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Monika Miazek-Męczyńska

ORCID: 0000-0002-3209-4932
Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań

The Funeral Rites of Xu Guangqi in the Account of Tomasz Dunin Szpot, SJ (*Historiae Sinarum Imperii*, Jap. Sin. 103, 4r–5v) Chinese and Christian Funerary Traditions in Convergence[1]

Obrzędy pogrzebowe Xu Guangqi w relacji Tomasza Dunina Szpota SJ (*Historiae Sinarum Imperii*, Jap. Sin. 103, 4r–5v) Zbieżność chińskich i chrześcijańskich tradycji pogrzebowych

Abstract

The aim of this article is to analyze the description of the funeral ceremonies of Xu Guangqi, a Chinese mandarin and imperial official who, after

1 This research was funded by the state budget under the programme of the Minister of Education and Science, *National Programme for the Development of the Humanities* (project no. NPRH/U22/SP/0021/2023/12), entitled *Historiae Sinarum Imperii and Collectanea Historiae Sinensis by Tomasz Szpot Dunin SJ – the Polish Contribution to the Study of Chinese Culture and History in the Early Modern Period*. The funding amount was PLN 1,566,263.42, which is also the total value of the project.

his baptism, was known as Paulus (Paul). This description is presented in Tomasz Dunin Szpot's *Historiae Sinarum Imperii* (Jap. Sin. 103). The intertwining of elements from native Chinese and Christian traditions within these funeral rites indirectly demonstrates the validity of the accommodative method adopted by the Jesuits in China and developed and propagated by Matteo Ricci, SJ. One of the core assumptions of the method was respect for local secular traditions, which the Jesuits allowed Chinese converts to continue to practice. The detailed description of Paul Xu's funeral ceremonies thus provides evidence of the possibility of reconciling Chinese and Christian traditions and, indirectly, confirms the effectiveness of the solutions adopted by the Jesuits in their evangelization efforts in seventeenth-century China.

Keywords: Xu Guangqi, Matteo Ricci, funeral rites, accommodation, Candida Xu.

Abstrakt

Celem niniejszego artykułu jest analiza opisu ceremonii pogrzebowych Xu Guangqiego, chińskiego mandaryna i urzędnika cesarskiego, który po chrzcie przyjął imię Paulus (Paweł). Opis ten został przedstawiony w dziele Tomasza Dunina Szpota *Historiae Sinarum Imperii* (Jap. Sin. 103). Wzajemne przenikanie się elementów rodzimych tradycji chińskich i tradycji chrześcijańskiej w tych obrzędach pogrzebowych pośrednio ukazuje zasadność metody akomodacji przyjętej przez jezuitów w Chinach, rozwiniętej i propagowanej przez Mattea Ricciego SJ. Jednym z podstawowych założeń tej metody był szacunek dla lokalnych tradycji świeckich, które jezuici pozwalali chińskim konwertytom nadal praktykować. Szczegółowy opis ceremonii pogrzebowych Pawła Xu stanowi zatem świadectwo możliwości pogodzenia tradycji chińskich i chrześcijańskich oraz pośrednio potwierdza skuteczność rozwiązań przyjętych przez jezuitów w ich działalności ewangelizacyjnej w siedemnastowiecznych Chinach.

Słowa klucze: Xu Guangqi, Matteo Ricci, obrzędy pogrzebowe, akomodacja, Candida Xu.

In the historical work *Historiae Sinarum Imperii* by Tomasz Dunin Szpot genre scenes occupy a significant place. These scenes depict events from the everyday lives of entire Christian communities as well as of individual believers. Their function and purpose within the historical narrative are varied: from simple embellishment that breaks the sequence of predominantly military events, through supplementing the portrayal of key historical figures with accounts of their private lives, to explaining aspects of Chinese cultural specificity. Such explanations may have

helped European readers better understand the text, while also serving to arouse their interest and encourage further reading. An important part of these genre scenes consists of depictions from the lives of Chinese Christians who, through their conduct, actions, commitment, and at times also through their suffering and death, bear witness to their fidelity to the new religion they embraced as a result of the missionary activity of the Society of Jesus. Scenes of this kind constitute clear evidence of the success of Jesuit missionary efforts and, at the same time, attest to the validity of the methods they adopted in proclaiming the Gospel.

