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How Do Michael Boym, Martino Martini, and Athanasius Kircher Understand Chinese Food Culture?

卜弥格、卫匡国和基歇尔是如何认识中国饮食文化？

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ABSTRACT

In the mid-17th century, the Jesuits Michael Boym, Martino Martini, and Athanasius Kircher all published outstanding works on China that recorded significant knowledge on Chinese food. Both having been to China, Boym illustrated abundant Chinese foods with pictures in his books *Flora Sinensis* and *Atlas Sinarum Imperii*, whereas Martini introduced Chinese food from the perspective of cultural geography in *Novus Atlas Sinensis*. Remarkably, although Kircher was a local European scholar who never travelled to China, his book *Chinese Illustration*, which cited many examples from Boym and Martini, was translated into various European languages and reprinted many times. The books by these Jesuits show how westerners understood and absorbed Chinese food knowledge in unique ways, and they present the historical evolution of westerners' knowledge of Chinese food.

摘要

十七世纪中期，入华耶稣会士卜弥格和卫匡国以及未曾入华的基歇尔均出版了有关中国的重要著作。相关著作中均包含有中国食物原料的重要知识。卜弥格在《中国植物志》和《中国地图集》中，通过可见的图像方式传递了更为丰富的中国食材内容。卫匡国在《中国新地图集》中，则强调从中国的具体地区来认识代表性物产。欧洲本土学者基歇尔在《中国图说》中，援引的主要材料源自卜弥格和卫匡国。《中国图说》被译成多种欧洲文字，多次再版。此三人著作展示了十七世纪西方人对中国食物原料知识的理解和接收过程，也体现出中国饮食西传的历史演变。

INTRODUCTION

Michael Boym (1612–1659), Martino Martini (1614–1661), and Athanasius Kircher (1602–1680) were western Jesuits of the 17th century. All wrote books in the mid-17th century to spread knowledge of Chinese food to the west. Both Martini and Boym travelled to China to conduct direct investigation; both demonstrated Chinese food in their map works, though without in-depth discussion. Although Athanasius Kircher never travelled to China or any other eastern countries, he collected and edited the available graphic knowledge of Chinese food, most of which was taken from Martini's *Novus Atlas Sinensis* (*Chinese New Atlas*) and Boym's *Flora Sinensis* (*Chinese Plants*) and *Atlas Sinarum Imperii* (*Atlas of the Chinese Empire*), written by Michael Boym. With the rapid development of printing in Europe, Chinese food knowledge spread in the books written by these Jesuits shaped westerners' perception and understanding of Chinese food culture thus exerted a profound influence.

DEEPENING OF WESTERNERS' UNDERSTANDING OF CHINESE FOOD

Martino Martini, whose courtesy name in Chinese was Jitai (济泰), was an Italian Catholic Jesuit missionary. He travelled to China in 1643 and returned to Europe in 1650. On the return journey, Martini published the Latin *Novus Atlas Sinensis*. *Chinese History of the Christian Crusade* was published by Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) in 1615; there were no other books like *Novus Atlas Sinensis*, in which European readers could find the newest and most comprehensive reports and comments about China (Shen 1995: 174–175), until some works related to China were published in the late 17th century. In his book, Martini introduced western countries to Chinese tea, apples, lychee (*Litchi chinensis*), water chestnuts, and other kinds of edible animals and plants in China.

According to literature research done by some contemporary Italian scholars like Matheny, Martini actually described some famous local specialties in *Novus Atlas Sinensis*, such as bergamot (Martini 2002: 535), chrysanthemum pear, Magu wine (麻姑酒), preserved egg, and so on. However, he was unable to use the actual Chinese names of these foods.

