

The Likely Origins of The *Boxer Codex*: Martín de Rada and the *Zhigong Tu*

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The *Boxer Codex* is shrouded in mystery and allure. The beauty of its illustrations, its anthropological and legendary contents, and the elusive history of its creation all make of the *Codex* an enticing, yet for a long time overlooked, object of study. The unfinished manuscript of the *Codex* encompasses a series of anonymous illustrations, descriptions and narratives dealing with the peoples, history, and mythological lore of East Asia as well as a collection of five accounts by three Spanish and Portuguese voyagers. Although we lack the necessary evidence to ascertain the stages of the *Codex*'s elaboration along with the agents involved in its drawing, composition and assembly, it is widely believed that the *Codex* was envisioned and created in the sixteenth-century Spanish Philippines. Despite its language and possible Spanish origins, the uniqueness of the *Codex*'s style and contents within the Hispanic and early modern European ethnographical tradition signals Continental East Asian rather than Spanish-Philippine sources.

This paper places the *Boxer Codex* within the tradition of Chinese written and pictorial records of encounters with the alien “other” in order to demonstrate that it draws from East Asian sources. A handful of scholars have recently touched on the Chinese sources of the *Codex*, opening the path for further investigation, yet the question is still in need of much research.¹ In their 2016 edition of the *Codex*, Souza and Turley (33-34) have noted the Chinese origins of the illustrations, in particular of those reproducing mythological beasts, which they link to *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*, and the ones portraying deities, connected to two sixteenth-century vernacular novels representative of the *shenmo*, “gods and demons.” Souza and Turley (33-34) state that these illustrations were most likely developed by Chinese artisans under the direction of a European patron. With regards to the illustrations of tributaries, Souza and Turley (33-34) note the following:

As for the depictions of couples or individuals from China and from states that had tributary relationships with China that appear in the *Codex*, the sources were probably encyclopedias with illustrations depicting such peoples which were already being produced and available during the Ming.

For the purpose of this study, I elaborate on this last statement focusing on the *Codex*'s descriptions composed in the style of Chinese tributary nations, which I will argue belong to the ancient genre of the *zhigong tu*, “illustrations of tributaries.” These ethnographical accounts, which date back to the Liang dynasty (552-557 AD), document the way of life and customs of the peoples living along China's imperial frontiers, continental and maritime, as well as the geopolitics of China's relationships with them. In light of these works, the ethnographical segments of the *Boxer Codex*, particularly those dealing with Chinese peoples—which bear an astonishing resemblance both in text and image to the Chinese accounts of foreign peoples—, unfold as a reworking and amalgamation of a long-established tradition of Chinese treatises on non-native ethnics partaking in the ancient Chinese tributary system. Consequently, I will suggest that the

¹ See Yu-Chung Lee; Ollé and Rubiés, 2015; and Chen.

ethnographical accounts in the *Codex* as a whole combine a knowledge and rough translation of the Chinese *zhigong tu* with first-hand experience. Finally, the *Codex*'s Chinese sources prompt us to reconsider its date of composition and authorship, which remain in the dark due to the lack of documentary evidence. Given its creator's probable familiarity with Chinese albums and their artisans, the Augustinian missionary and cosmographer Martín de Rada (1533-78) appears to be the *Codex*'s most likely compiler. Rada, who in his writings bears witness to the Chinese ethnographic tradition, was in close contact with the Chinese people both in the Philippines and on the mainland as a result of his evangelization of them. In fact, in 1575 Fr. Martín travelled to China, where he claimed to have collected numerous Chinese books, in which the origin of the *Boxer Codex* most probably lies.

In 1947 Charles R. Boxer, the renowned historian of Dutch and Portuguese colonial maritime history, purchased the codex that was subsequently named after him.² The *Boxer Codex* consists of two separate parts, one that deals with exploration and another that revolves around the ethnography of East Asian peoples and their myths. The part dealing with exploration comprises a gathering of three *rutters*, a type of geographical and sailing report, on the coasts of Aceh, Patani and Siam by João Ribeiro Gaio, bishop of Malacca since 1578; Roxo de Brito's journey to New Guinea between the years 1581 and 1582, and a portrayal of the kingdom of Tai Ming—i.e. China³— by Fr. Martín de Rada on the occasion of his visit to the Funkien province in 1575.⁴ The part that focuses on exploration has been used for dating the *Codex* given that it provides a chronological frame for the work's composition, yet it cannot be assumed that it formed part of the original plan for the work, since it could have been added at any time to the cultural component prior to its binding at Madrid in the early years of the seventeenth century (see below). It has been widely believed that the anthropological component of the codex, whose author is unknown, came into being in late-sixteenth-century Manila, center of the Spanish Empire in the Pacific. Boxer (1950, 47-48) maintained that either Gómez Pérez Dasmariñas, governor of the Philippines from c.1590 to 1593, or his son and successor in office, Luis Pérez Dasmariñas—who ruled between 1593 and 1603—, commissioned the *Codex*. More recently, Crossley (2014, 116) has developed Boxer's conclusions pointing to Gómez Pérez Dasmariñas as the work's patron due to his good relations with the citizens of the *Parian*—the Chinese quarter of sixteenth-century Manila adjacent to Intramuros and built to house Chinese merchants in the sixteenth century—and his exceptional interest in art. Nonetheless, there is no sound proof to validate these hypotheses, allowing for the possibility of an earlier date.⁵ In its turn, the cultural component consists of three disparate

² The Lilly Library at Indiana University in Bloomington currently holds the *Boxer Codex*, of which they provide a digital on-line version. For a detailed account on the history of the codex's creation, compilation and acquisition, see the introduction to Souza and Turley's edition of the *Codex*.

