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THE POLISH MARCO POLO – EXPLORER OF *ZHŌNGGUÓ*

THE CONTRIBUTION OF MICHAEL BOYM (C. 1612-1659)
TO THE EUROPEAN PERCEPTION OF THE GEOGRAPHY,
LINGUISTICS, HISTORY, POLITICS, NATURE
AND MEDICINE OF CHINA

ABSTRACT

The failed diplomatic mission of Michael Boym is still a little-known episode. Nevertheless, Boym's legacy goes beyond his missionary and political activities. This tireless researcher left us a collection of invaluable treatises that introduced Europeans to various phenomena of imperial China that were unknown at the time. Europe owes Boym a great deal of reliable knowledge about Chinese geography, history, philosophy, medicine, nature, local folklore and even astronomy. Boym's rich scholarly output in these numerous subject areas, which was created during his numerous travels, is astonishing.

Keywords: Michał Boym, China, the Míng Dynasty, politics, cartography, geography, history, philosophy, medicine, nature, Catholic Church, Catholic Mission, Jesuits

The Jesuit missionary Michael Peter Boym (known in Chinese literature as Bǔ Mígé) associated with Kraków was a great scientist and discoverer of China, which he brought back to Europe in a new light after Marco Polo (c. 1254–1324). It is hard to overestimate the significance of this outstanding personality for Polish-Chinese relations. This was noticed by the Chairman of the People's Republic of China, Xí Jìnpíng (born 1953), during his visit to Poland in 2016 in his article for the newspaper *Rzeczpospolita*.¹ This caused great interest in Boym in China and Xí Jìnpíng's text was analysed many times from this perspective. There were also extremely accurate summaries of Boym's activity, such as the statement that *17 shìjì zhōngyě, Bōlán chuánjiào shì Bǔ Mígé lái dào Zhōngguó, guāngfàn yánjiū Zhōngguó shèhuì, lishǐ, yīxué, dìlǐ děng xuékē, fābiāo dàliàng zhǔzuò, shì shǒuwèi xiàng xīfāng jièshào Zhōngguó gǔdài kēxué wénhuà chéngguǒ de Ōuzhōurén, bèi yù wèi "Bōlán de Mǎkě-Bōluó". Zhìcǐ, Bǔ Mígé zhè wèi Zhōng Xī wénhuà kējì jiāoliú shǐzhě zàicǐ zǒu jìn Zhōng Bō liǎng guó rénmin de shìyě* [In the middle of the 17th century, Polish missionary Michael Boym came to China and extensively studied Chinese society, history, medicine, geography and other subjects, published a large number of works, and was the first European to introduce ancient Chinese scientific and cultural achievements to the West. He was known as the 'Polish Marco Polo'. So far, Michael Boym, the envoy of Sino-Western cultural and technological exchanges, has once again entered the vision of the Chinese and Polish people].² Despite some modern translations and editions of Boym's works³ and the numerous studies on Boym's works, many aspects of his texts require further, in-depth research.⁴

¹ "Chiński wiatr współpracy" ["China's Wind of Cooperation. Specially for *Rzeczpospolita*: Xi Jinping, President of the People's Republic of China], *Rzeczpospolita*, vol. 140, no. 10473 (2016), p. 1, 11.

² Zhōngguó shèhuì kēxué wǎng, [Chinese Social Sciences Network], "卜彌格：中醫文化西傳的拓荒者," ["Michel Boym: Pioneer in the Spread of Chinese Medicine to the West"], *Zhōngguó shèhuì kēxué bào* [*Chinese Social Sciences Journal*], vol. 5, no. 1 (2016), p. 1, <http://www.nopss.gov.cn/BIG5/n1/2016/0719/c373410-28565002.html>, 12 May 2025.

³ Such as E. Kajdański (ed.), *Michał Boyma opisanie świata (wybór tekstów)* [*Michael Boym's Description of the World. Selected texts*], Warszawa, 2009; Bǔ Mígé [Michael Boym], 卜弥格文集：中西文化交流与中医西传 出版社：华东师范大学出版社 [*Collected Works of Michael Boym: Cultural Exchange between China and the West and the Spread of Traditional Chinese Medicine to the West*], Shanghai 2013.

⁴ J. Konior, *Historia polsko-chińskich kontaktów kulturowych w XVII w. Na przykładzie misji jezuickich* [*The History of Polish-Chinese Cultural Contacts in XVII Century: Jesuit Missions Examples*], Kraków 2013, p. 272; M. Miazek-Męczyńska, "Nauka w służbie wiary, czyli ile można zdziałać ad maiorem Dei gloriam. O wydanych i niewydanych pracach naukowych Michała Boyma SI" ["Science in the Service of Faith, or How Much Can Be Done ad maiorem Dei gloriam. On the Published and Unpublished Scientific Works of Michał Boym SI"], *Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne. Seria Literacka*, vol. 31 (2017), p. 147-166.

A) BOYM'S INTERCULTURALISM: FROM A THEOLOGY STUDENT IN KRAKÓW TO A MISSIONARY, A CHINA EXPLORER, AND A FRIEND OF THE EMPEROR

Michael Boym proved to be not only a zealous missionary, who managed to baptise Emperor Zhū Yǒuláng (1623–1662; the last emperor of the Southern Míng dynasty) himself, but also went down as a naturalist, cartographer, one of the first European sinologists, a promoter of Chinese medicine in Europe, and a diplomat of the Emperor of China to the Pope.⁵

It is assumed that Michael Boym was born in Lviv around 1612 or 1614 into a family of Polish notables of Hungarian origin. Boym's grandfather came to Poland from Hungary with King Stefan Batory (1533-1586, king of Poland from 1575) and married a Polish woman. Michael's father, Paweł Jerzy Boym (1581-1641), was the court physician⁶ of Sigismund III Vasa (1566-1632, king of Poland from 1587).

Michael Boym joined the Jesuits when he was a teenager. He studied theology in Kraków. In 1643, Boym went on a missionary mission to East Asia with his fellow monks. In this way he fulfilled his life's dreams.⁷ He first obtained the blessing of Pope Urban VIII (1623-1644), and then went to Lisbon because the Jesuits in China could only operate under the secular patronage of Catholic missions, which was then held by Portugal. Boym was very active in China, where he stayed, with breaks, for 16 years (1643-1659). In 1644 in his route to China, Polish Jesuit spent several months in Mozambique (then called as Cafraria) leaving a description of this country.⁸ Then Boym

⁵ A. Couderq, "Michael Boym: the Polish Marco Polo," *Comparative Civilizations Review*, vol. 90, no. 1 (2024), pp. 52-71; C. von Collani, "The Jesuits Andreas Koffler and Michael Boym at the Court of the Yongli Emperor," *International Journal of Sino-Western Studies*, vol. 17 (2019), pp. 113-116; H. Zhōu H., J. Zhèng, "卜弥格、卫匡国和基歇尔是如何认识中国饮食文化?" ["How Do Michael Boym, Martino Martini, and Athanasius Kircher Understand Chinese Food Culture?"], *Sednri Ethnological Studies*, vol. 100 (2019), p. 115-126; E. Kajdański, "The Traditional Chinese Medicine as Reflected in the Works of Michael Boym," *Monumenta Serica. Journal of Oriental Studies*, vol. 59, no. 1 (2011), pp. 383-400; N. Golvers, "Michael Boym and Martino Martini: A Contrastive Portrait of Two China Missionaries and Mapmakers," *Monumenta Serica. Journal of Oriental Studies*, vol. 59, no. 1 (2011), pp. 259-271; E. Kajdański, "Michał Boym (1612-1659). Szkic biograficzny" ["Michał Boym (1612-1659). Biographical Sketch"], in E. Kajdański (ed.), *Michał Boyma opisanie świata...*, pp. 17-35; E. Kajdański, *Michał Boym. Ostatni wysłannik dynastii Ming* [Michael Boym. The Last Envoy of the Ming Dynasty], Warszawa 1988, p. 32; E. Kajdański, *Michał Boym. Ambasador Państwa Środka* [Michael Boym. Ambassador of the Middle Kingdom], Warszawa 1999, p. 72; B. Szczęśniak, "The Beginnings of Chinese Lexicography in Europe with Particular Reference to the Work of Michael Boym (1612-1659)," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 67, no. 3 (1959), pp. 160-165.

⁶ H. Polankowa, "Paweł Jerzy Boym" ["Paul George Boym"], in W. Konopczyński, *Polski słownik biograficzny* [Polish Biographical Dictionary], vol. 2, Kraków 1934, pp. 381-382.

⁷ M. Miazek-Męczyńska, "Indipetae Boymianae. On Boym's Requests to the Jesuit General for a Missionary Appointment to China," *Monumenta Serica. Journal of Oriental Studies*, vol. 59, no. 1 (2011), pp. 229-242.

⁸ R. Wallisch (ed.), *Michael Boyms Bericht aus Mosambik – 1644: (Lateinischer Text, Übersetzung und Kommentar) mit ethnographischen Parallelltexten des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts aus der Wiener Sammlung Woldan*, Wien 2005.

arrived in Portuguese Goa, and finally in 1644 in Macau. He worked as a teacher at St. Paul Jesuit College (Macau), where he learned Chinese. He later ran Catholic missions on Hainan Island. After the island was taken over by the Manchus, Boym found refuge in Tonkin in 1647, from where he moved to the imperial court in 1649. He died in Guǎngxī Province in 1659.⁹

During his travels, Michael Boym gathered knowledge from various disciplines, which he also documented.¹⁰ This wealth requires proper appreciation because knowledge about China in Europe in the 17th century was extremely fragmentary, inaccurate and not free from distortions or simplistic explanations.

