

Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (Roman Archives of the Society of Jesus) and their China Holdings

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Historical Background

ARSI are the archives of the central government of the Jesuit Order. For this reason, they mainly contain materials sent from Jesuit provinces and colleges to the General regarding the general governance of the Society. The ARSI are divided into three main sections: the Archives of the Early Society (1540-1773); the Archives of the Restored Society (1814-present); and the so-called Fondo Gesuitico (not to be confused with the Fondo Gesuitico kept at the Italian National Central Library of Rome “Vittorio Emanuele II”).

At the time of the suppression of the Society of Jesus in 1773, the Archives of the Early Society, then kept at the Jesuit Professed House in Rome, seat of the General (in today’s Piazza del Gesù), were seized by Pontifical authorities, and remained under the control of the Roman Curia. Before this happened, however, part of the materials were probably destroyed by the Jesuit superiors themselves, to avoid any further attacks on the Society. Such was likely the case for most registers of outgoing letters by the General, including those of the missionary provinces of East Asia. Between 1773 and 1814, some of the documents kept at the Professed House were taken by single cardinals and other individuals, and ended up in different collections (such as the archives of Propaganda Fide in Rome, the French National Library, or the Chapter Archives in Toledo, Spain).

After the restoration of the Society (1814-1873), part of the documents returned in the hands of the Jesuits, but we know little about those years. In 1873, following the incorporation of Rome into the Kingdom of Italy and the suppression of religious corporations in Rome, the archives were secretly transferred by the Jesuits from the Professed House to the nearby Torlonia Palace, and then to a depot in the Collegium Germanicum, at the time in the Borromeo Palace (Via del Seminario). The Archives of the Jesuit General Procurators, kept in the Collegio Romano after the restoration of the Society, however, were confiscated by the Italian government in 1873. They became part of the Royal State Archives of Italy and were returned to the Jesuits only in 1924, forming the so-called Fondo Gesuitico in ARSI.

After 1873, the modern section of the archives moved with the General Curia to Fiesole near Florence, while the early section remained hidden in the German College in Rome. However, between 1890-1893 these documents were secretly transferred to Exaten, Netherlands, by order of the Jesuit General Luis Martin, who feared further confiscations. During the “Dutch exile” the documents were re-ordered, restored (with irreversible old methods like the coating of documents with gelatin and cellophane), and inventoried. The documents remained in the Netherlands until 1939, when they were finally transferred again to Rome, in the new General

Curia, in Via dei Penitenzieri. In 1993, a new archives building, located in the garden of the Curia, has been opened to the public.

On-site and published catalogues / other search tools

General reference books of Jesuit interest are available in the ARSI reading room, while other printed materials kept in ARSI can be located through a card index. Numerous manuscript, typescript and published inventories of the ARSI manuscript collection are available and listed in a general index. They are located in the reading room, and in some cases also digitized and loaded on computer terminals available to readers.

For the Western-language materials on China, see especially the manuscript Indexes of the Japonica Sinica section, bearing the call numbers (segnatura) Jap. Sin. 150a (inventory of Jap. Sin. 1-22; 27; 29; 31; 34-38; 45; 47-48; 68; 68a; 70; 76; 80-85; 123-126; 128; 132-133; 137; 137a; 139-141; 149), and Jap. Sin. 184a (this latter is an index to letters contained in Jap. Sin. 161-184.)

For the Chinese-language materials preserved in ARSI, see Albert Chan, *Chinese Books and Documents in the Jesuit Archives in Rome. A Descriptive Catalogue, Japonica Sinica I-IV*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2002.

For a list of missionary materials in the Fondo Gesuitico, see Edmond Lamalle, “La documentation d'histoire missionnaire dans le 'Fondo Gesuitico' aux archives romaines de la Compagnie de Jesus.” *Euntes Docete* 21 (1968): 131-176; see especially pp. 153-160, describing the China-related volumes.

Major Collections of the Archives on China (Manuscripts and Other Materials)

Early Society (1540-1773)

During the period of the Early Society (1540-1773), the Asian missions were entrusted to independent Jesuit provinces and vice-provinces. Therefore, unlike in the nineteenth century, provincial archival materials were either kept in Asia, in the various headquarters of the province, or, in small proportion, reached Rome as correspondence sent to the General in the context of his duties of universal governance. Most of the ARSI materials on China are preserved in the Japonica Sinica section (abbreviated as Jap. Sin; Western materials, Jap. Sin. 1 through 202; Chinese materials, Jap. Sin I through IV). The Ricci Institute at the University of San Francisco owns an authorized digital copy presented by ARSI of the entire Japonica Sinica Western series, and a large number of digitized materials from Jap.Sin. I-IV as well. Although many China-related Jesuit materials are to be found also in European archives and libraries, they mainly pertain to individual Jesuits and colleges or residences (including Macao), and only to a lesser degree to the general governance of the Asian provinces.