³ "And we shall be calling this country Tai Ming, for that is its proper name, because I do not see where the Portuguese could have come up with the name China, or Sina, unless they run across it in some village or location in these environs and then called the whole country by this name, just as in these islands, the Bruneians, though they are also called Burneyens, are also called Chinese" (*Boxer Codex*, 561). All the quotations from the *Codex* have been excerpted from Souza and Turley's 2016 edition. I will quote in Spanish or English as appropriate.

⁴ See Crossley 2014 for a study of the "explorer items."

⁵ Although this assumption has been widely accepted and reproduced, there is no substantial evidence to support it. See Souza and Turley 2016, 8-10.

segments. While the first one of these segments—chapters one to seven—describes a series of ethnic peoples and cultures from the Philippines, the second—chapters eight to fifteen, and chapter twenty-two—is devoted to the peoples from the East Pacific continental shores and islands. Finally, the remaining chapters—sixteen to twenty-one—, which constitute the third segment, tells of Chinese tributary neighbors, their history and cultures, including a bestiary and a pantheon. In sum, the exploratory and anthropological matters in the *Codex* combine to render a substantial compendium of southeastern Pacific ethnic tribes, nationalities, and beliefs. Yet, although the exploratory rutters and accounts round off the anonymous cultural illustrations and captions, it cannot be assumed that both parts were elements of a unified original plan for creating the *Codex*. Quite the opposite, in truth the possibilities concerning the stages of its compilation and the agents involved are varied.

Identifying the individuals involved in the patronage, composition and production of the *Boxer Codex* at the present time is not entirely feasible given the lack solid documentary evidence that exists to confirm what are little more than hypotheses and conjectures. Conclusions in this regard are reduced to no more than speculation, although some assumptions can be advanced and others refuted. The historian William Henry Scott (144) attributed the captions and narrations accompanying the drawings of the ethnographic and mythological portions of the manuscript to the inventive pen of a royal clerk or explorer, “an intelligent, observant traveller, perhaps a colonial officer, who did not stay long in one place, could not speak any Philippine language, and used an interpreter given to Mexican spelling conventions.” In their edition of the *Codex*, Souza and Turley (13) revise Scott’s claims portraying the compiler as a “layman and not a member of a religious order [...] a secular official, because a person in such a position would have had the time to dedicate himself or others to the translation of original reports in Portuguese to Spanish, or to manage a group of translators.” According to Souza and Turley, the compiler was in all likelihood a secretary to the governor since he exhibits no evangelizing zeal and seems to had been knowledgeable about Asiatic cultures and sufficiently schooled in the exploratory literature on the region to produce “a veritable anthology, combining existing accounts or reports (e.g., one of Ribeiro Gaio’s rutters, which was addressed to the King) with anonymous material” (Souza and Turley, 9). This clerk also must have been present in Manila at the time of the creation of the *Codex* since he had to have engaged in business with a group of Chinese artists (Souza and Turley, 9). Thus scholars seem to agree upon a layman, maybe a professional clerk stationed in the Spanish Philippines, as the author of the *Codex*.

Souza and Turley (26-27) propose Antonio de Morga as a the possible coordinator of the project given that he was a well-educated man of the law and a writer himself, the author of the *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas*, published in Mexico in 1609. Morga was appointed Governor of the Philippines under Luis Pérez Dasmariñas, a post that he held until 1598 when he resigned to become *oidor* of the *Real Audiencia* in Manila. He was also an acquaintance of Hernando de los Ríos Coronel, who had arrived in the Philippines in 1588 as a pilot and who might have been responsible for the appearance of the *Codex* in Spain when he travelled back to Castile c. 1605 as *Procurador general*.⁶ Once in Madrid, the *Codex* was bound around the year 1614, as physical evidence proves (Crossley 2014, 118- 119 and 122-123). In fact, in the last chapter of his *Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas*,

⁶ For a biography of Hernando de los Ríos Coronel, see Crossley, 2011. Sadly, there are no references in this volume to the *Boxer Codex*.

Morga gives an account of the origins, customs and forms of government of Philippine ethnic groups, some of which—such as the *cagayans*, the *visayans* or *pintados*, and the *sambales*—conform in name and in a small number of details to their overall anthropological description with those in the *Codex*. See for example the ensuing description of the cagayan's clothing:

El traje, y vestido destes naturales de Luzón [en la provincia de Cagayán], antes que los españoles entraran en la tierra, comúnmente, eran; los varones unas ropillas de cagan, sin cuello, cosidas por delante, con mangas cortas, poco más de la cintura, unas azules y otras negras, y algunas coloradas en los principales, que las llaman chininas, y una manta de color, rebuelta a la cintura, y entre las piernas, hasta cubrir sus partes vergonçosas, y a medio muslo que llaman bahaques, la pierna desnuda y el pie descalço... (Morga, 254)