One such approach was the method of accommodation, most commonly referred to as the strategy of Matteo Ricci, SJ (1552–1610), as it was he who developed it fully and put it into practice, although its foundations had been laid earlier by another Jesuit, Alessandro Valignano (1539–1606), who served as visitor of Jesuit missions in East Asia between 1574 and 1606. This method was based on four fundamental principles: the accommodation or adaptation of missionaries to Chinese culture; a vertical model of instruction, directed from the highest social strata toward the lower ones; evangelization through European learning, employed as a means of gaining attention and respect; and openness and tolerance toward Chinese cultural values. The deliberate intertwining of Chinese cultural practices and Christian religious practices, treated as complementary rather than mutually exclusive, constituted a compromise carefully developed by the Jesuits in China. This approach enabled the gradual spread of Christianity in a culturally distant land without disrupting, and while respecting, its long-established social and state structures. It was also the only model of evangelization – and indeed of Jesuit missionary presence in China – accepted by the emperors. In Europe, however, it did not always meet with understanding, let alone approval, which the Jesuits sought persistently amid the intensifying so-called Accommodation Controversy.

In this article, I aim to demonstrate how Tomasz Dunin Szpot, in his account of the funeral rites of Xu Guangqi (徐光启)[2] – one of the most prominent Chinese converts of the early seventeenth century – juxtaposed and harmonized elements of Chinese tradition with Catholic ritual practice. In doing so, he revealed their compatibility and, more or less

2 For more on the life and importance of Xu Guangqi for the beginnings of the Jesuit mission in China cf. Gregory Blue, "Xu Guangqi in the West: Early Jesuit Sources and the Construction of an Identity," in *Statecraft & Intellectual Renewal in Late Ming China: The Cross-Cultural Synthesis of Xu Guangqi (1562–1633)*, *Sinica Leidensia*, vol. 50 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 19–71.

consciously, argued for the validity of the assumptions underlying Matteo Ricci's method of accommodation.

Among the disciples and associates gathered around Matteo Ricci during his time in China, Xu Guangqi undoubtedly occupied a position of particular importance. Over time, he became one of the pillars of the Chinese Catholic Church, alongside two other eminent mandarin converts: Li Zhizao (1565–1630) and Yang Tingyun (1557–1627).[3] Xu Guangqi's figure is inextricably linked with the beginnings of the Jesuit mission in China, not least through the well-known double portrait of Xu Guangqi and Matteo Ricci included in *China Monumentis Illustrata* (Amsterdam 1667) by Athanasius Kircher, SJ. To this day, this image continues to serve as an illustration of the fundamental principle guiding the Jesuit evangelization strategy in seventeenth-century China: dialogue, friendship, and mutual inspiration between scholars of East and West.



Fig. 1. Illustration of Xu Guangqi and Matteo Ricci from, Athanasius Kircher, *China Monumentis Illustrata* (1667).

3 Cf. Williard J. Peterson, "Why Did They Become Christians? Yang T'ing-yun, Li Chih-tsao, and Hsu Kuang-ch'i," in *East Meets West: The Jesuits in China, 1582–1773*, ed. Charles Ronan and Bonnie Oh (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1988), 129–152.

Born in Shanghai on 24 April 1562 into an aristocratic family, Xu Guangqi attained high positions within the imperial administration thanks to his thorough education and innate talents. At the Ming court during the reign of the Chongzhen Emperor (r. 1627–1644), he served, among other roles, as Minister of Rites, overseeing state affairs related to ritual, culture, education, and foreign relations. He also held the office of Vice Grand Secretary, effectively acting as deputy head of the imperial Grand Secretariat. In this capacity, he was involved, among other matters, in the defense of the empire against Manchu incursions, cooperating in this regard with the Portuguese. At the same time, in accordance with his status as a scholar-official, Xu Guangqi pursued scholarly work in mathematics and astronomy – most notably in connection with calendar reform – as well as in agriculture and irrigation engineering.

