The concept of gentile civilization in missionary discourse and its European reception
Mexico, Peru and China in the Repúblicas del Mundo by Jerónimo Román (1575-1595)

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In September 1592 an English privateer fleet off the Azores captured an enormous 900-ton Portuguese carrack, the Madre de Deus, and within it found a luxurious cedar-wood casket with a book in Latin (wrapped in cloth) that the Jesuits had recently printed in Macau (1590), and which eventually found its way into the hands of the travel editor, colonial promoter and imperial ideologue Richard Hakluyt. The book, titled *De Missione Legatorum Iaponensium ad Romanam Curiam*, consisted of a series of humanistic dialogues describing the observations by a group of young Japanese envoys that the Jesuits themselves had sent in 1582 to Europe, or perhaps more precisely, to Spain (including Portugal) and Italy, to visit Philip II and other Catholic princes, and pope Gregory XIII in Rome. The dialogues offered an account of the five-year embassy, but also included a comparison of the civilizations of Europe and China, with a particular account of the latter based on the letters of Matteo Ricci. The book had in fact been designed by the Jesuit visitor Alessandro Valignano, and then written in Latin by fellow-Jesuit Eduardo de Sande, so that it may serve as an educational tool for their most accomplished Japanese student converts (a more accessible version in Japanese was also planned, but apparently the lack of Japanese movable types frustrated this)\(^1\). Although the dialogue certainly reflects a cross-cultural effort, incorporating materials from the

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\(^1\) The authorship of the treatise is disputed, with the editor of a recent Portuguese translation, Américo da Costa Ramalho, arguing against various Jesuit historians that Duarte de Sande was the main author, on the basis of what Valignano and Sande declared in their prefaces, and of the many references made in the *Dialogues* to Portuguese history. See A. da Costa Ramalho, “O padre Duarte de Sande”. However, in the light of Valignano’s private letters to General Claudio Acquaviva in 1588, where he explained that he was involved in the writing of this book, and of the similarity of contents of some key chapters (such as the one on China) with his *Historia del principio y progreso de la Compañía de Jesus en las Indias Orientales* of c.1583, I am inclined to believe (with Henri Bernard, Joseph Moran and Derek Massarella) that a detailed draft of the contents was supplied by Valignano, apparently in Spanish; Sande, as he himself explained in a letter to General Acquaviva in September 1589, had composed the dialogue from Valignano’s materials (probably including a summary of the diaries kept by the Japanese travellers) rather than just translating a text. From this perspective, it seems safe to consider the work as co-authored. The printing in Macau was in fact made possible because the envoys, on their return, brought with them the movable types that Valignano had requested. A new translation in English by Joseph Moran\(^4\), edited by Derek Masarella, is due to be published by the Hakluyt Society.

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diaries written by the young Japanese envoys, it does not represent an unmediated Japanese perspective on the civilizations of the world. In all the crucial passages where cross-cultural value judgements are made, Valignano’s ideological overlay is overwhelming, and in fact throughout their progress the four teenagers (representing prominent noble convert families) were constantly supervised by the Jesuits, who also served as interpreters. However, the account is rather unique in the fact that whilst it sought to impress a Japanese audience with the size and power of European civilization (presented exclusively in its Catholic aspect), it could also serve to gain support for the Jesuit missions amongst European patrons, especially in Rome and at the court of Philip II. In this sense, the book reflected well the double propaganda purpose, Japanese and European, of the embassy itself, which was indeed hugely successful in raising the profile of Japan in Europe, as a fairly civilized country with a great potential for Christianization².

But the value of the dialogues transcended Valignano’s aims. They were rich in information, so much so that Richard Hakluyt decided to include the account of China in the second edition of his *Principal Navigations of the English Nation* (1598–1600), with the suggestive title *An excellent Treatise of the Kingdom of China and of the Estate and Government thereof*. Only three years earlier Hakluyt had also encouraged Robert Sparke to translate the Augustinian Juan González de Mendoza’s *Historie of the great and mightie Kingdome of China* (January 1589), first published in Spanish in Rome in 1585³. Both publications are testimony of the speed with which Hakluyt incorporated newly available knowledge of China into his programme of publications. They also demonstrate how an English Protestant, passionately devoted to challenging the twin Catholic imperialisms of Philip II and the papacy, in Europe as well as overseas, nevertheless continued to rely on the publications by Catholic missionaries for his knowledge of gentile (non-Biblical) civilizations⁴. It was perfectly possible for Hakluyt to approve of, and profit from, the scientific criteria of the humanist educated missionaries in their cosmographical endeavours, whilst ignoring the instinct for double propaganda (of the Catholic missions in Europe, and of Catholic Europe overseas) that guided men like Valignano or Mendoza when writing their historical works. Hence Mendoza and Valignano together transmitted to late Elizabethan England (and elsewhere in northern Europe)
a remarkable image of the civilization of China, one of special significance to the international republic of letters because it potentially challenged the ideological assumption that in order to be fully civilized one needed to be Christian, that the two concepts were, or should be, necessarily linked. Although this only would become fully clear in the following decades, the extent to which gentilism implied idolatry was equally problematic, as the image of an idolatrous civilization was often less controversial than the image of a well-ordered society of natural philosophers, or, worse, of civilized atheists. Similarly, the existence of a society with a historical record whose claims to antiquity were outside, and perhaps contradicted, the biblical tradition, would raise extremely disturbing questions.

The eagerness with which, innocent of these future debates, the Protestant cleric Hakluyt imported this kind of historical and ethnographic knowledge and made it public (he had of course also already translated Peter Martyr’s Latin history of the Spanish discovery and conquest America, and many other accounts) offers an interesting contrast to the relative parsimony with which descriptions of gentile civilizations of America and Asia were publicized in the realms of the Catholic Monarch, or even in Rome. Arguably, it was Catholic missionaries working in Mexico, Peru, India, Japan and China that throughout the sixteenth century, especially after the 1550s, contributed most decisively to asserting the continuing empirical validity of an idea of gentile civilization otherwise usually confined to the ancient world of Egypt, Greece and Rome. And yet it seems equally clear that notwithstanding the many editions of a few exceptional works — in particular Mendoza’s Historia de las Cosas más Notables, Ritos y Costumbres del gran Reyno de la China (1585), and José de Acosta’s near contemporary Historia Natural y Moral de las Indias (1590), the intellectual impact of this idea would be particularly weak in the Hispanic realms, somewhat muted in Italy (although we must consider more carefully the enthusiastic reception of Giovanni Pietro Maffei’s 1588 Historiarum Indicarum Libri XVI), and clearly stronger in northern Europe (including France), especially throughout the seventeenth century⁵.

We could argue that, in effect, the intellectual impact of the history and ethnography of exotic civilizations was quite distinct from the conditions of production of empirical knowledge. Was the production of “knowledge” entirely unconnected from its consumption, or should we rather re-assert the ultimate unity of the European process of discourse-formation about other cultures, from exotic research and observation, to European reflection and debate? Can we perhaps explain the varying fortunes of the new images of gentile civilizations by looking for particular interactions between contexts of production and contexts of reception, or were the outcomes more casual?

One often neglected work that I believe can throw light on this issue is the cosmographical synthesis written by the Spanish Augustinian Jerónimo Román,

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⁵ Besides the historical syntheses by writers like Mendoza, Maffei and Acosta there was also an extensive missionary propaganda in Catholic Europe, but these collections of letters only offered a limited access to detailed ethnographic information, and rarely engaged with the more problematic aspects of the image of a gentile civilization.
Repúblicas del Mundo (2 vol. Medina del campo, 1575; 2nd ed. 3 vol. Salamanca 1595), since it incorporated missionary material which might in some contexts be considered controversial. In this article I will explore the concept of gentile civilization developed by Román from the writings of Bartolomé de Las Casas on Mexico and Peru and by Martín de Rada on China, with comparisons to the materials produced by Alessandro Valignano (who used the letters of Matteo Ricci), Juan González de Mendoza, and José de Acosta. That is, I will consider texts produced in overseas missions, but often edited for publication in Europe (although without excluding circulation in colonial settings, as we have seen in the case of De Missione, printed in Macau for a Japanese Christian audience). My first concern will be to contrast different views of the relationship between idolatry and civility: Was there a unique missionary perspective on this? How important were the differences between America and Asia? Finally, were the intellectual strategies adopted by Augustinian and Dominican writers different from those followed by the Jesuits, who perhaps too often get most of the attention from scholars? My second concern will be to assess the extent to which the idea of a gentile civilization became problematic, or not, in the early reception of these writings in Spain and elsewhere in Europe.

I. — JERÓNIMO ROMÁN AND CENSORSHIP: A NEW LOOK

The work of the Augustinian Jerónimo Román (1535-1597), that is his Repúblicas del Mundo is important for three reasons. First of all, it was one of the very few Spanish equivalents to a cosmographical genre widely practiced in Europe (as opposed to the historiography of conquest, where of course Spanish and Portuguese writers were leaders). This invites some reflection on how it compares with other examples of the genre, from Boemus to Botero, but also on why this kind of cosmography was so unusual in the central kingdom of a Catholic monarchy that claimed a universal status and controlled vast overseas territories. Second, the book made available otherwise unpublished ethnographic material of great importance for the European understanding of exotic civilizations and their religious traditions, in particular the accounts by Martín de Rada on China, and by Bartolomé de Las Casas on Mexico and Peru, which otherwise only circulated in manuscript or through other secondary recensions. Third, the Repúblicas were notoriously censored by the Inquisition, that is to say, some passages were expurgated (the book was not forbidden). As a result, the first edition, which included the republic of the “Western Indies” but not yet the chapter on China, is very rare and usually (but thankfully not always) found with whole passages blocked out.

For my analysis of the 1575 edition I have been fortunate to be able to consult three copies of the rare volumes without the excerpted passages crossed out, although in one case with marginalia noting the problematic passages. The first copy is in the Library of Congress. Two further unexpurgated copies are in private collections. I am extremely grateful to the antiquarian bookseller Anthony Payne, formerly of Bernard Quaritch Ltd in London, for alerting me of their existence, and allowing me
What exactly was the problem with this book—what bothered the censors? In an influential article, Rolena Adorno has argued that Román’s sympathy for the idolatrous but civilized Indians, inspired by Las Casas, implied a condemnation of the Spanish conquest, and that it was connected to his sympathy for the Jews, whose persecution in Spain he also regretted. However, Adorno’s occasional misunderstandings (for example of marginalia) tend to transform Román into the *avant-la-lettre* liberal he never was: the Augustinian had some nasty things to say about Jews, and despite his criticisms of the conqueror Pizarro he was generally very proud of the Spanish nation, and an apologist of what he understood to be the paternalistic rule of Philip II over the Indians. In his view, subjecting gentiles to the dominion of the Catholic Church was an entirely positive thing, and religion was the perfect complement to empire, since the preaching of the gospel had not only facilitated the great conquests and discoveries of the Spanish and Portuguese, but also moderated their greed and violence. From my own analysis of the book uncensored, and of marginal notes to the censored passages, what seems most striking to me is that the path-breaking descriptions by Las Casas and by Rada were not in

to consult them at length in the bookshop before they were sold (one complete set in July 2006, another copy of volume I only in March 2008). All subsequent quotations specify the year of publication to distinguish the two editions. On Román, see also F. Villarroel, “The life and works”.

7 R. Adorno, “Sobre la censura”.

8 As his formal submission to the authority of the Church (signed 14 April 1575) shows, included at the last minute in the first edition of the book, Román had been anxious about his detailed discussion of the Hebrew Republic. In the body of the work he expressed traditional opinions such as that the Jews were everywhere mistreated because God permitted it, including modern Spain, where even after their conversion to Christianity they were everywhere hated (because, Román insinuated, “I believe that few are good Christians”). His final sentence was: “Forgive me those of this nation, but in truth I say less than I could when speaking badly of them” (1575, I, f° 67v–68r). This passage was censored by the Inquisition (a reader noted that it was forbidden to say this although it was true), and the new version of 1595 briefly noted how the Jews, once loved by God above all nations, were now disliked above all others because of their sins. Strangely, Adorno reads the original passage as a criticism of the Spanish (rather than the Jewish) nation, and by contrast emphasizes the profound respect and sympathy that the friar showed towards the Jews. Another problem is how she reads marginalia. In p. 49 she quotes a marginal note to the 1595 edition (from a copy in the Lilly Library) which asserted that “at the time when the inquisitors expurgated my books, they saw that this one did not have to be expurgated”, noting the difference between the two editions, and adding that “I did not find here any of those things that are expurgated from the [1575] edition of Medina”. All this makes perfect sense as a note from an *owner* of that copy of the book, someone obviously relieved because the 1575 edition alone had been censored, and his copy of the new edition already had been suitably modified. Adorno however reads this as a marginal note written by Jerónimo Román himself, and presents it as evidence of how the friar evaded censorship!

9 J. Román, *Repúblicas del Mundo*, 1595, III, f° 210v–211r: “Nunca los Portugueses uvieran descubierto tantos puertos ni islas, si frayles con zelo de predicar no se adelantaran y entraran por entre gentes bárbaras sin miedo; ni nuestros españoles tuvieran ánimo a acometer empresas, si los religiosos no ablandaran las gentes indômitas con ponerles delante la lumbre de la fe… bástenos lo que vemos en las Indias Occidentales y Orientales que nuestros españoles han conquistado y traído a la obediencia de sus reyes, lo qual [es] cierto ni se uviera conquistado ni conservado si no estuvieran de por medio los religiosos que yvan a las empresas, para que la furia de los soldados y la avaricia de los demás tuviese templança con sus reprensiones y avisos, dándoles a entender cómo no yvan a robar ni a matar”.

fact the subject of any harsh censorship; rather the contrary, the account by Rada
was a novelty of the second edition, and obviously, whilst the censors made sure
that the expurgated passages were now eliminated, there was no negative reaction
to the description of China. In some ways this suggests that the description of a
gentile civilization — a concept I shall presently return to — was not in itself
problematic in Counter Reformation Spain.