B) BOYM'S PIONEERING CONTRIBUTION TO CORRECTING THE EUROPEAN PERCEPTION OF CHINA'S GEOGRAPHY

It is assumed that one of Michael Boym's greatest works is the handwritten atlas of China preserved in the Vatican Library entitled *Magni Cathay: Quod olim Serica, et modo Sinarum est Monarchia; Quindecim Regnorum; Octodecim geographicae Tabulae* (Great Cathay [archaic name for China]: Which was once Silk, and now is the Monarchy of China; Fifteen Kingdoms; Eighteen Geographical Maps).¹¹

It contains eighteen different maps enriched with drawings presenting Chinese nature to Europeans and scenes from the lives of the inhabitants of 'the Middle Kingdom' – *Zhōngguó* which have been subjected to detailed analyses by Eszter Csillag.¹² Boym intended to publish his atlas in Venice and Rome, but the manuscript disappeared in unexplained circumstances. It was rediscovered only in the next century at an auction in Paris, where it was purchased by a certain Riamonteger on 15 April 1729, whose name and identity historians are unable to establish. Eventually, the atlas ended

⁹ H. Zhōu H., J. Zhèng, "卜弥格、卫匡国和基歇尔是如何认识中国饮食文化?...", p. 116; D.E. Mungello, *Curious Land: Jesuit Accommodation and the Origins of Sinology*, Honolulu 1989, p. 139, 253; T. Opach, "Wkład Michała Boyma w tworzenie kartograficznego obrazu świata w XVII wieku" ["Michał Boym's Contribution to the Creation of a Cartographic Image of the World in the 17th Century"], *Pasaż wiedzy. Muzeum – Pałac w Wilanowie*, 6 May 2008, at <https://wilanow-palac.pl/pasaz-wiedzy/wklad-michala-boyma-w-tworzenie-kartograficznego-obrazu-swiate-w-xvii-wieku>, 13 May 2025]; L. Pfister, *Notices biographiques et bibliographiques sur les Jesuites-de l'ancienne mission de Chine*, vol. 1, Chang-hai 1930, pp. 272-276; P. Pelliot, "Michel Boym," *T'oung Pao. Second Series*, vol. 31, no. 1-2 (1934), pp. 95-151.

¹⁰ B. Szcześniak, "The Writings of Michael Boym," *Monumenta Serica. Journal of Oriental Studies*, vol. 14 (1949-1955), pp. 481-538.

¹¹ *Borgiani Cinesi 531, Manuscript – Atlas of Michael Boym: Magni Cathay: Quod olim Serica, et modo Sinarum est Monarchia; Quindecim Regnorum; Octodecim geographicae Tabulae*, Vatican: The Vatican Apostolic Library: Manuscripts from the Borgiani Cinesi/Chinese Fond, dated 1655, pp. 1r-20v, at https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Borg.cin.531, 29 May 2025.

¹² E. Csillag, "Natural History Illustrations in Michael Boym's 'Chinese Atlas' (Borg. cin. 531) and 'Flora Sinensis,'" *Miscellanea Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae*, vol. 26 (2020), pp. 115-141.

up in the Vatican Library¹³ and is kept in a special collection called manuscripts from the *Borgiani Cinesi* ('Chinese Fond').

This recovered manuscript, however, is missing the descriptive part, the existence of which we learn from the preserved nine-chapter table of contents.¹⁴ There are many indications that this missing descriptive part was preserved in a manuscript containing Boym's work *Rerum Sinensium compendiosa descriptio* from the collection of Fr. Gabriel Brotier SJ (1723-1789).¹⁵

Boym's maps of China were not the first modern printed maps of 'the Middle Kingdom' – Zhōngguó Europe (the first map was published by Abraham Ortelius [1527-1598] in 1584¹⁶). However, his cartography was an epochal event in the field of geography because the orientation in the topography of China at that time was based mainly on the colourful and imprecise descriptions of Marco Polo. Moreover, while Europeans had some real ideas about the coastline of China, the interior of this country was basically unexplored.¹⁷ Michał Boym, while developing his atlas, used the official Chinese maps of the time and based it on his own, profound knowledge of 'the Middle Kingdom' – Zhōngguó. The detail with which he presented the area of China is impressive. He showed the hydrographic system in particular, mainly the river network. He correctly identified the system of surface waters draining into the South China Sea and the East China Sea.¹⁸

In his atlas, Boym, in accordance with the Chinese manner, also placed astrographic and mineralogical symbols on the maps of individual regions of China.¹⁹ In his maps, he marked a whole network of meridians and parallels,²⁰ on which Beijing seems to

¹³ B. Szczęśniak, "The Atlas and Geographic Description of China: A. Manuscript of Michael Boym (1612-1659)," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, vol. 73, no. 2 (1953), p. 69; E. Kajdański, "Zawile dzieje 'korzenia życia': od cesarskiej alkowy do koncernów farmaceutycznych" [The Intricate History of the 'Root of Life': From the Imperial Alcove to Pharmaceutical Concerns], *Gdańskie Studia Azji Wschodniej*, vol. 4 (2013), p. 112; W. Fuchs, "A Note on Father M. Boym's Atlas of China," *Imago Mundi*, vol. 9 (1952), pp. 71-72.

¹⁴ *Borgiani Cinesi* 531, *Manuscript...*, p. 2r.

¹⁵ *Fonds Brotier* 118, *Manuscript of Michael Boym: Rerum Sinensium compendiosa descriptio* [A Concise Description of Chinese Affairs], Vanves : Archives françaises de la Compagnie de Jésus–Archives de la Province de France, pp. 78r-80v ; B. Szczęśniak, "The Atlas and Geographic Description of China...", p. 74.

¹⁶ V. Dorofeeva-Lichtmann, "The First Map of China Printed in Europe [Ortelius 1584] Reconsidered: Confusions of Its Authorship and the Influence of the Chinese Cartography," in L. Saraiva., C. Jami (eds), *Portugal and East Asia V: Visual and Textual Representations in Exchanges between Europe and East Asia 16th-18th Centuries*, National Tsing Hua University, Hsinchu, Taiwan, 7-9 November 2014, Singapore 2018, pp. 139-169.

¹⁷ T. Opach, "Wkład Michała Boyma ..., " p. 1.

¹⁸ *Borgiani Cinesi* 531, *Manuscript...*, pp. 3r-3v, 9r, 10r, 11r, 12r.

¹⁹ B. Szczęśniak, "The Mappa Imperii Sinarum of Michael Boym," *Imago Mundi*, vol. 19 (1965), pp. 113-115.

²⁰ *Borgiani Cinesi* 531, *Manuscript...*, pp. 3r-20v.

be located at 40° N and 134° E.²¹ Boym therefore enriched the Chinese geographical sources with European geographical coordinates and also added several explanations referring to the regions of 'Tartaria', 'Eatay', 'Samarcanda', 'Xamo' or Gobi Desert.²²

It is obvious that, being pioneering in many respects, Boym's maps also contain errors. The Japanese Islands and the Korean Peninsula were not presented accurately. On the other hand, it must be admitted that Boym's maps are new in this respect: he presented Korea as a peninsula, and not, as was believed until then, an island.²³ It is worth adding that other works by Boym also contain valuable geographical information.²⁴ Boym's geographical findings were an extremely valuable source of information for Europeans on the size and location of the most important Chinese cities.

Without a shadow of a doubt Boym's Atlas began an important process of organising and critically developing the geographical knowledge of the Far East by Europeans at that time. The location and size of Imperial China became increasingly apparent. It is worth remembering that an analysis of 127 maps of China published between 1584 and 1735 allows us to conclude that there were essentially three stages of cartographic publications in that time period. The first stage was the decade around 1580-1590, when Portugal unexpectedly gave up its previous monopoly on information about China.²⁵ These include the map of China from the 1584 edition of the *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* ('Theatre of the World'), the first world atlas in a modern sense (1st ed. 1570) by Abraham Ortelius (1527-1598).²⁶ However, it was not very accurate. The second stage is related to Boym's activity in the context of the fall of the Míng Cháo (1644; 1662 in South of China) and the return of Jesuit missionaries to Europe. It was then that the need for a modern approach to the geography of China arose, i.e. the processing of Chinese cartography and European measurements into Western maps. Historians believe that this was related to the new openness of the Catholic Church to the printing and dissemination of geographical and historical information through Dutch Protestant publishers. It was Boym's inspirations that contributed to the pan-European circulation of increasingly accurate maps of *Regnum Chinae* ('Kingdom of China'), which was characteristic of the third stage of the development of European cartography of China from the end of the 17th and the first half of the 18th century.²⁷ Thus, Boym's research contributed to popularising the reliable geography of *Zhōngguó* among various European nations and denominations. Without a doubt, Boym's exam-

²¹ B. Szczęśniak, "The Atlas and Geographic Description of China...", p. 66.

²² *Borgiani Cinesi* 531, *Manuscript...*, pp. 3r-20v.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 6r, 20r.

²⁴ E.g. *Japonica-Sinica* 77a, *Manuscript of Michael Boym: Brevis Sinarum Imperii Descriptio* [A Brief Description of the Chinese Empire], Roma: Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, dated 1655 pp. 33r-66v.

²⁵ M. Caboara, *Regnum Chinae: The Printed Western Maps of China to 1735*, Leiden 2022, p. 18.

²⁶ A. Ortelius, *Theatrum orbis terrarum opus tertio ab ipso auctore recognitum, multisque locis castigatum, et quamplurimis novis tabulis atque commentariis auctum*, Antwerpen 1584, p. 107; R.V. Tooley, *Maps and Map-Makers*, London 1952, p. 106; M.P.R. van den Broecke, *Ortelius Atlas Maps: An Illustrated Guide*, Goy-Houten 1996, p. 164.

²⁷ M. Caboara, *Regnum Chinae...*, p. 18.

ple motivated other Jesuits working in China to produce increasingly accurate maps. In the years 1708-1718, at the initiative of the Kāngxī Emperor's (1661–1722), the Jesuits undertook a detailed study of the topography of China at that time. The Emperor, concerned about the safety of the Jesuits, assigned them special protective units and provided them with Chinese surveyors. Within 10 years, the Jesuits explored and produced an atlas of the vast territories of the Chinese Empire, precisely determining the geographical location of over 600 localities. Like Boym, they also used many local Chinese maps and descriptions. The great atlas of the Manchu Empire published by Jean-Baptiste d'Anville (1697–1782) in 1737 was as accurate as, and in some respects even surpassed, European maps.²⁸ However, it was based primarily on the findings of the Beijing Jesuits and the Lazarist Matteo Ripa (1682–1746).²⁹

In any case, Boym and other Jesuits of the time conclusively proved that 'Cathay' is a synonym for China and not a separate geographical unit, a fact emphasised already in 1667 by Athanasius Kircher (1602-1680): *since in modern times Cathay refers to China, and there is no city or kingdom called Cathay outside the boundaries of China. All the fathers of our Society in China agree on this, and they have lived there many years. The most noted geographers also agree. These include Matteo Ricci, Nicolas Trigaut, Alvarez Semedo, Michael Boim, Martin Martini, Johannes Grueber, and Johannes Adams, who was a great mandarin of China.*³⁰

Finally, it is worth emphasising that Boym appreciated the value of Chinese art, because most of the drawings in his Atlas fit into the conventions of Chinese art, even though they were published in the West.³¹

C) BOYM'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE STUDY OF THE CHINESE LANGUAGE AND HISTORY

Michael Boym has made great contributions to introducing Europeans to the history China, especially in the 17th century.³² However, it is widely known that the basic key to reading the sources and understanding the culture of Zhōngguó is the Chinese language, which Boym mastered at a high level by the standards of the time. He was one of those researchers who tried to determine the structure and grammar of the Chinese

²⁸ R.M. Ribeiro, *Jesuit Mapmaking in China: D'Anville's 'Nouvelle Atlas de la Chine'*, Philadelphia 2014, pp. 38-56.