Michael Boym, another Jesuit, went to China after Martini, moving to Macau to study Chinese in 1644. He then travelled to China's Hainan Island to preach from the end of the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) to the beginning of the Qing Dynasty (1636–1912). During his period in China, he recorded and studied many edible plants and animals, as well as the eating habits of the time. He also wrote some books in Latin and introduced China's historical and cultural knowledge to the European intellectual community (Pfister 1995: 274–281; Szczesniak 1949: 481–538; Zhang 2011: 186) through works like *Brevis Sinarum Imperii Descriptio*, *Rerum Sinensium Compendiosa Descriptio*, *Medicamenta Simplicia Quae Chinensibus ad Usum Medicum Adhibentur*, *Atlas Sinarum Imperii*, and his missionary reports and letters. While on his way back to Europe, Boym's book

Flora Sinensis was published in Vienna in 1656. In this book, he not only compared the differences between China's northern and southern fruits, but also compared food in China with that of other countries and regions, such as Europe and India. He noted that 'In Southern China where the weather is very hot, there are many fruits originating from India: coconut, banana, mango, and pineapple. In the North, there are grapes, figs, walnuts, chestnuts, a variety of peaches, cotton, and pears' (Wang 2014: 75–83; Bocci 2011: 353–381). Through these comparisons, Boym considered China to excel both in natural scenery and fertility. In *Flora Sinensis*, he provided a detailed introduction to and did research on the characteristics and origins of 30 species of animals and plants growing in China and south Asia. Among them were 23 edible animals and plants, each of which was labelled with a specific Chinese name and illustrated with his own image (Boym 2013: 299–357).

Athanasius Kircher was a famous German scholar and Jesuit of the 17th century. He had various interests and broad knowledge, publishing more than 40 works in Latin. Unlike Boym and Martini, Kircher did not personally go to China. However, his book on China had huge impact from the moment of its publication. Kircher's *Chinese Illustration* was published in Latin in Amsterdam in 1668.¹⁾ According to Charles D. Van Tuyl, the translator of the 1986 English version of the book, 'Athanasius quoted Jesus's data and the talks of the Jesuits returning to Europe, as well as a variety of Western materials like Marco Polo's travels. During more than 200 years after the book was published, in shaping Westerners' understanding about China and its neighbour countries, Athanasius's *China Illustration* can be called a unique and most important work' (Kircher 2010: 18).

Kircher also focused on spreading China's food knowledge. He emphasized four tropical fruits in the book: jackfruit, papaya, heaven fruit, and pineapple. In addition, he introduced seven main types of edible plants with high medicinal value: guang lang (gomuti palm powder), *pusu* (nickname: undead grass, actually it is dwarf lilyturf tuber), cinnamon, tea, ginseng, rhubarb, and pepper. With respect to such animals as 'the weird Chinese animal' and 'the unique Chinese bird', Kircher not only introduced the real musk deer, hippopotamus, and giant tortoise in his book, but also the legendary phoenix and the sea monster with four eyes and six legs. Kircher also described the unique foods eaten by some Chinese people. One type was livestock and poultry, which were also common among westerners. For example, Sichuan pheasant meat was reported to be very delicious (Kircher 2010: 348). Cantonese people both raised ducks and preserved duck eggs in a masterful way, sprinkling them with salt or bringing them in saltwater to make 'salted duck egg' (Kircher 2010: 350). However, he also introduced other kinds of Chinese animal meat that seemed unbelievable to westerners. For example, Chinese people ate the fish that could fly, bats from Shaanxi Province, giant snakes from Zhejiang Province, and so on. As a westerner who had never been to China, Kircher built his image of Chinese food from other authors' descriptions. Ultimately, what he delivered was a hybrid patchwork, often mixing

legend and fact.

CONTINUITY OF CHINESE FOOD KNOWLEDGE ENTERING THE WEST DURING THE MID-17th CENTURY

Boym, Martini, and Kircher all used images in their work to illustrate China's agricultural or food knowledge. Their books vary in the purpose, number, and method of illustrations. Because Kircher had not been to China, many Chinese food illustrations in his book were consistent with images from the works of Boym and Martini. In *Novus Atlas Sinensis*, Martini and the publisher decorated the map by drawing farming images to illustrate Chinese local customs and practices. The figures in these pictures were similar to those pictured in Kircher's *Chinese Illustration*.