Our views on the subject might have been overly influenced by the famous pro-
hibition of further research into Indian religion and antiquities issued by Philip II
in 1577, directed at the work of the Franciscan Bernardino de Sahagún, and by the
self-censorship exercised by the Crown official Agustín de Zárate also in 1577, when
he eliminated the three chapters with religious contents from the second edition of
his Decubrimiento y Conquista del Perú (something which Marcel Bataillon inter-
preted in the light of the previous prohibition)\(^{10}\). We have therefore some appa-
rently contradictory evidence. George Baudot, who considered this issue at some
length in his still important study of the Franciscan ethnographic writings from
New Spain, noted the paradox that throughout the 1570s and 1580s, originally
under the leadership of its President Juan de Ovando, the Council of the Indies
was sponsoring the cosmographical research of Juan López de Velasco and issuing
questionnaires that requested systematic information about native government,
economy, customs and rituals; at the same time, a whole range of ethnographic
and historical writings were being systematically collected by the same Council on
an exclusive basis and taken out of circulation. To some extent the contradiction
is only apparent: in all cases information was being preserved, and in all cases its
use was restricted. What was novel in 1577 was the prohibition of further research.
In this respect, Baudot introduced a useful distinction between the long-standing
policy of secrecy by which foreigners were not allowed to acquire maps of the
American territories, the long-standing system of censorship by which any pub-
lication about “our Indies” required royal approval, the specific prohibitions of
politically-sensitive works such as the letters of Cortés (in 1527) or Francisco López
de Gómara (in 1553 and again 1566), and the new prohibition expressed in the
cédula of April 1577 that “nobody should in any way and in any language write
about the former superstitions and manner of living of these Indians”\(^{11}\). More
controversially, Baudot argued that in 1577 the issue was a “sudden awareness of
the grave situation in the Americas” in relation to its native inhabitants, a crisis

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10 On Sahagún see L. NICOLAU D’OLIVER, Fray Bernardino, which remains one of the best books
on the subject despite its many years (it was first published in Spanish in Mexico in 1952). See also
G. BAUDOT, Utopía e historia, and more recently J. BUSTAMANTE GARCÍA, “Retórica”. On Zárate see
M. BATAILLON, “Zárate ou Lozano?”.

11 “Estaréis advertido de no consentir que por ninguna manera persona alguna escriba cosas que toquen
a supersticiones y manera de vivir que estos indios tenían, en ninguna lengua”. On the prohibition
of the letters of Cortés see M. BATAILLON, “Hernán Cortés”. In her recent discussion of the cosmographer
Juan López de Velasco, Maria Portuondo suggests that the 1577 cédula was simply motivated by the
cosmographer’s efforts to collect all works that would inform his own work, but this interpretation
is obviously reductive — there was more to Sahagún’s controversial work than one mere source for
brought about by a number of factors, of which he identifies two as central: the millenarian ideology of the Franciscan missionaries of New Spain, which implied the potential for questioning the Spanish conquest and jurisdiction with reference to a higher spiritual authority (an example of this would be the work by Jerónimo de Mendieta, who for example was critical of the capitation taxes and compulsory labour levies imposed in the 1560s and 1570s), and the fear of a native rebellion, perhaps inspired by an indigenised version of the same millenarian ideology.

Whilst it is true that Philip II in 1577 was concerned with eliminating the memory of the native past and its free circulation from New Spain, we must express scepticism about the weight of his political fears: the possibilities of a full scale-rebellion, either led by disappointed conquerors or (even less likely) by the decimated and demoralised natives, were by the late 1570s quite remote in comparison with the much more dramatic situation in the 1540s both in Mexico and Peru; when necessary, the king was also able to use the bishops to weaken the power of the orders and their ability to challenge his viceroy. By contrast, the fears of a return to idolatry were very real. In other words, we must apply the distinction between the politically-motivated prohibitions of works such as those by Cortés and Gómara, for example because they glorified the conquerors at the expense of royal authority, from prohibitions that followed a religious logic. Whilst some of the Franciscan millenarian writers could have been politically controversial for their glorification of Cortés, or their defence of the Indians against economic exploitation, their extreme providentialist interpretation of the conquest and their support for the policy of congregaciones (resettlement) as an aid to evangelisation meant that they did not challenge the colonial status quo in the same way as Las Casas in his radical defence of the Indians as virtually politically autonomous (in 1555 the Franciscan Toribio de Motolinía even wrote against Las Casas for his lack of appreciation of what had been achieved in New Spain through the conquest). Instead, as the initial evangelical hopes were dashed by the growing evidence of native physical and moral decline, missionaries of a later generation like Sahagún or Mendieta were increasingly concerned with the failure of the mission and the hold that the Devil kept on the natives. Sahagún in particular felt that the optimism expressed by Motolinía some forty years earlier that idolatry had been eradicated by urgent mass conversions and simplified teachings was a serious mistake, as he perceived that the natives had mixed up elements from their old religion with the Catholic faith\(^\text{12}\). He might not have shared Philip II’s understanding of how best to deal with the problem, given that he saw his own historical and ethnographic research as a necessary tool to combat idolatry, but both king and friar were guided by the same rigorous religious concern. Hence, when in 1578 Sahagún wrote directly to the king,

\(^{\text{12}}\) On Sahagún’s criticism of Motolinía see J. Bustamante García, “Retórica”, 290-308. The congregaciones were seen by many friars as a means of aiding evangelization through control of the population, but the policy had also an economic logic as it helped structure the native workforce (for example in New Spain displaced Indians often became vagabonds rather than accept a position as macehualas). It became especially important after the epidemics devastated traditional towns and villages (after the 1540s in New Spain for example). For details see E. Roulet, L’évangélisation, pp. 122-130.
naively offering a fresh copy of his work “so that the memorable things from this
New World may not be forgotten”, he was offering a sophisticated tool that the
Council had determined to put aside because the memory of idolatry was in itself
too dangerous. It seems that Philip’s prohibition of Sahagún was in fact prompted
by rival friars working from Mexico, who condemned the project of keeping a
memory of diabolical works of idolatry as an obstacle, rather than as an aid, to
conversion, by the same logic that most Mexican books had been burnt by the early
missionaries —a mistake, thought Sahagún and others. But of course Sahagún
himself was horrified by the persistence of idolatry amongst the natives of New
Spain, despairing of them to the point of seeing the Americas as a mere staging
post towards the more promising China (a perspective of the 1570s very relevant
to understanding the assumptions of Rada and other early missionaries in the
Philippines). Leaving aside the issue of the legitimacy or not of conquering gent-
tiles in order to preach Christianity, this was never a dispute between those who
did not mind about idolatries and those who sought to persecute knowledge about
natives for the sake of empire, but rather one between those who sought to fight
idolatries by creating a tabula rasa of the past, and those who sought to combat
them through knowledge of the native belief system. Hence when issuing the pro-
hibition, Philip II and his Council were first of all responding to a dispute within
the missionary Church, not unlike the papacy when confronted with the rites con-
troversy in the seventeenth century.

The prohibition of 1577 was a momentary panic reaction, although it had some
important secondary effects for other publication projects. As mentioned above,
it prompted Agustí de Zárate to eliminate three whole chapters on native religion
for the new edition of his influential Descubrimiento y Conquista del Perú (origin-
ally from 1555), in what I believe was in effect a process of self-censorship char-
acteristic of this cautious royal officer, one that also affected the question of the
political legitimacy of the Incas. The 1577 prohibition also generated an obvious

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13 The criticisms of Sahagún and his works are discussed by L. NICOLAU D’OLIVER, Fray Bernardino,
pp. 72-73, who identifies Fray Francisco de Ribera as the main culprit. Sahagún was not alone in his
position during these years. We might consider the Dominican Diego Durán, who in 1581 justified
his vast ethno-historical research in a very similar fashion: “They made a big mistake those who at
the beginning, with good zeal but without much prudence, burnt and destroyed all the paintings that
they had about their antiquities, because they left us so much without light, that they idolize in front
of our own eyes, and we do not understand them when they dance, or are in the market, or bathe, or
when they sing their songs lamenting their old gods and lords, or when eating and feasting; and when
we look closely, in all these things there is idolatry and superstition…”, D. Durán, Historia, II, 16.

14 The climate would change during the reign of Philip III: consider the publication of the works
by Antonio de Herrera, Juan de Torquemada and Inca Garcilaso.

15 Besides M. BATAILLON, “Zárate ou Lozano”, see also P. DUVIOLS, “La Historia del descubrimiento”,
on how Zárate modified his account of the Incas to make it fit with the historiographical thesis on
Inca tyranny sponsored in the 1570s by Viceroy Francisco de Toledo. More recently, see also the intro-
ductive material by F. PEASE and T. HAMPE MARTÍNEZ in A. de ZÁRATE, Historia del Descubrimiento,
who offer a good summary and biographical sketch. Zárate was a well-connected man and always
eager to pre-empt criticisms, for example he also changed the details about the rebellion of Gonzalo
Pizarro against Viceroy Núñez Vela in order to distance himself from any anti-royalist sentiment. The
lack of royal enthusiasm for publicising the antiquarian section of the magnificent research into the natural history of New Spain just completed by Francisco Hernández, who for pre-Hispanic history had followed Franciscan sources. Yet ten years later the atmosphere had started to change, as royal authority had been strengthened in both Mexico and Peru, whilst the missionary orders had begun to chart a new strategy for dealing with the persistence of native idolatry, replacing the millenarian expectations of the first generation with a policy of educational reform that amounted to a more intensive form of acculturation, a policy defined in a number of provincial Councils in Lima (1581) and Mexico (1585). Significantly, in 1590 a grand synthesis of the natural and moral history of the New World was produced by the Jesuit Acosta in Spanish, making available to a wide public an account of the customs and religion of ancient Mexico and ancient Peru, with full royal approval 16.

It is likely that Acosta’s synthetic vision and powerful rationalisation of cultural diversity, combined with his harsh theological tone when dealing with the problem of idolatry and the Devil, made the circulation of the Historia Natural y Moral de las Indias less dangerous than the more detailed ethnographic work of the Franciscans in New Spain. But this was not one isolated exception. It is also significant that the extensive treatment of Indian religion and customs by Jerónimo Román in 1575 was not suppressed either, and passed on intact to the new edition of 1595 (including his argument that the decision to burn the pictographic books of the Mexicans had created an obstacle rather than an aid to their conversion). Here Baudot was somewhat unclear in his discussion of a consulta of the Council of the Indies of September 1575 that registered a complaint about two of the chapters of the República de las Indias Occidentales because they “treat of many things that go against the honour of the first conquerors, and raises doubts about lordship [i.e. the Spanish dominion], and other indecent things”17. Although the Council went on to insist that such books had to be examined before publication, this

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16 The license was issued by Juan Vázquez in the name of the king in El Escorial on 24 May 1589, and made reference of the fact that the book had been examined in accordance to the “pregmática por nos últimamente hecha sobre la impresión de los dichos libros”. It had been previously approved by the Jesuit provincial Gonzalo Dávila, and for the Church by fray Luis de León. Acosta also obtained approval from the king to dedicate the book to the infanta Isabel Clara Eugenia (having already dedicated his Latin De Procuranda Indorum Salute to him).

17 “Trata muchas cosas en deshonor de los primeros conquistadores, y poniendo duda en el señorío, y otras cosas indecentes…”, Archivo General de Indias, Indiferente General, n. 738, 1575, consulta of September 1575, quoted in G. BAUDOT, Utopia, p. 484. Here “cosas indecentes” does not refer to sexual or religious morality but rather to social decorum, in relation to the aristocratic honour of the Spanish conquerors whose appalling behaviour was being described. For an earlier discussion see J. FRIEDE, “La censura Española”, 61-63, still valuable despite some errors concerning Román’s biography.
example does not belong to the same category as the prohibition of Sahagún’s ethnographic research two years later. In the case of the Augustinian’s book, the issues raised at this point had exclusively to do with the criticism of the morality and rights of the conquest, a theme that Román had inherited from Las Casas\textsuperscript{18}. In particular, Román had developed a harsh attack on Pizarro’s methods of conquest, for example his duplicitous treatment of Atahualpa\textsuperscript{19}. He also declared that the land justly belonged to the Indians, not to the Spanish. However, in the same sentence, he made clear that his criticism of abuses was perfectly compatible with the policy of Philip II of officially protecting the Indians, following the theological and legal principles declared by the Dominican School of Salamanca: “We see that the Indians, whose land in justice this is, and not ours, are well treated and favoured by their king and natural lord”\textsuperscript{20}. The attack on Francisco Pizarro’s behaviour in Peru could always be represented as linked to an attack on the subsequent rebellion of his brother Gonzalo against royal authority. Most significantly, when Román’s book was eventually (from 1583) censored by the Inquisition, this was done on entirely different grounds, and this section was never expurgated: all the criticisms of colonialist abuse remained in the edition of 1595.

Considering the various examples it might be possible to accuse Philip II of a contradictory policy, but it seems more fruitful to emphasize the complex motivations behind his selective suppression of certain books. As king of Castile he had inherited a policy of secrecy in relation to the circulation of geographical knowledge and maps against the very real threat posed by many European rivals, a policy that made sense for as long as those foreigners lagged behind in their knowledge; hence the systematic cosmography by Juan López de Velasco (1574) was for internal use only (although it would be eventually publicised by Antonio de Herrera in 1601, under Philip III). Philip II was also concerned with supporting the Inquisition and the missionary orders in their struggle against heresy at home and idolatry in the colonies. We might perhaps add that in general he was a conscientious ruler and liked to control information, systematically placing his own needs as monarch (assisted by his Councils) above any idea of a national reading public. He was also suspicious of any international republic of letters, occasionally for political reasons, but mainly because of a very real fear of heresy. However, Philip II did not systematically suppress all ethnographic or even antiquarian works, and in fact he commissioned some, and supported the publication of others.

\textsuperscript{18} G. Baudot does note that the issue here was the legitimacy of pre-Hispanic sovereignty; however, he presents the evidence in the context of illustrating “the deliberate aim to make disappear any writings that referred to Amerindian cultures”, a view which I consider exaggerated. It is possible that the reason why this complaint had no effect was that the book had been previously approved by the Royal Council of Castile, whose jurisdiction was superior to that of the Indies, and where Román probably had sympathizers.