²⁹ R. Batchelor, "Introduction: Jesuit Cartography," *Journal of Jesuit Studies*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2019), p. 11.

³⁰ A. Kircher, *China Illustrate with Sacred and Secular Monuments, Various Spectacles of Nature and Art and Other Memorabilia by Athanasius Kircher*, transl. by Ch. van Tuyl, Bloomington 1987, p. 43.

³¹ J. Wasilewska, "Ilustracje Michała Boyma do Atlasu Chin ze zbiorów Biblioteki Watykańskiej" ["Michał Boym's illustrations for the 'Atlas of China' from the Collections of the Vatican Library"], in E. Kajdański (ed.) *Michał Boyma opisanie świata...*, Warszawa 2009, p. 323.

³² P. Adamek, "關於傳教士漢學的幾點思考 —以卜彌格、比丘林、鮑潤生為例," ["Reflections on Missionary Sinology: Using Selected Examples of Michał Boym, Iakinf Bichurin, Franz Xaver Biallas"], *Monumenta Serica. Journal of Oriental Studies*, vol. 35, no. 1 (2016), pp. 1-10.

language. Boym's fluency in this language was evidenced by his high position at the imperial court and also by the testimonies of his fellow Jesuits, e.g. Jesuit Atanasius Kircher, who wrote in 1667:

*Rev. Fr. Michael Boym, a Pole in the Jesuit Society and a specialist in the Chinese language and in everything pertaining to the Chinese customs. From this I have directly excerpted many things relating to Chinese reading and writing. I shall describe those things which are appropriate for my purpose. The other things which concern the Chinese kingdom, its politics, and the language are more fully described for the curious reader in the Elucidative Summary of Chinese Matters, written by Fr. Boym.*³³

As for the history and culture of China, first it is worth paying attention to the unpublished 70-page work *Brevis Sinarum Imperii Descriptio* ('A Short Description of the Empire of China'), kept in manuscript form in the Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu.³⁴ The text contains much valuable information from the 17th-century (then) history of China. From Boym's descriptions, one can learn many interesting details related to the dramatic circumstances of the overthrow of the Míng dynasty and the consolidation of power in the 'Middle Kingdom' by the new Manchu Qīng Cháo. This interesting history, rich in various ethnographic and geographical threads, shows in detail the activities and influence of the Jesuits in China. Of particular interest is their activity at the court of Emperor Yǒnglǐ (1623-1662) and, above all, the Jesuit initiative of an embassy from the ruler of China to the Pope.³⁵ The activities of Boym and his brethren also led to the acceptance of Christianity by many members of the imperial family, as he wrote, among others, in a letter to the Prince of Tuscany:

Tandem ad ipsa consinia Sinarum perveni, regnum inquam Tumquini; inde ad Imperatorem Sinarum, cujus mater Imperatrix, et Regina uxor, et Princeps filius baptizati sunt, brevi me penetraturum spero.

*At length I have reached the very borders of China, the kingdom of Tonkin, I say; from there I hope to soon penetrate to the Emperor of China, whose mother the Empress, and the Queen his wife, and the Prince his son were baptised*³⁶ (English transl. my own).

From a historical perspective, the account of Boym's second journey from Europe to China is also very interesting, especially the description of the situation in Tonkin.³⁷

³³ A. Kircher, *China Illustrate*..., p. 214.

³⁴ *Japonica-Sinica* 77a, *Manuscript* ..., pp. 33r-66v.

³⁵ M. Boym, *Briefve relation de la notable conversion des personnes royales et de l'estat de la religion chrestienne en la Chine, faite par le très R. P. Michel Boym*, Paris 1654, pp. 68-69; *Japonica-Sinica* 77a, *Manuscript*..., pp. 33r-66v; K. Dziedzic, "Geneza zespołu archiwalnego ARSI Jap. Sin. 77. Legatio P. Boym 1650-1664" [The Origins of the ARSI Jap. Sin. 77 Archive Collection. Legatio P. Boym 1650-1664], in A.W. Mikołajczak, M. Miazek (eds), *Studia Boymiana*, Gniezno 2004, pp. 70-105.

³⁶ M. Boym, "Epistula ad Principem Tusciae," in S. Ciampi (ed.), *Bibliografia critica delle antiche reciproche corrispondenze; politiche, ecclesiastiche, scientifiche, letterarie, artistiche; dell'Italia colla Russia, colla Polonia ed altre parti settentrionali; il tutto raccolto ed illustrato con brevi cenni biografici delli autori meno conosciuti*, vol. 4, Firenze 1834, pp. 41.

³⁷ *Japonica-Sinica* 80, *Manuscript of Michael Boym: Relatio Patris Michaelis Boym [Father Michael Boym's Report]*, Roma: Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, dated 1658, pp. 122r-128v.

In the letter he not only reflected the tensions in China in the final days of the Míng dynasty, but also many interesting details. For example, from this text we learn that the Míng Cháo used elephants to fight the Manchus:

*"Hic quator exercitus contra rebelles educit in aciem cum 100 elephantibus, et ad quinque regna quae actu possidet, reliquas Sinarum terras recuperare procurat. He [Emperor] leads four armies into battle against the rebels with 100 elephants, and manages to recover the remaining lands of China, in addition to the five kingdoms that he actually possesses"*³⁸ (English transl. my own).

Boym's descriptions also illustrate the problems of communication between Europe and China.³⁹ Michael Boym also presented other episodes of Chinese history critically. Among others, he described the activity of Confucius very positively and showed the deep cult of ancestors in the tradition of the 'Middle Country'.⁴⁰ It is worth emphasizing that many of Boym's historical and religious studies findings on China can be found in Athanasius Kircher's work *China monumentis illustrata*.⁴¹ In fact, Kircher based the core of his work on materials collected by the Polish Jesuit.⁴²

Regarding the beginnings of Christianity in China, he claimed that the lack of sources does not allow for establishing the first missionaries in the 'Middle Country', but he considered the year 636 as the beginning of the activity of Syrian missionaries.⁴³ It was based on the reading of a famous stele discovered between 1623 and 1625 next to the *Chónggrén sì* temple on the outskirts of Xī'ān. Boym's explanations were included in the famous work *China monumentis illustrata*⁴⁴ by Athanasius Kircher (1602-1680) as *Interpetatio* I, II, III.⁴⁵ It is worth remembering that initially the Jesuits claimed that the stele came from the first Christians in China, who were supposed to be Catholics.

³⁸ M. Boym, *Epistula ad Principem...*, p. 41.

³⁹ *Japonica-Sinica* 77b, *Manuscript of Michael Boym: Referitur iter R.P. Michaelis Boym ex Sinis in Europam* [*The Journey of R.P. Michael Boym from China to Europe*], Roma: Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu, dated 1655, pp. 57r-71v.

⁴⁰ See fragments of *Ratio eorum quae a Patribus Societatis Iesu et Christianis Sinsibus in Imperio Sinarum fieri solita sunt, a Patre Michaeli Boym Polono Societatis Iesu 4 votorum professo Sinico Missionario delucide proposita*: about the great Chinese philosopher Confucius and Chinese temples in E. Kajdański (ed.), *Michał Boyma opisanie świata...*, pp. 87-89; 189-191.

⁴¹ A. Kircher, *Athanasii Kircheri China Monumentis, Qua Sacris quā Profanis, Nec non variis Naturae & Artis Spectaculis, Aliarumque rerum memorabilium Argumentis Illustrata*, Antwerpiae 1667.

⁴² E. Jarmakowska, "'China illustrata' Athanasius Kircheri wobec badań naukowych Michała Boyma" [*"Athanasius Kircher's 'China Illustrata' in the Face of Michael Boym's Scientific Research"*], in A.W. Mikołajczak, M. Miazek (eds), *Studia Boymiana...*, pp. 184-205.

⁴³ M. Boym, *Briefve relation ...*, pp. 35.

⁴⁴ A. Kircher, *Athanasii Kircheri...*, pp. 13-35.

⁴⁵ M. Boym, *Interpretatio, I: Characterum Sinicorum, qui in Monumento Sririco continentur, pronuntiatio genuina per Latinos Characteres exprimitur*, in A. Kircher, *Athanasii Kircheri...*, pp. 13-21; M. Boym, *Interpretatio, II: Verbalis Latina Monumenti Sino-Chaldaici*, in A. Kircher, *Athanasii Kircheri...*, pp. 22-28; M. Boym, *Interpretatio III: Seu Declaratio Paraphrastica. Inscriptionis Sinicae, primum e Sinico in Lusitanicam, ex hac in Italicam, & demum ex Italica in Latinam linguam de verbo ad verbum translata, ut sequitur*, in A. Kircher, *Athanasii Kircheri...*, pp. 29-35.

This thesis was shared by Boym,⁴⁶ which is confirmed by a fragment of Boym's letter quoted by Athanasius Kircher in 1667:

*I am pleased to publish the whole inscription in Chinese and Latin script, with a literal Latin translation which keeps the Chinese word order, with all the Syriac inscriptions with comments as translated by Fr. Athanasius Kircher, and with other Chinese sources, as rich testimonies to the Catholic Faith. In short, I expose to the gaze of the whole world this stone written in Chinese in 782 A.D. From this anyone can see that modern Catholic doctrine was taught in 636 A.D., a thousand years ago, on the other side of the world. The original transcription of the stone is kept at the museum of the Roman College of the Jesuit Society and another copy in the archives of the Professed House. I also brought back a book written by Chinese scholars and magistrates of the time of the stone, and the style of the letters in the printed book exactly matches that on the stone.*⁴⁷

Later historians and writers corrected these opinions, attributing the authorship of this stele to Christians from the Assyrian Church of the East, and not from the Roman Catholic Church. Relatively quickly, the opinion of Boyma *quam vera sit doctrina moderna Catholicorum, cum eadem plane in opposito Mundo apud Sinas mille retro annis, videlicet a nato Christo anno 636, fuerit praedicata* (that modern Catholic doctrine was taught in 636 A.D., a thousand years ago, on the other side of the world)⁴⁸ was criticised by the Jesuits themselves. His expression *doctrina Catholicorum* was revised as *doctrina Christianorum* of the Assyrian Church of the East.