In 1596, Xu Guangqi first came into contact with Jesuit missionaries and Catholic teachings when he met Lazzaro Cattaneo, SJ (1560–1640) in Canton. His subsequent encounter with Matteo Ricci in Nanjing in 1600 encouraged him to undertake a systematic study of Christian doctrine. After studying Ricci's *Tianzhu shiyi* (*The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*) and completing a ten-day period of instruction in preparation for receiving the sacrament of baptism, Xu Guangqi was baptized on 15 January 1603. The sacrament was administered by João de Rocha, SJ (1565–1623), who bestowed upon him a new Christian name – Paulus (Paul). The choice of this name was certainly not accidental, as the example of the Apostle of the Gentiles was intended to guide the newly baptized convert in his efforts on behalf of the Christian community.[4] Following his baptism, Xu demonstrated profound commitment to the dissemination of Christianity in China, as well as to the transmission of knowledge gained through his collaborative studies with Matteo Ricci. To this end, he relocated to Beijing in 1604. This cooperation resulted, among other achievements, in the first translation of Euclid's *Elements* into Chinese and in Latin translations of Confucian teachings. Paulus Xu Guangqi not only actively promoted the Christian faith within his own family – leading to the baptism of his wife, children, and extended relatives – but also worked for the growth and development of the Chinese Christian community as a whole. To accomplish this, he financed the construction of Jesuit churches and residences in his native Shanghai, actively protected missionaries from persecution, and, in his memorials

4 The special patronage of St. Paul the Apostle over Xu Guangqi was also emphasized during the funeral rites discussed in this article, as a portrait of St. Paul was carried in the procession as the first sacred image.

addressed to the imperial court, argued for the possibility of coexistence between Christianity and Confucian teaching.

Xu Guangqi died on 8 November 1633 in Beijing. During his illness, he was accompanied and provided with spiritual support by another Jesuit, Johann Schall von Bell, who also ensured that Xu Guangqi's body was transported to Shanghai, his native city, in accordance with Chinese funerary customs. There, the body was laid in state and remained on public display for the following eight years, as only in 1641 did external circumstances allow for the funeral ceremonies to be conducted with the full ceremonial honors due to an official of his rank.

In his *History of China* (*Historiae Sinarum Imperii*, Jap. Sin. 103, 4r–5v), Tomasz Dunin Szpot provided a detailed account of the entire ceremony, offering a careful description of each rite, which combined elements of traditional Chinese ritual practice with Christian customs[5]. This extensive description – spanning three pages of the manuscript – may have played a significant role in shaping the perceptions of European readers, for whom Dunin Szpot's work was ultimately intended, regarding the possibility of a harmonious integration of the two traditions. The funeral of such a prominent state official, and at the same time a devout Christian and defender of the Church in China, as Xu Guangqi was, constituted tangible evidence that the Confucian doctrine concerning the veneration of ancestors through funerary rites and commemorative ceremonies could be fully reconciled with Catholic doctrine – one of the central points of contention in the so-called Chinese Rites Controversy. In Dunin Szpot's account, elements of Confucian and Christian tradition resonate with one another and form a harmonious whole.

Dunin Szpot emphatically underscores this reconciliation of the principles of both traditions already during the preparations for the funeral of Paulus Xu, as the decision concerning the form of burial was taken with particular care. It considered several factors and was the result of consultations between the family and the Jesuits:

> … Doctor Jacob, after consultation with Father Brancato, relatives, and friends, undertook to render to his father the final honors with such dignity as were required by his father's rank, the good reputation of the Christian

5 A detailed account of European and Chinese funeral customs and the interpenetration of both traditions in China under the influence of the Jesuit evangelization can be found in Nicolas Standaert, *The Interweaving of Rituals Funerals in the Cultural Exchange Between China and Europe* (Washington: University of Washington Press, 2008).

religion in the eyes of the pagans, and the laws of the empire concerning the burial of distinguished men.

The Doctor Jacob mentioned in the quotation above – Xu Ji – was the only son of Xu Guangqi. As his successor and closest surviving relative, he was obliged both to observe the longest period of mourning among all family members and to ensure a proper burial, provide his father with posthumous honor, and care for his grave for the rest of his life.[6] The observance of mourning, understood as "clothing oneself in filial obedience" (*chuanxiao*), required the son to wear a coarse, sleeveless garment without hems or adornment, fastened only with a belt, for three years.[7] For state officials, the death of a parent[8] imposed the formal obligation to take a three-year leave from duties toward the state. Through both appearance and conduct, the son was required to manifest sorrow at the loss of his father, a requirement that was to be particularly evident during the funeral ceremony itself, when the son – physically weakened by grief – walked in the procession leaning on a staff and supported by relatives.[9]

Dunin Szpot explains the extension of the mourning period beyond that prescribed by tradition in the case of Xu Guangqi's death not only by the son's exceptional sense of loss and respect for the deceased, but also by the necessity of preparing a dignified burial site – namely, the construction of a mausoleum[10] and the planting of cypress trees around

6 Cf. Wiesław Olszewski, *Chiny. Zarys kultury* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza w Poznaniu, 2003), 77.