Also in *Novus Atlas Sinensis*, beside a map of Huguang Province several strains of rice were illustrated, and two farmers standing separately on the left and right. One farmer was waving a twig with a hand on the plough, other sowing seeds in the valley, as shown in Figure 1 (Martini 2002: 515). This illustration vividly expressed the proverb 'When Huguang has a bumper crop, the country will be free from hunger'. Martini explained the origin of the proverb in detail by introducing Huguang's rice production. Alvaro Semedo (1585–1658), who visited China earlier than Martini, also recorded this proverb in his book *The History of That Great and Renowned Monarchy of China*. He believed that 'Huguang has the highest production of rice all over the country' (Semedo 2012: 25). However, unlike Martini, Alvaro did not illustrate Huguang's local customs and culture in his works. Even before publication of *Novus Atlas Sinensis*, western maps were frequently decorated with ribbons or relevant images. Accordingly, *Novus Atlas Sinensis*, incorporated paintings reflecting local customs and culture around the maps of China, which was rich in art and very attractive by contrasting the characteristics of different local geographical environments. A image similar to that of *Novus Atlas Sinensis* shown in Figure 1 also appeared in Chinese *Illustration* (Figure 2).

These cases show the continuity in Chinese food knowledge between the books of Martini and Kircher, indicating that they further demonstrated Chinese food knowledge through visualization of images. Nevertheless, this continuity does not prove that the illustration in Kircher's book is taken from Martini's; both probably referenced Chinese images painted by other authors in that century.

Unlike Martini and Kircher, who used images as auxiliary materials to explain Chinese dietary knowledge, Boym's works displayed images as key content. As mentioned previously, dozens of representative Chinese edible plants were presented in Boym's *Flora Sinensis*. In addition to a textual description of each plant and related knowledge, Boym also provided illustrated pictures, visualizing the Chinese plant knowledge visualized in the eyes of Europeans. Additionally, an image of a Chinese banquet spread to Europe was attached to the Chinese map



Figure 1 Sowing illustration of the Huguang Map from *Novus Atlas Sinensis* (Source: Martini 2002)

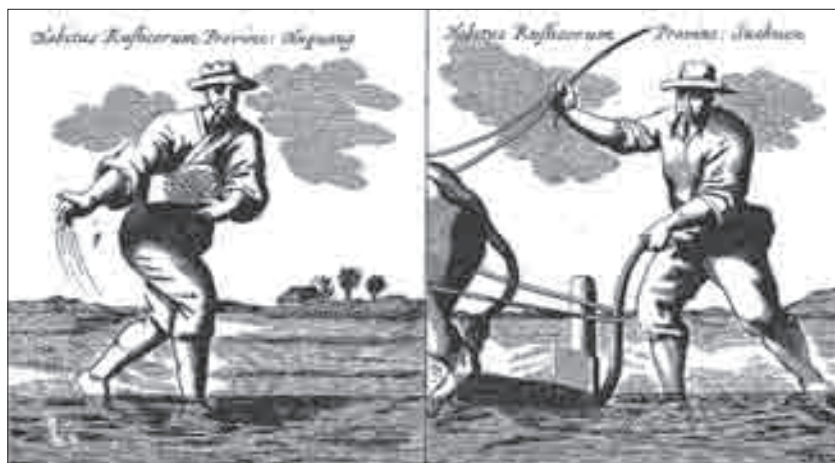


Figure 2 Sowing illustration from *Chinese Illustration* (Source: Kircher 2010)

drawn by Boym. In the unpublished manuscript of *Atlas Sinarum Imperii*, a complete image of a *convivia sinarum* (Chinese banquet) appears in the right appendix of the Kuey Cieu (Guizhou 贵州) Map,²⁾ as seen in Figure 3. Although *Atlas Sinarum Imperii* was not officially published, the manuscript is still precious evidence that knowledge of Chinese feasts in was spread into Europe visually in the 17th century. Boym's Chinese banquet image and the Latin text commentary is an important part of the evolutionary development history of western sinology. Limited by the available space on map, Boym simply introduced the unique



Figure 3 Chinese banquet image from *Atlas Sinarum Imperii*
(Source: Vatican Apostolic Library, Borgia Cinese 531)

foodways in a Chinese banquet in Latin, translated as follows:

The Chinese, seated around separate tables, ate with chopsticks and porcelain bowls but no forks. The chopsticks were made of wood or ivory. The Chinese drank warm wine and tea (cha). The Chinese will drink tea and greet each other before feasting, and send hosts gifts like candied food, golden spoons, and other utensils (Michael Boym, *Atlas Sinarum Imperii*, Vatican Apostolic Library, Borgia Cinese 531).

