The Chinese imprint

Printing and publishing Chinese religion and philosophy in the Dutch Republic 1595-1700

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IV

CHINA AND THE CHINESE RITES CONTROVERSY IN DUTCH NEWSPAPERS
AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

Introduction

Shifting Representations of China and Confucius
In the last quarter of the seventeenth century, developments in both Europe and China changed the manner in which the Middle Kingdom was represented to Dutch readers. This chapter explores how newspapers and periodicals printed in the Dutch Republic during the final decades of the seventeenth century reported and discussed Confucius and the so-called Chinese Rites Controversy. In this regard, this chapter examines how changes in the Jesuit mission, combined with developments in production, distribution, and availability of printed media, produced an image of China and its religion and philosophy that was increasingly focused on the Chinese Rites Controversy and the condemnation of the Jesuit missionary approach. Furthermore, over the course of the seventeenth century, Dutch-made news became influenced more and more by French culture and language. These shifts impacted representations of China and Confucius, whereby Dutch printers, publishers, and booksellers all produced and distributed a progressively Gallican image of the Middle Kingdom.

1 Parts of this chapter first appeared in ‘It is said that... The Chinese Rites Controversy in Dutch newspapers and periodicals in the seventeenth century’. Jaarboek voor Nederlandse boegschiedenis, vol. 23, 2016, pp. 172-191.
The early modern culture of news has received considerable attention in recent years. Scholars like Brendan Dooley, Joad Raymond, Joop Koopman, and Paul Arblaster have all advocated an interpretation of news that focuses primarily on production and distribution.\(^1\) Their attention has concentrated on the emergence of the periodic press and the distribution of news through international networks of book producers, translators, merchants, missionaries, diplomats, and religious immigrants. Research in this field has also investigated the relationship between news and public opinion. For example, an approach towards news culture as part of the early modern book market has been taken up by Andrew Pettegree and Arthur Der Weduwen of the University of St. Andrews.\(^2\) Additionally, recent studies by Michiel van Groesen, Helmer Helmers and others have further proposed to merge the various historiographies of news and information management by integrating these fields of study with Robert Darnton’s circuit of communication.\(^3\) Following an integrated approach towards these methodologies, this chapter seeks to examine the role of printers, publishers, and authors in shaping the early modern representations of China in newspapers.

Reports in early modern Dutch newspapers often concerned the non-European world. These reports were significant in that they changed the manner in which readers could relate to the Americas, Africa, Asia, and Australia by providing (relatively) current information which hitherto had only been available to a small part of society. By employing the periodic press, Michiel van Groesen has demonstrated in Amsterdam’s Atlantic that Dutch Brazil transformed (and was transformed by) the media

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landscape in the Dutch Republic.¹ This subject is further examined in Van Groesen’s NWO-Vidi project, ‘Covering the oceans. Newspapers and information management in the Atlantic world, 1620–1770’.

Dynamic China
With one notable exception, little research has been done on the representation of China in the European periodic press of the seventeenth century. Edwin van Kley’s ground-breaking work, ‘News from China’, has demonstrated that news about the Manchu conquest of 1644 had remarkable effects on Europe; the conquest was deemed incredibly important and was subjected to a wide variety of interpretations in the periodic press. Before 1644, however, reports about China were primarily static affairs as opposed to histories or news. In the words of Van Kley: ‘The image of China produced by such flat descriptions was flat; it lacked both a historical dimension in the background and individual personalities or discrete events in the foreground’.² However, the conquest changed the nature of news on the Middle Kingdom by dramatising the events and allowing for more substantial debates over the significance of Chinese incidents.

News from China retained this dynamic quality in the following decades. Jesuit missionaries and merchants from various trading companies provided generally accurate accounts, and the emerging news culture encouraged discussion on a more extensive and influential level. Europe thus became increasingly familiar with China and her recent history. In the second half of the seventeenth century, an enormous amount of new information about the Middle Kingdom reached the (Dutch) printing presses, which – as we have seen in previous chapters – became popular and widely read. Furthermore, when the Chinese Rites Controversy became a publicly discussed issue during the 1680s and 1690s, this information acquired even greater immediacy and dynamism. China truly became part of the European conscience, a development that was aided by newspapers, journals, periodicals, and books produced in the Dutch Republic.

Outline

This chapter aims to explain how a primarily Catholic debate – which mainly concerned France and Rome – was presented to a European public in periodicals produced by Dutch printers and publishers. The chapter further explores how production and textual transmission influenced the possible representations of China, the Chinese Rites Controversy, and the Society of Jesus. Reports in Dutch-made newspapers may be considered either metatextual commentary (the critical commentary of one text about another text) or intertextual allusion (a more passing or casual reference by one text to another text), depending on the strategy of the publisher. These relationships between different texts on the Middle Kingdom are used in this chapter to trace how newspapers often reported the same event, but in decisively different manners. Significantly, such a focus on transtextuality demonstrates how early modern images of China in print went beyond merely informing readers about events happening in a country far away. News about China was influenced by a variety of factors including its source, the strategy of the publisher and editor, and the presumed wishes of the potential readership.

The first section in this chapter focuses on news in the Dutch Republic and provides a general reflection on the unique character of Dutch newspapers and news digests. Dutch printers and publishers provided the whole of Europe with printwork that reported on recent events in Dutch and various other languages. Especially the papers in French – the so-called Gazettes de Hollande – were highly influential. These newspapers existed alongside their Dutch counterparts, but had a different readership; therefore, their approach towards China, the Chinese Rites Controversy, and the Society of Jesus was a divergent one. For further insights into the nature of Dutch-made printwork, the second section discusses books and pamphlets written by French Jesuit missionaries published in the Dutch Republic. During the final quarter of the seventeenth century, a Jesuit mission sent by Louis XIV played an increasingly important role in the formation of European images of China. This mission is vital to understanding not only how the printed medium became ‘French’, but also how the knowledge distributed also began to focus on French sources, subjects, and interests.¹

¹ Brockey, Journey to the East, pp. 126–163; R. Magone, ‘Portugal and the Jesuit mission to Chi-
A considerable amount of Dutch-made news on China was printed in French. Nonetheless, the Dutch Republic certainly saw the publication of many news items about the Middle Kingdom in Dutch. The third section examines the nature of these notices: their content, intended public, and their representation of China. As this section reveals, Dutch-language news was mostly concerned with events that could have an economic, political, or military impact on the activities of the Dutch in Asia. Consequently, these papers only sporadically reported on the Chinese Rites Controversy or the Jesuits. China is still mentioned often, however, but in the form of advertisements as Chinese items were offered for sale by numerous merchants.

The fourth section of this chapter analyses French-language news published in the Dutch Republic. The censorship of Louis Le Comte’s account of China by the Sorbonne (1700) shows how newspapers printed in the Dutch Republic often gave different accounts of the same event. Papers in French focused more on the presumed Catholic interests of their readers and consequently were often rather outspoken in their anti-Jesuit condemnation of Le Comte and the Chinese rites. This section further examines the various pamphlets that were published during the height of the Chinese Rites Controversy around 1700. These debates hardly concerned the Dutch, yet were furtively printed in Holland. Surprisingly, most of these pamphlets bear a fictitious imprint from Cologne and, as such, may offer clues to the changing role of the Dutch Republic in the provision of news on China at the turn of the eighteenth century. The fifth and final section concerns the discussion of China and the rites controversy in news digests. These so-called Mercuren summarised and ordered the news of recent months. Compared to newspapers, topics were presented in a more integral way. Hence, these digests provided a more comprehensive (and therefore different) discussion of China.

By considering these media, it becomes evident that even the publications that, at first glance, seemed to owe little to the Dutch, were largely indebted to the unique print culture of the United Provinces. Compared to other countries in Europe, the Dutch had fewer hesitations about openly discussing political or religious issues, and almost any major event was

accompanied by a large number of pamphlets. The Chinese Rites Controversy was primarily a French and Catholic debate, yet publishers in the Dutch Republic had few qualms and much to gain by joining the fray.

Publishing News in the Dutch Republic

*The Dutch Miracle of News Publication*

Besides being the European nucleus for the production of books and journals, Amsterdam and the Dutch Republic were an important centre for the production and distribution of news. The origin of the periodic news sheet, however, can be traced to another republic: the Venetian Republic of the sixteenth century. There, an early form of handwritten newspaper called *avissi* or *gazettes* circulated as a single, folded sheet that appeared on a regular (often weekly) schedule. Their main function was to circulate news — especially political, military, or economic tidings — quickly and efficiently. Soon, the periodic news sheet found its way from Italy to Germany and Holland. Newspapers came to the Dutch Republic in 1618, appearing first in Amsterdam. By 1645, this city alone boasted seven different titles by six publishers, who issued ten weekly editions on four days of the week.

Outside Amsterdam, newspapers appeared in Arnhem (1619), Delft (1620), The Hague (1652), Haarlem (1656), Weesp (1656), Utrecht (1658), Rotterdam (1666), and Leiden (1686).