7 In accordance with the degree of kinship to the deceased, the same attire was also prescribed for a father after the death of his firstborn son, for a wife after the death of her husband, for an unmarried daughter after the death of her father, and for a vassal after the death of his liege. In cases of more distant kinship, mourning garments were correspondingly lighter and more artfully made, and the period for which they were worn was shorter; cf. Jacques Pimpaneau, *Chiny. Kultura i tradycje*, trans. Irena Kałużyńska (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Akademickie DIALOG, 2001), 123–124.

8 In pre-Ming China, only the death of a father required the observance of a three-year mourning period, while the death of a mother entailed mourning of the second rank, unless she was the father's principal wife. From the time of the Ming dynasty onward, mourning for one's mother was obligatorily observed for three years, just as in the case of mourning for one's father.

9 John Chinnery, "Rodzina i społeczeństwo," in *Chiny. Kraj niebiańskiego smoka*, ed. Edward L. Shaughnessy, trans. Anna K. Maleszko, Bożena Mierzejewska (Warszawa: Horyzont, 2001), 60.

10 In Chinese tradition, both the selection of the site for the construction of a tomb and the determination of the date of the funeral required consultation with a geomancer. Dunin Szpot does not mention such consultations being undertaken by the Xu family; however, it may be inferred that the exceptionally long interval between the death and

it. Dunin Szpot emphasizes that cypress trees were also regarded by the Chinese as trees associated with mourning and burial, although it appears that their association with graves in China was rather linked to their perception as symbols of longevity.[11] The long lifespan of these plants, planted as guardians of tombs, was meant to ensure the enduring preservation of the burial sites themselves.

In shaping decisions concerning the entire course of Xu Guangqi's funeral ceremony – which was intended to serve as a dual testimony to the deceased's standing, both within the state and within the Christian community – a significant role was naturally played by the spiritual guardian of the local Christians, Francesco Brancato, SJ (1607–1671).[12] His opinion, and above all his participation in the ceremony, exerted a strong influence on the funeral's representational impact. The ceremony thus took on the character of a public manifestation of Christianity, while at the same time remaining fully embedded within and respectful of Chinese tradition. This is already evident in the rites preceding the burial itself. Dunin describes them as follows:

> Thus, on the night preceding the mourning procession and the funeral ceremony, one hundred and forty Christians dressed in mourning garments set out from the Jesuit church, carrying lit torches and walking pair by pair in a long line through the most prominent streets of the city, as far as the city gate, and from there to the House of Learning,[13] where the body was lying in state. At the head of this mournful procession marched four purple banners bearing a white cross, while a fifth – white with a purple cross and the five wounds of Christ – was carried by four selected youths. From four silver vessels filled with fragrant incense, they rendered homage to the signs of Christ's death. Next followed a gilded cross of Christ, mounted on a magnificently decorated frame and surrounded on all sides by the light of candles made of pure wax, carried on the shoulders of bearers. It was accompanied by many other Christian faithful with their rosaries – who, as

burial of Xu Guangqi could have been conditioned by multiple factors, including those not explicitly addressed in the text.

11 Cf. Wolfram Eberhard, *Symbole chińskie. Słownik*, trans. Renata Darda (Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych UNIVERSITAS, 2001), s.v. *cyprys (bo)*, 45.

12 Francesco Brancato was an Italian Jesuit who conducted vigorous and effective evangelizing activity in China, including in Shanghai, where he baptized several thousand Chinese converts, cf. https://www.fondazioneintorcetta.info/pdf/Brancati_Francesco_1607_1671.pdf (accessed on: 29.12.2025).

13 The House of Learning, a pavilion built by Paulus Xu Guangqi himself as a place of study, was located outside the city walls, which made it particularly suitable for displaying the coffin containing the deceased's body.