In any case, the pioneering work of transcription with translation was done by Michael Boym with the help of two young Chinese Christians who later visited Rome (Zhèng Āndélèi in the 1950s and a person who signed in Latin as 'Mathaeus Sina' in the 1660s):

*P. Michael Boim, Andreas Don Sin, Sina, Matthasus Sina. Oculati inspectores Monumenti, nec non hujus Tabulae ex Prototypo de scriptores – Fr. Michael Boim Andreas Don Sin, A Chinese Matthew, A Chinese Eyewitnesses of the monument, who described the tablet.*⁴⁹

It may therefore be said that Boym's information on Chinese Christianity of this era is in some respects a continuation and partly a supplement to the valuable Jesuit work entitled *Summa del estado del Imperio de la China* ('Summary of the state of the Empire of China') published in 1649 by the Fathers of the Company of Jesus.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ M. Boym, *Briefve relation...*, p. 35; M. Boym, *Michael Boimus Polonus é Soc. Iesu. Lectori benevolo Salutem*, in A. Kircher, *Athanasii Kircheri...*, p. 7-8; M. Boym, *Interpretatio I...*, pp. 13-21; M. Boym, *Interpretatio II...*, pp. 22-28; A. Kircher, *China illustrate...*, pp. 6-7.

⁴⁷ M. Boym, *Michael Boimus Polonus...*, pp. 7-8; English translation in A. Kircher, *China illustrate...*, pp. 6-7.

⁴⁸ M. Boym, *Michael Boimus Polonu ...*, pp. 7-8.

⁴⁹ A. Kircher, *Athanasii Kircheri...*, p. 10; English translation in A. Kircher, *China illustrate...*, p. 8.

⁵⁰ *Summa del estado del Imperio de la China, y Christiandad dél, por las noticias que dàn los padres de la Compañia de Iesus, que residen en aquel Reyno, hasta el año de 1649: aunque los alborotos, y levantamientos de la gran China no dàn lugar a tener plena noticia del estado de la Christiandad en aquellas Prouincias: las que por cartas de los superiores de la Compañia en aquellas dos Vice-Próvincias se han tenido en Filipinas desde el año de 1638 hasta el de 1649, son las siguientes*, Madrid 1649.

D) BOYM'S INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICS AND DIPLOMACY

During his stays in China, Michael Boym found himself at the centre of the country's rapid political changes. He was automatically drawn into a world of previously unknown political games and diplomacy at various levels.

In order to understand the significance of Boym's political activity, it is necessary to indicate the economic and political context of the events of the era in which he worked in the 'Middle Country'. Namely, the exceptional development of art in the Míng Cháo era (1368-1644) caused, among other things, a great increase in interest in Chinese porcelain in Europe. The fashion for this product from the 'Middle Country' swept the entire West and the demand for porcelain exceeded the supply. A kind of 'internalisation' of Chinese porcelain in Europe's material culture took place, the scale of which we learn about from numerous English, Dutch, Portuguese and Spanish sources.⁵¹ A few years after arriving in China, Boym familiarised himself with the history of the last decades of the sixteenth century and there is much to suggest that he was aware of the economic boom in China, one of the signs of which was the exchange of copper coins for silver imported from the West.⁵² However, at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, China was hit by a series of famines, droughts and floods. During Boym's stay in China, the consequences of these disasters were visible, which translated into economic decline. Attempts to improve the situation were, however, ineffective, which led to a systematically deepening poverty of the society. This in turn generated unrest, such as the famous peasant uprisings led by Lǐ Hóngjī (1606-1645[?]), which resulted in a drastic decline in Míng Cháo's authority. During this period of chaos, the Manchus took over Beijing, and the helpless Emperor Chóngzhēn (1611-1644) committed suicide. Míng Cháo managed to maintain power in southern China until 1662⁵³.

Michael Boym found himself in China during this period of dynastic turbulence. More precisely, the period of two centres of imperial power in China took place in the years 1644-1662, and Boym's stay fell between 1644 and 1659. Boym was involved in one of the political scenarios of Míng Cháo's return to Beijing, i.e. he took on the task of drawing the attention of the Western world to the need to support Míng Cháo from the south and restore their rule over the entire Zhōngguó. Boym drew attention to the barbarity of the Manchus (Qīng Cháo), emphasising the acceptance of the Catholic faith by many prominent figures of the Míng Cháo court. This Jesuit hoped that this would result in some form of military support for Míng Cháo from the south by Western Christian countries.⁵⁴

⁵¹ L. Afonso, "Precocious Consumption: The Career of Ming Porcelain in Renaissance Iberia," *The Journal of Modern History*, vol. 97, no. 1 (2025), pp. 44-83.

⁵² B. Moloughney, X. Wenzhong, "Silver and the Fall of the Ming Dynasty: A Reassessment," *Papers on Far Eastern History*, vol. 40 (1989), pp. 51-78.

⁵³ K.M. Swope, *The Military Collapse of China's Ming Dynasty, 1618-44*, London 2014, pp. 180-272.

⁵⁴ *Japonica-Sinica* 77a, *Manuscript*..., pp. 33r-66v; M. Boym, *Briefve relation*..., pp. 68-69.

There are many indications that the Emperor Yǒnglì of the dethroned Míng dynasty, who controlled the southern provinces of China, was counting on a real possibility of a reaction from the Western states. Boym, who supported him in this, was probably aware of the possibility of the Manchus closing Chinese ports important for trade between Europe and the Far East. Indeed, the Manchus, in their propaganda among the peasantry during the rebellion, postulated the closure of Chinese ports to Western merchants and the justification for returning to autarchy. Boym's activity was therefore in line with the policy of Portugal, which was aware of the loss of both political influence in the region and income from lucrative trade. Full of missionary zeal, Boym found favourable political circumstances for the conversion of the imperial family.⁵⁵

Residing at the court of Yǒnglì Boym had a unique position. He understood the threats from Qīng Cháo and, on the other hand, as a missionary, he had the opportunity to reach the pope's entourage. Boym rose to the rank of personal advisor to the emperor. In 1650, the emperor decided to send Michael Boym with a mission to Europe. It is worth noting that Boym was the second European (the first was Marco Polo), and the first and only Pole to represent the interests of the Emperor of China. As a representative – the imperial ambassador was equipped with a golden plaque on which the purpose of his mission was engraved with the seal of the emperor.

It is worth emphasising the scope of this diplomatic mission, as evidenced by the fact that Boym carried a considerable number of letters to Europe from the imperial chancellor Achilles Páng (Ākālǐúsī Páng) to Pope Innocent X (1644-1655), the General of the Jesuits Francesco Piccolomini (1582-1651), Cardinal Juan de Lugo y de Quiroga (1583-1660), the Doge of Venice Francesco Molino (1575-1655), the Serenissima Signoria (The Signoria of Venice) and the King of Portugal John the Restorer (1604-1656). In addition, Boym was supposed to deliver a letter from Empress Wǎnghuīlǐng (1594[?]-1651) to Pope Innocent X⁵⁶ (Carrington, 1976: 20–21). Some of these letters have survived to this day, e.g. a beautifully calligraphed letter from Empress Helena or a copy of Achilles Páng's letter to the Doge and Senate of Venice. The empress's letter has survived to our times.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ X. Zhāng, Zhāng X., “卜弥格与南明王朝文献考辨” [“Probing into the Relations between Michael Boym and South Ming Court”], *Gdańskie Studia Azji Wschodniej*, no. 8 (2015), pp. 42–66.

⁵⁶ G.L. Carrington, *Dictionary of Ming Biography, 1368-1644*, vol. 1, New York 1976, pp. 20–21.

⁵⁷ Elena di Cina [Wǎnghuīlǐng/ the Empress Helena], *La lettera su seta di Elena di Cina a Innocenzo X. In G. F. De Marini, Delle Missioni De Padri Della Compagnia Di Giesu Nella Prouincia del Giappone, e particolarmente di quella di Tumkino: Libri Cinque del Gio. Filippo de Marini della medesima Compagnia*, Roma 1663, pp. 545–546; Wǎnghuīlǐng (the Empress Helena), “Interpretation of the Chinese Letter by The Empress Helen and the Queen Mother Anna and Royal Wife Maria and the Imperial Son and Heir Constantine to the Most Holy Father. Sent Through Fathers Andrea Xavier and Michael Boym, Jesuits, Assistants in the Royal Court of the Chinese Emperor,” in A. Kirscher, *China illustrata...*, pp. 92–93; A. Kircher, *Athanasii Kircheri...*, pp. 101–102; Achilles Páng, “Interpretation of the Chinese Letter from Pan Achilleus, a Chinese Christian, Chancellor of the Chinese Empire to the Most Holy Father. Sent through Fathers Andrea Xavier and Michael Boym, Jesuits, Assistants in the Royal Court of the Chinese Empire,” in A. Kirscher, *China illustrata...*, pp. 91–92.

However, the letter from Achilles Páng to the Pope – most likely written with instructions from Michael Boym – shows the style of Chinese imperial diplomacy, which can be indirectly seen as a request for military support:

*Therefore, I requested Fr Boym to go by ship to the Far West and to approach you, great pontiff, as suppliant. Most Holy Father, when you raise your eyes to heaven before the altar of St. Peter and Paul, please pray with the church of the whole world that God might look down in mercy on this imperial house, that He aid and preserve the empire by setting up the borders of future peace.*⁵⁸

A similar tone was maintained in the letter from the Empress (Helena) to the Pope, which also mentions the missionary and diplomatic achievements of Michael Boym:

*We send your holiness Michael Boym, who is perfectly well acquainted with the affairs of the empire, to present these our humble petitions. He can declare to you verbally all that we more particularly desire, and he will make you acquainted how great is our submission to the Church. Whenever our empire shall enjoy full peace, we hope to send back some of these fathers, to present our vow and persons before the altars of the apostles St. Peter and St. Paul, as we do at present with profound respect.*⁵⁹

During this diplomatic mission, Boym was initially accompanied by two trusted imperial courtiers. One of them, having health problems during the journey, only made it as far as Macau. The other, the imperial officer Zhèng Āndélèi (Andreas Zhèng), accompanied Boym throughout the mission.

