely (*sabe já bellamente a lingua Persia*)’, credence may also be granted to Zaman’s mention that Buzeo not only supplied the book, but also ‘helped me’ to translate it.³³ In short, Ricci’s writings were taken from China to Europe, and then back east to India, in the process moving from Italian to Latin to Persian. Here, then, was a two-fold *translatio* in the dual senses of an act of linguistic translation and the transfer of something from one place to another.

Nonetheless, Zaman did not translate the entirety of *De Christiana expeditione*. Instead, through what Francesco Calzolaio and Stefano Pellò have aptly termed ‘a dual process of abridgement and delocalization’, Zaman made a series of cuts that removed the lengthy chapters detailing the Jesuit mission to China, as well as the many comparisons Ricci made with conditions in Europe.³⁴ Consequently, Zaman edited Ricci’s text down into a much shorter work—the ten chapters he mentioned in his preface—that focused solely on China in and of itself. One might be tempted to call it a text about China ‘in its own terms’. But there of course lay the rub: whose terms should, or could, Zaman deploy in translating a book about a culture for which there were no precise labels in either Latin or Persian?

The challenges of *Translatio*

As we will now see by turning to sample sections of the Persian text in relation to its Latin source, Zaman’s strategy of abridgement and delocalisation was not without its problems. Merely removing explicit mentions of Europe and its Christian missions could not exorcise the Jesuit spirit that infused the text as an interpretive whole. For *De Christiana expeditione* was not simply a Christian view of China, but a highly intellectualised Jesuit perception formed through the eyes and ideas, books and terms of the Confucian court scholars who, in comprising Ricci’s own intermediaries, shaped his account of China’s culture at large. As for Zaman’s decision to stay ‘true’ to the Latin original, this sometimes saw him adopt Latin loanwords that were surely meaningless to readers of Persian, all the more so because some were Trigault’s Latinisations of loanwords Ricci had based on vocalised Chinese characters for which he lacked equivalent terms in his Venetian dialect of Italian which Trigault had then rendered into Latin.

Even when Zaman decided against directly borrowing Latin terms from Ricci/Trigault, he faced the more general challenge of having to find Persian conceptual equivalents for Chinese practices, institutions, and doctrines. That is, for unfamiliar (and also, for Zaman, unwitnessed) customs that reached him via a European linguistic-cum-conceptual filter, which in the case of Ricci’s book also involved prior stages of filtering from Mandarin into Italian then Latin.

Consequently, Ricci supplied Zaman—and his Persianate readership—with a detailed yet invisibly distorted picture of China’s geography, economy, customs, and government, as well as of its systems of learning, and of what were—whether among European Christians or ‘Ottomans-Safavids-Mughals’—China’s effectively unknown religions. Rendering Ricci into Persian in the mid-seventeenth century therefore presented Zaman with an enormous, and twofold, interpretive challenge. This was not merely because he was translating a complex text from Latin. It was also because he was translating an account of a region with which he was not personally familiar and of a cultural

³² Castel-Branco, ‘From Flanders to Lisbon’, pp. 241–242.

³³ Letter from Buzeo cited in *ibid.*, p. 244.

³⁴ Calzolaio and Pellò, ‘A Persian Matteo Ricci’.

system for which there were precious few previous accounts in Persian.³⁵ In the early modern Persian manuscript ecumene, even such prior accounts as did exist—such as the third volume of the *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh* from the Mongol period—were not necessarily available to the likes of Zaman in Delhi, centuries after they were written.³⁶

This absence of accessible forerunners added further to the difficulties of ensuring the continuity and accuracy of cross-cultural comprehension. It meant that Zaman had little available to him by way of a Sinological vocabulary in Persian, forcing him to rely on broad Islamicate terms to describe a very different cultural system that lay outside the Islamicate and Persianate ‘connected systems’ of the Safavids, Mughals, and Ottomans. Consequently, Zaman had to render Ricci’s awkwardly combined Christian-Confucian presentation of Chinese religions in Persianate and Islamicate conceptual terms that were his best available equivalents for the ‘Christianate’ Latin terminology, which Trigault in turn had previously selected to render Ricci’s Italian approximations of ‘Confucianate’ depictions of Chinese Buddhism and Daoism as well as Confucianism itself. As counterparts to the established concept of ‘Islamicate’, here I propose the terms ‘Christianate’ and ‘Confucianate’ to refer to engagements with—in this case depictions of—non-Christian and non-Confucian religions or cultures that are nonetheless articulated in Christian and Confucian terms, whether by way of language, concepts, or textual genres.

We can now turn to an illustrative sample of these problems through a comparative analysis of relevant sections of the Persian and Latin texts. Aside from deleting Ricci’s discussions of Jesuit activities and comparisons with Europe, Zaman’s text followed the sequence, topics, and details of his Latin source text closely.³⁷ In expanding length, his ten chapters covered the name of China and its meaning; physical geography; agricultural produce; mechanical industries; branches of learning; mode of government; civil customs and ceremonies; the physical appearance of people and cities; fortune-telling rituals; and the doctrinal precepts of its main religions.

Translating the earlier chapters on geography, agrarian produce, and silk and cotton industries were relatively straightforward, insofar as they described flora, domesticated mammals, and trade commodities that had been shared across Eurasia for millennia. Fortunately, there was a focus on crops, animals, and trade goods (such as rice, goats, and cotton) for which there were clear terms in Latin (and Persian), rather than the much more varied items that surely appeared in China’s markets and dining tables. But even when a commodity was not yet known and hence named, circumlocutive explanation

³⁵ On the medieval interface between Persian and Chinese learning, see M. Minuvi, *Tarjuma-yi ‘Ulūm-i Chīnī bih Fārsī dar Qarn-i Hashtum-i Hijrī* (Tehran, 1334/1955). For the *Khitā’i-nāma*, see the edition by Iraj Afshar (ed.), *Khitā’i-nāma: Sharh-i Mushāhidāt-i Sayyid ‘Alī Akbar Khitā’ī, Mu‘āsir-i Shāh Ismā‘īl Safawī dar Chīn* (Tehran, 1357/1979). For studies, see K. L. Hemmat, ‘Children of Cain in the land of error: a central Asian merchant’s treatise on government and society in Ming China’, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 30.3 (2010), pp. 434–448; P. E. Kahle, ‘Eine islamische Quelle über China um 1500 (Das Khitayname des Ali Ekber)’, *Acta Orientalia* 12 (1934), pp. 91–110; and L. Yih-Min, ‘A comparative and critical study of Ali Akbar’s *Khitaynama* with references to Chinese sources’, *Central Asiatic Journal* 27.1–2 (1983), pp. 58–78.