The newspaper output of the Dutch Republic is all the more striking when compared to the publications elsewhere in Europe. In France and the Holy Roman Empire, a smaller number of periodicals served

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5 Der Weduwen, *Dutch and Flemish newspapers of the Dutch Republic*. 
a greater number of readers.\textsuperscript{1} Printed news came to Italy in the 1630s, while the first newspaper of Spain was published in 1661.\textsuperscript{2} Britain’s first daily newspapers were launched only in 1702, and the total production of the Spanish Netherlands never reached more than four titles at any given time.\textsuperscript{3} Thus, in the words of media historian Otto Lankhorst: ‘The wealth of publications coming off the Dutch presses in the seventeenth century, which is sometimes referred to as “the Dutch miracle”, certainly also included the newspaper.’\textsuperscript{4}

The emergence and spread of the printing press facilitated the emergence of regular news publications. In his article on the origins of the newspaper in Europe, Johannes Weber has convincingly argued: ‘At the same time, then, as the printing press in the physical, technological sense was invented, “the press” in the extended sense of the word also entered the historical stage’.\textsuperscript{5} These early newspapers ushered in a new phenomenon: a system of communication that made (relatively) up-to-date information available to a socially and economically diverse public. These newspapers tied the Republic of Letters together and promoted a hitherto-unknown diffusion of knowledge. In particular, the form and regular appearance of early modern gazettes influenced the newspaper as we know it today: they were published on a folded sheet in folio size and (unlike broadsheet) generally lacked pictures and headlines. To help the reader make sense of the news, publishers quickly began to number and date each issue, as well as provide the date and place of origin of each notice they printed. Unlike books and even academic journals, newspapers were subjected to strict


\textsuperscript{4} Lankhorst, ‘Newspapers in the Netherlands’, p. 152.

time constraints. Papers needed to be ready to be mailed at fixed times and printers and compositors ‘frequently work as if on a forced march’. While the work was more demanding than the publication of books and journals, publishers were ensured a more regular income as newspapers were often sold by subscription paid in advance.

Professional journalism only emerged during the eighteenth century; yet, even in the seventeenth century, some journalists managed to earn an income from editorial work. However, they were often dismissed as mercenaries who sold their writing skills for profit. Voltaire’s article in Diderot’s *Encyclopédie* complained that few journalists measured up to the standard of being ‘promptly informed, truthful, impartial, simple, and correct in his style’.\(^1\) However, journalistic work was a source of income for many early modern writers and, by the end of the seventeenth century, it had become a way to establish important positions in the Republic of Letters.\(^2\)

The readership of early modern Dutch-made newspapers was substantial.\(^3\) The average cost of one stuiver (20 stuivers equalled one guilder) per issue was low enough to bring them within reach of the lower middle classes, while the high literacy rate – roughly 60 per cent for men and 40 per cent for women – guaranteed the broad appeal of printed news. They were read by both professionals of the news market (merchants and statesmen) and by a wide range of literate citizens from ‘middling background’.\(^4\) Newspapers were popular reading matter in reading rooms, coffee-houses, and cafés, where readers could perhaps enjoy a cup of Chinese tea with their gazette. In the newspapers, these readers found a range of reports from across Europe and the world beyond, summarising and supplementing news that was often heard elsewhere. While the actual print runs are difficult to gauge, it has been estimated that a single newspaper may have been read by as many as ten different readers, making the potential distribution of the medium indeed very large.\(^5\)

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Dutch Newspapers in French

Over the course of the century, publishers in the Dutch Republic accommodated weekly papers in French, English, Spanish, Italian, and Yiddish.\(^1\) Newspapers in French proved especially important. Since the Northern Netherlands had become the dominant refuge for French Huguenot exiles, the journalistic climate had changed to accommodate them and thus included a sizeable French-language press.\(^2\) While Dutch-language newspapers were more confined to readers who had mastered that language, the audience of French-language newspapers was more widespread, finding readers in France, the Netherlands and throughout the whole Republic of Letters.\(^3\) Subsequently, Dutch-language newspapers were sold primarily in the Low Countries, while French-language newspapers also targeted foreign markets. Indeed, the very first newspapers of the Dutch Republic already appealed to this development: the *Tijdinghen uyt verscheeyde quartieren* (1619-1671) and *Courante uyt Italien et Duytschlandt* (1618-1669) were translated into French as *Nouvelles des divers quartiers* (1639-1643) and *Courant d’Italie et d’Almaigne* (1620-c. 1655).\(^4\) The *Gazette d’Amsterdam* was the first Dutch-made journal published solely in French, issued from the second half of the seventeenth century onwards.\(^5\) More followed, of which *Gazette de Leyde* (also known as *Nouvelles Extraordinaires des divers endroits* 1680) was the most celebrated.\(^6\)

By the end of the century, Dutch publishers in five towns printed French papers: Amsterdam, The Hague, Leiden, Utrecht, and Rotterdam.\(^7\)

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\(^1\) H. Pach-Oosterbroek, ‘Arranging reality: the editing mechanisms of the world’s first Yiddish newspaper, the Kurant (Amsterdam, 1686-1687)’, PhD thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2014.


\(^3\) Bots, *De Republike der Letteren*, p. 165-197.


French Huguenot refugees were usually responsible for the content, as their situation, aptitude, and needs, according to Graham Gibbs, ‘ideally fitted them for the role of journalists’.1 The Dutch-made gazettes de Hollande found an audience all over Europe. Demand abroad was considerable, regardless of their inflated prices and the persistent efforts by the French government to curtail the spread of news from the Dutch Republic.2 By the middle of the eighteenth century, the leading position of the gazettes was such that a newspaper entitled Observateur Hollandois was founded in Potsdam in 1744: a paper that had absolutely nothing to do with Holland, but ‘attempted to invest Prussian journalism with something of the reflected glory of Dutch journalism’.3 French-language newspapers catered to the international Republic of Letters and, more generally, to the growing number of European readers literate in French. Latin remained the language of scholarship and education, but the opportunities to learn, read, speak, and write French increased over the course of the century. This development was stimulated by the presence in the Dutch Republic of Walloon communities that acted as centres of French culture.4

Compiling News in Mercuren

Readers could also get their news from the so-called Mercuren (named after the classical winged messenger, Mercury). Examples are the Hollandse mercurius (1650–1690), the Europische mercurius (1690–1756), and the Mercure historique et politique (1686–1782). Their editors used national and international newspapers, making the Mercuren an excellent source into the provision of news in the Dutch Republic as well as revealing those news items that were of enduring interest.5 For instance, Joop Koopman has demonstrated that these periodicals were a separate medium with distinct characteristics, and held a contemporary significance that differed substantially from newspapers. Aside from commercial purposes, Mercuren were published for ‘the

coherent and regular presentation and preservation of information about important and interesting topics [...] for contemporary and later generations. The Mercuren also published news with explanation and commentary. Compared to newspapers, issues – such as China or the Chinese Rites Controversy – were presented in a more ‘interrelated way and with more persuasive authority’, and they therefore provided a distinct and comprehensive image of the Middle Kingdom and its religion and philosophy.

News from China

By the end of the seventeenth century, the newspaper had become a cultural phenomenon, as an ever-growing urban middle class public integrated the reading of news periodicals into their social, cultural, economic, and political lives. These readers were not only provided with Dutch and European news, but also with events that happened beyond Europe. Van Groesen has demonstrated that news from the Atlantic world occupied a prominent place in the early modern newspaper. However, distance and opportunity made news from China less prevalent. Numerous reports on the Middle Kingdom reached the pages of the Dutch periodic press, yet there was never any consistent supply of news. This relative paucity does not mean that it has lesser value, however. The provision of news on China – however small – in Dutch newspapers confirms the degree to which the Middle Kingdom had been integrated into the main current of European culture.

Is News from China even News?

In the context of this discussion, it is useful to consider what constitutes ‘news’. Andrew Pettegree and Arthur der Weduwen have proposed that four requirements must be met to call any publication a newspaper. First, the material has to be periodic (frequent and regular); second,
it has to be contemporary (new); third, the material has to be publicly available; and fourth, it has to have miscellaneous contents (reports need to come from different locations). In line with these conditions, news from China printed on Dutch presses was indeed publicly available and miscellaneous, but it was hardly every ever periodic or contemporary. As to periodicity: a round-trip from Europe to China took months, if not years, so when news from the Middle Kingdom reached the shipping ports of France, England, or the Dutch Republic it was always out of date on arrival. This is not to say that the information was not new for the recipient, it simply meant that any action required or undertaken on the basis of this information was almost certainly in vain, as the situation in Asia could have completely changed. Consider, for instance, news about the Manchu Conquest of 1644. Edwin van Kley has shown that missives about this conquest took quite some time to reach the printing presses of Europe. Only in July 1650 – six years after the event – the *Hollandsche mercurius* published a brief note ‘confirming the calamities of the ingenuous China’.\(^1\) News from the Middle Kingdom also lacked any substantial regularity. A considerable number of European ships sailed to Asia, yet the frequency of these travels was not reliable until the nineteenth century.\(^2\) Besides this, the news was generally not acquired in China itself. Merchants often learned about Chinese events through intermediaries in Batavia. Even though this not necessarily diminished the topicality of the news, it certainly influenced the nature of the information.

Although news from China may have lacked some of the traditional characteristics of news, its increasing availability changed the manner in which European readers could relate to the country. Through coverage in the periodic press, the Middle Kingdom gained a historical dimension by showing an image of a more dynamic China. From the 1650s onwards, China was ‘rather dramatically thrust into European consciousness, and West-

\(^1\) *Hollandsche mercurius*, Haarlem: Pieter Casteleyn (1650), p. 25; Van Kley, ‘News from China’, p. 563. Van Kley does note that the wording of the message may imply that there had been earlier reports.

\(^2\) The Dutch East India Company’s shipping between the Netherlands and Asia 1595-1795, Huygens-ING, via [http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/das](http://resources.huygens.knaw.nl/das), last accessed 17 April 2018; H. Ballou Morse, *The chronicles of the East India Company, trading to China*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1926; Blussé, ‘No boats to China’, pp. 51-76.
erners began their first debate over the significance of Chinese event[s].

This shift came as the result of the introduction of newspaper reports, which changed the way China was presented to European readers. In general, notices about Asia prior to the introduction of periodical media had been static descriptions. As Van Kley noted: “Events that occurred in China were not reported to Europeans; Chinese government, institutions, and customs were described to Europeans.” The distinction between reporting and describing it was a crucial one. The representation of China in print had long been that of a remote and often idealised empire. Thanks to the influx of more detailed information, this static image was at least partially replaced with that of a more dynamic picture.