Letters to the General

Fortunately, a good number of letters received in Rome from the missionary provinces of Asia has been preserved. The letters from China are contained in the section Japonica Sinica, in a number of volumes between no. 101 and no. 184 (interspersed are other materials on China; an index of the letters is in volume 184A). Letters by the China missionaries Ferdinand Verbiest and Anthoine Thomas SJ are preserved in the volumes Jap. Sin. 144-145 and 148-149 respectively. Another batch of a few hundreds letters is preserved in the Fondo Gesuitico, nos. 730-731.

Letterae Indipetae / Indipetarum (“Letters of those who wish to go to the Indies”)

The young Jesuit novices and priests often wrote letters to the General, asking to be sent to the “Indies.” Usually, it was only the General who could give the final permission for joining a missionary province. Out of probably 24,000 of these letters written between 1540 and 1773, around 17,000 have survived, mostly in the Fondo Gesuitico, nos. 732-759 (alphabetical index of authors available).

Litterae Annuae (Annual Letters)

The *Litterae Annuae* were relations on the state of each college or mission, written as apologetic and hagiographic accounts, but often rich in ethnographic information not available elsewhere. Some were edited and printed, but most remained manuscript. The manuscript *Annuae* for the China mission are to be found in the section Japonica Sinica 113 to 122 (covering 1613-1670), while some printed ones are in the book collection of ARSI. A list of the *Annuae* on China and of similar materials (like the preparatory *puncta ad litteras annuas*) preserved in ARSI and other libraries and archives can be found in two articles by Joseph Dehergne: “Les lettres annuelles des missions jésuites de Chine au temps des Ming (1581-1644),” *Archivum Historicum Societatis Jesu* 49 (1980): 379-392; and “Lettres annuelles et sources complémentaires des missions jésuites de Chine (suite: 1644-1722),” *Archivum Historicum Societatis Jesu* 51 (1982): 247-284.

Litterae Soli (Letters to Single Persons)

Most of these letters, excerpted in registers, sent from the General to outside Jesuits and other people have disappeared. For China we still have Jap. Sin. 98 (1746-1761) and 99 (1683-1766), with many letters by General Tirso Gonzalez.

Historiae

Manuscript histories of the China mission are to be found in different location in ARSI. For example, the 1710 manuscript by Thomas Dunin-Szpot SJ, “*Collectanea Historiae Sinensis ab anno 1641 ad annum 1700, ex varijs documentis in Archivo Societatis existentibus excerpta duobus tomis distincta*” is in Jap. Sin. 104-105. The preparatory drafts of Daniello Bartoli’s

extensive works, including his Cina, are to be found in the ARSI section *Historia Societatis*, nos. 114-125.

Chinese-language Materials: Japonica Sinica I, II, III, IV

The *Japonica Sinica* sections numbered with Roman numerals “I” through “IV” contain Chinese manuscripts and xylographs (Confucian, Daoist, Buddhist and mostly Christian texts), as well as some Western materials on China. A complete descriptive catalogue of this section is Albert Chan SJ’s *Chinese Books and Documents in the Jesuit Archives in Rome. A Descriptive Catalogue, Japonica Sinica I-IV*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2002.

Fondo Gesuitico

This section is separate from the remainder of the collection, and contains miscellaneous materials: volume no. 722, *De missione Sinensi*, is divided in 24 parts, including treatises, letters, and other juridical and economic documents; the volume nos. 723-729, *De ritibus Sinensibus*, is a large collection of treatises and memorials on the problem of the Chinese Rites; and nos. 730-731, *Epistolae* (1723-1848) are miscellaneous letters.

Restored Society (1814-present)

This section of the Archives is similar in organization to that of the Early Society, and in fact includes also materials on the period of the suppression (1774-1813), when some Jesuits were active in Russia. The documents can be consulted up to 1939. However, since in the modern period the European provinces, and not independent missionary provinces, were mainly responsible for evangelization and educational work in Asia and elsewhere, most relevant materials on the 19th and 20th century missions will be found in the archives of the single Jesuit provinces. In ARSI, one will mainly find materials related to the central government of the Order in relation to missionary problems.