³⁶ This point is borne out in reverse by a recent study of the difficulties of accessing medieval Indo-Persian historical texts in early Safavid Iran. See P. Bockholt, ‘So close and yet often so far away: the history of India as told by historians in Iran around 1500’, *Iran* 59.2 (2021), pp. 187–202. Note also that Rashīd al-Dīn’s authorship of the third volume of the *Jāmi’ al-Tawārīkh* (on China and India) has recently been questioned in Stefan Kamola, *Making Mongol History: Rashīd al-Dīn and the Jami’ al-Tawārīkh* (Edinburgh, 2019).

³⁷ Cf. Ricci, *De Christiana expeditione*, vol. 1, unpaginated ‘*indice di tutti i capi*’; and Zaman, *Mirāt al-Zamān*, *fasl* headings on pp. 2, 4, 5, 10, 12, 23, 37, 53, 57, 64 and modern chapter index provided by the editors in Zaman, *Chīn-nāma*, pp. *haft* and *hasht*. In making these and subsequent comparisons between the Latin and Persian versions, I have checked my schoolboy Latin reading of Ricci against the English translation in L. J. Gallagher, *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Matteo Ricci* (New York, 1953).

was possible, such that tea (*chā'ī*)—in Ricci and Zaman's time as unfamiliar in Europe as in India and Persia—was described as a herb that was harvested in spring, dried out, then 'drunk like coffee'.³⁸

However, when Zaman moved on to Ricci's account of religions—a topic that was, after all, at the core of Jesuit interests—he faced considerably more complex translational problems than finding equivalent terms for China's physical landscape, and for the agricultural commodities and craft goods it yielded. We will see how some of these problems played out by turning to Zaman's Persian rendition of Ricci's depiction of China's systems of learning and religions.

The religions of *Chīn* between Latin and Persian

Notwithstanding their shared commitment to Christianity, Ricci and Zaman both came from and wrote for quite different cultural environments. Moreover, their 'connected' attempt to describe China's wholly unfamiliar religious systems tested the terminological capacity of both early modern Latin and Persian, with results that obfuscated as much as explained. Consequently, Zaman's Persian translation altered the meaning of its already problematic Latin source in subtle but significant ways.

The chapter on popular divination practices provides an entry point to these semantic divergences between Latin and Persian (and between Italian and Chinese in the invisible background). The transmission of basic empirical observations from Latin to Persian was broadly accurate, explaining the widespread Chinese recourse to fortune-telling, such that printed almanacs detailed the best or worst dates to perform any number of activities, from seeing one's parents to building a house to making a journey.³⁹ However, the valence of such practices varied considerably between the text's Latin and Persian readerships. As a Catholic writing amid the Counter-Reformation, Ricci described divination in the plainly negative terms of '*superstitioni*' and '*errori*'. In Zaman's milieu of Mughal India and Safavid Persia, by contrast, learned divination was much more acceptable, particularly in the court circles between which he moved. Thus, in a subtle semantic difference that shifted the valence of these activities, Zaman termed these Chinese practices as '*fālqū'ī*', implicitly alluding to sophisticated Persian divinatory texts that used verses of Hafiz, and as '*ta'bir-i khwāb*' (dream interpretation), which was an even more respectable branch of the Islamic sciences studied by Muslim clerics as well as courtiers.⁴⁰

Yet Zaman's subtle approbation was not carried into his rendering of the next chapter on the religions (*mazāhib*) of China. While Ricci was himself broadly critical of these religions (if, as we will see, more positively disposed towards Confucianism), Zaman went a step further by framing them from the outset in terms of the older Islamicate category of 'idol worship' (*but-parastī*). He interposed this concept into his translation of the chapter's opening sentence, which had no equivalent term in the Latin original.⁴¹

Zaman's version of the chapter's opening paragraph is worth quoting in full to see how Ricci's 'Christianate' picture of Chinese religiosity was reframed in Islamicate terms:

Among the sundry religions of idol worshippers (*but-parastān*), I have read of none which is less erroneous (*kam ghalatar*) than the religion of the Chinese. Because in

³⁸ Zaman, *Mirāt al-Zamān*, p. 9; Zaman, *Chīn-nāma*, pp. 15–16.

³⁹ Ricci, *De Christiana expeditione*, vol. 1, pp. 92–103; Zaman, *Mirāt al-Zamān*, pp. 57–64; Zaman, *Chīn-nāma*, pp. 79–86.

⁴⁰ On the normative character of such practices in elite Ottoman-Safavid-Mughal milieu, see M. Melvin-Koushki, 'How to rule the world: occult-scientific manuals of the early modern Persian cosmopolis', *Journal of Persianate Studies* 11.2 (2019), pp. 140–154.