Newspapers as Vehicles for Discussing and Debating China

The introduction of news reports naturally increased the opportunity for debate and discussion. From the middle of the century onwards, Chinese events, such as the Manchu Conquest of 1644, provoked public speculation as to its cause and consequences. Writers began to include accounts of such events into their narratives, in which their cultural and religious background often determined how the news was presented and interpreted. For instance, the Jesuit Martino Martini presented the events of 1644 as God’s punishment for the Wanli Emperor’s (1572-1620) mistreatment of Christian missionaries. In contrast, Juan Palafox y Mendoza (who was embroiled in a major controversy with the Jesuits over ecclesiastical jurisdiction in Mexico) never even mentioned the Jesuit mission in China in relation to the conquest.

Newspaper reports also confirm the degree to which China had been integrated into early modern Dutch culture. The periodic press – learned journals and newspapers alike – demonstrates to us that the Middle Kingdom became increasingly assimilated into the main currents of society during the final decades of the seventeenth century. Readers who, beforehand, may have only had a pedestrian knowledge of China, could now seek out newsworthy information in the periodic press. They

1 Van Kley, p. 562.
2 Van Kley, p. 562.
3 Martini, De bello Tartarico; J. de Palafox y Mendoza, Historia de la conquista de la China por el Tartareo, Paris, Antonio Bertier, 1670.
did so for a variety of reasons and it becomes clear that representations of China during the last decades of the seventeenth century were as much the result of developments back home as they were the result of events in the Middle Kingdom itself.\footnote{For a discussion of public opinion, public sphere and its role in shaping early modern news see: J. Habermas, \textit{Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft}, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1962. A critique of this highly influential work may be found in J. Bloemendal and A. van Dixhoorn, \textit{Literacy cultures and public opinion in the Low Countries, 1450-1650}, Leiden, Brill, 2011. See also: R. Harms, \textit{Pamfletten en publieke opinie: massamedia in de zeventiende eeuw}, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2011, p. 24.}

In 1942, Helen MacGill Hughes, in her study about the United States in those years, noted that news is a relative matter and of all possible ‘facts’, only some can be written as news.\footnote{H. MacGill Hughes, ‘The social interpretation of news’, \textit{The annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science}, vol. 219, 1942, pp. 11-17.} She summed up the consequences of this observation by concluding that ‘news is whatever is news for “our” readers, and thus the news and the public that wants it are defined in terms of each other’. Interestingly, MacGill Hughes’s astute comment could very well apply to the Dutch Republic in the 1640s.\footnote{MacGill Hughes, ‘The social interpretation of news’, p. 11.} In the seventeenth century, as today, news was a commodity. The growing presence of China in newspapers of the early modern Dutch Republic shows how the country indeed became more ingrained in the European imagination by way of the economic rules of cultural consumption. News and the demands and wishes of the public depended on each other, and newspapers provided readers with a new way of accessing Asia.

Reports on China in Dutch-Made Newspapers

\textit{Reporting on the Economic Interests of the Dutch}

By the middle of the seventeenth century, there was a distinct divergence between Dutch and French reports on China in newspapers published in the Dutch Republic. Dutch news primarily focused on those events that might affect the economic interests of the United Provinces, such as shipping news, the fates of Jesuit missionaries (as intermediaries between the imperial court and the Dutch), and wars and conflicts that could disrupt trading lines. The numerous advertisements for Chinese
produce further emphasise the primarily economic character of Dutch news on the Middle Kingdom.

Hundreds of tidings take note of ships named China, ships going to China, ships sinking on their way to China, ships arriving from China, ships carrying Chinese products: the list is endless.¹ These notes were generally brief and to the point: ‘There are letters from the East Indies and from Ceylon […] that everything is well in the Indies, and that the trade with Persia and China is good’.² Readers were often meticulously informed of the exact nature of the loads carried by ships coming from Asia. Over the course of the century, Dutch newspapers published dozens of cargo-lists, informing readers (for instance) of how in 1672 ‘the first ten ships from Batavia’ brought with them ‘9005 pounds of China root [and] 79800 pounds of Chinese silk’.³

Although the Chinese Rites Controversy was primarily a debate that took place within the Catholic regions of Europe and therefore of lesser importance to the mainly Protestant readers of Dutch-language newspapers, this did not mean that news regarding the Jesuits in general was not reported.⁴ Their missionaries were an important point of contact for Dutch merchants in China; consequently, newspapers included reports on their affairs and (often) misfortunes: ‘In China, there has been a dispute between Monsr. Berito and the Jesuits, who insisted on his good character. Father Adam [Schall von Bell] had died in prison, where he had been put by the king [sic] of China.’⁵ The name of the Jesuit Schall von Bell would

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¹ These tidings were found using the online database Delpher, developed by the Royal Library in The Hague. A variety of keywords were used to search for China, or Chinese matters in newspapers printed in the Dutch Republic in the period 1 January 1640 to 31 December 1720. For an overview of available titles in Delpher see: www.Delpher.nl/en/kranten#krantenoverzicht, last accessed 9 January 2019.
² ‘Daar zijn brieven uit Oost-Indie en van Ceylon […] dat het in Indie nog alles wel staat, en de handel in Perzië en mede in China goed was’, in Amsterdamse courant, 20 February 1677; Pettregree, The invention of news, p. 39.
⁵ ‘In China was geschil geweest tussen de Jezuiten en Monsr. Berito, die daar zeer hard hadden gestaan op zijn karakter: de pater Adam [Schall von Bell] was overleden in de gevangenis, waar in hem de koning van China had doen zetten’, in Oprechte Haerlemsche courant, 6 October 1672. In reality, Adam Schall von Bell did not die in prison. The separate events of an earthquake in Beijing on 16 April 1665, and a palace fire on 29 April of the
have been familiar to the well-informed readers for, according to Johan Nieuhof, he had wilfully sabotaged the Dutch trading embassy of 1655-1657.¹ Tidings on China were not just concerned with the Dutch East India Company, but also foreign trade. For instance the Amphitrite departed out of Port-Louis in France for Guangzhou in March 1701.² On board were the French Jesuit Jean de Fontaney and nine of his colleagues. The ship arrived at its destination on 9 September.³

Even news that was not directly related to shiploads or cargo bore a distinct economic character, since focus remained on the commercial interests of the Dutch and all that may have influenced the activities of the trading companies in Asia. For example, newspapers reported on wars and conflict but often omitted human involvement: ‘This letter [of 1662] is said to report that from there 12 valiant warships were sent against the Chinese pirates, to counter them in the water.’⁴ Political events were likewise of importance to trade and were similarly reported: ‘Mekin, in China, the 28 December, 1674. Here in this empire it is full of unrest, and it seems great change is coming.’⁵

Advertising China
The economic character of Dutch-language news on China is further emphasised by dozens of advertisements announcing the sale of Chinese goods. These advertisements had become ubiquitous by the end of the century, and were intended (in the words of a contemporary):

same year were interpreted as signs of Heaven’s displeasure with the imprisonment of the Jesuit missionary. He was subsequently released. He died the next year.

¹ Nieuhof, Het gezantschap, pp. 162-163; Keevak, Embassies to China, pp. 68-70.
² G. W. Leibniz, Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe (vol. 20), Berlin, Akademie Verlag, letter 318: Joachim Bouvet to Leibniz, pp. 533-534.
For the sale or rent of dwellings, houses, fields, farms, gardens, cows, oxen, horses, sheep, books, &c. prices of grain, bread, butter, cheese, meat, bacon and a hundred other things which concern general society or the communality, and which [messages] are especially useful and necessary for those who seek to engage in trade, and who wish to make an honest profit.¹

Recently, Arthur der Weduwen has demonstrated that advertisements in Dutch newspapers changed from short announcements primarily about the sale of books to a broad range of goods and services. By the end of the century, these public notices of sale catered mostly to a local urban elite by providing ‘new platforms for the exchange of commercial goods and luxuries’.²

In the Dutch Republic, advertisements were influenced and stimulated by the book trade. Until the 1640s, newspaper advertisements were generally dedicated to the sale of books and prints, through which booksellers targeted a broad public of potential buyers. During the first half of the century, devotional and spiritual works, recreational literature, professional and educational books, and maritime handbooks were most often advertised.³ This last category regularly included books on China. For example, in February 1645, the Amsterdam widow of a certain Evert Cloppenburch offered a reprint of Jan Huygen van Linschoten’s Itinerario for sale in Tijdinghe uyt verscheyde quartieren.⁴ By publicly announcing the sale


² Der Weduwen, ‘From piety to profit’, p. 236.

³ Der Weduwen, p. 238-241.

of this expensive book, the widow hoped to catch the eye of the urban middle and higher classes: those with the commercial, social, and political powers and means to be interested in such printwork. Advertisements for books in newspapers such as the Amsterdamse courant were not limited to books printed in Holland. In 1699, Jan van Leeuwen of Tiel in Guelders sold (through Anthony Schouten of Utrecht) his Reis-beschryvinge van Polen na Muscovien which contained ‘some remarks on the journey of Spatarus from Russia, by way of Siberia, to China’. Advertisements in newspapers enabled publishers to announce their books to the wealthyburghers of the republic, in and outside of the urban regions.

From the early 1640s onwards, printwork was no longer the only advertised commodity in newspapers. Other products and goods were also offered for sale, indicating a shift not only in content of advertising but also in purpose. By promoting their Chinese wares in newspapers, merchants hoped to increase their profits and boost their overall business profile. Goods were often sold through a makelaar (broker). In September 1703, Cornelis de Roos de Jonge and Pieter Raket in the Amsterdamse courant offered the estate of the late Bartel Verhagen for sale, containing ‘[...] porcelain, lacquerware and many curiosities’, among which ‘24 bottles of oriental figures of different sorts, six large pots, the same number of small ones, bottles, 1000 “rinsing” bowls, a large batch of red, blue, and brown tableware for coffee, chocolate, and teacups, 100 teapots, a batch of large and small statues, a cabinet with nice shells and horns, Chinese bows, arrows, sables, and rudders with silver fittings’, as well as ‘unicorn horns, elephant teeth, and rhinoceros horns and much more’.