The entire diplomatic mission was fraught with political and logistical difficulties. When Boym reached Goa in India in May 1651, he learned that the Portuguese had declared Emperor Yǒnglǐ defeated and were hindering the mission, not wanting to spoil their relations with the Manchu victors. What is more, a new provincial of the Jesuits arrived in Goa from Europe, who was strongly opposed to the Jesuits' involvement in Chinese politics. Boym was interned and a memorandum was sent to Lisbon in his case. Although the Polish Jesuit managed to free himself from Portuguese guardianship relatively quickly, he could not travel by ship because sea communication was subject to strict control by the Portuguese. Determined to the highest degree and convinced of the justness of his mission, he set off for Europe on foot along a route unknown to him. As a fugitive, Boym was forced to keep away from Portuguese outposts and wander incognito. His journey with his loyal Zhèng Āndélèi led through Golconda (Hyderabad), Surat, Bandar-e Abbas (near the Strait of Hormuz), Shiraz, and on to the capital of Safavid Persia, Isfahan. From there, via Tabriz, Erzerum, he went to Trebizond on the Black Sea, and from there by ship to Izmir, where he arrived at the end of August 1652. It was only in Ottoman Turkey that he presented himself as an envoy-ambassador of the Emperor of China. He reached Venice in December 1652 on a Venetian ship. Interestingly, he travelled dressed as a Chinese mandarin (probably because the Jesuits were banned from Venice).⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Achilles Páng, "Interpretation of the Chinese Letter from Pan Achilleus ...," p. 92.

⁵⁹ Wánghuǐlíng (the Empress Helena), Interpretation of the Chinese Letter by The Empress Helen..., p. 92.

⁶⁰ Q. Hán, "南明使臣卜弥格的中国随从 – 教徒郑安德肋史事考释" ["The Chinese Attendant of the Southern Míng Envoy Michael Boym: An Examination on Andreas Chin"], *The Qing History*

In addition to the logistical difficulties of the journey, there were also problems with the complicated intricacies of European politics. First, the Doge of Venice did not want to receive the emperor's messenger, wishing to maintain the neutrality of his merchant state in the Chinese conflict. Finally, he obtained an audience before the Senate of the Venetian Republic thanks to the support of the French ambassador. His presentation of the consequences of the Manchu takeover of power in China, performed in the garb of a mandarin, met with great interest. However, in the context of French-papal tensions, Boym attracted the negative reaction of Innocent X. First, information about the violation of the Portuguese ban on leaving Goa reached Rome, and Boym's cooperation with the French diplomat in the Republic of Venice was assessed negatively, which resulted in the postponement of the audience with the Pope for 3 years.

What's worse, Boym reached Rome after the death of the General of the Order, Francesco Piccolomini (1582-1651), and the new General of the Jesuits, the German Gosvinus Nickel (1582-1664), believed that Boym's political activity was hindering missionary activity in China. In political terms and in the context of post-Tridentine papal centralism, Boym's proposals were 'politically incorrect'.⁶¹

Due to various unverified information reaching Europe from China, doubts even began to be cast on the authenticity of Boym's embassy. The situation changed somewhat after the election of a new pope, Alexander VII. After three years of trying to obtain a papal audience, Michał Boym finally received it on 18 December 1655. Despite convincing the pope to support the Míngs, Alexander's letters contained only words of encouragement and diplomatically neutral formulations,⁶² such as to Empress Wānghuīlīng (Helena):

*May the royal heir Constantine grow, now only for the hope of the kingdom, but equally for the hope of overthrowing superstition. We paternally embrace him and all the others. We lovingly grant Your Majesty the benediction you request, and we earnestly pray God to make your separated kingdom one in soul and faith with us. Given at Rome at St. Peter's, with the ring of the fisherman, on Dec. 18, 1655, in the first year of our papacy.*⁶³

Journal, vol. 1 (2018), pp. 121-126; P. Rule, "The Jesuits and the Ming Qing Transition: How Did Boym and Martini find Themselves on Opposite Sides?," *Monumenta Serica. Journal of Oriental Studies*, vol. 59, no. 1 (2011), p. 252; M. Miazek-Męczyńska, "The Roman Troubles of Michael Boym S.J. Described by Thomas Szpot Dunin in *Historiae Sinarum Imperii* and *Collectanea Historiae Sinesis*," in B. Hoster, D. Kuhlmann, Z. Wesolowski (eds), *Rooted in Hope: China – Religion – Christianity. Festschrift in Honor of Roman Malek S.V.D. on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, Abingdon 2017, pp. 178-179; J.P. Duteil, *Les Jésuites, Histoire et Dictionnaire*, Paris 2022, pp. 520-522; C. von Collani, "Michał Boym," in F.W. Bautz (ed.) *Biographisch-Bibliographisches Kirchenlexikon*, vol. 14, Nordhausen 1998, pp. 818-820; C. von Collani, *The Jesuits...*, pp. 125-126.

⁶¹ M. Miazek-Męczyńska, "Nauka w służbie wiary...", pp. 156-157.

⁶² Alexander VII, Pope, "The Answer of Pope Alexander VII to the Queens and to the Supreme Director of the Chinese Empire to My Dear Daughter in Christ Helen of Ta Mínga, The Queen of China," in A. Kirscher, *China illustrata...*, 93; Alexander VII, Pope, "The Answer to My Beloved son Pan Achilles, Eunuch of the 'Chinese King, General Prefect on Land and Sea, Etc. From Alexander VII, Pope," in A. Kirscher, *China illustrata...*, pp. 93-94.

⁶³ Alexander VII, Pope, "The Answer of Pope Alexander VII to the Queens...", p. 93.

Boym went from Rome to Lisbon, where, thanks to the Pope's support, he obtained more specific promises of armed assistance from the King of Portugal John IV the Restorer. Unfortunately, these were only proverbial empty promises at the Bragança court. Worst of all, the Polish Jesuit did not manage to obtain an 'iron letter', i.e. permission to pass through Goa without any problems.

In late March 1656, Boym set off on his return journey to China with eight new Jesuit missionaries (of whom only four survived the journey to Goa). Upon arrival in Goa, India, it became clear that the Yǒnglì situation in China was hopeless. Despite the support of King John IV the Restorer, the Portuguese resident there did not agree to Boym coming to Macau, fearing it would break the strained relations with the victorious Manchus (Walravens, 2014: 291-292). Learning that Yǒnglì now controlled only the southern Chinese provinces of Guǎngxī and Yúnnán, and wishing to fulfill his mission, he travelled from Goa overland to Ayutthaya, then the capital of Siam, where he arrived in early 1658. He then took a pirate ship to Hanoi in northern Vietnam. There, Boym tried to find guides who could take him to the Chinese province of Yúnnán, where he hoped to reach the Yǒnglì emperor, who was defending himself with the remnants of his forces. The local Jesuit superiors of Michael Boym of Tonkin (Bắc Bộ) did not agree to continue this mission (Marini, 1663: 348). Finding no guide or help from the local Jesuits, who advised him against the journey, Boym travelled from Hanoi to southern China only with Zhèng Āndélèi, who accompanied him on his 9-year journey. The tense political situation in southern China meant that Boym waited for permission to continue his journey in the border areas of Guǎngxī, a military centre controlling land traffic between Vietnam and China. Boym camped there in the spartan conditions of a border barracks, where he died of exhaustion on August 22, 1659.⁶⁴ The Polish Jesuit was accompanied until the last hours of his life by his travelling companion Zhèng Āndélèi, who also buried the Polish missionary in a place unknown to us today, somewhere near the royal road connecting Hanoi with Nánning. Zhèng Āndélèi's friendly relationship with Michael Boy was the subject of an interesting study by Professor Hán Qí titled *Nánmíng shǐ chén bo mí gé de zhōngguó suícóng – jiàotú zhèng'āndé lèi shǐ shì kǎoshì* (in the English version the back of the summary reads slightly differently: *The Chinese Attendant of the Southern Ming Envoy Michael Boym, 1612-1659*)⁶⁵.

E) BOYM'S DESCRIPTIONS OF CHINA'S NATURE

Boym, leading an exceptionally intense life, often created his works during his travels or diplomatic missions. It has been mentioned that due to unfavourable circumstances, Boym waited as long as three years (1652-1655) for an audience with the Pope. The

⁶⁴ G.F. Marini, *Delle Missioni De Padri Della Compagnia Di Giesu Nella Prouincia del Giappone, e particolarmente di quella di Tumkino: Libri Cinque del Gio. Filippo de Marini della medesima Compagnia*, Roma 1663, p. 349 ; P. Pelliot, "Michel Boym...", pp. 145-151.

⁶⁵ Hán Qí, "南明使臣卜弥格的中国随从 – 教徒郑安德肋史事考释...", pp. 121-126.

ambassador of Emperor Yǒnglǐ used this time to make final edits to the various research notes he had written during his stay in China. Perhaps the most extensive work was *Flora Sinensis*,⁶⁶ an original lexicon of Far Eastern nature. Interestingly, in this work Boym was probably the first to use the word *flora* to describe and classify plants. This interesting treatise begins with a short description of the provinces and climate of China (*De provinciis Regini Sinensis, ejusque Nobilitate Sinese Imperium*).⁶⁷ The work is not limited to describing the Far Eastern plants indicated in the title, but also presents a number of endemic animals. The main part of the work was written during Boym's stay in Hainán.

It is believed that Boym's interest in Chinese botany came from a home context, as his father was a doctor,⁶⁸ and the medicine of that time was largely based on medicinal herbs.