⁴¹ Ricci, *De Christiana expeditione*, vol. 1, p. 104; Zaman, *Mirāt al-Zamān*, p. 64; Zaman, *Chīn-nāma*, p. 87.

their books I have seen that in the beginning the people of China worshipped one God (*khudā*), who was greater than the sum of all things. They called him the ‘emperor of the heavens’ (*padshāh-i āsmān*), though they also knew him by another name: the ‘soul of the heavens and earth’ (*jān-i āsmān u zamīn*). From this it can be known that the ancient people of China held the belief that the earth and heaven are living beings, and they worshipped the spirit of both of them in place of God. They also believed there were spirits (*arwāh*) who act as guardians of the mountains, seas, rivers and four pillars of the earth. In all their actions, they held that reason (*‘aql*) must be obeyed. And they accepted that this light of reason comes from the heavens. And in none of their books were badness and wickedness related to that aforementioned God, or to spirits in the manner of the ancient Greeks, Egyptians and Indians, so as to find an excuse for their own sins. In their history books, for more than four thousand years there were many praiseworthy and good scholars among the ancients of China. Even today, they have books of consequence with acceptable rules and regulations for the purpose of acquiring perfection and wisdom. But because corrupt human nature is always drawn in the direction of wickedness, with the passing of time the light of their nature fell into darkness, such that now the Chinese people have descended into idol worship (*but-parastī*).⁴²

At both the end and beginning of this framing paragraph, Zaman had inserted the term ‘*but-parastī*’ (idol worship) with which China (and indeed India) had been associated in Persian texts since the early medieval period, not least through the Central Asian Buddhist practices that found etymological echo in the Persian term ‘*but*’. This was a culturally specific—and tangible—concept that differed from the condemnatory term Ricci used at the end of the paragraph, which was ‘*atheismum*’ (‘atheism’). By contrast, Zaman’s *but-parastī* was closer to the Latin term ‘*idolatria*’: unlike the abstract concept of atheism, idol worship was a visible transgression; it was more heteropraxy than heterodoxy. Although Zaman chose not to substitute Ricci’s comparisons to Europe with contrasts to India, for readers in India at least, ‘idol worship’ would have been easy to imagine, not least since *but-parastī* had often been used in Persian texts to refer to Hindu forms of worship.

After this framing introduction, Ricci and Zaman examined the ‘three religions’ of China in more detail. The first—what we would now call Confucianism—Zaman labelled the ‘*mazhab-i hukumā*’ (‘religion of the sages’ or more prosaically ‘religion of the learned’) in lieu of Ricci’s ‘*litteratorum*’ (‘scholars’). Ricci’s study of Confucian teachings had cultivated the positive appreciation that led him to write his celebrated Chinese text of composite Christian-Confucian theology, *Tianzhu Shiyi* (‘The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven’).⁴³ This intellectualised Jesuit approval of Confucianism was passed into Zaman’s Persian, lending the ‘religion of the sages’ an implicit endorsement among his presumed target audience of learned Muslims and Persian-reading Hindus associated with the Mughal court and bureaucracy.

Zaman went on to explain that this was the most ancient of China’s religions. Emphasising its learned credentials, he pointed out the large number of books written by its followers, who learn about the religion solely from books rather than orally from their parents. Moreover, not only do they refrain from worshipping ‘idols’ (*but*), they do not even permit idols to be kept.⁴⁴ In approving terminology, which may have

⁴² Zaman, *Mirāt al-Zamān*, pp. 64–65; Zaman, *Chīn-nāma*, p. 87. Cf. Ricci, *De Christiana expeditione*, vol. 1, pp. 104–105.

⁴³ Y. Liu, ‘Adapting Catholicism to Confucianism: Matteo Ricci’s *Tianzhu Shiyi*’, *The European Legacy* 19.1 (2014), pp. 43–59.

⁴⁴ Zaman, *Mirāt al-Zamān*, p. 65; Zaman, *Chīn-nāma*, p. 88.

resonated even more positively with Muslim than Christian readers, he declared that they worship only one God, whom he described in plainly Islamic as much as Islamicate terms as unitary and single/incorporeal (*wahid mujarrad*).⁴⁵

It is tempting to link this ‘unitarian’ presentation of Confucianism with the parallel conception of learned Hindus as the ‘unitarians of India’ (*muwahidun-i Hind*) in Dara Shikuh’s *Majma’ al-Bahrayn* (‘Meeting of the Two Oceans’), which was written around 1655; that is, slightly before or after Zaman’s text.⁴⁶ While as yet we have no direct evidence that Zaman was aware of Dara’s text (or vice versa), it is worth noting that that Zaman’s textual supplier Father Buzeo was also closely associated with Dara.⁴⁷ Be that as it may, comparisons between the two works—and thence between the religion of these Indian and Chinese ‘unitarians’—may conceivably have occurred to some of their readers. If so, this would widen the scope of cross-cultural philosophical cosmopolitanism across early modern Asia, albeit with Europe playing an interstitial enabling role. Here we can perhaps glimpse a historical process at work, with Zaman’s translation of Ricci’s text on China being made around a century after the series of painted representations of Chinese and Southeast Asian peoples by an Indian artist working under Portuguese sponsorship along the network of Portuguese Indian Ocean trading ports.⁴⁸

Returning to the evidence of the Ricci-Zaman texts, it was made clear to both of their readerships that, despite these monotheistic similarities, there were important differences between this highly intellectualised religiosity and Christianity and Islam. ‘Although those who follow the religion of the sages worship one God (*yik khudā*),’ Zaman continued,

they have never raised any place of worship, and they have no soothsayers (*kāhinān*) or priests (*mūbidān*); nor are rules and commands fixed with regard to worship and devotion, so they do not offer any prayers or worship to that one God. Instead, they say it is solely the task of the emperor to worship and offer sacrifices to the ‘emperor of the heavens’.⁴⁹

However, this religion did promote one ritual practice carried out by emperors and commoners alike: the annual veneration of parents and ancestors.⁵⁰ Despite his earlier statement about the ban on idols and the absence of temples, Zaman did subsequently concede that they venerated ‘images’ (*sūrat*, which Ricci termed similarly plainly as *statua*) of their founder.⁵¹ Regarding the location of their activities, Zaman opted for a more decidedly Christianate term than Ricci himself by calling them ‘monasteries’ (*dayr*), which were built by the emperor in every city.⁵² As for the founder of this religion, in orthographic testimony to the Latin transmission route of this pioneering Persian investigation of Chinese religions, rather than transcribe the Mandarin vocalisation Kǒng Fūzǐ, Zaman transliterated Confucius’s name as *Kīfūsiyūs*.⁵³

⁴⁵ Zaman, *Mirāt al-Zamān*, p. 65; Zaman, *Chīn-nāma*, p. 88.