\textsuperscript{19} J. Román, Repúblicas del Mundo, 1595, III, p. 190v. The Pizarro brothers were in fact a national disgrace: “más deshonor ganaron los reyes de España con ellos y sus compañeros, que lo que les interessa de tan grandes reynos”. There was also some criticism of Cortés in relation to his cruel treatment of Cuauhtemoc.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
In 1577 the contentious issue in relation to the ethnography of the American Indians was idolatry within a mission field, not civility outside Europe. But perhaps we need to look beyond Philip II and the circumstances of 1577 in order to assess the impact of the idea of a gentile civilization generated by the missionary enterprise. Is there a wider pattern to explain the restricted dissemination of Spanish ethnographical works throughout the sixteenth century, and in particular those that engaged in a detailed analysis of native history and religion? The issue of heresy, and in particular of a heresy deriving from the theses of Las Casas in the style of Francisco de la Cruz, had a crucial but limited impact\(^{21}\). If we consider all the instances of censorship or of restrictive circulation of works in the period 1550-1600, as we have seen we also need to include control of information relevant to defending the empire against foreign rivals, questions of aristocratic honour and political factionalism, monarchical propaganda seeking to prevent the possibilities of Spanish-criollo (rather than Indian) rebellion against tyranny, and the relative lack of development of a strong market of printed books. What is however absent is a clear indication that a positive presentation of a gentile civilization was seen as dangerous in itself, and thus merited persecution. The condemnatory discourse on gentile idolatry persisted —with some significant variations concerning how to classify certain practices, and about the possible “salvation of the gentiles”— with independence of the presentation of the cultural achievements of those same gentile peoples. This attitude can be exemplified by the observation about the peoples of pre-Hispanic Mexico by the Dominican Diego Durán (writing c.1580) that

\[\ldots \text{whilst in their rites and idolatries they showed blindness and that they had been deceived by the Devil, at least in those things relating to government and social order, subjection and reverence, greatness and authority, courage and strength, I can find no-one who could surpass them, nor in wanting to excel in all things so that the memory of them would last forever}.\]

The justification of conquest of civilized gentiles was of course controversial. In terms of the colonialist debate, we must first of all distinguish those jurists and imperial apologists with a humanistic formation (some of these, like Sepúlveda and Gómara, might be clerics), who held that one could always intervene to

\(^{21}\) Francisco de la Cruz, a Dominican preacher and visionary active in Peru, developed the views of Las Casas in a direction considered heretical by the Inquisition when he argued for a positive valuation of the religiosity of the New World, suggesting among other things that the American natives, who represented the lost tribes of Israel, might have been saved through their implicit faith. He was condemned for this and other radical apocalyptic views by the likes of José de Acosta (who believed that fray Francisco was under demonic influence), and, after a long process, burnt in 1578. See M. Bataillon, “La herejía de fray Francisco de la Cruz”.

\(^{22}\) D. Durán, Historia, I, p. 70 (it is to be noted that the English translation published in 1994 by Doris Heyden contains errors). It was on the basis of Durán’s extensive history of the Mexica following a detailed native chronicle that Acosta composed his influential account of the same subject a few years later, albeit through the version prepared by the Jesuit Juan de Tovar. Durán finished his work in 1581 but seems to have started writing in 1578.
destroy idolatry and prevent major crimes against natural law, as Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa was still arguing in the 1570s, from the canonists and friars trained in neo-scholastic doctrine, whose views concerning just war were much more restrictive. The Dominican Francisco de Vitoria’s authoritative position, that one could not conquer other peoples simply to impose faith or to persecute customary practices contrary to natural law, but only to guarantee the Christian right to preach or to protect Christians against persecution, was on the whole accepted by the Church and by the Monarchy. This meant that from this canonical perspective what was at stake was not whether one could be both an idolater and civilized, but rather whether a particular group was civilized enough to be capable of moral autonomy, or needed to be herded by the Spanish monarchy into true religion. (Another issue was how fairly were the infamous entradas conducted, and how well the colonial authorities exercised their paternal duty to protect — questions of practice rather than principle). There were of course different readings of Vitoria’s positions, some fairly radical like Juan de la Peña’s, a friend of Las Casas. Peña’s university lectures of c.1560-1565 concluded that the only legitimate protectors of natural law and hence persecutors of idolatry were the kings in their own kingdoms, whose tyranny — if they were indeed tyrants — could only be challenged from within each republic; only the defense of innocents, that is, the prevention of crimes against humanity through perverse customs (such as cannibalism or human sacrifice) might justify an external intervention, provided this was proportionate and followed a proper requerimiento. But this last “only” was of great significance, as it served to make all “irrational savages” (as opposed to all barbarians) vulnerable to conquest and enslavement. Whilst Peña made this single exception (one which did not make the war against Mexico just), other interpretations of Vitoria’s principles were openly imperialistic (even Sepúlveda, Peña’s key target, eventually claimed to follow Vitoria), so much so that Las Casas’ radical anti-colonialism was eventually forced to leave the consensus and openly questioned some of Vitoria’s conclusions. But even those who insisted on some temperamental weakness of the American Indians, or on their grievous lack of understanding of natural law, did not deny the natives some clear-cut cultural achievements and a capacity for moral progress, as Acosta exemplified in his great synthesis.

II. — THE CONCEPT OF GENTILE CIVILIZATION

Considering the variety and complexity of the arguments that relied upon an idea of the moral capacities of non-Europeans, the concept of gentile civilization is a crux, as it encapsulates the potential tensions between the languages of

23 For the debate about the American Indians see L. Hanke, All mankind, and A. Pagden, The fall.
24 J. de la Peña, De Bello, pp. 70-84.
25 This position of a moderate appreciation of the moral capacities of the American Indians was more common than rare, and not special to the Spanish. In the 1580s the English would adopt a very similar attitude in Virginia, as exemplified by the work of John White and Thomas Harriot.
Christianity and civilization in early-modern ethnological discourse. As I have argued elsewhere, this tension had long-term implications for European intellectual culture. The contribution by missionaries to this process was crucial, in particular the Jesuit method of cultural accommodation developed by Valignano, Ricci and Nobili, because it required a systematic application of the distinction between religious practices and civil customs. However, by no means were non-Jesuit orders uninvolved in shaping images of gentile civilizations. We could in this respect consider the impact of the ethnographic and ethno-historical work conducted by the Franciscans in the central decades of the sixteenth century in Mexico, especially by friars Andrés de Olmos, Toribio de Benavente (usually known by his Nahuatl name Motolinía, “the poor one”), and Bernardino de Sahagún. Although none of their works was published in the sixteenth century and, as we have seen, some were even suppressed, their impact transcended the Franciscan order and reached a number of lay or humanist writers. Hence Francisco López de Gómara, the most influential of the Spanish historians of the New World, summarized a great deal from Toribio de Motolinía, and his publishing success ensured that after the 1550s the European republic of letters formed an image of pre-Hispanic Mexico indirectly shaped by missionary ethnography. In the 1570s the royal medical doctor and naturalist Francisco Hernández relied largely on Sahagún for his antiquities of Mexico, although again in this case Philip II made sure that they did not get published. Alonso de Zorita, a lawyer of the Audiencia (High Court) of New Spain who in the 1560s worked with viceroy Velasco and the mendicant orders to protect the natives from excessive charges, after returning to Spain wrote an extensive description of New Spain (Relación de la Nueva España) for the Council of the Indies, completed in 1585, where he extensively summarized materials from both Olmos and Motolinía (although he also referred to the account published by Jerónimo Román). Similarly, local criollo historian Diego Muñoz Camargo was aware of the entire Franciscan corpus from Olmos to Gerónimo de Mendieta, personally knew some of the friars, and obviously understood their motivations better than many modern commentators; he referred to their writings as part of a struggle against idolatry in his Descripción de la ciudad y provincia de Tlaxcalla, an extended account in theory based on the 1577 official questionnaire (Camargo offered a personal copy to Philip II in 1585, on the occasion of an embassy of native representatives of Tlaxcalla to Spain).

The Franciscans also influenced writers from other mendicant orders. The Dominican Las Casas, in particular, relied on writers like Olmos for his understanding of Mexican culture, and it was through him that the originally Franciscan materials reached the Augustinian Jerónimo Román. It is not a coincidence that Román also had access to Augustinian writings on China, because the intellectual path linking Mexico to the Philippine Islands and then China clearly followed the missionary path of the Spanish orders. The Philippines were colonised in the 1560s.

26 J.-P. Rubiés, “New Worlds”. The importance of this distinction has often been echoed; see for example L. Millones Figueroa, Pedro de Cieza de León; E. Van Den Boogaart, Civil and corrupt Asia; N. Standaert, The interweaving.
and 1570s from Mexico and for many years belonged to its jurisdiction, both in secular and ecclesiastical matters (hence for example the first Bishop of Manila Domingo de Salazar participated in the Third Council of Mexico, albeit not physically present). The Augustinians in particular, who had an important presence in New Spain (although they wrote less ethnography than the Franciscans and Dominicans), were granted a leading role in the Pacific colony, and men like Martín de Rada transferred to the so-called “Indias” of the Philippines and to China missionary debates and concerns that had been shaped in America in the previous decades, from the justification of conquest according to the principles of Vitoria to the denunciation of abuses of the natives. Hence, given that the mendicant historiography of ancient Mexico reached a peak in the same decades, it is not surprising that Spanish Augustinians like Rada, Román and Mendoza made a very important contribution to the largely positive image of China that emerged in Europe in the late sixteenth century, although in treating the topic they had been preceded by the Portuguese writers João de Barros and Gaspar da Cruz. The Augustinians’ image of a flourishing gentile civilization characterized by a remarkable degree of economic prosperity, technological accomplishments, the widespread use of letters and a prudent system of centralized and legalistic government would be developed and modified in subsequent centuries, but not fundamentally challenged until the debates of the mature Enlightenment.

The influential history by Juan González de Mendoza, who had been detained in Mexico in 1581 on his way to China as Philip II’s ambassador by an unsympathetic viceroy (influenced by the colonial faction that wanted to conquer the mighty kingdom), can serve as an example of how the distinction between civilization and gentilism operated at the most fundamental levels of method and interpretation. Mendoza divided his ethno-historical synthesis around three categories, “natural” (including geography and economy), “supernatural” (encompassing religion and some religious customs) and “moral and political” (that is, civil customs and politics). Of course there was a potential issue here in the classification of customs as either civil or religious — could the distinction be applied neatly? Interestingly, in proposing the division of matter along these lines, Mendoza seems to anticipate the method of accommodation of civil customs and non-religious moral doctrines developed by the Jesuits Ricci and Nobilia a few years later. Arguably, the root distinction was already present in the Spanish debate about the civil rights of the American Indians, and in particular in Las Casas’ interpretation of the Thomist

27 The Spanish intellectual appropriation of China began with Bernardino de Escalante, who in 1577 published in Seville a work of synthesis, Discurso de la navegación que los portugueses hacen a los reinos y provincios del Oriente, y de las noticias que se tienen de las grandes del reino de la China, primarily based on the accounts by Barros and Cruz. It was subsequently used by both Mendoza and Román. For the Iberian image of China in this period see R. M. Loureiro, Fidalgos and M. Ollé, La invención de China.

28 The new viceroy who stopped the embassy was the Count of Coruña, but he sought the advice of the former Governor of the Philippines, Francisco de Sande, a leading proponent of a military conquest. Mendoza had previously spent most of his youth in the Augustinian monastery of Mexico City, from where he followed with interest Spain’s Pacific enterprise.
principle of the autonomy of the rational as natural. By contrast, it was another Jesuit working in the American setting, Acosta, who offered an alternative historiographic model that avoided declaring the theological issue in advance by simply considering two categories, “natural” and “moral” history — the latter including both the religious and the civil. Not all efforts to handle the two sides of the equation — morality as reason and morality as faith — were equally coherent. In dividing his various “republics”, Román also struggled with the issue, and his solutions were messy. In 1575 he applied a logical division between “those who know God” (ancient Jews and all Christians, ancient and modern) and those who “follow the Devil” (the ancient gentiles and their modern equivalents, from the American Indians to the Muslim infidels). Interestingly, the volume dealing with the Hebrew and Christian “republics” was dominated by religious themes — so much so that the discussion of modern European monarchies was subsumed within a history of the Church, and only a motley collection of odd modern republics (such as the Scandinavian “republic of the north”, Venice, Genoa, England or Switzerland) were described outside this ecclesiastical frame of reference. By contrast, the “gentile republic” not only dealt with the question of idolatry and the Devil, but also offered a detailed and systematic image of classical civilization, one clearly influenced by the antiquarian scholarship of humanists like Flavio Biondo and Polydore Vergil. This in turn served as model for a discussion of Mexico and Peru, suggesting a comparison that fitted perfectly with the materials inherited from Las Casas. However, when in 1595 two volumes became three, Román dissolved his already fragile theological logic and applied a secondary chronological principle, so that the first volume included the Hebrew and Christian republics, the second was restricted to the ancient “republic” of the gentiles, and all “modern” republics, Christian European or not, were gathered in the third volume (hence pre-Hispanic Mexico, previously presented after classical Rome, now was placed next to China). It seems likely that the practical requirements associated with the inclusion of new materials on China, Ethiopia and Tartary in the final volume determined this course. In any case, Román’s compilation grew erratically, taking as starting point an antiquarian passion for the ancient world, and then evolving towards a compilation of materials for a religious history of mankind. It lacked the comprehensiveness and systematicity that would characterize, for example, the Relazione Universali by Giovanni Botero (1591-1596).

Spanish images of China in the 1570s and 1580s were coloured by the controversial and much-debated project to conquer the kingdom from the Philippines, against the thesis that evangelisation had to be peaceful as a matter of principle.