Su traje y su constumbre es traer bahaques y unos sayos de manta negra anchos y largo hasta medio muslo. La mayor parte de los naturales andan en cueros. (*Boxer Codex*, 44)

The handful of similarities between the *Sucesos* and the *Codex* however do not suffice to claim Morga's authorship. Furthermore, there are no traces in Morga's work of the second and third segments of the cultural component, the ones concerning Pacific nationalities and Chinese civilization. The individuals involved in the production of the *Codex*'s cultural component and on its final assembly will for now remain a puzzle owing to the lack of sufficient proof to make a well-founded claim in this regard. To this day, scholarship on the *Boxer Codex* has insisted on a late-sixteenth century high-ranking patron, at the behest of whom the composition of the *Codex* was undertaken given to the absence of an acute proselytizing zeal in it. Yet, after a careful study of its sources as well as of textual evidence from the *Codex* itself, along with other written documents, the possibility of identifying the author of the anonymous matter takes on a different complexion.

I shall argue that the key to understanding the *Codex* as a whole resides in its sources, which I maintain to be predominantly Chinese. The *Boxer Codex* is neither the result of a colonial clerk's observations nor an assortment of Spanish and Portuguese travel literature. Instead, the Philippine manuscript shows signs of being a recasting of Chinese ethnographical representations of foreign nationalities and of the encyclopedic compendia mentioned by Souza and Turley. I will focus on the representation of China's tributary neighbors to show the *Codex*'s correspondence both in content and image to Chinese ethnographical accounts from local gazetteers and from the ethnographical genre of the *zhigong tu*, "illustrations of tributaries." Chinese historians, encyclopedists, and artisans continuously produced representations of foreign tributaries, integral to China's solipsistic worldview, during the Middle Ages up until the eighteenth century. Indeed, the Augustinian missionary, scientist, mathematician, and voyager Martín de Rada (1533-78), whose account of Tai Ming China is included in the *Codex*, bears witness to Chinese ethnographic writing, from which he extracted his knowledge. He notes that

Some of the things we shall be discussing here regarding this realm we were eyewitness to, while others have been culled from their own printed books and descriptions of their land, for they have a natural curiosity about themselves. Not only have they given us general and detailed descriptions of their own country, but they have also printed books about it in which are described all its provinces, cities, villages, and frontier posts and garrisons, plus all their details, and their families and taxpayers and taxes and revenues that the Emperor receives from each of them. There came into my possession seven different books, printed in different years and written by different authors; and thus by comparing them I have been able to better arrive at the truth... (*Boxer Codex*, 560)

To be sure, Martín de Rada sailed to Mexico from Spain around the year 1563, and in 1564 volunteered to participate in Andrés de Urdaneta's Pacific expedition to East Asia, staying in the newly founded Manila, on the island of Luzon upon arrival in the Philippines.⁷ He became a renowned scholar and cosmographer, a defender of the Philippine natives' rights against the abuse of *encomenderos* and soldiers, and a tireless, eager evangelist with a special interest in the conversion of Chinese peoples, with whom he developed extensive relations both in the *Parian* and in the Philippine ports where their merchant vessels arrived regularly. Martín de Rada was in fact a strong supporter of the Spanish conquest of China, which he encouraged in his letters to the viceroy of Mexico, Martín Enríquez de Almanza (*Boxer*, lxxi; Folch, 44). In 1574, Rada entered into contact with the Chinese envoy Wang Wanggao, sent to locate the pirate Limahon, who had attacked the Manila Bay and established a pirate base in Pagasinan, the northern area of Luzon. Wang Wanggao, who developed good relations with the Spanish officials, then offered to take a number of Spanish settlers with him on his way back to Fujian. On June 12, 1575, Rada together with Jerónimo Martín, Miguel Loarca, and Pedro Sarmiento shipped to China, where they stayed through August. The year after, Rada tried to return to China on the vessel of the Chinese embassy to Manila, but he was treacherously abandoned in Ilocos before reaching his destination. From his first trip to China, Martín de Rada took back with him to the Philippines more than a hundred volumes of Chinese books, as Gonzalez de Mendoza records in chapters XVI and XVII of the first part of his *History of the Great and Mighty kingdom of China*:

El P. Rada y sus compañeros trajeron cuando volvieron de la China a las Filipinas muchos cuerpos de diversas materias, que los habían comprado en la ciudad de Aucheo, estampados en diversas partes de aquel Reino; aunque los más en la provincia de Ochiam, donde hay la mayor estampa; y trajeron muchos más, según dijo, porque había grandísimas librerías y valían a poco precio, si el Virrey no se lo estorbara, que, temiéndose por ventura que por medio de ellos no se supiesen los secretos del Reino, cosa que con gran cautela procuran encubrir a los extranjeros [...] Los que tenían comprados cuando llegó la voz del mandato eran buena cantidad, de los cuales se han sacado en suma las más cosas que en esta pequeña historia hemos puesto... (González de Mendoza, 128)

⁷ For an account of the life and works of Fr. Martín de Rada, see Boxer 1953, Ostolaza, and Folch. For a history of the Spanish exploration of the Pacific, including Rada's deeds and contributions, see Ollé, 2002.