⁴⁶ M. Dara Shikuh, *Majma’-ul-Bahrain; or The Mingling of the Two Oceans*, (ed. and trans.) M. Mahfuz-ul-Haq (Calcutta, 1929).

⁴⁷ Castel-Branco, ‘From Flanders’; and Maclagan, *Jesuits and the Great Mogul*, pp. 115–117.

⁴⁸ The illustrations of the unknown artist have recently been published with a commentary by Sanjay Subrahmanyam (ed.), *Les Peuples de l’Orient au milieu du XVIIe siècle: Le Codex Casanatense* (Paris, 2022).

⁴⁹ Zaman, *Mirāt al-Zamān*, p. 66; Zaman, *Chīn-nāma*, p. 89.

⁵⁰ Ricci, *De Christiana expeditione*, vol. 1, p. 107; Zaman, *Mirāt al-Zamān*, p. 67; Zaman, *Chīn-nāma*, p. 90.

⁵¹ Ricci, *De Christiana expeditione*, vol. 1, p. 108; Zaman, *Mirāt al-Zamān*, p. 68; Zaman, *Chīn-nāma*, p. 90.

⁵² Zaman, *Mirāt al-Zamān*, p. 67; Zaman, *Chīn-nāma*, p. 90.

⁵³ Zaman, *Mirāt al-Zamān*, pp. 65, 68; Zaman, *Chīn-nāma*, pp. 88, 90, with the original spelling in the latter standardised by the editors to *Kunfūsiyūs*. Also, Zaman, *Tārīkh-i Chīn*, p. 89.

This mention of Confucius's name was important because it provided readers with a more specific identifier than the vaguer label of the 'religion of the sages', which might well be applied to many other religions. Latinised though it was, it was a label that would effectively stick: in Persian and Arabic no less than European-language works, the Latinate name *Kunfūsiyus*/Confucius has continued to identify the religion to the present day.

This was not the case with what we now call Buddhism. Since this religion lacked an accepted proper name in Latin no less than Persian, when Zaman wrote that 'the second religion of the people of China is called *Shakiyā* and *Umnūf*', there was a considerable amount at stake in his choice of nomenclature.⁵⁴ But unfortunately, no reader of Persian would have recognised these two names, whether when the translation was first made in around 1650 or in the nineteenth century when it was published in Calcutta and Bombay. Because, for want of an existing name for Buddhism in Persian, *Shakiyā* and *Umnūf* were Zaman's transliterations (perhaps further muddled by scribal error) of Ricci's Latin labels, 'Sciequia' and 'Omitose'. And for want of even a basic Buddhological vocabulary in early modern Europe, these were themselves Latinisations of vocalised Chinese characters which were in turn derived a thousand years earlier from Sanskrit.⁵⁵ As a result, Zaman's readers may well have found it difficult to connect this mysterious cult with the religion that was said to have been founded in India (not China) by Shikmuni in the aforementioned Mongol-era *Jāmi' al-Tawārikh* (as far as we know the most detailed prior Persian account of Buddhism).⁵⁶

Even so, Zaman did transmit into the Persianate 'connective system' some important factual information about this unfamiliar faith. He explained, for example, that its teachings had been brought from the kingdom of Tianso (being Ricci's Thienso, from the Chinese *Tianzhu*), 'which is now called Hindustan [India], in the sixty-fifth year after the birth of Jesus'.⁵⁷ As he went on to explain, 'in the histories of the people of China, it is written that the emperor of China sent ambassadors to import the religion due to a dream he had. The ambassadors then brought back a book.'⁵⁸

Beyond this broadly accurate historical outline of the origins of Chinese Buddhism, Zaman followed Ricci and by summarising the key doctrines of what he called 'the religion of *Shakiyā* and *Umnūf*', which included reincarnation (*tanāsukh*) into many different worlds. Although, he added, followers maintained the admirable virtues of asceticism (*riyāzat*) and chastity (*pārsā'ī*), and lived in monasteries, they also built great idol houses (*but-khāna*).⁵⁹ In these, they kept many images made from bronze, marble, wood, and clay that were 'frightening and strange (*muhīb ū gharīb*)' in appearance. Although in basic detail, Zaman was translating what Ricci described, his choice of words served to reinforce what was, by the 1600s, a centuries-old Persianate stereotype, reinforced in countless poems, of the *but-khāna-yi chīn*—of China as the primordial land of idolatry. While poets had often deployed this image positively for aesthetic or spiritual effect, it nonetheless reflected a deeply limited conception of Chinese Buddhism. It also echoed the anti-Buddhist prejudices of Ricci and his Confucian informants.

⁵⁴ Zaman, *Mirāt al-Zamān*, p. 68; Zaman, *Chīn-nāma*, p. 91, amended by the editors to *Umtūf* (see *ibid.*, footnote 3). Also, Zaman, *Tārikh-i Chīn*, p. 86.

⁵⁵ Ricci, *De Christiana expeditione*, vol. 1, p. 109.

⁵⁶ See the Persian text and translation in F. Calzolaio and F. Fiaschetti, 'Prophets of the East: the Ilkhanid historian Rashīd al-Dīn on the Buddha, Laozi and Confucius and the question of his Chinese sources (Part 1)', *Iran and the Caucasus* 23.1 (2019), pp. 23–24.

⁵⁷ Zaman, *Mirāt al-Zamān*, p. 68; Zaman, *Chīn-nāma*, p. 91.

⁵⁸ Zaman, *Mirāt al-Zamān*, p. 68; Zaman, *Chīn-nāma*, p. 91.

⁵⁹ Zaman, *Mirāt al-Zamān*, p. 69; Zaman, *Chīn-nāma*, p. 92.