29 In his prologue of 1575 Román explained that he had a separate work on “monarchies”, thus justifying the emphasis on religion of the seven books of his “republica Christiana”. He also explained his choice of the term “republic” as referring to the “various things”, divine and human, that are necessary to the cosa pública, and claimed originality in his method, distancing himself from his first model, Aulus Gellius, who dealt with these varied matters in a less systematic manner. What is most obviously incoherent is that Román published the smaller Christian republics, with their focus in government, almost as an appendix to the history of the Church, rather than alongside the monarchies, as for example Botero would do.
but also on practical grounds.\textsuperscript{30} It was a fascinating debate, which lasted almost two decades, about what approach would secure the grounds for evangelisation (although economic considerations were of course also a leading concern, especially of those laymen inclined to the idea of conquest). The discussion of what was legitimate was largely conducted on the basis of late interpretations of the authoritative theses of Francisco de Vitoria concerning just conquest, that is, as a direct extension of the fierce debate that had previously raged concerning the American conquests. Some churchmen in Manila, like the Dominican bishop Domingo Salazar and especially the Jesuit Alonso Sánchez who had at some point convinced him, sought to interpret Vitoria’s restrictive definitions of just war (to support the rights to travel and preach freely) in such generous ways that the Salamanca theologian, had he been still alive, would have been horrified. In order to do so they needed to emphasize Chinese hostility to foreigners, making diplomacy almost impossible, but also their military weakness.\textsuperscript{31} The work of Mendoza, by contrast, can be interpreted as an intervention in this debate in which his sources are almost invariably given a positive spin so as to strengthen the party of peaceful missionary penetration.\textsuperscript{32} We must however be careful not to assume too close an identity between sinophilia and pacifism, or belief in the method of accommodation. There were arguments against an exaggerated positive view of China from actors determined to question the project of conquest, such as the Jesuit Acosta, whose intervention against the Philippine project led by Alonso Sánchez was especially important.\textsuperscript{33} There were generally positive views of China—a country as large as the whole of Europe—from writers who, like Martín de Rada, were at least initially open to the idea of conquest, through a lax interpretation of Vitoria’s arguments. Notably, there were differences of opinion within each of the orders (Augustinians and Jesuits in particular); nor was it the case that the idea of conquest was universal amongst the Spanish in the Philippines, as opposed to its denial by the Portuguese in Macau or Melaka.

\textsuperscript{30} For a summary of the Spanish debate on the conquest of China see M. Ollé, \textit{La empresa}.

\textsuperscript{31} A perfect example of how the idea of conquest was sustained by a negative misrepresentation of China is given by the long letter and relation to Philip II written by Governor Francisco de Sande in June 1576 (Archivo General de Indias, Seville, Filipinas, 6, 28). Alonso Sánchez continued in the same vein a decade later—see for example the “Relación de las cosas particulares de la China” prepared for Philip II in the spring of 1588 (Biblioteca Nacional, Madrid, 287, 198-226), at a time when, closely supervised by José de Acosta, he had been forbidden by General Acquaviva to openly defend the conquest of China. M. Ollé, \textit{La empresa}, pp. 209-215 offers a contextual analysis of this text as part of the debates of the junta that discussed the Philippines and China, leading to a dispute between Sánchez and the Dominican Juan Volante that the Jesuit chronicler Francisco Colín compared to the famous debate of 1550 between Las Casas and Sepúlveda.

\textsuperscript{32} D. F. Lach, \textit{Asia}, I, 742-751, offers a good discussion of Mendoza as editor.

\textsuperscript{33} The existence of Castilian critics of the conquest in various religious orders, and the differences between Acosta and Sánchez within the Spanish Society, make it necessary to qualify the idea of a “Castilian party” within the Catholic Monarchy of the 1580s systematically opposed to the “Portuguese” Jesuits and their Roman universalism. For an account along these lines see J. Martínez Millán, “La trasformazione”. Although the tensions between Castilians, Portuguese and Aragonese certainly existed, the debate also took place within Castile. The case of Sánchez in any case must be analyzed as quite peculiar.
When was the idea of a gentile civilization first perceived as problematic, and why? My argument is that ideas are not problematic in themselves, but only in certain contexts of socio-cultural interaction. The rites controversy is an example of this—it was the need of missionaries to develop a strategy of peaceful penetration that prompted a theologically risky policy of selective cultural accommodation, yet the political context within the missionary movement, in particular rivalries between orders and nations, also meant that opposition to the policy would emerge and find support. There were in fact a number of common European intellectual strategies to negotiate the relationship between the principles of Christianity and Civilization. Although individual positions could be quite nuanced, we may distinguish two broad theological tendencies, Augustinian and Stoic-Platonic. Generally speaking, adherents of the former emphasized human fallibility and the absolute need for a particular form of faith for salvation (since there was no salvation outside the Church), whilst the latter were readier to accept that reason could naturally reach an understanding of God and his Law, faith could be implicit, and therefore the often admirable non-European civilizations should be engaged at a rational and moral level, for example through the policy of cultural accommodation. In the light of humanistic influences in the education of the missionary elites, it was inevitable that in assessing the rationality of the more sophisticated exotic cultures an antiquarian dimension would soon emerge, by which the civilizations of Mexico, Peru, India, China and Japan could be compared to ancient Greece and Rome. The contribution of Las Casas must be interpreted as part of the debate on the legitimate policy of the kings of Castile towards the American Indians, but his *Apologética Historia* also signified an antiquarian turn within the Neo-Thomist tradition of natural law. Therefore, the legitimate sphere of rational and moral autonomy defined in abstract terms by the scholastic tradition could now be demonstrated to apply to the peoples of Mexico and Peru (no less than to the inhabitants of the ancient Roman empire) by the tools of the humanist antiquarian. Las Casas’ strategy had the advantage that it built on Vitoria’s authoritative position, although in fact, politically, it went beyond the self-interested royal paternalism of the Castilian Crown.

An antiquarian dimension was also crucial to Jerónimo Román, who as we noted inherited the *Apologética Historia* by Las Casas. However, by the time he was writing the model by which the urbanized American Indians were found to be equal to the civilized gentiles of the European past, and the use of force to preach Christianity had been thoroughly questioned, was under strain. Few dared openly...
to challenge the narrow limits imposed by Vitoria and his followers in Salamanca to the legitimacy of conquest, and in that respect the net effect of the debate between Las Casas and Sepúlveda (which culminated a series of official discussions that had started as early as 1512) had been to force the imperialist camp to accept this. The Dominicans had defined the theological and legal terms of what had now become a quasi-official Crown position. However, as the Chinese project proposed from the Philippines soon demonstrated, those who desired conquests still found room to maneuver. In the heated debates of the 1570s and 1580s it became increasingly necessary to do what Las Casas had first attempted some thirty years later, that is, to offer an empirical application of this official position. It was at the same time necessary to moderate its radical edges, those that could challenge the legitimacy of the Spanish empire altogether, for example by adopting a more Augustinian theology of salvation. This was precisely the need met by José de Acosta’s synthesis, and a fact which may explain why it was published at a time of restrictions. Acosta defended the need to distinguished between savage barbarians and civilized barbarians whilst defending the superiority not only of Christianity, but also of European civility. He also resolved some of the doubts about the early history of mankind that the naturalist and antiquarian dimensions could raise, for example by tackling the origins of the American Indians as a natural historian. Acosta thus defined a hierarchy of civilizations firmly contained within a Biblical narrative of origins.

However, the assumption that the most civilized would also be most amenable to conversion —as had happened in the empire of ancient Rome from the times of Augustus to those of Constantine— was challenged by missionary practice, especially in Asia: the psychological strategy to displace hopes towards the next land ended in China, the most impressive gentile kingdom but also the most difficult to penetrate. Throughout the 1580s Alessandro Valignano defined a hierarchy of civilizations which was a mirror image of Acosta’s contemporary hierarchy of barbarism: the difference was that when Acosta emphasized European superiority over even the most civilized of the gentiles, Valignano wrote to support a generous approach to Chinese culture. It was in this context that, making a momentous strategic choice, Matteo Ricci declared Confucianism to be a rational system of civil morality, in its original version based on a non-idolatrous natural theism, hence compatible with Christianity (although not by itself sufficient for salvation). Through Jesuit efforts, late Ming China became the greatest but also the last chance for the evangelical principle that the most civilized, as the most rational, would embrace Christianity through peaceful means.

None of this, however, was part of the intellectual horizon of Jerónimo Román, or indeed of his sources. For him, China in the East stood like Mexico and Peru in the West as an example of the compatibility of idolatry and civilization. The standard was set not by Christian Europe, but rather by the classical world. Should we conclude that in this discourse there was no tension between civilization and idolatry? Let us then take a closer look at Román’s use of his key ethnographic sources, Las Casas and Rada. My aim here is to measure the distance between the missionary contexts of ethnographic analysis (where a cross-cultural interaction
shaped the production of “historical” knowledge) to the European contexts of reception (where a practical historiography could be transformed into a philosophical and polemical historiography).

III. — JERÓNIMO ROMÁN AND LAS CASAS

In his Apologética Historia Las Casas had systematically compared various American religions and customs with classical examples in order to prove that in Mexico and Peru the well-established fact of idolatry could not be construed as implying any irrationality or incapacity for self-government. His three key theses were that the rational capacity of the Americans was full, despite their timid temperament; that their achievements as a well-ordered society (buena i ordenada policía) often equalled those of the ancient Greeks and Romans, so that in this respect they could only be called barbarians because they lacked letters (although they used pictograms)\(^{37}\); and that idolatry and even human sacrifices could be explained with reference to a natural impulse to worship God. All this was of course meant to support his thesis that the only correct method for preaching Christianity is entirely non-violent, based on an idea of complete Indian self-determination.

Jerónimo Román did not simply mine Las Casas for information, when summarizing his extensive descriptions he also accepted to a large extent his theses. Because Román had discussed the ancient republic of the gentiles separately, he did not maintain the systematic comparative framework used by Las Casas in the Apologética, who section by section proved that both Mexicans and Incas met all the Aristotelian criteria of civility, that is, the existence of urban life, agriculture, artisans, professional armies, trade, a religious cult with temples and priests, a government that administered justice, and a strict moral education. In this respect, Román’s coverage was selective, and his intentions were obviously less polemical. Yet the comparability with ancient Greece and Rome, the key to the attempt by Las Casas to circumscribe the negative connotations of the image of the Indians as barbarians, remained implicit in his extracts, and was occasionally made explicit.

\(^{37}\) On Las Casas’ careful discussion of the notion of barbarism (in his arguments against Sepúlveda and at the end of the Apologética) see A. Pagden, The fall, pp. 123-145. In the Apologética (ch. 264-267 and epilogue) Las Casas agreed that the Indians were barbarians in the sense that they were foreign strangers, but of course from their own perspective the Europeans were equally barbarians. He rejected that the Indians were in any way savage or incapable of an ordered life, and emphasized that, after the trauma of the Spanish conquest, the standards of civility had declined, hence the present realities of New Spain and Peru offered a misleading image of Indian capacities. He conceded that Mexican pictograms were not entirely equivalent to European letters (an idea Acosta would later develop), although he referred to the English at the time of Bede as an example of how once Europeans had not been any different; Finally, and interestingly, he also noted that the notion of oriental despotism from Aristotle’s Politics could also apply to the civilized American Indians, because due to their humble nature they obeyed their kings in all things and accepted great impositions: but as Aristotle had made clear, this was no ordinary tyranny, but a legitimate form of voluntary subjection to royal power suited to a particular national temperament.
Román also adopted the thesis by Las Casas that idolatry was natural, because men’s religious impulse was also natural. In his own words, “we men naturally are inclined to worship God, even when we do not know who he is”; hence all the Indian nations, with different degrees of sophistication, “knew God and worshipped him, even if they did not know who he was”\(^\text{38}\). From this perspective, the worship of creatures (as opposed to the creator) was a deviation instigated by the Devil, but preferable to no worship at all: in the case of the American Indians, it proved that the basic desire to seek God was powerful and could be considered a virtue when properly directed by the Church. The less civilized peoples of the Caribbean region (Arawaks and Caribs) had no temples or formalized worship, but sought favors from idols, and in their minds “knew a true God who was immortal and invisible and ruled in Heaven”, although they mixed this truth with many errors (for example, this supreme God had a mother); by contrast, the peoples of the mainland worshipped many deities of different kinds through elaborate rituals and priesthoods, although they understood the Sun to be the principal deity. The more civilized, in other words, were the more idolatrous, because they developed their religious impulse according to a higher understanding of things, yet without the true light. It made sense therefore that the particular war God of the Mexica, \text{Uchihibuchitl} [Hutchilopochtli], was both a civilizing ruler who had made laws and built a city over water, and a man who, like the ancient Roman emperor Caligula, had instituted the worship of his own person, in this case with human sacrifices\(^\text{39}\). Hence Román faithfully adopted Las Casas’ valuation that civilization and idolatry, far from being incompatible, should be expected to come together in the absence of true doctrine, although he also described native religion as “superstitious” (religión supersticiosa), and made clear that the human sacrifices to demons were horrendous (casas horrendas y cruels). It had never been the aim of Las Casas to deny this demonic element, but rather to rationalize the descent into idolatry through fear and ignorance from what he considered to have been a state of primitive monotheism\(^\text{40}\). Román was also sympathetic to Las Casas’ theses that the gospel had been preached in Yucatán in ancient times, and copied his account of how the god of Cholula Quetzalcoatl was originally an extremely virtuous lord and teacher of arts, a white man of foreign origin with a black beard who had refused to accept human sacrifices and prophesied the arrival of the “his brothers” the Spanish\(^\text{41}\). In this way Román also transmitted the missionary mythology of the early Franciscans.

\(^{38}\) The 1595 edition (III, f° 127r°) maintained the same expressions: “naturalmente los hombres nos inclinamos a reverenciar a Dios, aunque no sepamos qual sea… conocían a Dios y le reverenciavan, aunque no conocían qual fuese”.


\(^{40}\) B. de Las Casas, Apologética, ch. 121.

\(^{41}\) Ibid., ch.122. Compare to J. Román, Republicas del Mundo, 1595, III, f°s 128v°-129v°.
All this had helped Las Casas in his defence of the Indians, but could be theologically contentious. In particular, an overly naturalistic explanation of idolatry could diminish its sinfulness (unless one were to naturalize human sinfulness to the extreme degree that only the Protestant doctrine of election made possible—hence Calvinists would also argue for the pervasive force of idolatry in the history of mankind). In general Catholic theologians (followed by Las Casas) tended to prefer the thesis that men had fallen into idolatry from an original primitive monotheism, usually tempted by the Devil, in this way making rational monotheism the natural state. From these premises, it is not surprising that a passage by Román emphasizing that idolatry was a natural impulse was suppressed by the Inquisition, although he was allowed to maintain that the impulse to search for God was natural. Las Casas’ formulations, which were the basis for Román’s discussion of idolatry, were a little more nuanced, since in his account it was religious belief, rather than idolatry, that constituted the original natural impulse, although at some point he also argued that over the millennia idolatry, in effect a corruption of that natural impulse, had become second nature to many people.