The image of the *convivia sinarum* on the Guizhou map of *Atlas Sinarum Imperii* had distinct figures and high authenticity. It depicts a Chinese banquet scene of the late Ming Dynasty with eight people of different identities. One in bright yellow dress enjoys a table alone in the upper right corner of the image. Two figures in the upper left corner also eat at a table alone. They sit at the north and face south. The remaining four guests share a table. Two servants and one bodyguard are also depicted. The social class of the different attendants can be judged based on the spatial layout of the figures in the picture, the colour of their dress, and the number of tables. Boym considered it more intuitive to show the etiquette for attending banquet using an image.

Boym's simple description included most features of a Chinese banquet, but did not go beyond the earlier work of fellow Jesuits in China, such as Ricci and Semedo, who both provided more detail about formal banquets in Ming China (Ricci 1942: 106–112; Semedo 1665: 65–67). However, Boym took the advantage of his banquet illustration, which provided more useful and visual knowledge of Chinese food culture. Semedo reported, 'The number of their tables sheweth the greatness of the banquet. One table for four, or one for two, is ordinary. But for persons of greater account they set one table for each' (Semedo 1665: 66). This information is clearly visible in Boym's image, and moreover, it shows that the noblest guest sits in the north and faces south, matching the Chinese tradition for layout of a house (*fengshui* 风水), which is supposed to have an influence on the fortune of the individuals or family. Dressed in bright yellow, the figure sitting in the north is definitely the noblest guest, judged based on the Ming custom that only noblemen and relatives of the emperor could wear bright yellow. Thanks to Boym's illustration, people who had not been to China could accurately and directly perceive the country's dining manners.

INFLUENCE OF BOYM AND MARTINI'S WORKS ON *CHINESE ILLUSTRATION*

Kircher never visited China, and his introduction of Chinese food culture in *Chinese Illustration* was mainly drawn from Martini. When referencing information from Martini's work, Kircher frequently cited Martini as the material's source. In *Chinese Illustration*, he explicitly stated that Martini was the source of information on the following plants or fruits: *pusu* (undead grass), ginseng,

rhubarb, tea, Chinese gomuti fruit, and cinnamon. However, when Kircher referenced information from *Flora Sinensis* and *Atlas Sinarum Imperii*, written by Boym, Kircher mentioned relatively little about him. Kircher's illustrations were informed mainly by the works of Boym. In his introduction of 'a bag of sweet fruit' (China jackfruit), he clearly noted that the knowledge came from Boym's *Flora Sinensis* (Kircher 2010: 334–335). Cross-referencing shows that the record in *Chinese Illustration* is very similar to Boym's original text: 'the fruit [jackfruit] grows on its trunk...it's also very sweet and delicious like chestnuts...It is like a bag filled with warm and sweet juice and nuts like chestnuts and walnuts' (Boym 2013: 323). When Kircher presented Chinese food knowledge originating from Martini and Boym, he seemed to prefer citing Martini over Boym. This might be because Martini, who acted on behalf of the new Chinese ruler (the Qing Empire), was more popular than Boym, who sought military aid from the western as the envoy of the dying ruler of the Ming Empire. Knowledge regarding the Chinese papaya, cashew (*kagiu* as mentioned by Boym) and pineapple (*ananas* as mentioned by Boym) is referenced from Boym's *Flora Sinensis*, although Kircher makes no explicit note of this.

Because Kircher did not go to China or other eastern countries such as India, he lacked accurate understanding of many tropical fruits and plants. Thus, when he reported the Chinese food knowledge written by Boym, he frequently misunderstood, leading to variation in Chinese food knowledge during its spread to Europe. When introducing pineapples, Kircher mistakenly reported, 'China has a kind of tree called "kagiu", which bears fruits twice a year. Its fruits are not in the middle part of the branch, but on the top of it. It is very unusual and can be found in America as well. The Indians call it "ananas". Chinese people call it "Fam-po-lo-nie", which largely grows in Guangdong, Guangxi, and Fujian'. *Kagiu* is actually cashew. In *Flora Sinensis*, Boym provided a detailed introduction to this plant, which bears fruit twice a year (Boym 2013: 309). But Kircher mixed up the descriptions of the cashew and the pineapple, leading readers to mistake *kagiu* for the Indian 'ananas' and the Chinese 'fam-po-lo-nie' (pineapple). In fact, Boym distinguished between the cashew and the pineapple very accurately, not only giving a detailed text description, but also painting accurate illustrations of pineapple and cashew nuts. The pineapple images and their descriptive text in Kircher's *Chinese Illustration* were adapted from *Flora Sinensis*. Boym wrote, 'The fruit in Chinese called "fam-po-lo-nie" is the one called "ananas" in Indian. This fruit was rich in southern Guangdong, Guangxi, Yunnan, Fujian, and Hainan Island... If you take its [the pineapple's] leaves off, bury them in the soil, and cultivate them, they will grow new fruits' (Boym 2013: 314–315).