Finally, Zaman followed Ricci in turning to the third religion of China, which in Persian he labelled ‘Lār Zū’ after the name of its founder, Lao Tzu (Laozi).⁶⁰ This name, he explained, meant ‘elder sage’ (*hakīm-i pīr*), an allusion to the famous legend he then recounted: that Lao Tzu spent 80 years in his mother’s womb before he was finally born as an old man. Again echoing Ricci’s closer interaction with Confucian scholars and thence texts, Zaman provided less detail on the doctrines of Lar Zu, merely recounting a legend about a cosmic struggle between two emperors of the heavens.⁶¹ Unaware, like Ricci, of the *Dao De Jing*, he declared that Lar Zu ‘wrote no book about this religion’.⁶² Nonetheless, in a narrative taken from his Christian informant but which, through his choice of words, Zaman ensured had even greater resonance for Muslim readers, he added that after Lar Zu’s death the ‘people of innovation’ (*ahl-i bid’at*) compiled several books from a blend of other religions and their own imagination.⁶³ For here came an echo from China of the traditional Muslim view of the Torah and Gospels as corrupted by the Jews and Christians.

Zaman’s choice of the term ‘*bid’at*’ (‘innovation’) is particularly interesting, since in Persian (and Arabic) theological writings it was a pejorative label that referred to doctrinal or ritual deviations introduced by later followers of a prophet. Reproducing Ricci’s introductory framing narrative of how the Chinese had gradually strayed from their original monotheism, here was an explanation of China’s religious pluralism as the outcome of spiritual degeneration. Nonetheless, this negative presentation of the religion of Lar Zu was more implicit than explicit. Despite the mention of ‘keeping images (*tasāwīr*) in their monasteries (*dayr*) of men who have gone up to the two heavens they believe in’, Zaman did not resort again to the vocabulary of idolatry—at least not until he painted a final general picture of religion in China, which emphasised the extraordinary number (‘thousands’) of idols found not only in religious sites, but in houses, markets, crossroads, courts, riverbanks, hospitals, palaces, and schools.⁶⁴

Yet when at the end of the chapter, it came to drawing conclusions about the three religions, Ricci and Zaman viewed them through the same soteriological lenses. In following these religions, even the otherwise admirable Chinese sages ‘have fallen into error (*ghalat*) that leads to dangerous places (*mahlaka*), and hell (*hāwiya*), and so into heresy (*ilhād*) and infidelity (*zandaqa*)’.⁶⁵ Once again, Zaman had taken Ricci’s Latin Christian terminology, such as *atheismo*, and rendered it into the condemnatory vocabulary of Islamic heresiography.

Together, these examples illustrate the challenges of not merely translating a text from Latin into Persian, but of translating an account of unknown religious systems (Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism) that were depicted in the terms of yet another (Christianity). The process of textual transmission involved the Chinese written characters (and their vocalisations) of Ricci’s informants, for which Ricci tried to find Italian terms, then Trigault’s Latin equivalents, for which Zaman in turn attempted to find Persian counterparts. The result was a triple layering of terminological representations that we might call ‘Confucianate’, ‘Christianate’, and ‘Islamicate’; that is, terms that drew from these particular religious traditions but depicted their various others.

In being embedded in the very vocabulary through which the text moved during its journey of *translatio*—of transfer from one cultural system to another—this process was all the more problematic in being invisible to readers, who were unable to compare

⁶⁰ Zaman, *Mirāt al-Zamān*, p. 70; Zaman, *Chīn-nāma*, p. 94, amended by the editors to La’uzu (see *ibid.*, footnote 3).

⁶¹ Zaman, *Mirāt al-Zamān*, p. 71; Zaman, *Chīn-nāma*, pp. 94–95.

⁶² Zaman, *Mirāt al-Zamān*, p. 70; Zaman, *Chīn-nāma*, p. 94.

⁶³ Zaman, *Mirāt al-Zamān*, p. 70; Zaman, *Chīn-nāma*, p. 94.

⁶⁴ Zaman, *Mirāt al-Zamān*, pp. 72–73; Zaman, *Chīn-nāma*, p. 96.

⁶⁵ Zaman, *Mirāt al-Zamān*, p. 73; Zaman, *Chīn-nāma*, p. 97.

the Latin and Persian versions for themselves. Through Ricci's book, Zaman had ventured far beyond the 'shared knowledge and connective systems' of the Ottomans, Mughals, and Safavids. But in doing so, he had faced an even greater—because vicarious—challenge than Ricci of communicating knowledge from outside his own cultural-linguistic system about a land he had never seen for himself.

A second afterlife in print

In 1864, the Ricci-Zaman text was published in Calcutta with the generic title *Tārīkh-i Chīn* ('The History of China').⁶⁶ This first imprint was apparently based on a manuscript transcribed in 1843 by Muhammad Najm al-Din of Delhi, an obscure copyist who acted as another go-between, this time between Zaman's Delhi and the Calcutta birthplace of Indo-Persian print.⁶⁷ The decision to print the manuscript was made earlier in 1864 at a meeting of the Aligarh Scientific Society, recently founded by the celebrated Muslim reformist, Sayyid Ahmad Khan (1817–1898).⁶⁸ In a hint of its perceived value, it appeared in eighth position on a list of 28 'useful' books on science, agriculture, geography, and history selected for publication by the Society's advisory council. Of the texts in the history category, most focused on India, with Persia, Andalusia, and ancient Greece receiving one apiece.⁶⁹ Although Zaman's book was the only one that focused on a region east of India, it did resemble the others on the list in being a translation of a European work. But by this time, its link to Matteo Ricci was long forgotten: it was recorded as being written by 'an English priest' called 'Father Axwells'—the English rendering of 'Pādri Īksūs', thus further concealing its complex history.⁷⁰

Describing the author as English was perhaps an understandable slip, since the Aligarh Scientific Society was adopting print as a Muslim educational response to the more recent British (rather than Italian) missionaries. Nonetheless, the Society still turned to these missionaries for help, resulting in their edition being printed by Calcutta's Baptist Mission Press, which over the previous half-century had pioneered the mass production of printed books in dozens of Indian scripts and languages. Such economies of scale placed the Ricci-Zaman text in the new print marketplace of Persian at a price of 12 *annas*.⁷¹

However, print did not always spread accurate (not to say up-to-date) information. By the time the book was issued, the name of the original author on the bilingual cover had changed from the 'Father Axwells' of the Society's minutes to 'Rev. Exoos' (in English) and 'Pādri Īksūs' (in Persian), which appeared with 'Muhammad Zaman' (in English, repeated in Persian with the addition of 'Farangī Khwān'), and the name of the priestly intermediary, rendered in English as 'Rev. Burnouf' and in Persian as 'Pādri Būnū' (who in Zaman's preface a couple of pages later became 'Pādri Būrnū').⁷² Even in the 1860s, transliteration

⁶⁶ Zaman, *Tārīkh-i Chīn*.