Likewise, in April

1 ‘Tot Tyel, by Jan van Leeuwen, Boekverkoper, is gedrukt, en te bekomcn tot Utrecht by Antony Schouten, Reis-beschryvinge van Polen na Muscovien behelsende de Oorlogen van de Muscoviters in de Krim [...] eenige aenmerkingen over de Reise van Spatarus van Ruschland doer Siberien, na China’, in Amsterdamse courant, 6 June 1699.
2 Der Weduwen, ‘From piety to profit’, p. 424.
3 ‘Cornelis de Roos de Jonge, en Pieter Raket makelaers sullen op woensdag den 3 October 1703, ten huyse van Anthony Swanenburg, Kasteleyn in ’t Oude Heere Logement, ’s morgens ten 9 en ’s namiddags ten 2 uuren verkoopen de nagelate porceleynen, lakwerk en veele rariteyten van Bartel Verhage, bestaende in 24 flessen Orientaelse figuuren van alderhande soort, 6 groote potten, kleynder dito, flessen, 1000 spoelkommen, een groote party root, blauw, en bruyn koffie, chokolaet, en teegoed, 100 de trekpotten, een party groote en kleyne beelden, een kabinet met mooie schelpen, horens, &c. Chineese Bogen, pylen, sables, en roers met zilver beslag: eenhoorens, olifants-tanden, en rinoceros horens’, in Amsterdamse courant, 15 September 1703.
1685, Herman van Pamburg of Amsterdam announced a public auction to be held on 17 April of a batch of ‘Chinese tea, various cotton goods, painted Chinese coverlets, Chinese flowers of gold and silk, three remarkable and large Chinese pots’. Throughout the century, the public of the Dutch Republic indeed became very well informed about the sale of Chinese goods through newspaper advertisements, which also raised public visibility and familiarity with the Middle Kingdom.

China is also mentioned in newspaper advertisements as part of the somewhat unfortunate category of ‘stolen goods’. These concerned personal announcements requesting the assistance of the general public. In the night of 15 February 1702, for instance, we learn that five dyed Chinese satins were stolen in Amsterdam, along with ‘a very expensive veil with gold embroidered at both sides and heavy gold lace at the bottom; a very expensive apron, all made of gold; five dyed Chinese satins; a satin coverlet, as well as various women’s clothing and many processed linens with the initials S.M.S with a little crown above it’. The advertisement concludes with the hopeful request that if one sees the items somewhere, to ‘please hold them, and bring them to Doctor Krytenberg, living at the Prinsegracht, near “The Elephant” brewery, for the reward of 25 guilders’.

1 ‘Herman van Pamburg, makelaar, zal dinsdag den 17 April ’t Amsterdam verkopen een partij puike Chineese thee, diverse catoene lywaren, geschilderde Chineese spreien, gouden en zijde Chinese bloemen, 3 curieuze grote Chinese potten’, in Oprecht Haerlemsche courant, 14 April 1685; Catalogus van de naargelaten porcelenen, lack-werck, en rariteyten […] naargelaten door Bartel Verhagen, die verkost sullen worden […] den 3 october 1703. ten huysse van Anthony Swanenburg […] door de makelaars Cornelis de Roos de Jonge en Pieter Raket, s.l.n.n., place and name not stated, [1703]; Notitie van de volgende porceleynen, lak werk en rariteyten, nagelaten door Bartel Verhagen, die verkost sullen werden door de makelaars Cornelis de Roos de Jonge en Pieter Raket […] den 3 october 1703. ten huysse van Anthony Swanenburg, s.l.n.n. place and name not stated [1703]; Appendix van eenig lackwerk […] stoffen en cabayen, behoorende tot de catalogus van de naargelaten porcelenen, lakwerk en rariteyten, naargelaten by Bartel Verhagen die verkost sullen werden den 4 october 1703. ten huysse van Anthony Swanenburg […] door de makelaars Cornelis de Roos de jonge, en Pieter Raket, s.l.n.n. place and name not stated [1703].

2 ‘Daar zyn tusschen Dinsdag en Woensdag den 15 February 1702 tot Amsterdam gestolen de navolgende goederen, een seer kostelyke Sluyer met gout aen weerydes geborduurt, met een sware goudde kant onder aen; een seer kostelyk voorschoot, alles van gout; 5 geverfde Chineese Satynen; een satyne gestikte Sprey; als mede verscheidelye vrouwe klederen, en een partye gemaekte lynwaten, gemerkt S.M.S. en een kroontje daer boven. Die het bovengemelde of een van het eerste genoemde goed moge voorkomen, gelieft het aen te houden, en te regt te brengen aen den Doctor Krytenberg, woont op de Prince-graft, by de Brouwery van de Oliphant, sal 25 gulden voor een vereering hebben’, in Amsterdamse courant, 16 February 1702.
advertisement the day after the theft in the Amsterdamse courant as well as in the Oprechte Haerlemsche courant of 16 February.¹

Newspapers thus supplied readers in the Dutch Republic with ample opportunity to satisfy their interests in China in their own language. Yet, news coming from and pertaining to this country was limited and mostly concerned economic, political, or military affairs. The papers therefore primarily focused on information coming from the trading companies, since these reports had the greatest impact on the (economic) interests of Dutch readers. The bulk of references to China had less to do with the Middle Kingdom itself and more with the commercial products that were the direct result of the increased contacts between Europe and Asia, such as books, commodities like tea and porcelain, and objects of art such as lacquerware. As such, newspapers reflected the economic impact of the increased intercultural contact between Europe and China for Dutch readers.

The Middle Kingdom in French-language Newspapers

The Kangxi Emperor and Louis XIV
Dutch newspapers in French reported differently on China, which was mainly due to an expansion in readership. Their public consisted not only of French exiles in the Dutch Republic and readers in the Southern Netherlands and France, they also encompassed the whole European Republic of Letters as their potential audience.² This broad circulation made news with a local (Dutch) economic focus superfluous, because Dutch readers of French papers were already supplied with economic news related to China in their own language. The majority of the reports on China in French-language newspapers concerned the Jesuits and their mission, especially since Louis XIV sent his own French envoy in the late 1680s.

France came to play a more prominent role in the Chinese missionary effort during the last quarter of the seventeenth century.³ In the 1670s,

¹ Oprechte Haerlemsche courant, 16 February 1702.
² Bots, De Republiek der Letteren, pp. 165-170.
³ Louis Pfister states that Joachim Bouvet only presented ’49 magnificently printed volumes’ to Louis XIV. However, Bouvet himself declared in a letter to Gottfried Leibniz, on 18 October 1697, that he brought 300 volumes to the library of the French King. See: L. Pfister, Notices biographiques et bibliographiques sur les jésuites de l’ancienne mission de Chine (1552-1773), Shanghai,
Flemish Jesuit Ferdinand Verbiest was instated as the new scientific teacher of the young Kangxi Emperor. Verbiest worried about the lack of Jesuit scientists, which he believed to be fundamental in the missionary efforts in China. He made an urgent appeal to the Jesuits in Europe, who then persuaded Louis XIV to send his own envoy. Known as the mathématiciens du roi (the ‘king’s mathematicians’), this envoy aimed at spreading French and Catholic influence at the Chinese court under the pretext of transmitting scientific knowledge. Sending a royally sponsored mission was also in line with Louis’s policy of religious autonomy, which asserted the independence of the French Church from Rome. As related by Virgile Pinot, the main goal of the envoy combined interests of diplomacy, trade, and religion and its policies, with those of the sciences: ‘Sending to China Jesuit mathematicians was but an expedient of the king’s government in order to have in China missionaries who would not only be representatives of the Pope’.3

The king’s mathematicians were tasked with making astronomical observations, investigating native flora and fauna, and mastering various technical arts. In late 1684 and early 1685, Joachim Bouvet, Jean de Fontaney, Jean-François Gerbillon, Guy Tachard, Claude de Visdelou, and Louis Le Comte were summoned to the Académie Royale des Sciences, where they met with Gian Domenico Cassini. Cassini was the director of the Observatoire de Paris, and he suggested that the Jesuits make astronomical observations in China. Cassini was primarily interested in Chinese chronology, biblical antiquity, and astronomical calculations (discussed in the previous chapter). As such, many of the Jesuits sent to China were respected astronomers, who brought with them a variety of their instru-
ments. Their regular correspondence with the Académie Royale des Sciences in Paris made for a swift and broad distribution of the information gathered.¹

The French Jesuits arrived in Beijing in February 1688, and were favourably received by the Qing Emperor Kangxi (1654-1722). The emperor appreciated them for their scientific knowledge, and he retained Gerbillon and Bouvet at court.² The king’s mathematicians regularly returned to Europe, where their informative manuscripts on their findings were soon turned into print.³ Regular contact between Paris and the Middle Kingdom facilitated the exchange of books, journals, instruments, and maps. This helped bring French and European science and culture to the Middle Kingdom and, in turn, further informed Europe about China.⁴

As the previous chapter has already demonstrated, French reports on the Middle Kingdom came to overshadow information from other sources.⁵ During the last quarter of the seventeenth century, not only the printed medium containing information on China became increasingly French:

¹ The expansion of European religion and science in China had been greatly hindered during the 1660s. During the early Qing period, an anti-Christian movement was launched by Yang Guangxian 楊光先, who was the head of the Bureau of Astronomy from 1665 to 1669. It led – among other things – to the arrest of Jesuit missionary and imperial advisor Adam Schall von Bell, and the execution of a large number of Chinese converted astronomers. The events greatly influenced the young Kangxi Emperor, who soon began to study astronomy for himself in order to resolve a dispute concerning the calendar. Yang Guangxian was tasked to produce a valid calendar during a competition with the Jesuits astronomers, yet he could not do so. Yang was removed from his post as head of the Bureau of Astronomy, and replaced by the Flemish Jesuit Ferdinand Verbiest. The case against the Jesuits was subsequently reinvestigated, and all previous findings were reversed. See: A. Udías, Jesuit contribution to science: a history, Heidelberg, Springer, 2015, pp. 90-95; S. Salvia, ‘The battle of the astronomers: Johann Adam Schall von Bell and Ferdinand Verbiest at the court of the celestial emperors’, in A.M. Roca Rosell (ed.), The circulation of science and technology. Proceedings of the 4th international conference of the European Society for the History of Science, Barcelona, Institut d’Estudis Catalans, 2010, pp. 959-963; Mungello, The great encounter between China and the West, pp. 47-65.