As González de Mendoza—who extracted this information from Miguel de Loarca rather than Rada (Folch, 60)⁸—states, contemporary knowledge on China sprang from Rada’s Chinese book collection, which comprised a wide range of information, including a description “de los tributarios que tiene cada provincia [de todo el Reino de la China], y el número de los que son libres de pagar el tributo; y los tiempos y el orden de cómo se ha de cobrar” (González de Mendoza, 129). Although the vast majority of Martín de Rada’s library and personal writings were lost over the course of time as a result of pirate attacks, such as Limahon’s, and Rada’s continuous relocation; there are ample references to his production.⁹ Besides a large number of linguistic, religious and cosmographical works, Rada wrote two accounts on China, *De los que les sucedió a los padres Martín de Rada y fray Gerónimo Marín en su embaxada de China hasta que bolvieron a Manila con los Capitanes españoles que los acompañaron* and the *Relación verdadera del reyno de Taibin, por otro nombre China, y del viage que a él hizo el muy reverendo padre fray Martín de Rada, provincial que fue del [sic]orden de San Agustín, que lo vio y anduvo, en la provincia de Hocquien, año de 1575 hecha por él mismo*. The latter is the one included in the *Boxer Codex*. On this account, it does not seem strange that a Western man of letters with such an interest in China as Rada, and having in his possession numerous Chinese compendia, would undertake the assembling of illustrations and the translation of captions. It should not be forgotten that Rada was fluent Chinese; therefore, capable of accomplishing the task, and that he kept good relations with the Chinese artisans and traders of the *Parian*.¹⁰ By reproducing the form and design of the Chinese volumes in his possession, Rada might have sought to provide a heuristic model for the Spanish empire’s own need to define and understand its distant, newly subjugated territories and peoples while underscoring his own role and contribution to the prosperity of the Spanish empire. In light of the above, Martín de Rada seems the most likely compiler of the cultural component of the *Boxer Codex*, which, as the ensuing discussion will show, is based on Chinese albums, particularly from the *zhigong tu*. If that were the case, the *Codex* would have been created in the period between Rada’s return to the Philippines from his second journey in 1576 and his fateful trip to Borneo in 1578. The unfinished manuscript would have remained among his papers, probably along with his description of Ming China, until its journey to the court of Philip II and binding as a book in Madrid.

The Chinese Empire has a long history of international contacts and mergers with its frontier peoples. From its beginnings, when the Zhou Dynasty conquered and absorbed the realms of the Shang around the year 1045, Chinese civilization has been a hybrid entity in which different ethnicities have blended together as a result of constant invasions and shifting borders.¹¹ In addition to territorial expansion, classical Confucian philosophy advocated a Pan-Asiatic and universal order centered around Chinese civilization,

⁸ RAH, Colección Salazar y Castro, ms. 9/4842, f. 149. See Ostolaza, 191-192, for Loarca’s news on Chinese books collected during the trip.

⁹ In his letters Rada complains frequently about the destruction and disappearance of his papers, cf. Folch, 55 and 57. Portuondo traces the afterlife of Rada’s papers, connecting them, on the one hand, to Juan Bautista Gesio’s scholarly endeavors, and on the other, to Juan de Herrera’s cosmographical project to determine the boundaries of the Spanish Empire, entrusted to the mathematician Jaime Juan. Interestingly enough, Portuondo (92 and 290) points to Hernando de los Ríos Coronel as one of the final holders of Rada’s papers.

¹⁰ In this regard, it is significant to take note of the distribution of illustrations and text within the *Codex*, and of the fact that only Rada’s account is accompanied by illustrations. See Souza and Turley, 15.

¹¹ For a short and comprehensive history of East Asia, see Holcombe.

emphasizing ethnic continuity—*datong*—and acculturation to the Chinese lifestyle—*yonxiabianyi* (Dikotter, 2). This classical Confucian ideology became an essential component of Chinese foreign relations. From its beginnings until at least the nineteenth century, Chinese civilization regarded itself as an all-embracing entity under which all people in Asia and around the globe could unite. The Chinese geographical and cultural realm, the *t'ien-hsia* or *tianxia*, which translates as “all-under-heaven,” metaphysically tied together the entire world in harmony. As a result, this Sino-centric cosmological system required geographically adjacent countries, as well as those nations involved in trade with China, to pay homage to the emperor, the *T'ien-tzu* or “Son of Heaven.” These peoples ranged from nearby and culturally similar areas—such as Korea and Vietnam—to nomadic tribes from inner Asia that were culturally non-Chinese; and to more distant nations, whether they were the societies of the southeast Pacific—referred to as “barbarians” by Chinese ethnographies—or Western communities far away from Asia (Fairbank 1968, 2-11).¹² In practice, the Sino-centric worldview was also accompanied by a bureaucratic and ceremonial tributary system that compelled subordinate nations to participate in an array of symbolic rites of gift presentation in exchange for trading privileges and protection.