⁶⁷ For details on the manuscript, see Ivanow, *Concise Descriptive Catalogue*, p. 98. On the many other Indian-language accounts of China published in Calcutta and Bombay over subsequent decades, see N. Green, *How Asia Found Herself: A Story of Inter-Cultural Understanding* (New Haven, 2022), chapter 5.

⁶⁸ A. Abbas, *Print Culture: Sir Syed's Aligarh Institute Gazette, 1866–1897*, (trans.) Syed A. Ali (New Delhi, 2015), pp. 19–20.

⁶⁹ There was also a kind of *Fürstenspiegel* referred to as 'Alexander's Gems by Aristotle'. As it turned out, only 15 books were subsequently published by the Society, with a history of ancient Egypt being added to the list and published in 1870. See the published list in *ibid.*, pp. 27–28.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 20, 27.

⁷¹ Zaman, *Tārīkh-i Chīn*, cover.

⁷² *Ibid.*, title page and p. 2. Aside from the title page, the remainder of the text is solely in Persian. The shift from 'Axwells' to 'Īksūs' may have been a scribal error via an elision of the *lam* and *sin* of 'Īkswls'. But I have been unable to identify how the text was first attributed to this 'Father Axwells', nor for that matter from which language and script this name first originated.

—let alone translation—remained prone to subtle but significant errors, especially in what we might call ‘circulational translations’ that saw texts, names, and terms move between multiple scripts and languages.

Just under three decades later, Zaman’s translation was printed again in Bombay. Hiding its origins still further, it now became part of a compendium volume called *Mirāt al-Zamān dar Tāriḫ-i Chīn u Machīn u Jāpān* (‘The Mirror of the Times through the History of China, Greater China and Japan’). The volume was assembled by the émigré *Īrānī* publisher, Mirza Muhammad Shirazi, whose productivity won him the moniker Malik al-Kuttab (‘King of Books’).⁷³ In his interpolated foreword to the volume, Shirazi claimed the text was a history of China written in 970 *hijrī* (1562–1563) by a Christian priest called ‘Iksus’, details he took from Zaman’s original preface as it appeared in the preceding Calcutta edition.⁷⁴ Although Shirazi mentioned that someone called ‘Farangī Khān’ had translated the text into Persian from *English* (again reproducing the errors on the cover of the Calcutta edition), he cut out Zaman’s preface and name ‘Zaman’. This further concealed the true source of the text—unless the title he chose for the published version, *Mirāt al-Zamān*, was intended as a secret pun between ‘mirror of the times’ and ‘mirror of Zaman’.

In contrast to the edition issued by Sayyid Ahmad Khan’s Aligarh Scientific Society, Shirazi’s version reflected the more commercial imperatives of Bombay publishing. To issue Zaman’s translation of Ricci *qua* ‘Iksūs’, Shirazi made use of one of Bombay’s flourishing Gujarati printers, the Dutt Prasad Press. Following the publication in Bombay of several Gujarati works on the China trade, Shirazi seems to have been responding to corresponding interest among the large community of émigré Persian traders who were based in Bombay, a city that owed much of its wealth to the export of Malwa opium and by the 1890s was doing a brisk trade with Japan.⁷⁵ After direct steamship links between Bombay and Yokohama were launched in 1885, an additional direct steamship line to Kobe was initiated in 1893—the year Shirazi published his book, in which he appended a translation about Japan to the Ricci-Zaman account of China.⁷⁶

Shirazi also presumably had in mind the book market in Qajar Persia, where he exported many of his publications, and whence many fellow Shirazis were trading with Japan and China via British ports like Bombay. For Shirazi was very much a trade publisher: his output included various contemporary works, as well as classical Persian texts he made available in affordable printed editions.⁷⁷ Reflecting the selection of books chosen by the Scientific Society, Shirazi’s output included a history of ancient Greek and Roman philosophy drawn from European authors.⁷⁸ Far from being a new colonial educational imposition, these works reflected the similar translation on Greek philosophy which ‘Abd al-Sattar made for the emperor Jahangir.

As Muslim scholars had long recognised, ‘indigenous’ informants were neither intrinsically superior nor otherwise preferable. Even if Shirazi, or Sayyid Ahmad beforehand, had known about alternative Persian accounts of China by Muslims, such as the *Jāmi‘*

⁷³ The colophon dated the lithograph’s completion to Jamadi I 1311/November 1893. See Zaman, *Mirāt al-Zamān*, p. 110. The other text included in the joint volume was a Persian translation of the travelogue of Lord Macartney (1737–1806), which recounted the 1793 British embassy to Beijing.

⁷⁴ Shirazi, untitled preface, in *Zamān, Mirāt al-Zamān*, p. 2.

⁷⁵ A. Farooqui, *Opium City: The Making of Early Victorian Bombay* (Gurgaon, 2006); and M. O’Sullivan, ‘Vernacular capitalism and intellectual history in a Gujarati account of China, 1860–68’, *Journal of Asian Studies* 80.2 (2021), pp. 267–292.

⁷⁶ My thanks to Martin Dusinberre for pointing out this joint timing.

⁷⁷ See the details of 12 of his imprints in E. Edwards, *A Catalogue of the Persian Printed Books in the British Museum* (London, 1922), p. 429.

⁷⁸ Anonymous, *Tāriḫ-i Qadīm Yūnān ū Tāriḫ-i Hukūma-i Falāsifa-i Yūnān* (Bombay, 1304/1887).

al-Tawārīkh or the *Khitā'ī-nāma* ('Book of Cathay') of Sayyid Ali Akbar Khita'i, they still chose wisely in opting instead to publish Zaman's translation of the 'English' book by a 'Christian priest'.