² Jami, The emperor’s news mathematics, pp. 139-151.


via the royal mathematicians, the knowledge distributed by print began to focus on French sources and content as well. This contributed to a (partial) shift in production from the Dutch Republic to France. The Dutch Republic had been a favourite location for authors to publish their books on China throughout the seventeenth century. Even those affiliated with Rome or Paris often chose for the printing presses of Holland due to the high quality of their products, the excellent possibilities of distribution, and the relative lack of interference from government or church.¹

However, in the last decade of the seventeenth century, those unique circumstances lost some of their decisive advantage. For one, governmental censure was less of an issue for the French Jesuits, as they worked and wrote primarily in the service of their royal missionary policy. Besides, while the printers of Holland were especially renowned for their illustrated books in folio, the writings of the mathematicians were mostly published in relatively small sizes without engravings. Furthermore, for the proofreading and correcting of astronomical or mathematical works, someone versed in the specific field was preferred. While linguistic proofs could mostly be corrected by anyone knowledgeable in the text’s language, the correctness of mathematical formulas proved difficult to gauge for someone without a firm grounding in the subject. This explains why the King’s mathematicians chose printers and publishers in France, where they could control the production process: at least, they could for a while with little hindrance from the French government.

_Diverging Reports in French and Dutch_

The production of books on China partially shifted from the Dutch Republic to France; yet, the Dutch still greatly influenced the image of the Middle Kingdom through the publication of newspapers, learned journals, and books. Dutch-made periodicals in French provided readers throughout the international Republic of Letters with information about the Middle Kingdom, the Jesuit mission and, eventually, the Chinese Rites Controversy. However, a distinct variance between reports related to China in French and Dutch papers soon became visible. Generally speaking, the Dutch papers focused inwards, led by the commercial and economic interests of their

¹ Dijstelberge, ‘De cost en de baet’, p. 222-225.
readers. They reported events that could impact the Dutch presence in Asia, paying special attention to incidents that might disrupt lines of trade and communication. A paper might, for instance, report on wars with these elements in mind: ‘[Letter] from Peking, capital of China, the 8th of October, 1696. During this year, the Emperor was busy undertaking war against the king of Elouth, a land located in Tartary, at three hundred leagues from here to the north-western side’. In contrast, French-language papers were more outwardly focused, giving voice to those developments in and relating to China that could influence religious and cultural interactions in China. Additionally, French-language papers became preoccupied with the Chinese rites when these became part of a Jesuit-Jansenist controversy, in which Louis XIV tried to influence the mission in China through the Société des Missions étrangères de Paris and the Faculty of Theology of the Sorbonne.

The difference between French and Dutch-language newspapers is clearly evident when they report on the same event, illustrating how textual transmission (from source to printed paper) could influence content and interpretation. On 3 March 1709, Gazette d’Amsterdam informed its readers that ‘this Thursday, the Pope offered his assistance to a congregation devoted to the mission in China – from which Father Provana, Jesuit, has arrived after a long and arduous journey, accompanied by a mandarin lodging with the Fathers of the Society [of Jesus].’ On the same day, Nouvelles extraordinaires des divers endroits carried the same notice but without mentioning the congregation on the China mission. The next day, Oprechte Haerlemsche courant also reported on the arrival of Father Provana and the mandarin, using essentially the same words. Three newspapers – two in French, and one in Dutch – noted the return of Father Provana: all reports were brief and in accordance with each other.

2 ‘Le Pape assista Jeudi à une Congrégation sur les Missions de la Chine; d’ou le Père Provana Jésuite est arrivé après une fort longue navigation, avec un Mandarin, qui est logé chez les Pères de la Société’, in Gazette d’Amsterdam, 22 March 1709.
3 ‘Le Jésuite Provana est revenu ici de la Chine, avec un Gentilhomme de ce Pais là’, in Nouvelles extraordinaires de divers endroits, 22 March 1709.
4 This mandarin must have been Louis Fan Shouyi (1682-1753), a native of Shanxi province. Fan stayed in Europe for 12 years, primarily in Italy, before returning to China. ‘Alhier is na en lange Reys uyt China aangekomen Pater Provuna, Jesuyt, met een mandarijn’, in Oprechte Haerlemsche courant, 23 March 1709.
Yet a week later, only the Dutch *Oprechte Haerlemsche courant* carried another notice about Provana, this time specifying that ‘the arrival of the Jesuit Provana with the Mandarin from the Empire of China has caused more than a little fear about these affairs at the court [...] since it would do great damage to [...] the *commerce that would be lost* in these regions.’ One week after the arrival of Antonio Provana, more information about his Asian stay was made public, and this knowledge posed a threat to commercial and religious interests of the Dutch. French-language papers would have had access to this information – if not by way of a primary source, then through other papers – yet they did not think it worthy enough for publication as their potential readers held fewer commercial stakes in the Middle Kingdom.

Publishing strategies were thus aimed at either French or Dutch potential readers and their presumed interests and demands. However, when the Chinese Rites Controversy became more publicly visible during the last decades of the seventeenth century, it overshadowed almost all other news related to China. As such, both papers in French and Dutch became increasingly preoccupied with this polemic debate.

The debate concerning the Chinese rites had been an internal concern of religious authorities in Paris and Rome since the beginning of the seventeenth century. While the Jesuits claimed that the Chinese rites were secular rituals compatible with Christianity, Dominicans and Franciscans disagreed and reported the issue to Rome. In 1645, Rome’s Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (*Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* (the congregation of the Roman Curia for missionary work and related activities) sided with the latter and condemned the Chinese rites. However, in 1656, the *Propaganda Fide* briefly reversed this decision in favour of the Jesuits. In 1704, Rome issued a decree (later reinforced by a bull in 1715) in which Pope Clement XI banned the rites. Benedict XIV reaffirmed the prohibition and forbade further debate in 1742. In 1721, the Kangxi Emperor objected to the decrees of 1704 and 1715 and he banned Christian missions in China. The Yongzheng Emperor 雍親王 (1722-1735) also

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1 ‘De komste van den Jesuyt Provana met den Mandarijn uyt het Keyserrijk van China heeft geen kleyne vrees over de bewuste Saken aen dit Hof veroorsaeckt. [...] naademael het een seer groot nadeel soude wesen voor [...] de *commercie* die men in die Gewesten stont te verliezen’, in *Oprechte Haerlemsche courant*, 30 March 1709. My emphasis.
reinforced various anti-Christian policies during his reign. The Chinese Rites Controversy would not be formally resolved until 1939, when the Holy See allowed Christians to participate in ceremonies involving Confucius and to observe ancestral rites. In the meantime, leading universities in Europe had been involved in the conflict, together with eight popes and the Kangxi Emperor.

The sometimes furious discussion often went beyond issues concerning the civil or religious character of Confucian ceremonies. In Rome, the Propaganda Fide had long wished to control the mission in Asia through its apostolic vicars. Since the Society of Jesus resisted such control, the Propaganda Fide had grown hostile towards them. This animosity was exacerbated by the fact that the Propaganda Fide was generally under the influence of the Dominican and Franciscan Orders. In France, the debate on the Chinese rites became part of a Jesuit-Jansenist controversy, combined with Louis XIV’s efforts to influence the mission in China through the Société des Missions étrangères de Paris and the Faculty of Theology of the Sorbonne.¹

The Chinese Rites Controversy in the Public Eye

Both Paris and Rome had motives that transcended the issues of the Chinese rites proper, which aggravated the discussion of the Jesuit policy of accommodation. However, this conversation was primarily carried out behind closed doors until 1696, when the publication of Nouveaux mémoires sur l'état présent de la Chine by the mathématicien du roy Louis Le Comte catapulted the debate into the public consciousness. A veritable war of pamphlets broke loose, in which Dutch-made newspapers facilitated a swift distribution of the latest information and all its relevant movers and shakers.²

The Chinese Rites Controversy was a long-contested issue, which became an increasingly public debate from 1696 onwards. The periodic press subsequently picked up the dispute, which also increased the num-

ber of reports on China in both Dutch and French newspapers. Before the issue of the Chinese rites entered the European stage, Dutch-made newspapers in French had been quite confident in their evaluation of the Jesuit mission. This may be related to the fact that news from China in French-language papers was largely supplied by the Society of Jesus, especially through letters sent by their missionaries to Rome or Paris. Gazette de Rotterdam of 12 September 1695 printed one such missive, reporting that the Chinese emperor was very fond of the Christian religion and the Society of Jesus: ‘From Rome a letter was sent to Father de la Chaise. It had been written on the 10th of February 1694 in Beijing, the capital of China, by father Antoine Thomas – Flemish missionary to the general of the Jesuits. This letter reports that the emperor is always very affectionate towards the Christian religion and the Society of Jesus.’