Chinese Illustration also showed illustrations of ring pepper trees and the *fructus innominatus* (nameless plant), which Kircher believed were both pepper trees. He wrote, 'What we add here is the pepper tree, whose fruit is born around the root of the tree, similar to the European fig tree in some aspects' (Kircher 2010: 339). The two plant illustrations are from *Flora Sinensis*. Boym

Table 1 Text comparison of the *ye-ki* recorded by Boym and Kircher

| Boym's <i>Atlas Sinarum Imperii</i> | Kircher's <i>Chinese Illustration</i> |
|--|--|
| The Chinese called it the <i>ye-ki</i> (wild fowl). Its feathers are very unusual, and the meat is delicious. Its body is very big. | There is another kind of the fowl in Sichuan Province. Its feather is like wool. These feathers look like animals' hair, so they are called hairy fowl. |
| The Chinese also have a <i>ciam-vi-ki</i> (long-tailed fowl). Its tail is fluffy, very beautiful, and six palms long. This fowl inhabits Gaili, which is in Korea, and also China's Shaanxi and Guangxi Provinces. | Similarly, <i>ye-ki</i> is called hairy fowl. They are found in the mountains of several provinces in China. These provinces are Korea, Shaanxi, and Gansu. <i>Ye-ki</i> is beautiful and its feathers are colourful. When they are served as food, the meat is delicious. |
| There is another fowl named <i>to-ki</i> which means that it is like a camel, with a white head and something like hump on the body. It is four palms long. | The <i>ye-ki</i> has a little hump on the back and chest, and it can be speculated that the <i>ye-ki</i> comes from a common fowl after the degeneration. |

distinguished the two kinds of plants in his work with both images and text. One was pepper; the other *fructus innominatus* (Boym 2002). Of the latter he stated, 'I don't remember its Chinese name. I saw it earlier in Hainan Island, and later I saw it in Guangdong Province [...] There seems to be a neoplasm close to the ground and among the root hair of the tree, [...] The tree fruits are like the figs from Europe' (Boym 2013: 330–331). This plant whose name Boym forgot was actually *Cynometra cauliflora* L., but regardless, he did not group the *fructus innominatus* and the pepper as the same kind. Obviously, Kircher misread Boym's description of the two species.

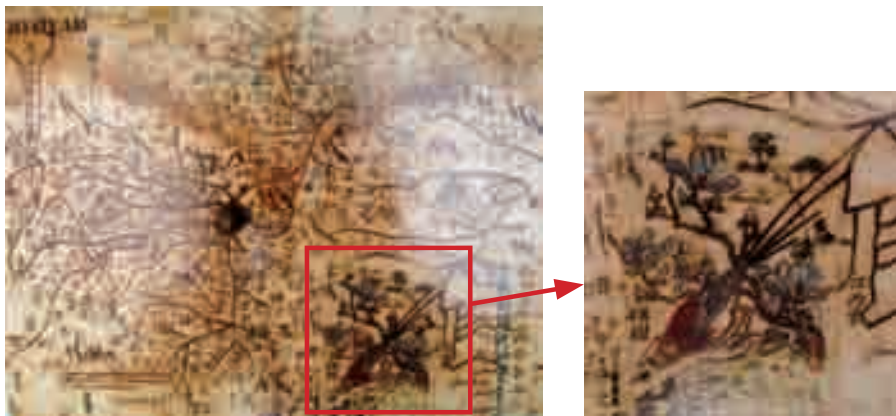
In the process of knowledge spread, truth and falsehood always co-exist. Another example of this is the wild fowl (*ye-ki* 野鸡) recorded by Kircher. His knowledge of Chinese people's edible wild fowl was drawn from Boym. But Boym's discussion distinguished three types of wild fowl: *ye-ki* (野鸡, *Gallina sylvestris*), also called 'hairy fowl'; *ciam-vi-ki*, which corresponds to 'long-tailed fowl' (*changwei ji* 长尾鸡), often used for birds of the genus *Syrmaticus*; and *to-ki*, 'camel fowl' (*tuoji* 鸵鸡), resembling an ostrich (Bocci 2011: 358–359). In Boym's *Atlas Sinarum Imperii*, he also painted accurate illustrations of the hairy fowl, long-tailed fowl, and camel fowl (Figure 4). In *Chinese Illustration*, however, Kircher did not distinguish between the different species of wild fowls, instead classifying all under the breed 'pheasant'. How did Athanasius misunderstand Boym's records? We can learn by comparing the two texts side-by-side (Table 1).