Flora Sinensis is the only scholarly treatise by Boym that was published during his lifetime. It was published in 1656 on the occasion of the coronation of Emperor Leopold I (1640-1705) as King of Hungary (*Annum coronationis serenissimi et potentissimi Leopoldi Ignati Hungariae Regis*).⁶⁹ *Flora Sinensis* of Michael Boym consists of 75 leaves, which present 23 engravings. Unfortunately, the manuscript of the treatise has not survived to our times. The inclusion of several relatively extensive dedications of the lexicon to the Habsburg ruler⁷⁰ probably resulted from the Jesuits' policy of obtaining financial resources for Far Eastern missions.⁷¹ The work enjoyed great interest throughout Europe, and for this reason, a few years after the publication of the Latin version, a French translation appeared by Melchisédec Thévenot (1620-1692) entitled *Flora sinensis, ou Traité des fleurs, des fruits, des plantes et des animaux particuliers à la Chine* (*Flora sinensis, or Treatise on the flowers, fruits, plants and animals peculiar to China*). Thanks to the popular French language at the time, the treatise became accessible to a wide range of readers.⁷²

In his *Flora sinensis* Boym identified and drew the following plants: coconut palm (*Cocos nucifera*, according to Boym *Yay-Cv*),⁷³ papaya (*Carica Papaya*; according to

⁶⁶ M. Boym, *Flora Sinensis, fructus floresque humillime porrigens, Serenissimo et Potentissimo Principi, ac Domino, Domino Leopoldo Ignatio, Hungariae Regi florentissimo, etc. Fructus Saeculo promittenti Augustissimos, emissa in publicum a R. P. Michaele Boym, Societatis Iesu Sacerdote et a Domo Professa eiusdem Societatis Viennae Maiestati Suae una cum felicissimi Anni appreciatione oblata*, Viennae 1656.

⁶⁷ Ibid., p. 18.

⁶⁸ H. Walravens, "Der Jesuit Michael Boym (1612–1659) und seine 'Flora sinensis,'" in I. Kästner (ed.), *Erkunden, Sammeln, Notieren und Vermitteln – Wissenschaft im Gepäck von Handelsleuten, Diplomaten und Missionaren*, Aachen 2014, p. 294.

⁶⁹ M. Boym, *Flora Sinensis...*, p. 15.

⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 8-15.

⁷¹ H. Walravens, *Der Jesuit...*, p. 294.

⁷² M. Boym, *Briefve Relation de la Chine et de la notable conversion des personnes royales de cet Estat, faite par le très-R. P. Michel Boym /.../, Flora sinensis, ou Traité des fleurs, des fruits, des plantes et des animaux particuliers à la Chine, par le R. P. Michel Boym*, transl. by Melchisédec Thévenot, Paris 1664.

⁷³ M. Boym, *Flora Sinensis...*, p. 26.

Boym, *Fan-Yay-Cu*),⁷⁴ Areca palm (*Areca catechu*, according to Boym *Pim-Lam*),⁷⁵ banana tree (*Musa sapientum*, according to Boym, *Pa-Cayo*),⁷⁶ cashew (*Anacardium occidentale*, according to Boym, *Kia-Giv*),⁷⁷ longan (*Nephelium longana*, according to Boym, 32-33: *Li-ci*),⁷⁸ water apple (*Eugenia jambos*, according to Boym, *Giam-bo*),⁷⁹ pineapple (*Ananassa sativa*, according to Boym, *Fan-Po-Lo-Mie*),⁸⁰ mango (*Mangifera indica*, according to Boym *Man-ko*),⁸¹ loquat (*Eriobotrya japonica*, according to Boym *Pi-pa*),⁸² common guava (*Psidium guajava*, according to Boym, *Cieu-ko*),⁸³ chempedak (*Artocarpus integra*, according to Boym *Po-Lo-Mi*),⁸⁴ oriental persimmon (*Diospyros kaki*, according to Boym 46-47: *Sv-Pim*),⁸⁵ sugar apples (*Anona squamosa*, according to Boym *Ya-Ta*),⁸⁶ durian (*Durio zibethinus*, according to Boym *Du-Liam*),⁸⁷ cauliflorous (*Cynometra cauliflora*, Boym did not give a Chinese name to this fruit: *fructus innominatus*),⁸⁸ black pepper (*Piper nigrum*, according to Boym *Hu-cyao*),⁸⁹ Chinese cinnamon (*Cinnamomum cassia*, according to Boym *Kuey-pi*),⁹⁰ rhubarb (*Rheum sp.*, according to Boym *Tay-huam*),⁹¹ catbriers (*Smilax pseudo-china*, according to Boym, *Fo-lim*),⁹² ginger (*Zingiber officinale*, according to Boym *Sem-kiam*).⁹³

In addition to plants, Boym also described a number of animals such as pheasant (*Phasianus colchicus*, according to Boym, *Fvm-Hoam*),⁹⁴ hen (according to Boym, *Yeji*),⁹⁵ Siberian musk deer (*Moschus moschiferus*, according to Boym *Xe-Hian*),⁹⁶

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 27.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 23.

⁷⁶ Ibid., pp. 28-29.

⁷⁷ Ibid., pp. 30-31.

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp. 32-33.

⁷⁹ Ibid., pp. 34-35.

⁸⁰ Ibid., pp. 36-37.

⁸¹ Ibid., pp. 38-39.

⁸² Ibid., pp. 41-42.

⁸³ Ibid., pp. 42-43.

⁸⁴ Ibid., pp. 44-45.

⁸⁵ Ibid., pp. 46-47.

⁸⁶ Ibid., pp. 48-49.

⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 50-51.

⁸⁸ Ibid., pp. 52-53.

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 54.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 55.

⁹¹ Ibid., pp. 56-57.

⁹² Ibid., pp. 58-59.

⁹³ Ibid., pp. 60-61.

⁹⁴ Ibid., pp. 62-63.

⁹⁵ Ibid., pp. 62-63.

⁹⁶ Ibid., pp. 64-65.

Chinese snake, mistakenly called ‘boa’ by some authors⁹⁷ (most likely *Orthriophis taeniurus* – the Chinese beauty snake, according to Boym, *Gen to*),⁹⁸ probably Chinese leopard (*Panthera pardus japonensis*, according to Boym, *Hiven Pao*),⁹⁹ squirrel (*Sciurus vulgaris*, according to Boym, *Sum-xu*),¹⁰⁰ turtle (one of the species found in China, according to Boym, *Lo Meo Quey*)¹⁰¹ and perhaps the most unusual (fantasy?) animal for China – hippo (according to Boym *Hay ma*).¹⁰²

In my opinion, hippos, which did not occur and do not live in China today, were wrongly (by mistake) attributed to the Chinese fauna by Boym because he most likely saw these animals during his stay in Mozambique. Some of his African observations probably merged with Chinese observations, especially since Boym edited *Flora sinensis* many years after he had observed various phenomena.

Scholars have suggested other explanations, such as that the early seventeenth-century Chinese work *Túhuì Zōngyì* (‘Principles of Painting’) is the most likely source for the animal illustrations in *Flora Sinensis*.¹⁰³ However, the question arises whether this work is the genesis of all the animals depicted in *Flora Sinensis*. Moreover, scholars find traces of Portuguese influence in Boym’s *Flora Sinensis*, related to information obtained from the Portuguese encountered during the Polish Jesuit’s travels between Portugal, Mozambique, India and China. *Flora Sinensis* thus combines not only Boym’s personal observations but also information obtained by him on Portuguese territory, from the Portuguese, their contacts or slaves.¹⁰⁴ However, this information was not always objective and reliable.

That is why, when critically evaluating the natural history material contained in this work, contemporary Chinese biologists and zoologists quite often state that *Bǔ Mígé duì shù zhōng xǔduō dòng zhīwù de liǎojiě láizì zhīguān gānshòu hé qièshēn jīngyàn* [Boym’s understanding of many of the animals and plants in the book comes from intuitive feelings and personal experience].¹⁰⁵

⁹⁷ H. Walravens, *Der Jesuit...*, p. 296.

⁹⁸ M. Boym, *Flora Sinensis...*, pp. 64-65.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 70-71.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, pp. 68-69.

¹⁰³ A. Le Roy, “The Genesis of Animal Drawings in the *Flora Sinensis* (1656): Between the *Tuhui zongyi*, Magni Catay Atlas, and Michał Boym’s Wall Map,” *East Asian Science, Technology, and Medicine*, vol. 56, no. 2 (2024), pp. 197-238.

¹⁰⁴ A. Le Roy, “L’Empire portugais d’Asie dans la *Flora Sinensis* de Boym (1656): acteurs, espaces et représentations” [“Boym’s *Flora Sinensis* (1656) and the Portuguese Empire in Asia: Actors, Spaces and Representations”], *Artefact. Techniques, History and Human Sciences*, vol. 21 (2024), pp. 25-52; Ch. Bocci, R. Ptak, “The Animal Section in Boym’s (1612-1659) *Flora Sinensis*. Portentous Creatures, Healing Stones, Venoms and Other Curiosities,” *Monumenta Serica. Journal of Oriental Studies*, vol. 59, no. 1 (2011), pp. 353-381.

¹⁰⁵ W. Zhāng, 卜弥格和他的 ‘中国植物志’ [“Michael Boym and his ‘Flora of China’], *Rénmín ribào*, 7 February 2025, p. 17.

The popularity and great influence of Boym's work on European botany in the seventeenth century is evidenced by the fact that drawings from this work were copied in subsequent Western studies of Chinese nature.¹⁰⁶ This was not only about work the work of Athanasius Kircher¹⁰⁷ but also in *Ost- und West-Indischer wie auch Sinesischer Lust- und Stats-Garten* (*East and West Indian as well as Chinese pleasure and state gardens*) of Erasmus Finx (1627–1694)¹⁰⁸ and *Description géographique, historique, chronologique, politique, et physique de l'empire de la Chine et de la Tartarie chinoise* (*Geographical, historical, chronological, political, and physical description of the empire of China and Chinese Tartary*) of Jean-Baptiste Du Halde (1674–1743).¹⁰⁹

F) BOYM'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE SPREAD OF CHINESE MEDICINE IN EUROPE

It has already been mentioned that Father Boym was the personal physician of King Sigismund III Vasa, so the Polish Jesuit grew up not only in the context of botany but also medicine.¹¹⁰ It seems that this also aroused Boym's interest in medicine and it is this circumstance that Europeans owe Boym several works on medicine. Despite the great value of these works, they fell into oblivion in the nineteenth century and were only rediscovered in the twentieth century.¹¹¹ Chinese scholars consider Boym to be the first European to undertake in-depth research into Chinese medicine¹¹² who is

¹⁰⁶ H. Walravens, "Flora Sinensis Revisited," *Monumenta Serica. Journal of Oriental Studies*, vol. 59, no. 1 (2011), pp. 341-352; H. Walravens, *Der Jesuit...*, pp. 305-306.