1 It may be clear from such reports that the Jesuit provenance heavily influenced both tone and content, presenting the results of the mission as inherently positive. Dutch-language newspapers were apparently influenced by this Jesuit approach as they, too, added a subtle note of confidence to the mission, albeit in a more implicit manner: ‘That the emperor of China has deigned the missionaries by means of an edict, to preach the gospel in his empire, and to his subjects to embrace the Christian religion’.2

During the last years of the seventeenth century, French-language newspapers began to demonstrate a certain opposition to the Jesuit pres-

1 ‘On a envoié de Rome au Père de la Chaise une lettre écrite de Peking Capitale de la Chine le 10. Février 1694 par le Père Antoine Thomas missionnaire Flamand [sic] au Général des Jésuites. Cette lettre porte que l’Empereur est toujours très-affectionné à la Religion Chrétienne & à la Compagnie de Jesus’, in Gazette de Rotterdam, 12 September 1695. Antoine Thomas came from Namur in Wallonia and as such was not Flemish. Until 1692, the city was part of the Spanish Netherlands, after which it was annexed to France.

2 ‘Dat de keizer van China door een edict aen de Missionarissen vergunt heeft, het Evangelium in sijn Rijck te verkondigen, en aen sijn Onderdanen, de Christelijke religie t’omhelsen’, in Oprechte Haerlemsche courant, 27 April 1697. This notice may refer to Kangxi’s edict of Christianity, issued in 1692. This decree compared Christianity on an equal level with Confucianism: ‘The Europeans are very quiet; they do not excite any disturbances in the provinces, they do no harm to anyone, they commit no crimes, and their doctrine has nothing in common with that of the false sects in the empire, nor has it any tendency to excite sedition. [...] We decide therefore that all temples dedicated to the Lord of heaven, in whatever place they may be found, ought to be preserved, and that it may be permitted to all who wish to worship this God to enter these temples, offer him incense, and perform the ceremonies practised according to ancient custom by the Christians. Therefore let no one henceforth offer them any opposition.’ See: Pelican history of the Church: history of Christian missions, vol. 6, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1964, pp. 189-190.
ence in China, especially where it concerned the issues of Confucius and the Chinese rites: ‘The Jesuits understand that they can no longer prevent, nor elude for long, an evaluation of the case of the Chinese cults [...] themselves having remained quietly in agreement about the truth of the facts concerning the rites of Confucius and [worship of] the dead, which are the principal points to evaluate.’ 1 Another paper demonstrates concerns about the role of Pope Innocent XIII (1691-1700), who by the end of 1699 was already gravely ill: ‘One does not know whether or not the setback of the Pope’s illness will postpone the judgment of the case of the Chinese rites against the Jesuits.’ 2 Meanwhile, papers in Dutch kept printing news about China in a more descriptive manner. Yet, the main sources of news shifted from shipping reports to letters from missionaries, which were combined with tidings from Rome. These also began to inform readers about the growing unease of the Roman Curia concerning the role of the Jesuits in China.

*Louis le Comte’s Nouveaux Mémoires sur l’état présent de la Chine*

The Rites Controversy came to a boiling point on 18 October 1700, when eight deputies filed their report on Louis Le Comte’s *Nouveaux mémoires sur l’état présent de la Chine* to the Faculty of Theology at Sorbonne University of Paris, to decide whether this account should be officially censured. After brief deliberations, the faculty strongly condemned the text, denouncing the majority of 19 selected passages as ‘false, reckless, scandalous, impious, contrary to the word of God, heretical, subversive to the faith and religion of Christ, obviating the virtues of the Passion and the Cross of Jesus Christ’ 3 The main reason for this censure was Le Comte’s defence of the Jesuit accommodation of various Chinese rites, which were considered idolatrous by the Société des Missions étrangères de Paris. 4 Anti-Je-

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1 ‘Les Jésuites s’aperçoivent qu’ils ne peuvent plus empêcher ni reculer long-temps le jugement de la cause des cultes Chinois [...] eux-mêmes étant demeurés tacitement d’accord de la vérité des faits touchant les cultes de Confucius & des morts, qui sont les principaux points à juger’, in *Gazette d’Amsterdam*, 19 November 1699.
2 ‘On ne sait pas si le contretemps de la maladie du Pape éloignera le jugement de la cause des cultes Chinois contre les Jésuites’, in *Gazette d’Amsterdam*, 30 November 1699.
4 I. Landry-Deron, ‘Confucius au coeur des polémiques sur la scène européenne au tournant
suit forces celebrated the censure as a victory, especially so, because it was soon followed by additional official attacks on the Jesuit interpretation of the Chinese rites. These assaults proved so effective that Rome eventually ruled against Jesuit accommodation in the Papal bulls *Ex illa die* (1715), and *Ex quo singulari* (1742).¹

Le Comte had been part of the French envoy sent to China to strengthen Louis XIV’s influence in the Middle Kingdom.² After a stay of only two years, Le Comte was enjoined to return to Europe to inform his superiors of the dire situation in which the Jesuits in China had found themselves. He left in 1691 and reported to Rome and Paris. Thereafter, he returned to France, where he became confessor to the duchess of Bordeaux—never to return to China again.³ In France, Le Comte soon started work on a book about China, entitled *Nouveaux mémoires sur l’état présent de la Chine*, which was first published by Jean Anisson in Paris. Two reprints appeared within the year, and translations in English, Dutch, and German followed before the end of the century.

The work was mainly descriptive with a focus on ‘the largest provinces, and many cities, palaces, rivers, canals, ships, roads, and passages, as well as its [China’s] antiquity, good statesmanship and government’.⁴ Had Le Comte constrained himself to a simple description of China, the book would probably not have caused such a stir as it did. The book’s biggest

issue lay in the second main subject, on ‘the progress of the conversion of
the inhabitant to the Christian faith’. The popular success of this propa-
gandistic account made the book a convenient target for those trying to
undermine the Jesuit mission, and its rather unsophisticated explanation
of complex theological issues only added fuel to the fire.

David Mungello has noted in his book, Curious land, that it is both sur-
prising and unfortunate that Le Comte became such a primary figure in the
Chinese Rites Controversy: his short stay in China had prepared him poorly
for the role of spokesman for Jesuit accommodation. To begin, it is unlikely
that he was literate in Chinese or had any real acquaintance with Chinese lit-
erature. Besides, his writings were ‘far less intellectually distinguished’, com-
pared to those by his fellow mathematicians. However, while Visdelou may
have been better versed in sinology, Bouvet more creative, and Fontaney and
Gerbillon more scientifically educated, Le Comte’s popular tone and subject
made his work attractive to a much larger public of potential readers. His
Nouveaux mémoires concentrated on descriptions of travel, climate, and geog-
raphy, as well as shorter treatments of Chinese government, history, culture,
language, religion, and the Jesuit mission. These were exactly the subjects
that, time and again, had proved their popular potential. It comes as no sur-
prise, therefore, that Le Comte was the only one of the king’s mathematici-
cans to be translated and reprinted. On 2 February 1697, Oprechte Haerlem-
sche courant announced the publication of the Dutch translation, printed and
published by Engelbrecht Boucquet in The Hague, ‘with fine illustrations’. Earlier that year, a French edition was already published by Étienne Roger
and Jean Louis de Lorne in Amsterdam. The work was apparently so much

1 ‘En eyneldig De voortgangen van de bekeringe der Inwoonders tot het Christen Geloof’, in Le Comte, Beschryvinge van het machtige Keyserryk China, title page.
4 At least ten reprints had been published, and an English translation was made in 1697 by Benjamin Tooke and Sam Buckley of London, while the Dutch translation appeared in The Hague in 1698. In 1699–1700, a German reprint was made by Christoph Riegel and Christoph Fleischer of Frankfurt.
6 L. Le Comte, Nouveaux memoires sur l’état présent de la Chine, Amsterdam, Etienne Roger and Jean louis de Lorne, 1697.
in demand that Antoine Schelte of Amsterdam had already issued a reprint of the French edition in 1698.1 Through the popularity and broad dissemination of *Nouveaux mémoires*, and its subsequent discussion in the periodic press, Louis Le Comte would become one of the prime figures in ‘that phase of the Chinese Rites Controversy which climaxed at Paris in 1700.2

Sorbonne’s censure of Le Comte not only exacerbated the institutional discussion of the Chinese Rites Controversy, it also made the dispute over the religiosity of Confucius’s teachings and other Chinese rituals visible to the general public through the pamphlet war of 1700. One of the most vicious of these was *L’enterrement de Confucius*, a leaflet distributed in various churches in France.3 It attacked both Confucius and the Jesuits: ‘Confucius lived in error and died in paganism. His ashes enclosed in an urn awaited in horror for the reunion with his soul, to be sad companions to his eternal misery: but he still he found the geniuses who, against their own conscience and by cruel stubbornness, have resurrected him in order to present him as a model for Christianity.’4

The growing public dissemination of the Rites Controversy was not limited to France. The forceful rejection of Confucius in *L’enterrement* was reprinted verbatim in the Dutch-made newspaper *Gazette de Rotterdam* less than a month later, on 4 November 1700. According to the editor of the *Gazette*, readers would surely be interested since ‘the case of Father Le Comte had caused so much turmoil’.5 The Dutch-made periodical *Mercure historique et politique* printed a similar notice, here accompanied by the

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4 ‘Confucius avait vécu dans l’erreur et était mort dans la paganisme. Ses cendres resserrées dans une urne attendaient avec horreur la réunion de son âme, pour être les tristes compagnes de son malheur éternel et cependant il a trouvé des génies, qui contre leur propre conscience et par un entêtement cruel l’avaient ressuscité et proposer pour modèle aux Chrétienne’, in *Gazette de Rotterdam*, 4 November 1700.
comment that “if he [Le Comte] does not defend it better [...] he should [...] stop digging in the ashes [of Confucius].”