Literature on the ARSI and the China holdings

Corsi, Elisabetta. “Review of *Chinese Books and Documents in the Jesuit Archives in Rome: A Descriptive Catalogue: Japonica-Sinica I-IV*,” *China Review International* 10.2, Fall 2003, pp. 326-337.

Dudink, Ad. “The Japonica-Sinica Collections I-IV in the Roman Archives of the Society of Jesus: An Overview.” *Monumenta Serica* 50 (2002): 481-536.

Lamalle, Edmond. “L'archivio di un grande ordine religioso. L'Archivio Generale della Compagnia di Gesù.” *Archiva Ecclesiae* 24-25 (1981-82): 89-120.

McCoog, Thomas. *A Guide to Jesuit Archives*. St. Louis (Mo.) - Rome: Institute of Jesuit Sources - Institutum Historicum Societatis Jesu, 2001, pp. 169-173.

Medina, Francisco de Borja. “La Compañía de Jesús y la Evangelización de América y Filipinas en los Archivos de la Orden.” *Memoria Ecclesiae* V (1994): 31-61.

Menegon, Eugenio. 2003. “Review of Albert Chan, *Chinese Books and Documents in the Jesuit Archives in Rome: A Descriptive Catalogue: Japonica Sinica I-IV*.” *H-Asia* (February 2003) <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=7170>

Ruiz de Medina, Juan. “La sección JapSin del Archivo Romano de la Compañía de Jesús.” In *Extremo Oriente Ibérico. Investigaciones Históricas: Metodología y Estado de la Cuestión*, edited by Francisco de Solano, Florentino Rodao and Luis E. Togores, 117-124. Madrid: Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional en colaboración con el Centro de Estudios Históricos, Departamento de Historia de América, CSIC, 1989.

Rule, Paul. “Chinese Books and Documents in the Roman Archives of the Society of Jesus. A New Catalogue.” *Monumenta Serica* 50 (2002): 463-80.

Standaert, Nicolas, ed. *Handbook of Christianity in China. Volume One: 635-1800*. Leiden: Brill, 2001, “ARSI,” p. 156 (Ad Dudink) and “Western primary sources,” esp. pp. 163-174 (Noël Golvers).

Teschitel, Josef. “Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu.” *Archivum* 4 (1954): 145-152.

Teschitel, Josef. “Das Generalarchiv der Gesellschaft Jesu in Rom.” *Römische Historische Mitteilungen* 4 (1961): 247-254.

Teschitel, Josef. “L'organizzazione dell'Archivio Generale della Compagnia di Gesù.” *Rassegna degli Archivi di Stato* 22 (1962): 189-196.

Witek, John. “Research on China in the Archives of the Society of Jesus - Luoma Yesuhui Dang'anguan zhong guanyu Zhongguo de dang'an de yanjiu 羅馬耶穌會檔案館關於中國大的檔案的研究.” In *Zongjiao yu wenhua 4. Zaoqi jidujiao yu jiaofu zhexue yanjiu 宗教與文化.4. 早期基督教與教父哲學研究*, edited by Chen Cunfu 陳村富, 379-387 (English); 387-392 (Chinese): Beijing, Dongfang Chubanshe, 2000.

Published Materials from the Archives (sample on China)

Several Western language documents on China from ARSI are included in D'Elia's *Fonti Ricciane*, in *Sinica Franciscana*, as well as in a number of monographs on single China missionaries, too many to mention. The volume edited by John W. Witek and Joseph S. Sebes, *Monumenta sinica. I: (1546-1562)*, Monumenta historica Societatis Iesu 153 - Monumenta missionum Societatis Iesu 66. Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 2002, gathers the

Western-languages documents of the first decades preceding the founding of the China Jesuit mission. More volumes are scheduled to appear in the future.

A collection of rare Chinese materials preserved in ARSI is Nicolas Standaert, 鐘鳴旦 and Adrian Dudink 杜鼎克, eds., *Yesuhui Luoma Dang'anguan Ming-Qing Tianzhujiao wenxian* 耶穌會羅馬檔案館明清天主教文獻 *Chinese Christian Texts from the Roman Archives of the Society of Jesus*. Taipei: Taipei Ricci Institute, 2002, 12 vols.