"Sinae autem imperium suum Chunghoa vocant, & Cungque …"

On exploring pre-1700 strategies to integrate China into Western knowledge

Abstract

The traditional master narrative describing the integration of China (or information from/about China) into Western knowledge is tale of heroic explorers driven by European inquisitiveness. Research has focused on biographies of people involved and bibliographies of texts produced. The perpetuation of a quasi-canon of 'important' texts on China has hidden the lack of focus on the content of the material and the difficulties of de-facto accessing the (often rare) books.

Digitization projects open the doors to new ways to explore pre-1700 strategies to integrate 'things Chinese' into European (common) knowledge by providing easier access to hitherto hard-to-find texts. "Bibliotheca Sinica 2.0" is a tool to locate digital copies of Western books on China 'hidden' in digital repositories around the world.

Starting in the seventeenth century, writing the history of Western learning about China has been a prime example of a carefully controlled message. The labelling of texts such as *De christiana expeditione apud Sinas*, *Novus Atlas Sinensis*, *China monumentis … illustrate*, or *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* as 'influential' and 'important' has been widely accepted despite a lack of evidence. The paper will outline a new approach for writing the history of early Western contacts with 'things Chinese' by reassessing hitherto unchallenged assumptions. Part of this new approach is the adaptation of theories of knowledge research by exploring paradigms proposed by Burkhard Spinner for applicability to the early modern period.

Using a small selection of examples, it will be demonstrated how making use of digitized material interrupts the vicious cycle narrating a story of 'great white men'. In doing so, a different narrative is suggested, a narrative that takes a variety of strategies into account and values the serendipitous paths chosen to integrate 'things Chinese' into common knowledge in pre-1700 Europe.

About Bibliotheca Sinica 2.0

Bibliotheca Sinica 2.0 explores Sino-Western encounters by ways of texts and images published before 1939 and is as an extension of a bibliography "Western Books on China in Libraries in Vienna/Austria, 1477-1939" that was started in 2003/04 and switched to the current format in 2009.

Bibliotheca Sinica 2.0 aims to provide information on digitized books on China published up to 1939 freely available in digital repositories all over the world. The project wants to facilitate further research on the various aspects of the history of Western perceptions and Sino-Western relations. To maintain this, references to major bibliographies are provided for each entry.

Bibliotheca Sinica 2.0 is an independent project (without external funding) run by Monika Lehner an Georg Lehner.

URL: https://www.univie.ac.at/Geschichte/China-Bibliographie/blog/

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