The reason is that such earlier Muslim accounts of China were even more interpretively problematic, and factually outdated, than the Zaman/Ricci text. If the latter dated from the middle of the Ming era, then the *Jāmi' al-Tawārīkh* dated from more than three centuries earlier in the Yuan/Mongol period. A subsequent report of the Timurid embassy to the early Ming that was incorporated into several Persian histories was far less detailed than Ricci/Zaman, focusing mainly on court protocol, while Ali Akbar Khita'i's sole account of Chinese religious life was a generic reference to 'idol-houses'.⁷⁹ Indeed, his *Khitā'ī-nāma*, written as it was by a Central Asian merchant in 1516, was the informational result of a mere three months spent on the trade route to Beijing as part of the Ming tribute system. Zaman's translation of Ricci was not only far more detailed than these earlier works, there was also an important qualitative difference. For Ricci had lived in China for nearly 30 years and, unlike the authors of the previous Persian works, had learned to speak and read Chinese. This has positive consequences for the relative accuracy of his information—flawed as its own perspectives, then translations, still were.⁸⁰

So, when the Ricci-Zaman text was twice published in the nineteenth century, it placed before Indian and Iranian readers a wealth of information on China that was still otherwise unavailable.⁸¹ Given the dearth of detailed texts on China available in Persian, Ottoman Turkish, or Arabic—the languages of those lingering 'connective systems'—the decision to publish it made sense as there was nothing better available. Despite the fact that Zaman's translation was several centuries old, the Bombay publisher Shirazi used his own preface to talk up its contemporary relevance by using the fashionable modernist terms of the Muslim *fin de siècle* to claim the book showed how China had followed the 'highway of progress' (*shāhrāh-i taraqqī*) to achieve greatness through its pursuit of political unity, commercial acumen, and industrial excellence.⁸² Ultimately, these topics—the discussion of statecraft, trade goods, and traditional crafts—were easier to translate than more abstract matters of religion. Fortunately, they were also the tangible transferable lessons that Muslim modernists were most eager to learn, whether from China (and Japan) or Europe.

Conclusions

After our long excursions from the linguistic geography of Robinson's Ottomans-Safavids-Mughals, let us return to the first of our two questions by asking: what does this detour from Isfahan and Delhi to Beijing and Rome tell us about the 'shared knowledge and connective system' that Robinson delineated?

To answer briefly, the challenges of *translatio* seen in the Persian version of Ricci's account of Chinese religions suggest that Robinson's model remains an important one. The system he delineated was based not merely on the ability of the rare individual to read texts in another language. Rather, it was based around a network of numerous,

⁷⁹ See the transcription and translation of the Turkic version in I. Beller-Hann, *A History of Cathay: A Translation and Linguistic Analysis of a Fifteenth-Century Turkic Manuscript* (Bloomington, 1995), with the idol-house/*butkhāna* (*butxānāyā*) mentioned on p. 153 (Turkic text) and p. 184 (translation). The original Persian version is not extant in its complete form.

⁸⁰ On Ali Akbar's inability to speak Chinese, see Hemmat, 'Children of Cain', pp. 436, 438.

⁸¹ For an overview of early printed accounts of China from these regions, see Green, *How Asia Found Herself*, chapter 5.

⁸² Shirazi, untitled preface, in Zaman, *Mirāt al-Zamān*, p. 2.

widely distributed educational institutions that shared not only languages, but also larger curricula that fostered mutual comprehension of complex legal, moral, and metaphysical discussions by means of a common and agreed-upon set of concept words that could be used to systematically compare (and not merely connect) the ideas, data, and arguments presented in different texts. Transient moments of intellectual intersection were insufficient to generate such deep understanding between otherwise disconnected linguistic, philosophical, and more broadly cultural systems. This is not to say that different cultural systems could not be rendered mutually comprehensible over time. In Zaman's own lifetime, Dara Shikuh's *Majma' al-Bahrayn* and his related Persian translation of the Sanskrit *Upanisads* attempted to do this between Hindu/Vedantin and Islamic/Sufi philosophy. This was only a part of a larger pattern of inter-religious translations that flourished under the Mughals, ranging from a Persian rendition of the *Bhagavad Gita* to the *Dabistān-i Mazāhib* ('School of Sects') that in 1655 attempted to compile information on all of the religions of the Mughal realm.⁸³ Around the same time in China, the so-called 'Han Kitab' corpus evolved in an attempt to render Islam comprehensible in the conceptual and linguistic terms of Confucian Chinese.⁸⁴ Yet both ventures were the long-cultivated fruit of centuries of coexistence, and gradually evolving bilingualism (and biliteracy) within specific imperial polities, and not the sudden flowering of short-lived, solitary connections, such as Zaman's chance bibliographical encounter in the house of a Jesuit acquaintance in Delhi. And so, while Zaman's translation drew on a fascinating moment (or two) of connection, it was insufficient to produce a 'connective system' that bridged the vast cultural distances of Eurasia.

Our second opening question asked how, at the height of British imperial power in the nineteenth century, Robinson's theory of 'the impact of print' affected this earlier 'connective system', particularly with regard to the geographies of knowledge that had linked the Ottomans, Mughals, and Safavids? Of the six major changes Robinson argued that print brought to the Muslims of South Asia and beyond, the last was what he termed 'the colonizing of Muslim minds with Western knowledge'.⁸⁵ This brings us to the intellectual dilemma faced by the likes of Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Mirza Muhammad Shirazi as participants in the rise of Muslim printing amid the high tide of colonisation (a dilemma which was already apparent to Zaman in the early modern manuscript era): Europeans had access to information that Indians and Persians lacked but considered valuable—or, conceived slightly differently, useful information was available in texts written in European languages. In the short term at least, the solution was clear: to translate pre-existing European studies of a whole range of subjects that also included China.