The rites that constituted the tributary system were meant to enhance China’s ontological superiority, which was otherwise difficult to maintain. Control and governance by the Chinese imperial administration over tributary nations was complex and active, depending on—among other measures, such as, military occupation or tactful administrative stratagems—a body of envoys and interpreters both from the border regions and from the central Chinese empire. On the one hand, Chinese tributaries would send emissaries to the imperial court in order to comply with the aforementioned ceremonies. On the other, the Chinese administration arranged missions to their borderlands with the purpose of both collecting information and proselytizing. The ethnographical intelligence provided both by alien and domestic envoys in their visits to the imperial court took the shape of ethnographical albums, in which along with strategic information regarding physical and human geography, diplomatic emissaries and the foreign peoples in question were portrayed (See Lung).¹³ Chinese ethnographical albums are divided into two subgenres depending on their illustrations: the *wanghui tu*, “illustrations of meetings with kings,” and the *zhigong tu*, “illustrations of tributaries.” As Lung shows, these ethnographical records became part of the official histories of Chinese medieval dynasties, such as the *Suishu*, the official history of the Sui lineage (581-618 AD), and the *Yuanshi waiyizhuan*, the history of the Yuan dynasty (1271–1368 AD).¹⁴ Although the number of extant sources is very scarce,¹⁵ it seems that the *zhigong tu* date back to the Liang era (502-

¹² See Fairbank’s 1968 volume for a through and wide-ranging introduction to the Chinese world order and tribute system. For most recent studies, see Pan, especially with regards to the Han and Sui-Tang periods, and chapters three and four in Kang.

¹³ In her 2009 article on diplomatic missions and the writing of history in Tang China, Rachel Lung expounds on the role of envoys and their interpreters in the collection of data on foreign surrounding territories. It is interesting to note both the interview process to which envoys are bound and the subsequent compilation of cultural and geographical specifics on illustrated accounts, most of which has sadly been lost.

¹⁴ See Brose for a study of the latter.

¹⁵ Hostetler (2001, 88-89) provides a short sample of representations of foreigners, most of them known only by references from other works, such as encyclopedias and histories. Li Jing composed an exclusively written record of the customs of southwestern barbarians, entitled *Yunnan zhilüe*, at the beginning of the fourteenth century. An English translation of the text by Jacqueline M. Armijo-Hussein is found in Mann.

557), when emperor Yuan commissioned the first illustrations of tributaries. They flourished during the Tang dynastic period (618-907) as a result of an unprecedented territorial expansion and reached its zenith in the Qing era (1644-1912) (Lung, 202; Hostetler, 2001 and 2006). The *zhigong tu* albums changed over time both in format and purpose (Hostetler 2001, 44); however, on the whole they continued to provide jurisdictional and ethnographical information on non-Chinese ethnics and minority peoples.

During the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), whose last century overlapped with the Spanish occupation of the Philippines and with the creation of the *Codex*, the southern frontier of present day China was for the most part established as a result of territorial expansion. The meridional border, riven by turmoil, became not only a place for cultural and commercial exchange, but also a strategic site for the strengthening of China’s cultural superiority and colonial dominance (Shin, 29-31).¹⁶ In the days of Ming rule, the ethnographical imagination became paramount for the maintenance of Chinese government at the margins of the empire and served to reaffirm China’s superior level of civilization while subjecting the border minorities to a process of “tribalization” (See Shin, chapter 1).¹⁷ Despite their historical significance, extant ethnographical descriptions remain scarce. As in previous centuries, a large part of the ethnographical writing from the Ming dynasty is gathered in historical accounts, such as the *Da Ming shi lu*, i.e. the *Veritable Records of the Ming Dynasty*. Representations of foreign people were also found in military entries, travel accounts and, especially, in local gazetteers (See Shin).¹⁸ Furthermore, in these centuries recreational travel rose in popularity bringing about a profusion of guidebooks depicting both human and physical geography, as seems to have been the case with Hsieh Chao-che’s *Pai-yiieh-feng-t’u chi*, i.e. the *Record of Customs of Southern China*, most likely composed at the end of the sixteenth century or in the early years of the seventeenth (Shin, 177).

Even though there are no surviving sixteenth-century illustrations of tributaries *per se*, the fact that a revival of pictorial compendia occurred during the Ming period makes it likely that illustrations of tributaries were indeed produced.¹⁹ Some examples of encyclopedic writing from Ming China that involved ethnographical accounts are the *Dao yi zhi lue* (c.1349), i.e. a *Brief Account of the Island Barbarians*; the *Wu che ba jin* (c.1597), i.e. *Selected Gems from Five Cartloads*; and the *San-ts’ai t’u-hui*, i.e. the *Collected Illustrations of the Three Realms*, compiled by Wang Qi (1565-1614) in the late sixteenth-century and published in 1610. The *Collected Illustrations of the Three Realms* in particular

¹⁶ See Dardess (9), especially with regard to the frontiers, which “stretched in a great semicircle: from the subtropics bordering South and Southeast Asia, a lush landscape cut by sharp cliffs and deep ravines; then along the forested mountain edge of Tibet; to the desert, oasis and grassland country of Qinghai, Gansu, and outer Shaanxi; then a stretch of some thousand miles along the lines of the Great Wall, whose construction began in the late fifteenth century, and which China administered directly, and where nothing like a *tusi* system ever came into being; ending finally in the forested, sub-Arabic expanses of Manchuria out as far as the lower Amur river valley. The immensity taxes the imagination. And then there was the maritime frontier, completing the circle.”

¹⁷ “The practice and process of ‘tribalization’ should be understood as an integral part of Chinese history, in which the majority (i.e. the people and institutions that support the centralizing state), in order to legitimize their power, were often moved to affirm their political unity and cultural superiority by categorizing and objectifying people who lived on the margins of society.” (Shin 7)

¹⁸ For a list of sixteenth-century ethnographical accounts on Guizhou province, see Hostetler 2001, 129.