By contrast, there was nothing problematic with the positive presentation of the cultural achievements of those idolaters. Here for example Las Casas had offered a legal code of Mexico, praising its prudence and asserting that it was properly directed at those ills that would cause harm to the republic, rather than those private vices that only affected individuals. The success of these laws was manifest in the urban and social prosperity of New Spain when the Spanish arrived. The conclusion was that the Mexican laws were equal or superior to the best in ancient Greece (which, despite their virtues, could be criticised on some grounds). Jerónimo Román here again followed Las Casas very closely, emphatically proclaiming that

42 B. de Las Casas, *Apologética*, ch. 73, 74 (1992, pp. 640-650). In particular, Las Casas followed Aristotle’s ethics in arguing that habits created by custom generate natural inclinations; in that respect, the natural tendency to worship God had been historically corrupted (with help from the Devil) over thousands of years into a natural inclination to idolatry (pp. 648-649). It was this passage that led Román to his own controversial formulation in 1575 (vol. II, book 1, f° 1-2). The new edition of 1595 (vol. II, f° 1r-5v) no longer claimed in a simple sentence that idolatry was natural, but continued to argue that whilst all men rationally tended to believe in a supreme being, and naturally worshipped that which was superior, they were led by sin to ignore God (unless God himself enlightened them), and were tempted by the Devil to worship creatures. In a peculiar passage, interpreting the book of *Genesis*, Román attributed the origins of this degeneration to the descendants of Cain before the Flood.

43 *Ibid.*, ch. 214 and 215 (1992, pp. 1356-1365). Las Casas explains (p. 1365) that he obtained this legal code from a friar “who best learnt the Mexican language”, and that it was taken from an authentic native codex. This friar probably was Andrés de Olmos, who together with Motolinía was one of the key ethnographic sources for Las Casas on New Spain. The document has in fact been preserved in a miscellany collected by Ramírez de Fuenleal in Valladolid and is dated 1543, albeit signed by one Fray Andrés de Albiz. It remains unclear whether this Andrés de Albiz or Dalviz was Andrés de Olmos himself by another name, a mere copyist in Valladolid, or a contemporary Dominican friar who also was an expert in Nahuatl, as argued by J. Bustamante García, “Las Fuentes”; however, in ch. 213, where the same topics are discussed, Las Casas declares that he took these materials from the Franciscans. He certainly seems to be following Motolinía in a very similar discussion.

44 B. de Las Casas, *Apologética*, ch. 216 (pp. 1366-1368).
… regarding the good governance of this people, it seems to me that they
were not in any way different from a very good republic, because in all things
they followed a natural order and in all things showed an excellent under-
standing of political life.

Perhaps what both friars found so admirable were the extremely harsh punish-
ments —usually death— meted out for drunkenness, dishonesty, theft, adultery,
homosexuality and incest (by contrast, they thought it was a mark of prudence
that the laws permitted prostitution and concubinage). As for the Incas, they were
even more obviously admirable, with Pachacuti Capac Inga Yupangí in particular
emerging as an extremely wise and effective civilizing hero, a creator of laws and
institutions, religious and secular, comparable, the Augustinian cosmographer
insisted, to the Roman king Numa Pompilius.

As we have seen Román’s attack on the burning of pre-Hispanic books—a pas-
sage where he goes beyond Las Casas—was not censored. In order to criticize
those Dominican missionaries who were keen to burn the books, he appeals to
another Dominican authority, Lope de Barrientos, Bishop of Cuenca, who in his
treatise on divination had written that even though superstitious books are bad in
themselves, they might be needed in order to defend the Church. (The Augustin-
ian’s emphasis on Dominican authorities may be explained because he was fully
aware that the order controlled the Inquisition). So Román would obviously have
been with Sahagún rather than those who sought to limit his research into native
idolatry. However, what seems most original is his argument that those books,
written in an obscure script “in figures and paintings of animals”, presented no
danger because they could not have been understood except by the learned. It
is Román’s idea of privileging the reading interests of an elite of “curious and
learned” men (hombres curiosos y doctos) —that is to say, the intended audience
for the Repúblicas del Mundo—that is distinctive; he does not simply assert that
the native books of the peoples of America could be useful to combat idolatry and
heresy, like Sahagún had, but also claims they could have had a wider intellectual
purpose as a source for antiquarian research, for example because they provided
a chronological sequence for historical events. It is this belief in the legitimacy
of intellectual curiosity, a republic of letters inspired by humanist learning and pro-
tected from scandal by its elitism, that reveals Román’s most original motivation.
Román’s commitment to historical learning can be related to his connections
amongst Spanish antiquarians of his generation who were working under the

45. J. Román, Repúblicas del Mundo, 1575, II, "República de las Indias Occidentales", book 2, ch. 4
(compare B. de Las Casas, Apologética, ch. 214). Also ch. 5 (the Mexican legal code, following Las
Casas, ch. 215).
46. The Maya of Yucatán were also presented in glowing terms as “más políticos que otras [gentes]
de que avemos contado” (J. Román, Repúblicas del Mundo, 1595, III, f° 161r°), because of their sup-
posed monogamy. In addition, Román—always following Las Casas—defended them from the accus-
ation of having practiced sodomy, cannibalism or human sacrifices.
47. Ibid., f° 170r°.
48. Ibid., f° 171r°.
patronage of Philip II, in particular Ambrosio de Morales (1513-1591) and, through him, Jerónimo Zurita (1512-1580) and Esteban de Garibay (1533-1600). By contrast, he was most vulnerable as a theologian, which helps explain why the Inquisition censored his work.

IV. — JERÓNIMO ROMÁN AND RADA’S ACCOUNT OF CHINA

Whilst in his presentation of matters relating to the Indias Occidentales Román was aware of many previous published writers, and could only claim originality in his description of native religion, he felt especially proud to be able to include a systematic description of China largely derived from the account by his fellow Augustinian Martín de Rada (although, at the same time, he remained bitter that the same materials had been used in advance by another member of his order, Juan González de Mendoza). It is true that there already existed a significant tradition of published accounts of China generated by the Portuguese, from the third Década by the humanist historian João de Barros (1563), which incorporated amongst other things the observations of a few captives, to the rather substantial account by the Dominican Gaspar da Cruz (1569-1570), which had been made known in Spanish in the version (amplified with materials from Barros) by Bernardino de Escalante in 1577. Some of the Jesuit materials synthesized by Valignano — including a few important early writings by Ricci — had also been publicised in 1588 by Gian Pietro Maffei in the sixth book of his Latin history of the Eastern missions of the order, but Román shows no sign of knowing these (the only Jesuit writer he mentions is Francis Xavier), nor of course had he read Sande’s more ambitious but rather obscure dialogue De Missione Legatorum of 1590, which was also based on Valignano’s materials. By contrast, Román knew that Rada’s Spanish account incorporated important and original insights by a first-hand educated observer who had some knowledge of Chinese, and that it was thanks to this that he was able to go beyond the less penetrating materials that Gaspar da Cruz had made available. It was a pity therefore that Román found himself in competition with a successful work that had synthesized all the same materials, although he did not give up the hope that his version in some ways was more faithful to Rada’s manuscripts — he was certainly eager to proclaim so.

In general terms, Rada’s relation offered an image of China as a vast, extremely populous and well-cultivated country which obviously was highly urbanized and prudently governed — an image which did not differ from the standard European views of the period. Methodologically, his originality and importance relates to his extensive use of Chinese books, which he combined with his personal observations as envoy to Fukien in 1575 to create a thematically uneven but often detailed and penetrating description. After writing his influential report, the friar continued to work on translating the Chinese books, and there is evidence that Mendoza and probably Román had access to some of these additional papers. Román’s claim that Rada, having seen the 1575 edition of the Repúblicas, wrote his relation of China especially for him, is certainly exaggerated. Both Rada and his lay companion
Miguel de Loarca were obviously exercising an official function when writing their accounts of the journey and of the country visited, under direct instructions from the Governor of the Philippines Guido Lavezares\textsuperscript{49}. It is also clear that Rada and Loarca acquired many books and had them translated by interpreters during their sojourn, sharing information with each other. It can be presumed that Rada, as the educated cleric, was the leading writer (Loarca’s account, which is often more detailed, has survived in many copies but remains unpublished)\textsuperscript{50}. A copy of Rada’s relation — what we might call the standard text used by modern editors — is now kept in Paris, although many others existed\textsuperscript{51}. This appears as a very synthetic document extracted from a longer account\textsuperscript{52}. Román is probably to be trusted when he complains that he had been sent a copy of the relation, that this was taken by Mendoza but never returned, and that he had to obtain further papers directly from Martín de Rada’s brother Juan in Spain. Román, however, by these means seems to have ended up using a more extensive document than the relation known from the manuscripts. He was also eager to be faithful to Rada’s account, proclaiming the extreme reliability of a witness who “does not make up anything”, perhaps aware that Mendoza, in the context of the debate about China at the Spanish court, had been accused of editing his materials poorly\textsuperscript{53}. What is certain is that Román

\textsuperscript{49} Moreover, their expedition to China took place in June-October 1575, whilst a copy of Román’s book, printed the same year, could not have reached Rada in Manila without many months of travel.

\textsuperscript{50} To determine the exact relationship between the two relations will require a more systematic comparison of the relations by Rada and Loarca. For Loarca’s account I have used the version kept in Paris, \textit{BnF}, Fonds espagnol, 579, f\textsuperscript{er} 1-56, compared by the transcription of a copy in Madrid, \textit{Real Academia de la Historia}, Colección Salazar, N IV, f\textsuperscript{er} 113-150. In a future edition the Madrid text should be used as base, since it is more complete; the Paris manuscript has lost some pages and is often less detailed, although some of its readings are more precise and need to be taken account of. It was dedicated to the new Governor of the Philippines Francisco de San de (May 1\textsuperscript{st}, 1576) and might have been a presentation copy that had been revised and summarized.

\textsuperscript{51} Paris, \textit{BnF}, Fonds espagnol, 325, f\textsuperscript{er} 14r-30r (hereafter Rada, \textit{Paris}). This is part of a contemporaneous miscellany that contains a great deal of missionary documents of the 1560s and 70s, including some original letters by Rada that seem to be autographs, but also a great deal of material from Las Casas. The collection probably was assembled in an Augustinian convent in Mexico or perhaps Spain (since it also has matters concerning Andalusia or Aragon). Gregorio Santiago Vela believed that the compiler had been Alonso de Veracruz, an Augustinian friend of Rada mainly based in Mexico, to whom he addressed some important letters. See G. SANTIAGO VELA, \textit{Ensayo}, VI, pp. 454-455. An almost identical copy of Rada’s relation was used by the Augustinian chronicler fray Gaspar de San Agustín in the seventeenth century, who found it in the Convent of San Pablo in Mexico (G. de SAN AGUSTÍN, \textit{Conquistas}, pp. 313-323; p. 362 for the detail of the location of the papers). A third copy of the relation, made in Manila c.1590, was in the possession of Charles Boxer in 1953 and was the basis for his English translation (C. R. BOXER, \textit{South China}, p. lxxxiii).

\textsuperscript{52} Or perhaps a preliminary report, as Charles Boxer suggested. He in fact noted that Rada must have circulated this preliminary report in 1576 before he embarked upon a second expedition to China (C. R. BOXER, \textit{South China}, p. lxxxi). My hypothesis is that during his journey Rada kept a detailed travel account, on his return to Manila in 1576 wrote the synthetic relation we know, and subsequently continued to work on translating Chinese books and expanding the relation, until his untimely death in 1578.

\textsuperscript{53} “Deve se dar mucho crédito a este religioso en lo que dize, así porque en el término del proceder muestra no poner nada de su cabeza, como por ser hombre religiosíssimo, lo qual yo pude probar algún tiempo vieniendo en Toledo juntos, adonde mostró lo que avía de ser en lo venidero” (J. ROMÁN, \textit{Repúlicas del...
was more faithful than Mendoza in transmitting Rada’s critical stance towards the value of Chinese civilization.

Inevitably, in order to assess how he dealt with his materials we need to compare Román’s account with the synthetic Paris manuscript, rather than with his actual sources. From this text, it is apparent that Rada’s chapters follow a logical order, one that in fact defined the “relation” as a Renaissance genre for the methodical description of lands and peoples. Interestingly, in the 1570s the Council of the Indies began to institutionalize a version of the geographical relation as part of its imperial management of information. Rada’s organisation was in this way methodical, according to the following heads: 1. Name; 2. Geographical situation, size, neighbours; 3. Provinces; 4. Cities and towns; 5. Warfare; 6. Demographic calculations based on information on tributes; 7. Antiquity; 8. Physical aspect, dress and social codes of address; 9. Food and eating; 10. Technology, economy and trade, learning; 11. Justice and government; 12. Religion: gods and idols, sacrifices and celebrations; 13. Friars and monks.

In his exposition, Román changed the order of a similar list of topics. After discussing name and situation, he placed the sections dealing with religion (defined as idolatry and superstition) ahead of the chapters dealing with civility, following the same practice he had chosen when dealing with Mexico and Peru; by contrast, he sent the section on Chinese warfare towards the end. He expanded the analysis of justice, and broke down the massive chapter on technology, the economy and learning into various sections. His chapter on marriage and burial customs (not in Rada) was modelled on Gaspar da Cruz or perhaps Mendoza (Cruz, through Escalante’s version, had been Mendoza’s source for this topic). It seems clear that Román was, despite his critical tone, influenced by Mendoza, a better organiser; Román however only acknowledged as complementary sources Cruz, Escalante, and the letters from Francis Xavier.

Some of the themes discussed by Román in his description are of particular interest as revealing the potential complications within the detailed empirical analysis of an idolatrous civilization. The most notorious is the issue of Chinese

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Mundo, 1595, III, ¶ 212v-213r). Román therefore had met Rada personally in Spain, probably in the late 1550s, after Rada’s studies in Paris and Salamanca, but before he left for Mexico (c.1560) and eventually the Philippines (1564-1565). Román also gave him credit for the nobility of his family (his father León de Rada was of the Council of the kingdom of Navarre, and his brother Juan maintained a position there as alcalde of the High Court). By contrast, Román might have been unfair to Mendoza. Modern critics such as C. R. Boxer (South China, p. lxxx) and D. F. Lach (Asia, I, pp. 791-793) have defended Mendoza as editor for example against the accusation of mendacity by Juan Fernández de Velasco, Condestable the Castilla, writing from Naples as early as 1585.