¹⁰⁷ A. Kirscher, *Athanasii Kircheri...*

¹⁰⁸ Erasmus Francisci, *Erasmi Francisci Ost- und West-Indischer wie auch Sinesischer Lust- und Stats-Garten. In drey Haupt-Theile unterschieden. Der Erste Theil Begreiff in sich die edelsten Blumen, Kräuter, Bäume in Ost-Indien, Sina und America: Der ander Theil Das Temperament der Luft und Landschaften daselbst; die Beschaffenheit der Felder, Wälder, Wüsteneyen. Der Dritte Theil Das Stats-Wesen, Policy-Ordnungen, Hofstäte*, Nürnberg 1668.

¹⁰⁹ J.B. du Halde, *Description géographique, historique, chronologique, politique, et physique de l'empire de la Chine et de la Tartarie chinoise*, vol. 1-4, La Haye 1735-1736.

¹¹⁰ H. Walravens, *Der Jesuit...*, p. 294.

¹¹¹ E. Kajdański, "'Medicus Sinicus' i 'Receptarium Sinensium Liber'. O odnalezieniu rękopisów medycznych Michała Boyma" ["'Medicus Sinicus' and 'Receptarium Sinensium Liber'. On the Discovery of Michał Boym's Medical Manuscripts"], *Gdańskie Studia Azji Wschodniej*, no. 10 (2016), pp. 141-159; E. Kajdański, *Sekrety medycyny chińskiej. 'Medicus Sinicus' Michała Boyma* [*Secrets of Chinese Medicine. 'Medicus Sinicus' of Michael Boym*], Warszawa 2010; E. Kajdański, "The Traditional Chinese Medicine...", pp. 383-400; E. Rosner, "Michael Boym and the Introduction of Chinese Medical Knowledge to the West: A Reappraisal," *Monumenta Serica. Journal of Oriental Studies*, vol. 59, no. 1 (2011), pp. 401-416.

¹¹² X. Zhāng, "Boym and Rémusat: Communication of Traditional Chinese Medicine and the Rise of Western Sinology," *Chinese Medicine and Culture*, vol. 4, no. 3 (2021), p. 138; L. Xiāoli, "Michel Boym: the First European Who Wrote about Chinese Medicine," *Journal of Traditional Chinese Medical Sciences*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2014), pp. 3-8.

remembered as one of the greatest propagators of this knowledge at the turn of the Míng and Qīng dynasties.¹¹³

First of all, it is worth mentioning *Specimen Medicinae Sinicae sive Opuscula Medica* (*Specimen of Chinese Medicine or Medical Works*),¹¹⁴ which contains several treatises, including fragments of *Tú zhù mài jué biàn zhēn* (*Illustrated Notes on Pulse Secrets and Treatments*).¹¹⁵ Thus, *Specimen Medicinae Sinicae* contains parts of a work of Chinese medicine on diagnostic methods, written during the Míng dynasty in 1510 (*Tú zhù mài jué biàn zhēn* consists of four volumes and one volume of prescriptions).

Some researchers believe that *Specimen Medicinae Sinicae* is a collection of Boym's medical works/translations sent by him to Europe and confiscated in Batavia (on the north coast of Java) by the governor of the Dutch East Indies and therefore published without indicating the authorship of the Polish Jesuit.¹¹⁶ According to the supporters of this interpretation, the confiscation of Boym's works is evidenced by the expression *Eruditus Europaeus* ('educated European') included by the editor in the subtitles of the works in this collection in the form of the entry *Tractatus /.../ ab erudyto Europaeo collectos* (*A treatise /.../ taken from an educated European*)¹¹⁷ and the information *Fragmentum operis medici ab erudyto Europaeo conscripti*, (*A fragment of a medical work written by a certain learned European*).¹¹⁸ However, some scholars deny Boym's authorship of the treatises contained in *Specimen Medicinae Sinicae*. According to this opinion, the anonymous phrase *Eruditus Europaeus* did not refer to Michael Boym because the letters of this *Eruditus Europaeus* were always preceded by requests from 'D.T.' (*Dominatio tua*), who was probably the German physician, pharmacist, botanist, trader and Japanologist Andreas Cleyer (1634–1698). In addition, the evolution and self-corrections of *Eruditus Europaeus* are shown, which testify to a different development and context of life than Boym's experiences.¹¹⁹ Finally, there are those who see

¹¹³ W. Wáng, J. Zhōu, Y. Wáng, "明清之际中医海外传播概述" ["An Overview of the Spread of Traditional Chinese Medicine Abroad in the Ming and Qing Dynasties"], *Zhōngguó Zhōngyī Jīchǔ Yīxué Zázhi*, vol. 20, no. 7 (2014), pp. 914–950.

¹¹⁴ Eruditus Europaeus [Boym ?], *Specimen Medicinae Sinicae sive Opuscula Medica ad Mentem Sinen-sium; Continens I. De Pulsibus Libros quatuor è Sinico translatos; II. Tractatus de Pulsibus ab erudito Europaeo collectos; III. Fragmentum Operis Medici ibidem ab erudito Europaeo conscripti; IV. Excerpta Literis eruditi Europaei in China; V. Schemata ad meliorem praecedentium Intelligentiam; VI. De Indicis morborum ex Linguae coloribus & affectionibus. Cum Figuris aeneis & ligneis*, Francofurti 1682.

¹¹⁵ M. Hanson, "Travels of a Chinese Pulse Treatise: The Latin and French Translations of the Tuzhu maijue bianzhen 圖註脈訣辨真 (1650s–1730s)," in H.J. Cook (ed.), *Translation at Work: Chinese Medicine in the First Global Age*, Leiden 2020, pp. 23–57.

¹¹⁶ E. Kajdanski, "Wykaz skrótów oznaczających rękopisy i drukowane prace Michała Boyma" [List of Abbreviations for Michał Boym's Manuscripts and Printed Works], in: E. Kajdański (ed.), *Michał Boyma opisanie świata...*, pp. 317.

¹¹⁷ Eruditus Europaeus [Boym ?], *Specimen Medicinae...*, p. 1.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. 17.

¹¹⁹ N. Golvers, "Philippe Couplet, S.J. (1623–1693) and the Authorship of Specimen 'Medicinae Sinen-sis' and some other Western Writings on Chinese Medicine," *Medizinhistorisches Journal*, vol. 35, no. 2 (2000), p. 181.

a connection between *Specimen Medicinae Sinicae* and the work published in French by Louis-Augustin Alemand (1643–1728) under the title *Les secrets de la medecine des Chinois, consistant en la parfaite connoissance du pouls / Envoyez de la Chine par un François, homme de grand mérite* (*Secrets of Chinese medicine, consisting of the perfect knowledge of the Pulse*).¹²⁰

The problem of Boym's authorship/translations of the treatises contained in *Specimen Medicinae Sinicae* is therefore complicated. It seems, however, that this collection contains such rich material that – if we were not to recognise Boym's authorship – we cannot at least rule out that the author of *Specimen Medicinae Sinicae* drew some information from one or another of the accounts of the Polish Jesuit. It is also intriguing to what extent the printed treatises are clearly separate units, as evidenced by the editorial form of the work, among others, the separate numbering of most of the treatises starting from the first page, even if they are located on the later pages of the collection (1 – *De Pulsibus Libros quatuor e Sinico translatos*, 2 – *Tractatus de Pulsibus ab erudito Europaeo collectos, Fragmentum Operis Medici ibidem ab erudito Europaeo confcript*, 3 – *Excerpta Literis eruditi Europaei in China*, 4 – *Schemata ad meliorem procedentium Intelligentiam*, 5 – *De Indiciis morborum ex Linguae coloribus et affectionibus*).

It seems that traces of Boym can be seen in the list of *Medicamenta Simplicia, que Sinensibus ad usum medicum adhibentur* (*Simple medicines, which the Chinese use for medical purposes*) contained in *Specimen Medicinae Sinicae*. This list presents a wealth of 287 medicines of animal, mineral and plant origin in Chinese medicine.¹²¹ In some respects, the presentation of the material resembles the description from the list of plants contained in *Flora Sinensis*. In turn, in another treatise, *Tractatus de pulsibus* (*Treatise on Pulses*), it is possible that Boym provided some information, including the connection between medicine and philosophy in China (*Doctrina Sinarum Philosophica*).¹²² It is possible that the work was the result of some broader cooperation between several Jesuits.

However, Michael Boym's medical work (which leaves no doubt as to its authorship) is undoubtedly the *Clavis Medica ad Chinarum doctrinam de Pulsibus* (*Medical Key to the Chinese Pulse Doctrine*) published under his name.¹²³ This work is original because Boym did not rely on a simple translation of classical Chinese medical texts, but created a work that combined traditional Chinese diagnosis and treatment of

¹²⁰ L.A. Alemand, *Les secrets de la medecine des Chinois, consistant en la parfaite connoissance du pouls/Envoyez de la Chine par un François, homme de grand mérite*, Grenoble 1671.

¹²¹ Eruditus Europaeus [Boym ?], *Specimen Medicinae...*, pp. 1-54.

¹²² *Ibid.*, pp. 1-54.

¹²³ M. Boym, *Clavis Medica ad Chinarum doctrinam de Pulsibus / Autore R.P. Michael Boymo, e Soc. Jesu, & in China Missionario. Huius operis ultra viginti annos iam sepulti fragmenta, hinc inde dispersa, collegit & in gratiam Medicae Facultatis in lucem Europaeam produxit Cl. Dn. Andreas Cleyerus, M.D. & Societatis Batavo-Orientalis Proto-Medicus. A quo Nunc demum mittitur Totius Operis Exemplar, e China recens allatum, & a mendis purgatum, Procuratore R.P. Philippo Copleto, Belga, e Soc. Jesu, Chinenensis missionis Romam misso*, Norimbergae 1686.

a given disease based on his own understanding of Chinese medicine.¹²⁴ For example, in terms of the concept of terminology, Boym, contrary to Chinese tradition, believed that *yīn* is expressed by the Chinese character ‘阴’ and *yáng* is expressed by the character ‘阳’. This led him to interpret the two characters together as the Chinese character ‘人’, (*rén* – ‘people’), which he believed meant that a person is composed of *yīn* and *yáng*. In addition, the work contains many terms that never appeared in the theoretical system of Chinese medicine, such as nervos ‘nerve’), which Bom adopted from the Portuguese word ‘nervos’.¹²⁵ In addition, Boym included several views in his presentation of Chinese medicine that do not belong to the theoretical system of traditional Chinese medicine, such as the opinion: *hepar/.../ ac cordi subministret, nervositatem irriget, ungubuisque tribuat vegetationem* (‘the liver/.../ supplies the heart, irrigates the nervous system and ensures the vitality [of the human body]’).¹²⁶ The terms mentioned belong to classical European medical terminology. We can therefore observe an interesting paradox: Boym used European classical medicine to explain traditional Chinese medicine.