> mentioned above, numbered many thousands within the walls of this city. In this ordered formation, the procession passed through streets lined on both sides with spectators and proceeded to the House of Learning. There, Doctor Jacob Xu, a mandarin, together with his three sons, came out to meet them. He knelt with great reverence, received those approaching in accordance with Chinese custom, and venerated the cross. Finally, when the cross was carried into the spacious main hall of the House, he offered solemn thanks to the Christians for their piety and dismissed them.

The throngs of thousands accompanying the Christian symbols in the procession, along with banners and the cross carried through clouds of incense to the funerary hall, were received by the principal mourners in the Chinese manner – with a bow to the ground. This visitation of the deceased, performed by Chinese Christians, fulfilled a duty prescribed by Chinese custom. Relatives were obliged to bow before the coffin, and the number of mourning laments and expressions of grief they uttered was strictly determined by their degree of kinship to the deceased.

The most important and grandest ceremonies were associated with the funeral itself. In the traditional Chinese ritual, they began in front of the ancestral temple, from where the procession set out according to a fixed order. At the front walked professional mourners, followed by musicians and exorcists driving away evil spirits, and then the mourners carrying personal belongings of the deceased. In the case of officials and warriors, these included items associated with their offices and weapons, as well as garments, vessels, and jewelry intended to be buried with the deceased. Next came the coffin, transported on a special funeral cart, behind which the deceased's family followed according to a hierarchical order determined by degree of kinship.[14]

All of these elements are present in the description of Xu Guangqi's funeral – the Christian Paulus Xu – with the difference that they were supplemented or modified by elements of Catholic ritual. Thus, in the early hours of the morning, when the procession was formed to escort Xu Guangqi to his final resting place, at the head of the funeral procession

> … a triumphal feretory bore an image of Saint Paul the Apostle, Teacher to the Nations, holding the Gospel in his hand – as a memorial to the tireless zeal and fervent effort with which Doctor Paulus Xu Colao[15] promoted the Christian faith in the Chinese empire. After the image of the holy Apostle marched six banners depicting the holy Archangels Michael, Gabriel, and

14 Cf. Alexandra Wetzel, *Chiny. Od ustanowienia cesarstwa do dynastii Ming* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo "Arkady," 2008), 296.

15 *Colao* – a Chinese term for a high official.

> Raphael; the Guardian Angel; the Queen of Angels; and the Holy Cross. These were positioned appropriately among groups of Christians carrying censers with precious incense. Following them walked one hundred and forty Christians in a long line, carrying lit torches and rosaries in their hands.

Placing images of an entire array of Catholic saints, the Virgin Mary, and the cross at the forefront of the procession clearly establishes a hierarchy, placing the religious element before the cultural. However, for balance, the next stage of the procession takes on a strictly traditional character, referring to Chinese history and the personal achievements of the deceased:

> Next, twenty tables draped with white silk were carried, each displaying painted emblems drawn from the early history of China's great heroes, celebrated for deeds benefiting the state, but here adapted in honor of Paulus Colao. Accompanying these tributes to Paulus were his garments, insignia of the Colao rank, and a gilded official's chair, borne on the shoulders of four men, flanked by four mandarins on horseback. Behind them proceeded an image of Paulus Colao himself, displayed on a feretory covered with silk interwoven with gold, surrounded by a radiant glow and carried by eight men – one might imagine that the living Colao was stepping out from his tribunal or palace into the city. Accompanying the image were twenty drums struck in a mournful rhythm, alongside weeping mandarins, former students of Doctor Paulus, dressed in mourning garments of coarse hemp and bound with straw cords; next followed friends, relatives, Father Francesco Brancato between two Christian scholars – grandsons of Colao – and Doctor Jacob, the son, in accordance with Chinese custom supported on a staff, appearing faint with profound grief and sorrow, held up by two attendants. After this mournful scene came the body itself, enclosed in a coffin made of fragrant, decay-resistant wood, covered with white silk embroidered with a magnificent red cross, topped with the inscription of the Savior in the four initials, as custom dictated. Flanking the coffin were, on the right, Paulus's widow – the mother of Doctor Jacob – borne in a litter by eight men, and on the left, Jacob's wife with their two daughters, Candida and Felicita – each in her own litter carried by four men. Behind the coffin followed all the female servants of the household, dressed in mourning attire, separated from the view of spectators on both sides by linen curtains two hundred hands long and eight hands high, hung on poles like walls. At the very end of the procession walked countless poor Christians

gathered from across the Shanghai region, to whom, after the funeral rites, all of the aforementioned tables with offerings were distributed as alms.[16]

Thus, all elements of a traditional Chinese funeral were preserved. The mourners, dressed in coarse garments, proceeded toward the burial site to the solemn rhythm of the drums. The deceased, present in a dual sense – both through his image and as the body resting in the coffin – undertook his journey to the final resting place. His son accompanied him on this journey but walked with difficulty, weakened by prolonged grief, seeking support from the men accompanying him and from a long staff (*zhangqi*), which complemented the mourning attire and, in accordance with tradition, was made of undyed cloth.