54 I have consulted the Parisian manuscript, as well as Loarca’s similar text, and many other letters by Rada contained in the same miscellany. I am grateful to the librarians of the BnF for allowing me to consult the original, which is superior to the microfilm. This text was published in Revista Aguirraniana, vol. VIII-IX, in 1884-1885. There now exists a digitalized version of many of these texts at a webpage created by the Universitat Pompeu Fabra of Barcelona under the direction of Dolors Folch, although regrettably many of the transcriptions lack punctuation and are poorly edited.

55 See J.-P. Rubiés, “The Spanish contribution”, for a discussion of how this genre was applied by Antonio de Morga to the Philippines.
antiquity. Rada’s great learning and his reading of Chinese books had allowed him to add an antiquarian dimension to the description of the modern kingdom of “Taybin” (Great Ming), and for example he quickly identified the kingdom with Marco Polo’s Cathay. He also distinguished the fabulous lineages of ancient China—including an account of origins and a list of the first emperors—from the “truthful” historical records, starting with king “Vitey” (corresponding to Great Yu, founder of the Hsia), and the continuing with all the great dynasties. However, this kind of historical research also brought up the embarrassing problem that Chinese chronological records implied a beginning before the Flood. Rada had concluded his historical sketch without fully acknowledging the problem:

They say that it is some two-hundred years since they expelled the Tartars, to which if we add the 2,257 years of the kings who ruled before the wall was built [by “Ciucion” of the Ch’in, third century B.C.], it is a wonderful thing to think that this kingdom has lasted so complete and independent of foreign peoples, save for the short time that the Tartars ruled it; if this history is true, they began to have kings shortly after the Flood, and they have been without any intermixture with foreigners since then.

Román however did some calculations and saw the problem: from its foundation to the time he was writing in the late sixteenth century, the Chinese kingdom had lasted 4,123 years, whilst Creation was dated by the Vulgate at 4004 B.C., and the Flood at 2348 B.C. As he saw it, the Chinese were claiming to have started 2567 B.C., 220 years before the Flood. But Román also offered what was probably the first published argument seeking to make compatible Chinese antiquity, as revealed by its own historiography, and the shorter biblical chronology. His answer, inspired by Augustine, was that “years” meant different things in antiquity—not necessarily solar years. It was their power that gave the Chinese (not unlike the ancient Egyptians) the arrogance to claim that they were the most ancient people of the

56 Loarca offered a very similar account, but more detailed, although in the manuscripts that I have been able to consult the names are often spelt differently. It seems very likely that Loarca here as elsewhere relied on the same set of translated materials as Rada. As he explains (Loarca, RAH, N IV, ch. 10, f° 149v°), they bought many books freely in various bookshops and found them cheap (although books about Ming history were more difficult to obtain).

57 Rada in C. R. Boxer, South China, p. 282. Rada counted 2257 years from the first king to the building of the Great Wall (Loarca rounds this figure to 2250), 1641 years from the beginning of the Wall until the “Tartars” [the Mongols] were expelled by the Ming, and two-hundred more years until his mission in 1575. Hence, had he added up, the first king would have been dated 2523BC. In this light, it made no sense for Rada to conclude that “si esta historia es verdadera, no muchos años después del diluvio comenzaron a tener reyes”. Loarca was even more circumspect, not mentioning at all the Bible (Loarca, RAH, N IV, f° 144r°-146r°).

58 J. Román, Repúblicas del Mundo, 1595, III, f° 226v°-227r°. Román’s numbers are not exact. His numbers would suggest that he was writing in the year of 1555. However, if we assume that this passage was written closer to 1590, then he should have calculated 185 years before the Flood.

59 That was also the patristic solution offered for example by Eusebius of Caesarea in his important Chronicle (or Chronicon) to establish the chronological priority of the Bible over any gentile (Egyptian or Babylonian) dates.
world. Román was probably proud of this personal intervention, but some sixty years later the Jesuit Martino Martini’s momentous work, which correlated Chinese chronologies to astronomical data, and hence to solar years, would make this kind of solution untenable.

Another issue that required attention were Chinese technological achievements. Both Gaspar da Cruz and Martín de Rada had recognized the prior invention of the art of printing in China, and Román, like Mendoza, gave prominence to this, although he watered down his enthusiasm with the surprising argument that the technique had also been known by Greeks and Romans in ancient times. Mendoza was also keen to add artillery to this appreciation of Chinese inventions, but Rada, followed by Román, seemed more eager to emphasize its poor quality. Román was nevertheless full of admiration for Chinese porcelain and craftsmanship, and he could not believe that men could make some of the objects he had seen in Lisbon. He interpreted this skill, a worthy source of Chinese pride, in relation to their industriousness: economic necessity had taught the Chinese to excel, although, because they lacked a true knowledge of God, in their dealings they were far from honest.

Román’s view of Chinese books and science was even more qualified, and very much written in open polemic against Mendoza. As a starting point, he was aware of Rada’s discovery of the vast range of subjects treated in Chinese books. Mendoza in fact had publicised the full list of books acquired by Rada, greatly expanding upon the succinct account offered in the friar’s brief relation. However, Román asserted that the Chinese lacked “true letters”, or knowledge of the liberal arts as understood in Europe. The negative comparison of the thousands of Chinese characters, “one for each thing”, with the much more economical European alphabet, clearly paralleled Acosta’s contemporary discussion of the same topic, in which this particular criterion—the abstraction of its system of writing—helped define European civility as superior to the Chinese. As for the particular contents of Chinese science, Román declared that it was all “without foundations or principles” (sin fundamento ni principios). For this harsh judgment he took his lead from a very similar passage by Rada, who had been especially scathing about Chinese mathematics and geometry. Obviously here Román, eager to correct Mendoza’s

60 J. González de Mendoza, Historia, pp. 128-130.
61 Rada had simply asserted that “La letra es la más bárbara y difícil que se ha descubierto, porque más son caracteres que letras, que para cada palabra o cosa tienen letra diferente, de manera que aunque uno conozca diez mil letras, no sabrá leer todas las cosas…” (Paris, f. 28r°). Cruz had noted very much the same thing, but also saw the advantages in a system of writing that could be understood by people speaking different tongues. It is not clear that Acosta influenced Román. By 1595 Román had probably read J. de Acosta’s Historia Natural y moral de las Indias (Seville, 1590). However, the chapter on China seems to have been written c.1590, since he added 25 years to Rada’s calculations about the age of the Chinese monarchy.
62 J. Román, Repúblicas del Mundo, 1595, III, f. 223v°.
63 “Except medicine, where they know as herbalists by experience the virtues of plants and have them drawn as we do in the book of Dioscorides, in all their other sciences there is nothing valuable [no hay que echar mano], since they have nothing more than the smell or shadow of the substance [que no tienen más del olor o nombre dello]. For they do not know anything of geometry, nor do they have
interpretation of the same sources, was not following the Lascasian principle by which the culture of civilized gentiles was seen in the best possible light, in almost all respects as good as the ancient Greek and Roman. Although Román respected the fact that in China men of letters were educated by the government, he also considered that Chinese learning was not properly philosophical. That is, it included empirical knowledge (such as botany), legal studies and a system of writing, but its physics was limited to some knowledge of astronomy, whilst the Aristotelian framework that defined the European system of higher scientific learning, and which the friar took to be of universal validity, was entirely absent. This was a criterion that the Jesuits would continue to emphasize in the seventeenth century.

By contrast, here agreeing with Vignano and Mendoza, Román presented the authoritarian but legalistic system of government of China as its best feature: rigour and rectitude in the administration of justice was something that other republics—meaning those of Europe—could learn from\(^4\). The observance of good laws not only helped the remarkable conservación of the state (“this republic has a rigorous government with which it preserves itself”), but the prohibition of vagabonds, punishment for indolence and respect for private property also created a healthy habit of work amongst the common people\(^5\). Moreover, the prohibition to travel abroad meant that the people multiplied. Hence the remarkable economic prosperity of China had political causes. The reverse was also true: an abundance of people facilitated a lower fiscal pressure, and enabled the state to afford many civil servants. These loytas (here adopting a term used by Cruz and Mendoza for lao-t’ai, mandarin officials, over Rada’s mandadores) were like cavalleros or hidalgos, held in huge respect, but did not form a titled nobility: they obtained their position through service to the state, in particular by cultivating letters, and promotion was meritocratic\(^6\). Moreover, they did not administer an independent territorial jurisdiction like the aristocracy of Europe\(^7\). In these admiring passages, Román was

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sources to Boxer’s South China, pp. 295-296) according to the Paris text (f. 28r\(^o\)). Earlier Rada had written that the Chinese have a compass-needle (aguja de marcar) which was a little different from those used in Europe, so with Boxer here I interpret ni tienen compás—all used by Román—to mean that they lack compass-dividers.

\(^4\) J. Román, Repúblicas del Mundo, 1595, III, f. 231\(^r\): “Lo mejor que tiene la China y de que se pueden aprovechar las otras repúblicas es de la rectitud que ay en guardar justicia”.

\(^5\) Román’s emphasis on lack of poverty is in contrast with Rada’s judgment that “most of the people are poor”, by which he meant not that the workers had nothing, but that they obtained relatively little for their efforts. He also wrote about seeing many beggars and the lack of a fully monetarized economy, points omitted by Román.

\(^6\) However, Román also believed that in China only men of noble origin studied letters, and compared that practice with the prevailing principle in the modern European system of education, where some of the best students were from the humblest social backgrounds (J. Román, Repúblicas del Mundo, 1595, III, f. 224\(^r\)).

\(^7\) J. Román, Repúblicas del Mundo, 1595, III, f. 227\(^v\): “La potencia del rey de la China necesariamente ha de ser grande, porque no hay hombre que en el reyno sea señor de una almena, ni vasallo, ni imperio, ni jurisdicción de un palmo de tierra”.

or use compass-dividers [ni tienen compás ni usan de él], nor can they reckon beyond simple addition, subtraction and multiplication. They think that the sun and the moon are human, that the sky is flat, and that the earth is not round”. I have modified Boxer’s translation (C. R. Boxer, South China, pp. 295-296) according to the Paris text (f. 28r\(^o\)). Earlier Rada had written that the Chinese have a compass-needle (aguja de marcar) which was a little different from those used in Europe, so with Boxer here I interpret ni tienen compás—all used by Román—to mean that they lack compass-dividers.
expanding on Rada’s figures for population and tributes, as well as his observation that there was no feudalism in China (“there are no lords of vassals, for everybody is directly subject to the king”), in order to advance the image of a benevolent Chinese despotism not dissimilar to what Giovanni Botero had recently analysed in his *Relationi Universalis*. What was admirable was the concentration of jurisdictions under state authority, rather than the more extreme royal monopoly over the rents of the land found in many oriental monarchies, which Botero had in fact denounced as pernicious. Román made it clear that the Chinese were not heavily taxed and enjoyed full control of their property.

Whilst Román’s assessment of Chinese civility combined very positive and rather negative comments, his views on their religion were entirely negative, and can be classified as more Augustinian than Lascasian. Following Rada but also taking elements from Gaspar da Cruz, the Chinese were described as essentially superstitious and idolatrous, like the ancient Romans. Their ideas of God were similar to the ancient gentile hierarchy of divinized men, intermediary idols, and a superior providential principle, Heaven. However, taking a very different line from Matteo Ricci, that high principle was not a valid starting point for a natural monotheism: the Chinese do not know in particular who is the true God, that is, the creator God, “autor y principio”. Román’s analysis of these beliefs was rather general, and only identified particular sects when discussing monks and hermits. The founder of their religion Buddha, “Siquiag”, he identified as coming from Syria rather than India, on the basis that “some of the things they have show that they learnt from our people”. Román was here embracing a common diffusionist assumption that the Jesuit Kircher would later develop with more detailed information.

Perhaps the most revealing passage relates to the fact that the Chinese do not sacrifice men, not because they embrace a rational religion, but rather because the Devil has them under full control, and therefore does not need to engage them in such cruel rituals. This rather uncharitable interpretation seems to be a reverse application of Las Casas’ argument that, however misguided, the peoples of New Spain were showing their extreme religiosity—a kind of virtue—in their human sacrifices. Román’s Chinese in contrast, albeit equally idolatrous, were not religious enough:

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68 Román did not however appeal to Aristotle’s concept of despotism as a distinct type of monarchy. For an analysis of the relationship between political theory and exotic ethnography in the evolution of the concept of oriental despotism in this period, including a detailed discussion of Botero’s views, see J.-P. Rubiés, “Oriental despotism”.


70 Ibid., f° 214v: “tienen por supremo Dios al cielo”.

71 Ibid., f° 215r: “Ningún conocimiento tienen de Dios verdadero, y si algo hay es rastreando, y así dicen que de lo alto dependen todas las cosas criadas y la conservación y gobierno de ellas, sin saber decir en particular quién sea el autor y principio”.

72 Ibid., f° 216r.

73 Ibid., f° 215v: “Como el demonio los tiene ganados, no cura de ocuparlos en los sacrificios de hombres ni otras cosas cruales de que usaron otro tiempo diversas gentes”.

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This people have very little care of the things of religion, as can be seen by their lack of a great priest or festivals dedicated to a principal idol, nor does the state spend money in any of these things.

What the Jesuits would later take as a positive sign of Confucian rationality that accorded with their good opinion of Chinese civility, was here used as further evidence of the imperfection of Chinese culture.

Román was again distancing himself from Mendoza’s attitude, who despite denouncing the lies and absurdities (patrañas) of Buddhist beliefs, had also seen much that was good, and (like Gaspar da Cruz) interpreted the signs of limited respect for their gods as evidence of widespread rationality, and a clear indication that the Chinese would readily convert to the truth of the gospel: “And this will be made much easier because they are all men of good understanding, docile, and willing to subject themselves to reason.” Mendoza even argued that Christianity must have been preached in China by Saint Thomas in the past, in the same way as it was widely understood to have reached India. In assuming that rationality was incompatible with idolatry and that preaching therefore would work easily, Mendoza was closer to the Dominican Cruz than to the Augustinian Rada. What is less clear is the extent to which a more negative perspective about Chinese religion was conditioned by the debate about the conquest of the kingdom.