¹⁹ See “Pictures in the Chinese Encyclopaedia: Image, Category and Knowledge” in Clunas, 112-136.

displays in chapters 12 to 15—labeled as *renwu*—a collection of factual and legendary foreign peoples in their costumes most likely developed from the *Shanhaijing*, i.e. *The Classic of Mountains and Seas* (Hostetler, 90). *The Classic of Mountains and Seas*, collected during the Han dynasty, encompasses a wide scope of knowledge from a variety of fields such as religion, mythology, flora and fauna, geography and foreign peoples, among others. The early *Classic of Mountains and Seas* very likely was illustrated, although these illustrations were probably lost. In fact, the first set of woodblock illustrations dates from an edition issued in 1597.²⁰ In this ancient Chinese encyclopedia, foreign peoples are represented as fantastic hybrid monsters (fig. 1) in the same manner as those in the *Boxer Codex*'s bestiary (fig. 2). Representative examples of the ancient demonological ethnography of non-Chinese peoples are also found in the *Codex*, like the half human-half serpent or half-feline single or multi-headed monsters, the double-headed human and the remarkable robed creature in the upper quadrants of figs. 1 and 2. In addition to the bestiary, *The Classic of Mountains and Seas* contained, as most certainly did its subsequent reworkings and editions, a pantheon of gods and demons, which can also be seen in the *Codex*. The inclusion of a bestiary and an inventory of divinities, both distinctive of Chinese encyclopedic tradition (See Souza and Turley, 34), in addition to the striking similarity between the monsters in *The Classic of Mountains and Seas* and in the *Codex*, once again provide reason to believe that at least one third of the cultural component of the *Boxer Codex* is a rough rendering of Chinese illustrated compendia.



Fig.1 Some Inhabitants of the Great Wilds from the *Classic of Mountains and Seas* (Source: UC Press E-Books Collection, 1982-2004 – California Digital Library. Also in Strassberg, 78)

²⁰ See the introduction to Strassberg's edition.



Fig. 2 *Boxer Codex* (Source: Lily Library Digital Edition)

Notwithstanding the incomplete evidence for it, encyclopedic writing certainly occupied a significant place in Ming China as the *Codex* itself manifests. Along with encyclopedic compendia and maybe as part of them, ethnographical albums must have circulated widely in sixteenth-century China, thriving in the succeeding Qing era (1644-1912). In point of fact, given the relative absence of extant Ming albums and the impossibility of gaining access to other previously mentioned ethnographical records and handbooks—except from a portion of fragments included in Shin’s tract—, I will refer to the *Huang Qing zhigong tu*, i.e. the *Qing Imperial Illustrations of Tributary Peoples*, commissioned by the Qianlong emperor in 1751, in order to demonstrate and highlight their similarities.²¹ This pictorial representation of tributaries bears an astonishing resemblance to the *Codex*, providing further evidence, not only for the *Codex*’s Chinese antecedents, but also for Ming pictorial tradition of representing tributaries and foreign “barbarians.” In these images from the *Qing Imperial Illustrations of Tributary Peoples* (figs. 4 and 5) and from the *Codex* (fig. 6), male and female couples are portrayed in their traditional costumes carrying a signifying artifact that evokes a distinctive cultural practice against no background or scenery.

²¹ For a study of ethnographical albums during the Qing dynastic period, see Hostetler 2001 and 2006. Hostetler (2001, 42) records three extant copies of the *Qing Imperial Illustrations of Tributary Peoples*: a woodblock from 1761; the “Xie Sui” edition, which takes the name of its compiler, and is dated 1761 and 1775; and an untitled volume from 1805. The most elaborate version of this ethnographical work is a set of silken scrolls that contain 304 color paintings accompanied by descriptive text. These scrolls belong to the National Palace Museum in Taipei (Taiwan, Republic of China). I have not been able to consult these editions of the *Qing Imperial Illustrations of Tributary Peoples*, of which there are no modern editions or English translations available. Hence I will rely upon Hostetler’s research on the topic. Some reproductions are also accessible through a number of webpages and through the National Palace Museum Open Data.



Fig. 4 *Qing Imperial Illustrations of Tributary Peoples* (Source: National Palace Museum Open Data)



Fig. 4 *Qing Imperial Illustrations of Tributary Peoples* (Source: National Palace Museum Open Data)



Fig. 5 *Boxer Codex* (Source: Lily Library Digital Edition)

Although the nationalities and ethnicities represented in the *Qing Imperial Illustrations of Tributary Peoples* and the *Codex* do not align perfectly, the drawings in both albums represent a common style for depicting a culturally symbolic male and female pair, just as at the same time they exhibit a close artistic resemblance, particularly with regard to the lack of topographical or background setting, color, and the similarity of the character's postures and gaze. In the illustrations of tributaries from both the *Qing Imperial Illustrations of Tributary Peoples* and the *Boxer Codex*, male and female couples appear in a typical costume connected to the cultural practices pertaining to their ethnicity. The style of the attires, both between the two albums and throughout each one of them individually, is strikingly similar, ranging from long tunics to a simple cloth around the waist in the case of warrior tribes, usually in a bright blue, red or brown shade. Males carry a signifying tool, either a cultural object, such as a fan, a weapon, or a farming and hunting implement. On the other hand, women for the most part hold vessels and nests, as in the *Qing Imperial Illustrations of Tributary Peoples*. In both ethnographical works, couples are engaged in some sort of activity, looking and interacting with each other. These correspondences appear to evince a more than casual connection between the *Codex* and imperial Chinese ethnographical albums, as well as the existence of a common pictorial tradition.