Boym painted the wild fowl's image on the Sichuan map of *Atlas Sinarum Imperii* (Boym 2013: 226–227). He painted another wild fowl on the Huguang Map. Judging from the image, it should depict the long-tailed fowl of his description (Boym 2013: 222–223). This also explains why Kircher clearly stated: 'Sichuan province has another commendable fowl. It has feathers like sheep's wool' (Kircher 2010: 438).

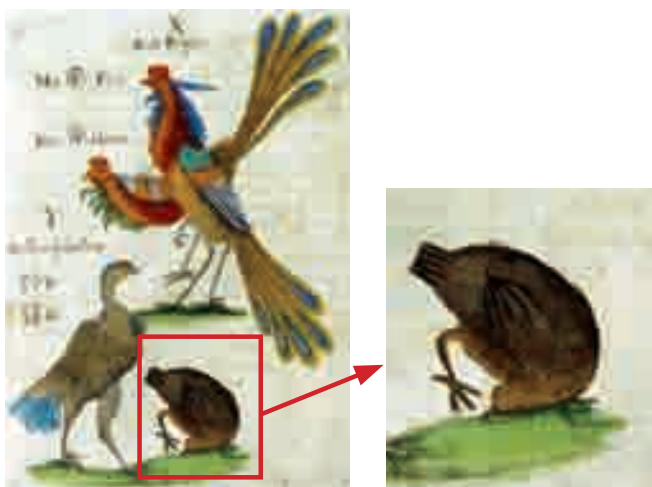
The majority of the knowledge about Chinese food in the works written by Boym and Martini came from their own experiences. Because Kircher never



The wild fowl (*Ye-ki*) on Map Sichuan of *Atlas Sinarum Imperii* (Boym 2013).



The long-tailed fowl (*Ciam-vi-ki*), on Map Huguang of *Atlas Sinarum Imperii* (Boym 2013).



The *Yi-ki* (lower left) and *To-ki* (lower right) from Boym's *Flora Sinensis* (2002).

Figure 4 Three types of fowls painted by Michael Boym. *Ye-ki*, *ciam-vi-ki* and *to-ki*

visited China, a large amount of the Chinese food knowledge in his work is from materials provided by other Jesuits. Prior to the mid-17th century, Europeans mainly learned about Chinese food by reading reports. Subsequently, a large number of images in relevant works were used to deepen the image of Chinese food in European eyes. Boym and Martini, who went to China and returned to Europe, met Kircher and provided him with relevant information about Chinese graphic reports. As a native European scholar, Kircher referenced a large number of graphic materials from Boym and Martini in his *Chinese Illustration*, showing the reception of Chinese dietary knowledge spread to the west by native western intellectuals. Whether these Chinese works were officially published in Europe or remained as unpublished manuscripts, they all constitute an important part of the formation of western sinology.

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NOTES

- 1) The book *Chinese Illustration* known by the name *China Illustration*. It was published in Dutch in 1668 and in French in 1670. The Chinese edition of this book, titled 中国图说, was translated primarily based on the English edition published in 1986.
- 2) The full Latin title of this unpublished manuscript is *Magni Catay quod olim Serica et modo Sinarum est Monarchia; Quindecim Regnorum; Octodecim geographicae Tabulae*; it can be simply referred to *Atlas Sinarum Imperii*. The manuscript includes one full Chinese map and 17 maps of Chinese provinces and areas. The manuscript is preserved in the Vatican Apostolic Library, document coding Borgia Cinese 531. The map of Kuey Cieu (Guizhou) is accompanied by an image of a Chinese banquet, with annotation in Latin.

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