Le Comte shared the role of spokesman for the Jesuit policy of accommodation with Charles Le Gobien, a French Jesuit and procurator in Paris for the China mission who had never travelled to the Middle Kingdom. However, apropos the public discussion of the Chinese Rites, Le Gobien had written extensively on the country. In 1698, he joined Le Comte with the publication of *Historie de l'edit de la Chine en faveur de la religion Chrétienne*. He allied himself to Le Comte by providing an account and explanation of the Kangxi Emperor’s Edict of Toleration 正教奉傳 (1692), which recognised the Roman Catholic Church, barred attacks on Catholic churches, and legalised the practice of Christianity in China. To this, Le Gobien added a clarification of the honours presented by the Chinese to Confucius, followed by letters and reports of events related to the Chinese Rites Controversy. Due to the combined efforts of Le Comte and Le Gobien, the polemics in France soon reached ‘an almost hysterical pitch’, which would last from 1697 until 1700, when a final decision on the subject was made by Pope Clement XI.

**A War of Pamphlets**

In France, the offensive against the Chinese rites was led by the eminent Dominican theologian Noël Alexandre. In 1699, he published a lengthy exposition on the history of the Dominican Order in China and their growing discontent with the Jesuit policy of accommodation. The fol-

1 ‘Mais s’il ne le défend pas mieux [...] qu’il ne fouille plus dans ses [Confucius] cendres’, *Mercure historique et politique*, Den Haag, Henri van Balderen, November 1700, p. 534.
2 Lach and Van Kley, *Asia in the making of Europe*, p. 429.
6 N. Alexandre, *Apologie des dominicains, missionnaires de la Chine ou Réponse au livre du père Le Tellier, jésuite, intitulé: Défense des nouveaux chrétiens et à l’éclaircissement du P. Le Gobien, de la même compagnie, sur les honneurs que les Chinois rendent à Confucius et aux morts*, Cologne, Corneille d’Egmond, 1699. The work was ostensibly printed in Cologne, yet in reality was published in Amsterdam, see: E. Weller, *Die falschen und fingierten Druckorte. Repertorium der seit Erfindung der Buchdruckerkunst unter*
The following year, Alexandre issued *Conformité des cérémonies chinoises avec l'idolatrie Grecque et Romaine*, which was a direct attack upon the Jesuit position by way of a comparison between these rites and the (already) acknowledged idolatrous ceremonies of ancient Greeks and Romans.¹ Again in 1700, the Dominican launched his last major salvo by publicly addressing seven letters to Le Comte concerning the rites, together with the publication of a collection of writings about Confucian ceremonies.² Much of the flurry of publications that accompanied and fuelled the public discussion of the controversy was supposedly published in Cologne, either by Corneille d'Egmond or Jean le Sincere. However, this Cologne imprint is likely fictitious.³ It is more reasonable to suspect that the pamphlets were published in Amsterdam.⁴

Neither the political nor ecclesiastical powers of the Dutch Republic were ever able (or willing) to exercise the same degree of control over the production and trade in print as France or England could.⁵ While decrees and proclamations were made by the States General or the provincial States against the publication of certain texts on a regular basis, even works that were deemed seditious, blasphemous, or otherwise harmful to the state, church, or public interest could usually be published without much difficulty.⁶ The publication of pamphlets concerning the Chinese rites...
served a dual purpose: first, it was a relatively easy way to keep the printing presses going and, thus, make money. A pamphlet could be made within a day, distributed the next, and be profitable within the week. Second and related to the first, pamphlets fuelled the discussion on Chinese rites, which led to the publication and sale of additional pamphlets (and maybe even increased demand for related work).

For instance, in 1700 alone, nine pamphlets in 12 editions by Noël Alexandre were issued in Amsterdam.¹ His seven *Lettres d’un docteur en théologie de l’ordre de S. Dominique sur l’idolâtrie et les superstitions de la Chine* demonstrate the ‘back and forth’ of debate between supporters and detractors of the Chinese rites, which saw their publishers laughing all the way to the bank. Charges and rebuttals of the rites circulated in the form of ‘letters’ to the Pope and other dignitaries of the Catholic Church. The Jesuits were accused of insincerity, idolatry, and a lack of uniformity in their ideas. Alexandre further argued that, while they [the Jesuits] reconciled the Chinese god as the creator of the universe with the law of nature and the Ten Commandments, they had concealed Original sin, the faith in Jesus Christ and His incarnation, death and resurrection because they felt it to be irrelevant.²

With these pamphlets, Dutch book producers took yet another publication strategy. Pamphlets allowed for discussion on a widespread level, and they served to change the manner in which religious, cultural, and social conversations were viewed and carried out. As such, pamphlets also created new ways of communication and news styles of language. Before this point, the country had seemed a static entity in the eyes of the European...
The Chinese Rites Controversy in News Digests

Noël Alexandre brought the case against the Jesuits officially to the Sorbonne in 1700, assisted by Nicolas Charmot of the mission étrangères. A letter dated 20 April 1700 from the foreign mission of Paris to Pope Innocent XIII denounced six propositions taken from both Le Comte and Le Gobien’s works. Another letter followed on 1 July, written by Solomon Prious – Doctor of theology at the Sorbonne and one of the directors of the mission – condemning Le Comte’s *Nouveaux mémoires*, Le Gobien’s *Histoire*, and the anonymous *Lettre sur les ceremonies de la Chine*, on the basis that they contained propositions that had to be censored. On 2 August, Charles Boileau, member of the deputies, presented the report of the foreign mission to the Sorbonne Faculty of Theology. Subsequently, the faculty began their deliberations on the subject on 17 August.

By this time, Louis Le Comte had become a well-known figure and representative of the Jesuit mission: his presence as such can be traced through newspapers and periodicals. Both French and Dutch papers reported on his comings and goings, like his departure from France and arrival in Rome in July 1700, and the rumour that he would soon return to China. Notices in French-language papers on Le Comte and his fellow Jesuits turned grim after *Nouveaux mémoires* was brought before the Sorbonne in 1700. At the end of that month, just before the book was condemned, *Nouvelles extraordinaires des divers endroits* somewhat prematurely reported that ‘the king [Louis XIV] has proposed three Jesuits to the duchess of Burgundy, so that she may choose

1 Harline, *Pamphlets, printing, and political culture in the early Dutch Republic*, p. 3.
3 In *Historia cultus Sinensium seu varia scripta de cultibus Sinarum, inter vicarios apostolicis gallos aliosque missionarios, & patres Societatis Jesu controversis, oblata Innocentio XII. Pontifici Maximi. I-II*, Charmot edited a collection of evidence which concerned the case against the Jesuits. See: Streit VII, p. 23-24. Again, this work was probably printed in the Netherlands, while the title page states it was published in Cologne, see: Weller, *Die falschen und finfierten Druckorte Repertorium*.
4 Oprechte Haerlemsche courant, 17 July 1700; *Gazette d’Amsterdam*, 19 July 1700; *Gazette de Rotterdam*, 19 July 1700.
one as her confessor, in place of Father Le Comte who is disgraced.¹ In August, ‘this affair continues in a heated manner’ for Le Comte.² On the 26th of that same month, a French paper reported that the Faculty of Theology gave their opinion on the propositions, and that they had declared them ‘reckless [and] scandalous’.³ Three other French-language newspapers copied this message in the days that followed.

Surprisingly, while papers in French presented the censure of Le Comte’s propositions as a done deal, Dutch-language papers were more nuanced. They spoke of the ‘supposed idolatry of Confucius’, giving Le Comte the opportunity to ‘refute the allegations of the missionaries of China on the false idolatry of Confucius’, which (at least according to Oprechte Haerlemsche courant) he did so with ‘very great expertise’.⁴ However, it would take another two months before a Dutch newspaper would again comment on the proceedings of the Sorbonne, while French papers remained very clear in their opposition of the Jesuits.

The deliberations of the Sorbonne concluded on 18 October, when the propositions of Le Comte and Le Gobien were condemned as ‘false, erroneous and foolhardy’.⁵ La Gazette d’Amsterdam articulated why Confucius and the Jesuit accommodation of the Chinese rites were denounced and Le Comte’s book served as a concrete example of everything that was wrong with the Jesuit mission in China. In this tiding, a writer who signed with the pseudonym ‘De Champ Veille’ [From the Vigilant Field] first repeated the propositions of Le Comte, and then emphasised their absolute ‘falseness, recklessness, scandalousness and wrongness’.⁶ The author finished his litany by noting that the ‘the sacred faculty further declares that it will not hear of approving the other things contained within these books.’⁷

¹ ‘Le roy a proposé a la Duchesse de Bourgogne 3 Jésuites, afin qu’Elle en choisisse un person Confesseur en la place du Père Le Comte qui est disgracé’, in Nouvelles extraordinaires de divers endroits, 20 July 1700 (my emphasis).
² ‘Cette affaire poursuit avec chaleur’, in [Gazette d’Amsterdam], 26 August 1700.
³ ‘Téméraires, scandaleuse’, in [Gazette d’Amsterdam], 26 August 1700.
⁴ ‘De gesupposeerde Idolatrie van Confucius’, in Oprechte Haerlemsche courant, 4 September 1700 (my emphasis); ‘dat den Jesuyt Le Comte met seer groote bescheydentheydt sijne wederleggingen tegen de Beschuldigingen van de Missionarissen van China over de valsse idolatrie van Confucius in ’t Licht gegeven heeft’, in Oprechte Haerlemsche courant, 2 October 1700.
⁶ ‘fausse, téméraire, scandaleuse & erronée’, in [Gazette d’Amsterdam], 28 October 1700.
⁷ ‘La Sacrée Faculté déclare en outre qu’elle n’entend pas approuver les autres choses conte-
Dutch newspapers provided less information about the censure of Le Comte’s book than their French counterparts. Only one Dutch digest, *Europische mercurius*, reported in great detail on the issue; however, it mainly outlined the arguments from the side of the Jesuits. This news digest devoted two pages in its second edition of 1700 (July to December) to the ‘Assembly of the Faculty of Theology of Paris about the case of the Chinese rites’. It opened with a short description of the proceedings of the Sorbonne and their decision to censure Le Comte. The digest seemingly presented both sides of the argument but with the effect of nuancing the severity of the case: ‘Among the doctors who gave their opinion, were some who thought the word heresy to be too grave’.