With respect to the descriptive captions, the written portions of the *Codex* are on the whole analogous to their Chinese congeners. Early modern Chinese descriptions of tributaries and the later *Qing Imperial Illustrations of Tributary Peoples* (Hostetler 2006, xx; and Hostetler 2001, 42) embraced several or each one of the following particulars: jurisdictional, cultural and ethnic data concerning in the main the political and tributary nexus between China and a given border group; geographical location, moral and physical disposition, cultural customs, dressing conventions, religious rites, and farming and trading practices. In addition, and for the sake of hierarchical classification, Ming local gazetteers placed special emphasis on the distinction between tribute-paying and non-tribute-paying nations, beyond China's power. (Shin, 39)

Now, let us consider the following example of the description of a "barbarian" from a 1531 edition of the *General Gazetteer of Kuang-hsi*, itself most likely a recasting of a previous source, in order to contrast it with several fragments from the *Boxer Codex*:

Originally found in the areas of Hsing-an, I-ning, and Ku-t'ien of Ching-chiang as well as Jung-shui and Huai-yüan of Jung-chou [i.e. northeastern Kuang-hsi], [the people known as Yao] are born deep in the mountains and up along the rivers. Many are surnamed P'an. Their hair is bundled in the style of a mallet and their feet are bare. They pay no taxes and provide no corvée [i.e., a day's unpaid labor owed by a vassal to his feudal lord]. They grow a mixture of grain, beans, and taro for food [...] and in their spare time hunt for wild animals to supplement their diet. It is their custom to kill for revenge. They are suspicious by nature and are not afraid to die [...]. They can travel through dangerous terrain as if they could fly. As soon as a child can walk, they heat up a piece of metal to sear the heels to benumb them so that the child can step on thorny bushes without getting hurt. (In Shin, 164-165)

This written representation lists a considerable amount of details concerning geography, traditional costume and hairstyle, labor and temperament, together with tributary bonds to the Chinese empire. Likewise, in the ensuing descriptions of the *Boxer Codex* the details listed above are incorporated to a larger or lesser degree:

Giao Chi is a country that borders on China and pays tribute to its king. They say that the soldiers and fighting-men go about naked, as depicted, and that the citizens and men of letters wear the kind of clothing as shown. They respect the same rituals and ceremonies as the peoples form China.

The *She* people are Chinese laborers who dress in the way depicted here. And they do not pay taxes to the Emperor because they have no agreements or contracts; they live exclusively by their labor in the fields.²²

Dashui is a sovereign kingdom. It borders on the kingdom of Keelung. It is independent. The inhabitants are proud and are disposed to warring and disputes. They are great archers, and they frequently plunder and make war. And it is their custom to cut the heads off the people they kill, which they then skin, leaving just the skulls, which they gild... (*Boxer Codex*, 530, 535 and 541, respectively)

These examples epitomize the *Codex's* ethnographical descriptions of China's tributaries, which amount to eleven written captions of very short length, comprising in the main these ethnic's tributary status and some prominent feature of their way of living. The Chinese tributary peoples from the section of the *Codex* bearing this heading have so far been impossible to trace since these ethnic groups do not coincide with the foreign "barbarians" described in either the Ming or Qing accounts (Shin, 188; Hostetler 2001, 146-148). Nonetheless, the nations represented in the *Boxer Codex* both in the aforementioned section and outside of it were in fact Chinese tributaries. According to Fairbank's (1941, 151) list of tributary countries during the Ming dynasty, Vietnam as well as Japan, Champa, Java, Malacca, Brunei, Cambodia, Siam, and—last but no least—the

²² In the Spanish original "tribute" instead of "taxes" (*impuestos* in Spanish): "Los de Xaque son chinos labradores qu[e] andan bestidos de esta manera. Y no pagan tribto al rrey porque no andan en tratos ni contratos sino solo atienen a bibir de su trabajo en el campo." (*Boxer Codex*, 220)

Philippines were Chinese tributary nations. Vietnam, and in particular northern Vietnam—known as *Annam*—, represented in the *Codex*'s compilation of Chinese tributaries by the Quang Nam (*Boxer Codex*, 533) and the Dashui couple (*Boxer Codex*, 541), was from the fourteenth-century forward a Chinese tributary state, undergoing repeated invasions from China, who exercised administrative control over the territory (Dardess, 3-4). Likewise, Japan had shared for a long time religious, cultural and commercial ties with China, who recognized it as a *guo* state together with Vietnam and Champa (Dardess, 16-17).²³ As for the south Pacific—Champa, Malacca, Java, et al.—, Ming China embarked on its exploration and control through a series of seven voyages between the years 1405-1431 under the command of the Muslim eunuch admiral Zheng He (Dardess, 17). The imperial dominance of the Pacific coast of Asia was tied directly to the Sino-centric worldview advanced by the tributary system. Accordingly, Zheng He's maritime voyages had the purpose of persuading south Pacific nations to recognize the emperor's preeminence and become associate tributary nations (Reddick, 56).