Yet our case study of Matteo Ricci's two Persian afterlives, in manuscript and print, shows that this adoption of 'Western knowledge' was not as forced a process as Robinson's 'colonizing of Muslim minds' might suggest. Local actors were neither compelled to accept nor passively receive such knowledge, whether in the case of Zaman

⁸³ Audrey Truschke, *Culture of Encounters: Sanskrit at the Mughal Court* (New York, 2016); *idem*, 'Defining the other: an intellectual history of Sanskrit lexicons and grammars of Persian', *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 40.6 (2012), pp. 635–668; and *idem*, 'The Persian text of the Doha Ramayana', in Marika Sarkar, John Seyller and Audrey Truschke, *The Ramayana of Hamida Banu Begum, Queen Mother of Mughal India* (Cinisello Balsamo, 2020), pp. 24–31. On the *Dabistan-i Mazāhib*, see Syed Hasan Askari, 'Dabistān-i Madhāhib and Dīwān-i Mubad', in *Indo-Iranian Studies Presented for the Golden Jubilee of the Pahlavi Dynasty of Iran*, (ed.) Fathullah Mujtabai (New Delhi, 1977); and Fathullah Mujtabai, 'Dabestān-e Maḍāheḥ', in *Encyclopædia Iranica*, 6, fasc. 5, 532–34, www.iranicaonline.org/articles/dabestan-e-madaheh (accessed 6 June 2023).

⁸⁴ On the evolution of the Han Kitab tradition, see Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, *The Dao of Muhammad: A Cultural History of Muslims in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge, MA, 2005); and Kristian Petersen, *Interpreting Islam in China: Pilgrimage, Scripture, and Language in the Han Kitab* (Oxford, 2018).

⁸⁵ Robinson, 'Technology and religious change', p. 249.

himself or his later publishers, who selected a text they knew was composed by a European Christian (whether the Italian Ricci or the English 'Axwells'). Given the shortage of detailed information on China that was available in Persian in the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries alike, this decision to turn to a European text was a pragmatic response to the informational scarcity caused by a lack of early modern 'connectivity' across the vast spaces Europeans dubbed 'Asia'. For as Zaman himself declared in his preface:

Since ancient times, the laws of China have mandated that foreigners cannot enter the country, and that the people of China are not allowed to travel to other countries. Consequently, Chinese people are nowhere to be seen in the world. And nor is any reliable information (*haqā'iq*) or news (*akhbār*) about events and people in China available to people in other countries.⁸⁶

To Muhammad 'Paolo' Zaman, the Latin book he came across in Delhi seemed more detailed, accurate, and recent than the few Persian accounts of China that then existed. He described learned Chinese as sharing this approach, noting how 'the people of China have great respect for scholars (*'ulamā*), and search for the likes of them', which was why 'the sages of China (*hukumā-yi Chīn*) invited the Christian fathers to China and gave them good living places'.⁸⁷ Such informational dependency was by no means one-way traffic. Just a few decades before Zaman drew on Jesuit data on China, the first Jesuit missionaries to Lhasa relied on local Persophone Muslims as informants on Tibet and its mysterious religion.⁸⁸ Two centuries later, in the quite different circumstances of colonial rule, learned Indians and Persians such as the educationalist Sayyid Ahmad Khan and the publisher Mirza Muhammad Shirazi took a similarly pragmatic, or cosmopolitan, view in deciding to print Zaman's translation of a Christian work.

They were by no means the only Muslim scholars involved in translating and printing European texts at this time. In Cairo, the leading modernist Rifa al-Tahtawi (1801–1873) translated and published dozens of Europeans works, even going so far as to establish an Arabic translation school to expand this project further.⁸⁹ A century later, as director of public instruction in Hyderabad state, Sayyid Ahmad's own grandson, Ross Masood (1889–1937), was closely involved with a similar translation bureau that sought to uplift Muslims through rendering the latest European learning into Urdu.⁹⁰ Amid contemporary calls to 'decolonise the curriculum', we might pause to remember that the most progressive Muslims of the nineteenth century were the keenest proponents of absorbing European knowledge.

Enabling what we have seen of the flawed, but nonetheless ambitious, attempt to translate China between Europe and India were two key figures who were more complex than the simple binary of colonial/indigenous can capture. These multilingual cross-cultural middlemen comprised the Islamicate Christian Muhammad (who became Paolo) Zaman and the Confucianate Christian Matteo Ricci, whose bilingual tombstone recorded his similarly mixed moniker as Master Li who 'was called Madou [Matteo] and had the

⁸⁶ Zaman, *Tārīkh-i Chīn*, p. 1; Zaman, *Chīn-nāma*, p. 1. This preface was not included in Shirazi's Bombay edition.

⁸⁷ Zaman, *Tārīkh-i Chīn*, p. 1; Zaman, *Chīn-nāma*, p. 1.

⁸⁸ M. Gaborieau, 'The discovery of the Muslims of Tibet by the first Portuguese missionaries', in *Islam and Tibet: Interactions along the Musk Routes*, (eds) A. Akasoy, C. Burnett and R. Yoeli-Tlalim (Ashgate, 2010).

⁸⁹ See the details of many of the translations which Tahtawi oversaw in T.-X. Bianchi, 'Catalogue général et détaillé des livres arabes, persans et turcs, imprimés à Boulac, en Égypte, depuis l'introduction de l'imprimerie dans ce pays', *Journal Asiatique* 4.2 (1843), pp. 24–61.

⁹⁰ K. Datla, *The Language of Secular Islam: Urdu Nationalism and Colonial India* (Honolulu, 2013), chapter 2.

sobriquet Xitai [wise man from the west]’.⁹¹ Between them, they attempted to bridge the cultural systems of Confucian China, Christian Europe, and Islamic Asia, to ‘share knowledge’ through making ‘connections’ across what remained quite different ‘systems’. The cursory reading of Zaman’s translation of Ricci presented here suggests just some of the challenges they faced in that laudable venture.

Conflicts of interest. The author reports none.

⁹¹ See the translation of Ricci’s bilingual Chinese/Latin tombstone in E. J. Malatesta and G. Zhiyu (eds), *Departed, Yet Present: Zhalan, The Oldest Christian Cemetery in Beijing* (Macau, 1995), p. 132.

Cite this article: Green N (2023). Matteo Ricci as an Islamicate informant. Two moments of connection in the Persian afterlives of a Latin account of China. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* **33**, 971–990. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1356186323000263>