The traditional absence of color in the mourners' garments is echoed in the shroud covering the coffin. It is made of white silk, for it was precisely the lack of color – white[17] – that was perceived in China as the color of mourning. Against this background, however, the image of the cross embroidered on the shroud stands out in vivid red. The color of the embroidery is certainly not accidental, as it not only refers to the washing of the deceased in the life-giving blood of the crucified Christ, but also evokes Chinese symbolism, in which red has been regarded since ancient times as a life-giving color[18] associated with fortune. In this way, the symbolism of the two traditions is intertwined in the posthumous shroud of Paulus Xu. Also noteworthy is the presence of women accompanying the coffin, somewhat hidden within their litters. Carried, again in accordance with the hierarchy of kinship, the female relatives of the deceased, along with their attendants walking on foot, expanded the throng of those mourning Xu Guangqi – people who, as we may infer, owed their conversion to Christianity to him. Among them was one of the deceased's granddaughters, Candida Xu, who would later play a significant role in the history of Christianity in China. She became renowned for her piety and efforts on behalf of Catholicism, and in some studies is even referred to as the "mother of the Chinese Church." The activities

16 These carefully itemized gifts intended for almsgiving consisted of "numerous slaughtered pigs, sheep, calves, hares, roosters, and other animals of this kind, together with two hundred or more tables lavishly laden with various dishes and covered with silk cloths – all of which, after the funeral, were to be distributed among the poor."

17 Cf. Pimpaneau, *Chiny. Kultura i tradycje*, 122; Janusz Smołucha, "Pogrzeb Matteo Ricciego SJ (1552–1610) w *Historiae Sinarum Imperii* Tomasza Szpota Dunina. Kulturowa interakcja", *Rocznik Filozoficzny Ignatianum* 29/4 (2003), 64.

18 "Red appears to have been regarded in prehistoric times as a 'life-giving' color; burial finds reveal that cinnabar or red ochre was placed in graves together with the dead.", cf. Eberhard, *Symbole chińskie*., s.v. *czerwony (hong)*, 47.

of Candida Xu were described and publicized in Europe by the Jesuit Philippe Couplet (1623–1693), who collaborated with her.[19]

The sheer number of people forming the funeral procession – which Dunin Szpot emphatically stresses consisted of "countless Christians" – most clearly attests to the effectiveness of the Jesuits' evangelizing efforts in China. Paulus Xu's funeral was a carefully staged and deliberate manifestation of the triumph of Catholicism, intended to appeal to the imagination and emotions of even those residents of Shanghai who had not yet encountered the teachings of the "Fathers from the West." Through its monumental theatricality, visual spectacle, musical accompaniment, and mass scale, the funeral procession of a high-ranking official, esteemed for his service to the local community, served as the most effective catechesis the Jesuits could provide to the people of Shanghai. This is also why Dunin Szpot's account so meticulously describes all elements of the procession, highlighting the Christian symbols interwoven with traditional Chinese ritual. After reading it, a European audience could hardly fail to feel admiration for the Jesuits' achievements, who could boast such a spectacular success in their evangelizing mission.

The funeral procession itself, moreover, attracts far more attention than the burial ceremony, which is described much more modestly and unfolds, as it were, along two parallel tracks: at the coffin, Chinese rites (referred to by Dunin Szpot as "pagan") are performed in succession, followed by Catholic rites celebrated by Fr. Francesco Brancato:

> In this order of procession and with such solemnity of ceremony, the cortege reached the burial site. There, between two so-called triumphal arches – such as are commonly erected in China in honor of meritorious men – and amid a ring of cypresses surrounding those arches, a spacious chapel was built over the grave. When the body was taken from the shoulders of the bearers and laid within it, the pagan friends, having performed their funerary rites, returned to the city, while Father Brancato, together with the Christians, after reciting – according to the Church rite – the Office for the Dead and other prayers for the soul of this righteous man, brought the funeral observances of that day to a close.