To be sure, China was at the time of the composition of the *Codex* the main Pacific political and cultural power, exercising its control over foreign neighboring and distant nations largely by means of a carefully designed ideological and administrative program, whose main institution was the tribute system. Representations of tributaries or *zhigong tu* must have been produced profusely, as happened before and after the Ming period, yet there is no evidence of any extant copies of these from the Ming era. The *Boxer Codex*'s resemblance both in text and image with Chinese ethnographical illustrated accounts from Ming local gazetteers and with the eighteenth-century *Qing Imperial Illustrations of Tributary Peoples*, implicitly attest to the existence of Ming illustrations of tributaries while providing evidence of the *Codex*'s own sources. However, the cultural component of the *Boxer Codex* does not seem to be a faithful translation of its sources, but rather an emulation of Chinese ethnographical albums. The cultural component imitates the overall design of Chinese compendia at the same time it draws from their content to a noticeable extent. The third segment, dealing with China, is possibly the closest in text to the Chinese albums, as it displays a Sino-centric view and an awareness of Chinese cultural heritage. The first and second segments, those focusing on Philippine and East Pacific nationalities, move away from these sources, offering a more comprehensive report of the Pacific territories in which there is room for a non-idealistic view of the Chinese empire. An example of this can be found in the following fragment of the *Boxer Codex*'s account of Japan:

When Japanese and Chinese ships encounter each other and engage in combat, the Japanese always best their adversaries because they are much better fighters and more spirited. They are so feared by the Chinese that when a Japanese vessel enters Sangle Bay [i.e. Manila Bay], it is hailed in the traditional manner with drumming... (*Boxer Codex*, 527)

²³ “The polite term *guo*, used by Ming founder Taizu for those entities he forbade his successors to attack, had in mind fairly large and fairly well-ordered hereditary monarchies that bent to conform their conduct of relations with China to the highly restrictive rules imposed by the Chinese. Indeed, the term *guo* applied to China itself—regularly ‘Zhonggu,’ the ‘central guo.’” (Dardess, 2)

The first and second segments of the cultural component offer, as opposed to the last third, a larger and seemingly more true-to-life historical account and detailed descriptions of the ethnics in question. This leads us to think that, although the artistic design is Chinese, the accompanying descriptions sprang from not only Chinese written sources, but mainly from direct observation and enquiry into the culture and origins of the Pacific peoples. It would not be strange—or unwarranted—to suppose that a Western scientist and man of letters with access to the Chinese volumes and a certain degree of linguistic ability, as was Martín de Rada, would be interested in reproducing and emulating Chinese encyclopedic albums, crucial components that defined, sustained, and helped vouchsafe Chinese imperial rule. The historical relevance of the genre in Chinese culture and in China's diplomatic control over the nations depicted in the *Codex* would have made it very easy to gain access to the illustrations. Martín de Rada's outstanding relations with the Chinese artisans and merchants of the *Parian* as well as his well-documented search for knowledge about the East, further point to him as the possible compiler. After his sudden death in 1578, the unfinished manuscript might have remained among his papers, most likely together with his account of Ming China, until its mysterious arrival in Madrid, where it was bound together with the other four items in the exploratory component of the *Boxer Codex*.

In conclusion, the cultural component of the *Boxer Codex* is doubtless an emulation of Chinese illustrated albums. The ethnographical accounts of the *Codex* drew both on Chinese “illustrations of tributaries,” personal first-hand observation, and research on Pacific ethnicities to give an ethnographical description of East Pacific cultures and politics. Despite the lack of material evidence; it is reasonably safe to conclude that the third segment of the cultural component of the *Boxer Codex* directly originated from Chinese pictorial albums concerning historical beliefs and ethnography. The representation of China's tributaries developed in the third segment of the *Codex* certainly stem from the genre of the *zhigong tu*, “illustrations of tributaries,” most likely providing a rough rendering of these albums. The resemblance of both text and image between the *zhigong tu*, which conveys a Sino-Centric worldview alien to the European system of values, and the *Codex* suffice to prove their kinship. Particularly, the artistic similarities between the *Codex* and the *Huang Qing zhigong tu*, i.e. the *Qing Imperial Illustrations of Tributary Peoples*, suggest a common ancestry, even though the common antecedent has most likely been lost. While this third segment is the most faithful to its Chinese congeners, the drawings and arrangement of the remaining cultural component indicate that it also drew inspiration from Chinese albums as well. Yet the text that accompanies the illustrations of Philippine and Pacific ethnicities is obviously not of Chinese origin, but the result of an individual's immediate contact with surrounding Pacific natives. The compiler was doubtless a widely educated individual who in all likelihood had access to the original Chinese volumes, some knowledge of Pacific languages, and an everyday relationship with native peoples. For these reasons Martín de Rada is the *Boxer Codex*'s most likely compiler, who assembled the three components of the *Codex* between his first journey to China, in 1575, and his death, 1578. The Chinese tributary albums could have served as exemplars for the agents of the Church and the Crown like Rada for reporting on the newly encountered peoples of East Asia as well as a means for legitimating the important role people like Rada could play in defining the extent and reach of Christian and Hapsburg power across the globe.

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