Perhaps we need to assess in some more detail the importance of Rada’s ambivalence towards the idea of conquest. Acting to some extent as a spy, in his relation he had noted that despite the large numbers of Chinese soldiers, many were poorly armed, and the kingdom relied on stone walls and fortifications for defence. However, it seems likely that the embassy of 1575 encouraged Rada towards moderating his earlier belief that to conquer China might well be both feasible and justified. In this respect, it is important to make clear that from the very beginning the Spanish had approached the conquest of the Philippines as a stepping stone towards China as well as the Moluccas, and when Rada left Mexico for the Philippines in 1564 to accompany Legazpi and Urdaneta, China was in everybody’s mind. In 1569, writing to the new viceroy of Mexico Martín Enríquez from Cebu, Rada made clear that he considered the conquest of China as a very real possibility, and seems to have approved of it, although he also began to deplore that the Chinese project detracted from missionary efforts to convert the natives of the Islands, which he considered the most urgent priority. Three years later—in August 1572—he

74 Ibid., f° 216v.
75 “A lo cual ayudaría mucho ser todos ellos hombres de buenos entendimientos, dóciles, y que se sujetan a la razón”. J. GONZÁLEZ DE MENDOZA, Historia, p. 62.
76 Rada thus participated in the famous expedition led by Tomás López de Legazpi and the Augustinian Andrés de Urdaneta by which the Crown of Castile first discovered the return navigation across the Pacific and began colonizing the islands, despite the suspicion that the archipelago fell within the agreed Portuguese sphere of influence.
77 Archivo General de Indias, Seville [AGI], Filipinas, 79, 1, 1. The letter is also available in www.up.es/flu/ceao/proyecto/che/s16/rada1569, and in English in E. H. BLAIR and J. A. ROBERTSON (eds.), The Philippine Islands, 34, pp. 223-228. In Mexico in the early 1560s Rada had displayed a similar commit-
suggested that a mission to China seeking trade and the right to preach was the best strategy, although he also implied that if the Chinese accepted the gospel, they would also be obliged to serve Philip II. For Rada, who interpreted Vitoria in an imperialist fashion —and he referred directly to his lectures when writing to his superiors about the colonisation of the Philippines— one could make a natural law argument for a just conquest to support preaching which was entirely independent from the denunciation of abuses and lack of missionary zeal amongst the Spanish governors and soldiers. In reality, it was the poor practice in the Philippines —the fact that the natives were not benefiting from the Spanish conquest as they should—that most concerned him. In other words, unlike the Dominican Las Casas, Rada believed in conquest for the sake of religion, but he was uncomfortable with the evidence of conquest for greed. In this respect it is illuminating to consider his contrasting views in a number of letters on the situation of the Philippines, on the one hand emphasizing the injustice of the Spanish entradas, but on the other also deploring the lack of civility of the natives. Rada seems to have learnt the Otomi language, notably difficult, in the space of a couple of years.

79 Not only the right to preach, but also the ius peregrinandi (right to safe travel) and the protection of innocents, justified the conquest of the Philippines. Rada to Alonso de Veracruz, Provincial of the Augustinians in New Spain, letter of 16 July 1577, Paris, BnF, Fondsespagnol, 325, Fo 42r. This extensive letter offers both an ethnography of the Philippines, and a summary of Rada’s mature missionary thought.
80 The letter of July 1569 (AGI, Filipinas, 79, 1, 1) is in this respect a remarkable document. Writing to the new viceroy Martín Enríquez and seeking to impress him with a particular missionary agenda, Rada did not question that the Spanish could legitimately seek gold in the Philippines, but argued that a new colonial model was needed, one not based on soldiers greedily looking to enrich themselves at the expense of the natives, but rather on settlers conducting their own business whilst the natives were looked after by the friars. These natives were understood to be “like monkeys very desirous to imitate us in dress, speech and in everything else”, hence they would readily become Christians. The flaw of the current model was that the leader (Legazpi) had not punished many abuses by the Spanish, hence the whole land was being destroyed. So far the echoes of the standard Dominican denunciation of the conquest of Hispaniola, Cuba and mainland America are unmistakable. It was only at the end that Rada argued that “if your majesty seeks the conquest of China”, before anything else the control of the Philippines needed to be consolidated, for strategic reasons. The undertaking would otherwise be relatively easy given the cowardice of the Chinese (despite their high level of civility, or “gran policía”). However, even while the conquest of China for the first time, as some have suggested (M. Ollé, La empresa, pp. 41-42, who is offering a plan for mistaken in asserting that the letter was addressed to Philip II) what Rada was doing here was to seek to change the priorities of a new viceroy already keen on the idea (“si vuestra majestad pretende...”), so that the care of the Philippines took precedence. Another letter he wrote to Philip II in July 1570 attacking the colonial model in the Philippines and its governors, but not mentioning China, is entirely consistent with this reading, as is also a subsequent letter to the viceroy of New Spain in June 1573, declaring that “unless this is sorted out, our presence in this land is unjust”.
81 Yet again in his letter of 1577 to Alonso de Veracruz (F 43vn), Rada suggested that the natives of the Philippines “no es gente para poder constituir razonable república”, an additional title to the Spanish right to dominion, but immediately went on to denounce the manner of the actual conquest of the Islands, with many abuses and violence. The king and his council had been lied to, and existing encomiendas had to be revised.
have gradually distanced himself from the idea of the conquest of China on practical grounds—it was too difficult, there might be a diplomatic avenue—but also for the sake of his evangelical concerns: the obsession with conquering China stimulated the neglect of the Philippines, and threatened the opportunity to develop a successful native policy. In one of his latest letters, and his more personal one (expressing the doubt that he was fit for that distant mission), complaining to fellow Augustinian Juan Cruzet about all those who “pretending to look for God, only look after themselves”, he concluded that “to see how all want China so brazenly, forgetting these poor people [of the Philippines], has made me lose control”\(^{82}\).

It is possible that by aligning himself with a faithful rendering of Rada’s ambivalent views of China against Mendoza’s more idealizing portrait, Román was also expressing some sympathy with the faction that in the 1580s had proposed the conquest of China, although never renouncing a pro-native stance in America and the Philippines. Rada’s brief report of 1576 was not overtly polemical, and in the context of the 1590s the idea of conquest had been clearly put aside. In fact, Román made it clear that the conquest of China could not be easy (a point already made by Bernardino de Escalante in 1577). It was well-known that the Chinese could deploy a huge number of well-armed troops—for example, Rada gave more than four million foot soldiers and about 780,000 cavalry. Although these soldiers were not perceived to be courageous or ferocious, they were skillful and astute in warfare, and with Portuguese help their artillery was being updated—a judgment where Román departed from both Rada and Loarca, who did not think the quality of Chinese troops or of their artillery was very high\(^{83}\). Notwithstanding this military caution, for as long as there was potential for a debate on the idea of conquest the tone of any description mattered, and in the context of what had been published in the previous twenty years, in 1595 Román was challenging Mendoza’s extreme idealism, and in particular his positive interpretation of the hopes for peaceful conversion on the basis of a shared rationality\(^{84}\). In effect, in his approach to China Román was by implication also distancing himself from the kinds of political conclusions that Las Casas had developed in his Apologética Historia Sumaria. Rather than impose a coherent ideological or intellectual stance on his materials,

\(^{82}\) Letter of 15 July 1577. Paris, BnF, Fonds espagnol, 325, f° 31v\(^{r}\). Rada’s death in 1578 deprives us from the opportunity to see how he could have shaped the fierce debate that took place in subsequent years, when the Jesuit Alonso Sánchez, working closely with the Governors Gonzalo Ronquillo and then Diego Ronquillo, manipulated the Bishop of Manila Domingo de Salazar into an aggressive stance towards China, purportedly on evangelical grounds, because the Chinese were not allowing the peaceful preaching of the gospel or any other type of free communication. (Obviously the permissions of residence granted to the Italian Jesuits Ruggieri and Ricci in 1582 and 1583 weakened these arguments and eventually led Salazar to change his mind).

\(^{83}\) J. Román, Repúblicas del Mundo, 1595, III, f° 231r\(^r\).

\(^{84}\) In fact Mendoza had declared that the conquest of China was undesirable rather than impossible, referring to some secret advice that he had offered. He acknowledged that Chinese soldiers lacked courage: “Los cuales, si igualaran en el valor y valentía a las naciones de la Europa, eran bastantes para conquistar el mundo; pero aunque en el número exceden y en los ingenios le son iguales, en los ánimos y valentía quedan atrás” (J. González de Mendoza, Historia, p. 99)
the Augustinian cosmographer was allowing two different sets of sources dictate two different agendas in America and in Asia: through Las Casas, the ancestors of the now downtrodden peoples of Mexico and Peru became more admirable than was often granted, even if they lacked letters, and their conquest could be depicted as cruel and abusive, at least in the case of Peru; by contrast, the still independent and arrogant Chinese were, despite all their obvious technological and political achievements and their libraries full of books, not Europe's equals, and one fears that their conquest might, after all, be justified, at least for as long as they closed the door to the preaching of the gospel. By the time the Repúlica del reyno de la China was published, the Jesuits had thankfully started to penetrate the gentile kingdom, but, as Román himself had explained when opening this chapter, conversion to Christianity was often only the first step to subjection to the Catholic king.

V.— THE TRIUMPH OF THE NOTION OF A HIERARCHY OF CIVILIZATIONS

Despite the importance of his new world sources, Román had limited impact in Spain and was never translated into other languages, the appearance of a second edition of the Repúblicas notwithstanding. The attractive but somewhat shallow book by Mendoza, a first attempt at a synthesis, was far more successful, being published in many languages and dominating the field for about thirty years; yet relatively soon, that is after 1615, it was superseded by Nicola Trigault’s Latin version of Ricci’s history of the Jesuit mission, which offered detailed knowledge of China by a man with many years of experience and who had become proficient in the Mandarin language; by contrast, the insightful as well as forceful book by Acosta on the New World, a mature product of Spanish colonial historiography, remained highly influential for many more decades, well into the seventeenth century. Mendoza and Acosta can be considered as the high products of Spanish missionary ethnography in the republic of letters of the late Renaissance, but they stood at different stages of the Spanish encounter with civilized gentiles. Acosta, writing at the end of a long series of debates within an imperial domain, was aware that there were some issues that required a mature intellectual response, and he offered solutions, humanist and Augustinian, that would have a long life. In particular, he offered the notion of a hierarchy of gentile civilizations—all barbarian, all inferior to Europe—and a reasoned solution to the origins of the American Indians through land migration. Writing in the midst of the early debate about the conquest of China, but defending a diplomatic approach, Mendoza was expressing the hope that the most civilized gentiles could be converted through preaching alone, inaugurating a tradition that would be soon continued (with some refinements) by the Jesuits, who after Ricci were able to speak with real expertise. In his preference for conversion without conquest, Mendoza was closer to Valignano’s mainstream Jesuit position than to Alonso Sánchez. This accommodation however only concerned the case of “civilized gentiles”.

85 In his preference for conversion without conquest, Mendoza was closer to Valignano’s mainstream Jesuit position than to Alonso Sánchez. This accommodation however only concerned the case of “civilized gentiles”.
of a gentile civilization however lacked theoretical elaboration, and it was the Jesuit Alessandro Valignano who offered a real orientalist counterpart to Acosta’s New World model, most notably in the *De Missione Legatorum*.

From our point of view, Acosta’s key proposal in the sixth book of his *Historia Natural y Moral de las Indias* was that whilst it was proper to distinguish several levels of civility, Europeans must be placed at the top not only because of the truth of Christianity, but also because their civilization was the most sophisticated of all (something with which Román would have generally agreed). His argument however, as far as China was concerned —he was more hesitant about Japan— hinged almost entirely on his assessment of the superiority of the European system of writing:

> Not one single nation of Indians discovered in our times uses proper letters or writing, but only the other two types, which are images or figures, and I understand this to be true not only of the Indians of Peru and New Spain, but also in part of the Japanese and Chinese.

In effect, “an Indian of Mexico or Peru who has learnt to read and write [like us] knows more than the wisest of all mandarins”, because the mandarin was bound to the 100,000 words that he had painstakingly learnt. Acosta’s argument that the Chinese mandarins did not employ a true system of writing because it was not tied to a single spoken language was clearly meant to be deprecatory and sceptical of Mendoza’s claims; it was complemented with the assertion that Chinese schools only taught Mandarin and some empirical literature, and did not cultivate philosophy or the natural sciences (in a passage that could have been written by the Augustinians Rada or Román).

Writing from the East rather than the Americas, and with better sources at his disposal, Valignano pursued a very similar argument about the need to establish European superiority as a civilization, but he was able to offer a more wide-ranging analysis of why this was so. The last two chapters of the *De Missione Legatorum* are invaluable in this respect. Dialogue thirty-three —the one Hakluyt would translate— offered the Jesuit view of China, concluding however that

> … even though the kingdom of China is celebrated everywhere in the East, there can be no doubt that it is inferior to Europe, the most noble part of the earth.

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86 J. de Acosta, *Historia*, p. 395. Acosta devoted chs. 5 and 6 of that book explaining how the Chinese mandarins had to spend years learning thousands of characters (as now the Jesuits in China had to do, charitably, in order to conduct their mission). However, Acosta misunderstood some aspects of the system of writing. For a discussion see A. Pagden, *The Fall*. For Acosta’s orientalism see also F. del Pino Díaz, “El misionero”.

87 Ibid., p. 398.

88 Ibid., pp. 397-398. Acosta relied on Alonso Sánchez as his main authority, so his Jesuit sources were given a negative slant. In effect Acosta came to share the negative interpretation of China of the faction whose plans of conquest he was nevertheless instrumental in derailing.