From this passage we do not learn according to which rite or religious order the Chinese performed their ceremonies, which may point to a certain ignorance on the part of the Jesuits, who not infrequently subsumed all systems of Chinese belief under the common label of *idololatria*.

19 Cf. Gail King, *"A Model for All Christian Women". Candida Xu, a Chinese Woman of the Seventeenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2020).

What is noteworthy, however, is that although Paul Xu was a Christian, his non-Christian friends were not denied the right to pay him respect in accordance with their own religious convictions. Nevertheless, it is the Christian prayers that ultimately bring the ceremony to a close, in a sense sealing the entire set of rites.

The following day brought the official completion of the farewell to Xu Guangqi. At sunrise, the Prefect of Shanghai, accompanied by mandarins, presented at the sarcophagus a gift sent by the Emperor in honor of the distinguished official. After the ceremony had been carried out in accordance with Chinese custom and the entire procession returned to the city, the final act of the funeral took place – the placing of the coffin in the sarcophagus, preceded by a blessing and prayers performed by Fr. Francesco Brancato. The Jesuit additionally covered the coffin with a white silk cloth, on which an epitaph of his own authorship was embroidered in golden letters, with the following wording:[20]

> To the Great Doctor of the Chinese Empire, Paul Xu, counsellor of the imperial cabinet of that realm, a man most eminent among all the dignitaries of the state; for his acceptance of the Christian faith, which he honored, loved, and spread; renowned beyond the measure of his earthly years – the entire Society of Jesus has erected this monument as a token of grateful remembrance and love.

The second eulogy, also authored by Fr. Brancato and similar in content, but written in Chinese, was embroidered in gold thread on silk and hung in the main hall of the House of Learning, where Xu Guangqi's body had previously rested while awaiting burial. The text praised the merits of the deceased for the state, for the local community of Shanghai, and for the Society of Jesus, presenting the magnitude and versatility of his achievements. Its placement in a publicly accessible space, in a position of honor, made it possible for all learned mandarins visiting the House of Learning to become acquainted with it. Dunin Szpot once again emphasizes Fr. Brancato's skillful combination of the two traditions: although the eulogy was written in Chinese and on a traditional material, its style and form were European. This was so well received by learned readers that it ultimately led to the eulogy being published in print.

In *The History of China*, Dunin Szpot contributed to securing and perpetuating the posthumous glory of Xu Guangqi, portraying him in

20 On the epitaph and its reconstruction on Xu Guangqi's tomb in Shanghai, cf. article *Tomasz Szpot Dunin's Historiae Sinarum Imperii and the Original Text of Xu Guangqi's Latin Epitaph* (in print).

the final paragraph of his account as an uncompromising promoter and defender of Christianity in China, as well as a great benefactor of the Society of Jesus. Paulus Xu provided the Jesuits with comprehensive support and means of livelihood, institutional and financial protection, and through his personal example attracted entire multitudes of new believers to the Church. To this day, Xu Guangqi's tomb remains a central feature of the Shanghai park that bears his name, and the 350th anniversary of his death was publicly commemorated. At that time (in 1983), for understandable reasons, media coverage emphasized primarily Xu Guangqi's contributions to the development of Chinese science and technology, paying little attention to the Christian dimension of his life. The twenty-first century – especially the year 2010, when the 400th anniversary of Matteo Ricci's death was solemnly celebrated in Beijing – changed the perception of Xu Guangqi's life achievements in global media and scholarly literature. His figure, alongside Ricci's, once again became a symbol of intercultural dialogue, of China's openness to the Western world, and of a partnership rooted in mutual acceptance and respect for difference. His contributions to the Church were also highlighted, which resulted in the opening of his beatification process in 2011.[21] This undoubtedly confirms the conviction held by Matteo Ricci and the continuators of his evangelization method in China: that the Chinese could become Christians without losing their cultural and social identity – that in becoming Christians, they need not cease to be Chinese. Xu Guangqi and his descendants, immortalized on the pages of Tomasz Dunin Szpot's *Historia Sinarum Imperii*, constitute the best proof of this.

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21 Cf. https://jcapsj.org/2011/06/chinese-catholic-layman-be-beatified/ (accessed on: 29.12.2025)

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