In a salient move, Louis Le Comte’s propositions were quoted in full; however, without the disclaimer that these were considered idolatrous by the Sorbonne. This information was, of course, available to the editors of this digest, since other Dutch newspapers had already included it in their reports. In *Europische mercurius*, Dutch readers were thus confronted with statements like ‘China has practised the purest precepts of moral philosophy, while Europe and almost all the rest of the world lay in error and corruption’, but without the context to put the recently condemned nature of this proposition into perspective. For a fuller understanding of this article, readers could have obtained this context from other sources, such as articles in French-language newspapers. Yet, so far, no report in a Dutch-language publication elaborated on the fact that the statements in Le Comte’s work had been condemned by the Sorbonne.

The *Europische mercurius* was not yet finished with the case. In the first issue of 1701, a notice entitled, ‘Jesuits protest against the verdict of the Sorbonne’, listed all the arguments given by the Jesuits as to why the censure was unjust. The popularity of Le Comte’s book was emphasised: ‘Over the past four years [...] his books have been reprinted several

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1 ‘Vergadering van de Faculteit der Theologie van Parys over de zaak van den Dienst der Chineezen’, in *Europische mercurius* March 1701, pp. 139–141.
2 ‘Onder de doctoren, welke opineerden, waren eenigen die meenden dat het woord Ketersch al te hard was’, in *Europische mercurius* March 1701, pp. 139–141.
times, even in various languages'. Moreover, in those years ‘neither complaints nor allegations were made’.1 Besides, Le Comte would have based his work ‘only on historical facts about religion in the ancient Chinese books’, and works written by members of the Sorbonne.2 It is therefore proper that ‘Father Le Comte protests [in order] to nullify all that has been undertaken so far’.3 A protest which, according to the *Europsiche mercurius*, should be considered seriously.

However, this was not to be. The Sorbonne and Pope Clement XI remained firm in their condemnation of the propositions, along with a general rejection of the accommodation of the Chinese rites by the Jesuit missionaries in China. On 20 November 1704, Pope Clement XI condemned all the rites and rituals with the decree *Cum Deus optimus*, which also outlawed any further discussion. The Papal bull *Ex illa die* of 19 March 1715 reaffirmed this condemnation and, in 1742, Benedict XIV reiterated Clement XI’s decrees, which required all missionaries in China to take an oath never to argue the matter again.4

As a direct result of the Pope’s objections to the Chinese rites, the attitude in China towards Catholic missionaries changed. In 1721, the Kangxi Emperor commented that: ‘I have concluded that the Westerners are petty indeed. It is impossible to reason with them [...]. From now on, Westerners should not be allowed to preach in China, to avoid further trouble.5 The Jesuits were especially affected in the following years. Despite all their efforts, their progress in China stalled and their movements were severely restricted. Newspapers reported that ‘the emperor of China published a rigorous edict against all missionaries [...] who have to leave the empire on punishment of death’.6 But, as the *Oprechte Haerlemsche courant* informed its

3 ‘Vader Le Comte protesteert van nulliteit van alles’t geen tot hier toe is ondernomen’, in *Europische mercurius* 1701, p. 101. The arguments were probably taken from Louis Le Comte’s *Éclaircissement sur la dénonciation faite au Pape des Nouveaux mémoires de la Chine* [s.l.], 1700.
5 Li, *China in transition*, p. 22.
6 ‘De Keyser van China had een rigoreus Edict tegen al de Missionarissen [...] die op
readers, matters could always be worse: ‘We have heard that many of these missionaries embarked on a ship to save their lives, but have lost them by shipwreck’.1

Conclusion

This chapter aimed to explain how Dutch-made newspapers and digests reported on China during the last quarter of the seventeenth century, and how the Dutch provenance of printwork influenced possible representations of the Middle Kingdom. Dutch tolerance – combined with the country’s famous economic pragmatism – allowed printers, publishers, and editors to publish periodicals. The quality of the Dutch product guaranteed that even Catholic authors would often choose Amsterdam over Rome or Paris. Add to this the extensive trading network of Dutch book producers, it becomes clear that the Dutch Republic had long been Europe’s primary storehouse for publications on the Middle Kingdom, in which the veritable ‘Dutch-ness’ of the product only added to their appeal.

In this period, Dutch printers and publishers provided much of Europe with periodic printwork, not only in Dutch but in French, English, Spanish, Italian, and Yiddish. The papers in French catered to the international Republic of Letters and the growing number of readers literate in French. Dutch-made newspapers enjoyed a considerable readership and they were dispersed far and wide. They were read not only by professionals but by an increasing number of literate citizens from a middling background. On the pages of newspapers and digests, which summarised and supplemented news that was heard elsewhere, these readers were

Levensstraf uyt het Rijck moeten gaen, laten publiceren’, in Oprechte Haerlemsche courant, 7 December 1709. Oprechte Haerlemsche courant was not entirely correct here. The expulsion of all missionaries and the prohibition of Christianity only took place in 1724, decreed in January of that year by Kangxi’s son, the Yongzheng Emperor. The ‘rigorous edict’ the Haarlem newspaper speaks of probably refers to a permit needed by all missionaries in which they had to declare to adhere to the rules of Matteo Ricci, which were in favour of an accommodation of the Chinese rites. Additionally, while the newspaper reported that the missionaries had to leave on punishment of death, many missionaries asked for a permit, and those that did not were expelled or went to Macao. See: T. D. DuBois, Religion and the making of modern East Asia, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2011, pp. 92–92.

1 ‘En men verstaet, dat veele van dese Missionarissen, op een schip gegaen zijnde, om ‘t leven te behouden, door Schipbreuck ‘t selve verloren hebben’, in Oprechte Haerlemsche courant, 7 December 1709.
informed about events happening across Europe and the world beyond.

This growing number of newspapers reports significantly changed the manner in which China was represented. Before their introduction, notices about the Middle Kingdom had been rather static descriptions of an idealised and remote empire. However, the increase of more detailed information replaced these descriptions (at least partially) with more dynamic images. The introduction of news reports also expanded the possibilities for discussion and debate: Chinese events began to provoke public speculation and polemic argument. Here, the cultural and religious background of the reporting parties determined how the news was presented and interpreted.

Newspapers from the Dutch Republic frequently reported on China, informing readers about events happening in the Middle Kingdom: especially those developments that would have an impact on Europe. However, there was a distinct divergence between reports in Dutch and French. Dutch news mainly focused on those events that might affect the economic interests of the United Provinces, such as the fates of ships and wars and conflicts that could disrupt lines of trade and commerce. Additionally, numerous advertisements for products from China accentuated this primarily economic focus of Dutch news on the Middle Kingdom. As such, most news was less concerned with China itself and more with the commerce that resulted from the contacts between China and Europe.

In contrast, papers in French had a far broader potential audience – the whole Republic of Letters – making economically centred reports redundant. French-language reports were more concerned with the Jesuits and their mission. In the late 1680s, Louis XIV sent a French Jesuit mission to China, which came to play an increasingly influential role in providing Europe with knowledge of the Middle Kingdom. Regular contacts between Paris and Beijing facilitated the exchange of goods and information, which not only helped to bring French and European science and culture to China, but also further informed Europe about the Middle Kingdom.

Dutch publishing strategies thus aimed at French or Dutch readers and their presumed wishes and demands. Yet, in the last decades of the seventeenth century, the Chinese Rites Controversy cast a long shadow over all other news related to China, turning the country into a dynam-
ic and interactive entity. The debate had long been an internal concern of religious authorities in Rome and Paris. However, Le Comte’s *Nouveaux mémoires* of 1696 catapulted the debate over the religiosity of Confucius’s teachings and other Chinese rituals onto the public stage. In this context, the resulting pamphlet war was fundamental in disseminating the latest information in a swift and comprehensive manner.

The official censure of Le Comte’s book in 1700 further exacerbated the public discussion of China. And thanks to the increasing number of books, pamphlets, newspapers, and digests, the dispute was also brought to the public’s attention. This growing public dissemination was not limited to the Catholic regions of Europe: Dutch newspapers also concerned themselves with the issue. For the Dutch, their interests remained economic rather than religious. The controversy provided an easy way to keep the printing presses going and periodicals made a quick profit. The debate on Chinese rites also fuelled further discussion, leading to additional publications and maybe even increase demand for related works.

It is important to note that when regarding newspapers, periodicals, and pamphlets, the all-important function of the printing location plays an important role as well. In the analysis of the development and distribution of early modern periodicals on China, it becomes evident that even publications that seem far removed from the Dutch printing phenomenon do, in fact, owe much to the unique influence of the culture of print of the Dutch Republic in the seventeenth century. Through newspapers, news digests, learned journals, pamphlets and other periodical printwork, Dutch printers, publishers, and booksellers facilitated the public discussion of various religious, political and cultural matters: the Chinese Rites Controversy among them. Their publishing strategies allowed for conversation on a broad and influential level. As a result, they changed the way in which China and its religion and philosophy was viewed and represented. Indeed, the extensive coverage of the Chinese Rites Controversy in Dutch-made periodicals made the Middle Kingdom truly a subject of public discussion, dissemination, and polemic debate.

Readers who, beforehand, may have had only a pedestrian knowledge of China were now urged to seek out newsworthy information in the periodic press. They did so for a variety of reasons and representations of
China during the last decades of the seventeenth century were as much the result of developments back home as they were due to events in the Middle Kingdom itself. Newspaper reports thus confirm the degree to which China had been integrated into early modern Dutch culture. We have seen that the periodic press – learned journals and newspapers alike – demonstrates how the Middle Kingdom became increasingly assimilated into the main currents of society during the final decades of the seventeenth century. However, this assimilation soon narrowed the gaze of spectators and players alike; China may have provided the stage, the players remained decidedly European.