89 E. de Sande, *De Missione*, p. 398: “Quanuis igitur regnum in toto hoc oriente sit celebratissimum, non dubium tamen est, clarissimae orbis terrarum parti, Europae molto inferius esse”. I have relied on
The last dialogue went even further, with an unprecedented global vision of the world as a hierarchical system of civilizations (not dissimilar to the contemporary vision by Giovanni Botero), by which Europe’s position ahead of all other regions was justified “on account of its climate, the intelligence of its peoples, its industry and nobility, the organisation of its life and government, and for the abundance of excellent studies”90. Most strikingly, through his mouthpiece the Japanese traveller Miguel, who momentarily put aside his national identity in order to become, like Socrates, a citizen of the world, the Jesuit postulated that there existed three universal levels of civility, all found in the East, which could be linked to three broad anthropological types: blacks, oriental whites, and European whites. In this way, Valignano established (in a fundamentally novel manner) a racialist link between the lowest levels of barbarity and darker colors: although some of the peoples of Asia “can be considered white and intelligent, all those others who are dark are by nature rough and uncivilized”91. Needless to say, the point of all this was to demonstrate to a Japanese audience the superiority of Christian Europe over China and over Japan, as witnessed by the Japanese themselves, whilst at the same time reassuring them of their own position above the less civil peoples of India and South-East Asia.

The passages devoted to “black peoples” thus offer the perfect counterpoint from which to judge the intermediate category of “civilized gentiles” to which the peoples of Japan and China belonged92. The lowest category embraced the peoples of Africa, America and southern Asia — all described as “dark”, albeit with degrees: Indians South of Goa, Malays and American Indians were not as dark as the Black Africans, and also less savage93. But black peoples in general had no law or religion, lacking cultivation and human sensibility. They were, indeed, natural slaves, as Aristotle had asserted (a paradoxical convergence with the views of Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, from a man best known for his defense of cultural accommodation)94. Valignano went on to attribute to these peoples a natural tendency towards the imaginary fantasies of gentile idolatry, although he also noted that the Japanese, as gentiles, were also given to those vain beliefs (hence it should be clear that gentilism was not determined by race, although race could create a predisposition towards irrationality).

90 Ibid., p. 407: “Quo sit, ut caeli natura, nationum ingenii, industria et nobilitate, vivendi gubernandi ratione, multitudine bonarum artium, inter omnes alias regions praestet”. Giovanni Botero, who in his Relationi universali (1591-1596) developed a similar argument for the superiority of Europe, relied on Jesuit missionaries (including Acosta) and might have been influenced by Valignano’s writings.

91 Ibid., p. 407: “Unde fit, ut quanuis aliqui albo colore praediti ingeniosissimi dici possint, reliqui tamen omnes qui subnigri sunt, rudi admodum impolitaque sint natura”.

92 Ibid., pp. 35-46 (fifth dialogue).

93 The key distinction was between albo colore and nigro colore. Africans were nigris, South Asians and American Indians subnigri.

94 E. de Sande, De Missione, p. 44: “We can say that, generally speaking, all these peoples have no law or religion… but that like animals that nature inclined towards the earth and to obey their stomachs, they live largely devoted to their low desires and vices, without any cultivation or human feelings; and with reason a European philosopher said that these peoples were born to serve".
By inviting the Japanese to distance themselves from the “savage” Blacks, Valignano was also inviting them to convert to Christianity, the religion of the superior races.

Valignano’s racism was attenuated only by the Christian assumption of mankind’s original unity. This monogenism, in turn, was qualified by the assertion that Adam and Eve were of a nice white color. Valignano then logically considered various climatic explanations for the darkening of the original color, dismissing a simple correspondence of climate and race on the basis of scientific observations (because not all peoples living in very hot climates were equally dark, and black people remained black in a cold climate). Instead, he focused on genetic transmission from parents to children (in Aristotelian idiom, on “nature” transmitted by “seed”). However, he still needed to explain the original divergence between human groups. Miguel, the speaker that represented the author’s views, considered dark color as a stain, hence one possibility was descent from Ham and his malediction (this hypothesis was reinforced by the observation that Africans are not only dark-skinned, but also their expressions are sad-looking and twisted, and their nature wild, uncivilized, and inhuman). However even if all this was true, this racial divergence must also have a natural dimension, for example, it could have been caused over a long period by the sun’s heat, since it is clear that all peoples of the world have peculiar physical traits—the Japanese and Chinese differ from Europeans for their small eyes and flat noses for example.

This is the racialist context which allowed Valignano to fully domesticate the idea of a gentile civilization for the case of China. Mainly following Ricci’s early letters for his description, the dialogue explained that the country was very fertile, prosperous and abundant in people; the inhabitants were industrious and extremely skilled in the mechanical arts. They were also given to letters, although these were difficult to learn. The Chinese practiced natural and moral philosophy, and unlike Rada and Román, who had ignored Confucius, the Jesuits acknowledged that in this moral field the Chinese had obtained some excellent results: so much so that “nothing better could be expected of men without the light of faith”. However, the dialogue did agree with the Augustinian critics in emphasizing that Chinese natural science was full of errors, although (unlike Rada) recognizing that some knew astronomy very well. It was also in agreement with Jerónimo Román’s analysis that the art of government was presented as the main concern of the Chinese, in such a way that they ruled according to the law of nature, giving authority to the most learned (a meritocracy of literati was of course quite close to the Jesuit ideal of promoting talents in a centralized hierarchy). This vast hierarchy of pru-

95 *Ibid.*, pp. 39-42. Valignano was not the first to consider the issue of why climate could not fully account for colour differences. Already Vespucci, in his correspondence with the Florentines (the “Ridolfi fragment” of c.1502), had been obliged to justify his observations of skin colour, noting that the American Indians in Brazil were not as dark as Africans in the same latitude, because the climate was not identical, and that in any case, through miscegenation nature and custom could trump climate (A. Vespucci, *Il Mondo Nuovo*, pp. 95-96). We lack a comprehensive study of ideas of race and skin colour in the European Renaissance, but for stereotypes of Black Africans see T. F. Earle and K. Lowe (eds.) *Black Africans*. On climatic theories C. J. Glacken, *Traces*, remains important.

dent magistrates dedicated to justice ensured general peace and tranquility, which offered an obvious contrast with the continuous wars of Christian Europe. In accordance with this, their best religious sect — the one closest to Truth — was that of Confucius, who, guided by nature, taught much that was praiseworthy; however, his cult of ancestors was idolatrous:

If only Confucius had made a reference to God, and to future life, and had not attached so much importance to celestial fate, and finally had not occupied himself so much with the statues of ancestors! On this matter he can hardly free himself from the accusation of idolatry.\footnote{Ibid., p. 395. This passage on Confucius, albeit still insisting on an idolatrous element, reflected the increasingly positive views of Matteo Ricci, and went beyond Valignano’s more superficial assessment of the literati as mere atheists in his report of 1584, which had relied on Ricci’s first impressions (in 1584 Ricci had written to Philip II’s official Juan Bautista Román that the sect of the literati did not believe in the immortality of the souls and made fun of the supernatural beliefs of Buddhists and Taoists; in a letter of October 1585 to General Acquaviva, he referred to them as “Epicureans”).}

The chapter ended with a clear explanation of why Europe was clearly superior to China. Taken as a whole, Europe was bigger and more civilized (it had more and better cities, especially Italy), it produced a wider range of products (people lived more luxurious lives), their arts (military and political included) flourished in a superior manner, and their nobility was respected and cultivated. Valignano here imposed his Italian aristocratic seal upon the definition of civilization. On the other hand, religion offered a trump card: Christianity, being the true one, had perfected the customs and intelligence of Europeans to the highest point. The Jesuits’ philosophical model for coordinating the relation between religion and civilization was therefore clearly Thomist: grace perfects nature, and Christianity had perfected European civility over the Chinese, who otherwise, on pure natural grounds, had a great deal to be proud of.\footnote{Lino, one of the minor speakers, expressed the idea radically: “No nation for whom the light of Christian truth has failed to shine can truly and perfectly flourish in just government, virtue and the other goods” (E. de Sande, \textit{De missione}, p. 409).}

Because the dialogue had Japanese speakers and addressed an audience of young Japanese, the comparison of Japan with China had to be handled with sensitivity.\footnote{One may wonder what the Japanese young really thought. It is interesting that Miguel, Valignano’s Japanese mouthpiece, rejected joining the service of Toyotomi Hideyoshi in 1590, staying with the Jesuits. However, a few years later he abandoned not only the Jesuit order, but also Christianity.} The speaker conceded that China was economically and intellectually superior, but in compensation asserted that Japan excelled in military skills and nobility.\footnote{E. de Sande, \textit{De missione}: “The Chinese are ahead of us for the size of their country, its peace and tranquility, its method of government, and its wealth and abundance of goods; on the other hand, we are superior for our military knowledge and greatness of spirit, and for our observance of etiquette and the degrees of nobility”. Interestingly, at that time the Japanese were often perceived as “the Spanish of Asia”.} Hence they both stood, however distinctly, on an intermediate level, above the various nations of “black barbarian gentiles”, but below Europeans, with whom they shared many things, including their white color and an inclination to civility. Europe’s
superiority was military, cultural and economic, but it was religion—Christianity—that, by perfecting nature, ultimately explained this superiority. What Valignano and Sande had accomplished was simultaneously to address a variety of agendas: to idealize Europe, so poorly known in Japan; to relativize the civilization of China, so often admired in the East; to criticize Japan, through the voice of the cosmopolitan Japanese who had seen Europe and recognized the true faith; finally, to show contempt for black peoples, whilst admitting gradations between them. In the final analysis, the dialogue identified the “low” civilization India (from Goa to Melaka), Africa, and America, with nature debased; the middle civilization of China and Japan with nature largely accomplished, but contaminated with idolatry; and the high civilization of Europe with nature perfected by faith. Throughout all this, the issue was never how to establish a polarity between the human and the non-human, but rather how to define with increasing precision a hierarchy within humanity, analyzed in terms of two parallel categories, religion and civilization.

As we saw earlier, Acosta and Mendoza responded to immediate debates about colonial and missionary policy, one towards the management of persistent idolatry, the other towards the issue of whether one needed to conquer in order to preach. Valignano, in turn, was concerned with the need for accommodation amongst the more rational, “white” gentiles. But all these missionary agendas were in reality quite narrow. From a general perspective, the concept of gentile civilization was not understood to be problematic by the majority of those members of the Catholic orders writing ethnographies throughout the sixteenth century. The reason is clear: a hierarchical notion of civility—a notion with classical roots but also with a widespread late-medieval usage, hence not a purely humanist notion—was always assumed, although the precise contours could vary. Images of alternative cultures as more or less civilized were often shaped by political agendas, in particular the “imperialist” and anti-imperialist theses so well encapsulated in the debate between Sepúlveda and Las Casas (theses equally relevant in Asia, as the debate on the conquest of China makes clear). The idea that one could always find something that placed modern European civilization (however slightly) above any gentile nation may not have been universally shared by sixteenth-century Europeans (consider Montaigne), but its prominence in the most informed missionary accounts published before 1600 was reassuring. It would only be in the seventeenth century that the deeply problematic nature of the idea of a gentile civilization would become apparent, and that crisis would be the outcome not of colonialist debates, but rather of the European context of religious controversy and the rise of libertine thought. It was only when orthodoxy found itself under steady attack in an ideologically fragmented Republic of Letters that ethnography, and its antiquarian corollaries, could have a devastating impact for many of the basic assumptions held by a majority inclined to religious conformity. The way the rites controversy, which had started as an internal debate within the missionary movement, became public and was made to contribute to an anti-religious climate, exemplifies this, as I have argued elsewhere101. I am not of course saying that in the sixteenth century there

101 J.-P. Rubiés, “The concept of cultural dialogue"
was no sense of the intellectual challenges posed by the impossibility of assuming that all Christians were civilized, and all the civilized Christian. However, the hope that it was just a matter of time before the two elements, Christianity and civilization, would come together perfectly was pervasive, especially within Catholicism. Writers like Acosta, Román or Botero had already identified some of the ethno-historical problems that would require a solution, in particular the origins of the American Indians, and the antiquity claimed by the Chinese, all difficult to square with biblical genealogies and chronologies. They had also provided an apparently successful framework for domesticating these issues, the principles by which peoples were connected genealogically, whilst civilizations could be ranked hierarchically. And yet those same debates acquired an entirely new aspect—one decidedly anti-religious—from about 1650, in particular after the publication of the *Prae-Adamitae* by Isaac La Peyrère, and of the *Annals* of ancient China by the Jesuit Martino Martini102. Also significant was, a few years before that, La Mothe Le Vayer’s defence of the salvation of “virtuous gentiles” such as Confucius in his *De la vertue des payens* (1641), an anti-Jansenist tract with libertine implications. The sceptical attack on biblical authority that ensued made almost inevitable a decisive step towards extreme fideism or towards philosophical deism, when not atheism. In the new climate, the presumption that it was just a matter of time before all the civilized became Christian, and all the Christian civilized, became a secondary issue, as both the notions of Christianity and Civilization were suddenly open to revision. Interestingly, as Europe’s global dominance only increased, the idea of a hierarchy of civilizations and the racialist temptation that sometimes accompanied it would survive the ordeal better than the idea that grace perfected nature.

Anthropological arguments and ethnographic support for those arguments were decisive in shaping the colonialist debate in sixteenth-century Spain. However, one could argue that the imperial and missionary debate in Spain in the sixteenth century was entirely different from the antiquarian and religious debate in Europe in the seventeenth century. The debates in Spain or within the context of the missions operating under Spanish and Portuguese patronage were conducted in the royal Councils and within the religious orders, occasionally at the university or at the papal court. Their spillage into public debate through publication was naturally limited, and when necessary, restricted. Books did of course have power, but what was printed was tiny compared to what was written. In other words, they were not debates primarily intended for a cosmopolitan republic of letters. Hence Jerónimo Román, who acted as a bridge between missionary ethnography and the skeletal republic of letters that existed in Catholic Spain, was quite exceptional in his national context, and his international impact was even more limited. Moreover, despite provoking the intervention of the Inquisition for his account of Judaism, his account of the gentile civilizations of America and China was not perceived to be problematic. By contrast, the European debates of the seventeenth century about the history of gentile peoples might have still originated, but could

no longer be contained, within any institutional limits, national or religious. The libertine turn of the debate in effect coincided with the increasing domination of a public sphere (however tentative the notion) constituted by the republic of letters, an international community of learning of humanist origins but with novel scientific and philosophical pretensions. It was a public sphere in which the religious orders, for example the Jesuits, conducted rearguard operations, but where the Spanish and the Portuguese, successfully insulated against heresy yet bankrupt in terms of political economy, had become almost entirely marginal. In these circumstances, the impact of missionary knowledge outlasted the force of missionary discourse.