It is no wonder, then, that because of Boym’s multicultural approach to describing Zhōngguó medicine, Chinese scholars are currently focusing particularly on this aspect of the Polish Jesuit’s work, as aptly reflected in the opinion of professors Mǎ Huīmín and Zhāng Shùjiàn in their *Bǔ Mígé “yīxué de yàoshi” tàn wēi* (*The Investigation of Michel Boym’s Clavis Medica ad Chinarum Doctrinam de Pulsibus*):

Zì 1643 niánlái dào Àomén zhī shí, bō mí gé jiù tóushēn dào Zhōngguó zìrán kēxué yánjiū de shìyè zhōng, yīxué de tànsuǒ zìrán yě bèi nángkuò zài nèi. Dāngdài Zhōngguó xuézhě duì Bǔ Mígé de yánjiū dàduō jùjiāo yú tā duì Zhōngyī Xī chuán de fēngxiàn (Since arriving in Macau in 1643, Michael Boym has devoted himself to the study of Chinese natural sciences, which naturally included the exploration of medicine. Most contemporary Chinese scholars’ research on Michael Boym focuses on his contribution to the spread of Chinese medicine to the West).¹²⁷

More specifically, Chinese scholars have rightly focused on a still underexplored interaction that can be summarised as *Bǔ Mígé yǔ Zhōngguó běncǎoxué Xī chuán* – ‘Michel Boym and Chinese herbalism spreading to the West’.¹²⁸ This is in line with Beijing’s efforts to show the world the greatness and significance of Chinese civilisation. In this way, Boym became an example not only of a political diplomat but also an ‘ambassador’ of Chinese medical knowledge and culture in seventeenth-century Eu-

¹²⁴ H. Mǎ, Sh. Zhāng, “Bō mí gé “yīxué de yàoshi” tàn wēi” [“The Investigation of Michel Boym’s *Clavis Medica ad Chinarum Doctrinam de Pulsibus*”], *Medicine & Philosophy*, vol. 44, no 2 (2023), p. 75; X. Zhāng, “卜弥格与中医的西传” [“Boym and the Spread of Chinese Medicine to the West”], *Běijīng Xíngzhèng Xuéyuàn Xuébào*, vol. 4 (2012), pp. 123-128.

¹²⁵ M. Boym, *Clavis Medica ad Chinarum...*, pp. 17, 41, 87, 107; H. Mǎ, Sh. Zhāng, “Bō mí gé “yīxué de yàoshi” tàn wēi...,” p. 75.

¹²⁶ M. Boym, *Clavis Medica ad Chinarum...*, p. 88.

¹²⁷ H. Mǎ, Sh. Zhāng, “Bō mí gé “yīxué de yàoshi” tàn wēi...,” p. 73.

¹²⁸ L. Sūn, G. Wáng, J. Liáng, “卜弥格与中国本草学西传” [“Michel Boym and Chinese Herbalism Spreading to the West”], *Medicine & Philosophy*, vol. 35, no. 4A (2014), pp. 85-87.

rope. Chinese researchers characterise this phenomenon as *Zhōngxī wénhuà jiāoliú yǔ Zhōngyī Xī chuán* – ‘cultural exchange between China and the West and the spread of traditional Chinese medicine to the West’. This is the title of one of the Chinese editions of Boym’s works.¹²⁹ The interest in Boym’s contribution to the promotion of Chinese medicine has resulted in, among other things, many valuable studies. In addition to the ones already mentioned, it is worth mentioning the work of Wáng Yín-quán, *Shíqī shìjì lái huá Bōlán Yēsū huì shì bó mí gé Zhōngyī yì jiè yánjiū* [*Study on the translation and introduction of Chinese medicine by the Polish Jesuit missionary Michael Boym who came to China in the 17th century*]¹³⁰ interesting observations from Zhāng Xīpíng, *Bǔ Mígé yǔ Zhōngyī de Xī chuán* [*Boym and the spread of Chinese medicine to the West*]¹³¹ and Gāo Xī, *Shíwǔ shìjì yǐlái Zhōngyī zài Xīfāng de chuánbò yǔ yánjiū* [*The spread and research of Chinese medicine in the West since the 15th century*].¹³²

It is worth remembering that Boym studied theology and was a child of his time. Thus, his understanding of Chinese medicine was expressed in the terminology of European classical philosophy and Catholic theology.

CONCLUSION

Professor Zhāng Zhènghuī, an outstanding expert in Polish language and culture, who has devoted a dozen or so years to researching Boym, stated: *Boym loved China and was faithful to it to the end. In order to fulfill the mission entrusted to him by the Chinese emperor, he set off on a difficult and long journey from China to Europe and back.*¹³³ Zhāng Zhènghuī also translated Polish works on Boym into Chinese, e.g. *The Last Envoy of the Ming Dynasty* by Edward Kajdański (1925-2020) under the Chinese title *Zhōngguó de shǐ chén: Bǔ Mígé*.¹³⁴

Boym was underestimated in the West for many years. Much suggests that this was due to his political commitment to the declining Míng dynasty, as well as his criticism in the West of the famous Jesuit method of accommodation. For centuries, these were neither politically correct topics nor did they serve the post-Tridentine Roman centralism. In addition, there were internal divisions in the Jesuit order, which manoeuvred

¹²⁹ Bǔ Mígé [Michael Boym], 卜弥格文集....

¹³⁰ Y. Wáng, “十七世纪来华波兰耶稣会士卜弥格中医译介研究” [“Study on the Translation and Introduction of Chinese Medicine by the Polish Jesuit Missionary Michael Boym Who Came to China in the 17th Century”], *Běijīng xínghèng xuéyuán xuébào*, vol. 3 (2014), pp. 113-121.

¹³¹ X. Zhāng, “卜弥格与中医的西传...”, pp. 123-128.

¹³² X. Gāo, “十五世纪以来中医在西方的传播与研究” [“The Spread and Research of Chinese Medicine in the West since the 15th Century”], *Zhōng Yīyào Wénhuà*, vol. 10, no. 6 (2015), pp. 15-24.

¹³³ “Oto Michał Boym, o którym wspomina przewodniczący Xi Jinping na łamach ‘Rzeczpospolitej’” [“Michael Boym, mentioned by President Xi Jinping in ‘Rzeczpospolita’”], *Chirńskie Radio Międzynarodowe* [*China Radio International*], 20 June 2016, at <https://polish.cri.cn/1461/2016/06/20/21s135141.htm>, 16 May 2025].

¹³⁴ E. Kajdański, 中国的使臣：卜弥格 [*China’s Envoy: Michael Boym*], transl. by Z. Zhāng, Běijīng 2001.

between the Míng and Manchu dynasties during the turbulent period of change in seventeenth-century China.

The failed diplomatic mission of Michael Boym is still a little-known episode that undoubtedly deserves a film adaptation. Nevertheless, Boym's legacy goes beyond his missionary and political activities. This tireless researcher left us a collection of invaluable treatises that introduced Europeans to various phenomena of imperial China that were unknown at the time. Europe owes Boym a great deal of reliable knowledge about Chinese geography, history, philosophy, medicine, nature, local folklore and even astronomy.¹³⁵ Boym's rich scholarly output in these numerous subject areas, which was created during his numerous travels, is astonishing.

Boym – a titan of work and courage, was not afraid of hardship and sacrifice, being resistant to discouragement. He did not break down even during a long and exhausting diplomatic mission when he basically did not obtain any European aid for China. Despite the great difficulties of the mission, humiliations and political failures, Father Michał Boym remained faithful to his promise to the imperial court. Persuasions from his friends did not convince him to stay in Europe, but he decided to make an exhausting return journey accompanied by the faithful Zhèng Āndélèi. He searched for the Yǒnglì Emperor until the end of his days, when he returned to China in 1659, when the Míng court had already essentially ceased to exist. Boym died of exhaustion in the same year, at the age of 47 on the southern border of the Chinese Empire, which was then already under the control of the Manchu Qīng Cháo dynasty. The fate of the Yǒnglì Emperor, with whom Boym tied his life, was no less tragic. Until 1658, he put up effective resistance to the Qīng army. After the defeat in 1659, only the provinces of Guǎngxī and Yúnnán were in his hands and he was finally defeated in 1661, he suffered, retreating to Burma, where the local king granted him asylum in Sagaing. In April 1662, however, Yǒnglì was betrayed and handed over to Wú Sāngui (1612–1678), a general of the Qīng Cháo army, who sentenced him to death along with his entire family and court.¹³⁶

Father Michael Boym was not only a Christian devoted to Poland and Europe, but also a great lover and loyal friend of China. He was a man of honour, to whose characterisation can be applied the Chinese saying: *yī nuò qiān jīn*,¹³⁷ i.e. he was a person for whom *one word was worth as much as a thousand pieces of gold*. One could say that even much more, because for the words of the oath of allegiance to Emperor Yǒnglì, the faithful Boym gave not only money and health but above all his life.

¹³⁵ L. Tirapicos, "Boym, Michael Petrus," in Th. Hockey (ed.), *Biographical Encyclopedia of Astronomers*, New York 2014, pp. 293–294.

¹³⁶ D.H. Shore, *Last Court of the Ming China: The Reign of the Yung-li Emperor in the South (1647–1662)*, Ph.D. dissertation, Princeton University 1976, at <https://www.proquest.com/openview/088c1538e9e13bf7acdc8df6844bb1f8/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>, 12 June 2025.

¹³⁷ Stowarzyszenie Sinicum im. Michała Boyma, *Michał Boym. Biografia*, [Michał Boym. Biography], 2019, at <http://www.michalboym.pl/tekst,biografia,229.html>, 12 June 2025.

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