

Biography of Martino Martini SJ, China missionary

Name and Name Modifications:

Chinese: Wei Kuangguo

Relevance for the China Mission:

Martino Martini published several bestsellers on China in Europe: an Atlas of China, a Chinese history, a description of the conquest of China by the Manchus and a Mission statistics. Besides that, he helped to obtain a Decree in favor of the Chinese Rites in 1656.

Dates of Birth and Death:

(*) 20 September 1614 in Trento, Tirol, Holy Roman Empire of German Nation, today Italy

(†) 6 June 1661 in Hangzhou, China

Family Data:

Martini's parents were Andrea and Cecilia de Rubeis.

Martini joined the Society of Jesus on 7 or 8 October 1632 in Rome. Noviciate: 1634-1635.

Martini made his four solemn vows on 15 of August 1655 in Rome, in the Profess house of the Jesuits.

Martini was ordained to priesthood in the beginning of September 1638.

Education:

Martini quite probably attended the school in Trento run by the Jesuits from 1625. After he had joined the Jesuits, he was sent to Rome. Like his brethren [Matteo Ricci SJ](#) (1552-1610) or [Johann Adam Schall von Bell SJ](#) (1592-1666) before him, he made his philosophical studies at the "Collegio Romano" (today Gregoriana), famous then for its scientific education. In Rome, Martini was private disciple of [Athanasius Kircher SJ](#) (1601-1680), the famous polymath and proto-Egyptologist. Martini exchanged letters with him after his arrival in China and sent him information, which Kircher used for his *China ... illustrata* (Amsterdam 1667). Martini studied Aristotle,

Arithmetics, Geometry, Geodesy, Cosmography, Astronomy, Cartography, Music, Hydrography and other subjects, which all belonged to the field of “Philosophy”.

After Martini had obtained the permission to go to the Far East as a missionary, he travelled to Lisbon, because China belonged at that time to the sphere of influence of the Portuguese Padroado. He stayed for some time in Lisbon to prepare his work as a missionary and also started to learn Chinese.

Mission:

On 11 of August 1634, Martini asked the Jesuits General to be send as a missionary to India or East Asia (“Indipetae”).

Departure from Rome for China: 22 July 1638.

Soon after his ordination, Martini travelled with 11 other Jesuits Portugal, because all Jesuits bound to the Far East had to travel with the permission of Portugal. Departure from Genua to Lisbon was on 25 December 1638. On 23 March 1640, Martini started together with 24 Jesuits, all going to the East, on the ship “Nossa Senhora de Atalaia”.

Arrival in Goa: 19 September 1640.

Arrival in Portuguese Macau: 4 August 1642.

Professional Career:

Martini stayed for one year in Macau. Via Nanking and Shanghai, Martini reached Hangzhou, the capital of the Chinese province of Zhejiang, in June 1644.

When Martini was in China, it was the time when the Manchus conquered China. At the same time, rebels and robbers terrified the people so that at the end, people were glad that the Manchus brought peace to the country. In Peking, the new rulers ordered Johann Adam Schall von Bell to calculate a new calendar as a symbol of their rule. In 1644, Schall became director of the calendar office.

When the Manchus conquered Hangzhou, Martini fled into the mountains of Southern Zhejiang. There he served the prince Ming Zhu Yujian (1602-1646), who in 1645 proclaimed himself emperor, he only ruled in Fujian till 1646. Martini should cast him cannons. But since summer 1646, he had good contacts to the advancing Manchus. In 1646, he returned to Hangzhou, where he stayed till 1650, in 1648, he became Superior of the Jesuits residence

in Hangzhou.

In 1650, Martini travelled to Peking and to the Great Wall. Martini, who was trained in Mathematics, should become Schall's assistant in the Calendar Office, but the two Jesuits did not fit together. Schall felt uneasy because of Martini's connections to the Ming, which could damage the relations of the Jesuits to the Manchus. Therefore, the Ministry of Rites, the Libu, on Schall's advice refused Martini the permission to stay in Peking and sent him back to Hangzhou. A short time after he returned, Martini was sent to Rome as a procurator of the China mission of the Jesuits.

Martini travelled via the Philippines and Batavia, where he was imprisoned by the Dutch for a short time, to Bergen in Norway (August 1653), then to Hamburg and finally to Amsterdam, where he published his famous *Novus Atlas Sinensis* (1655). He then travelled to Antwerp and Brussels. Everywhere, Martini was received by scholars. Finally, Martini arrived in Rome, where he made petitions in favor of the Chinese Rites to the Holy Office. In 1645, the Dominican [Juan Bautista Morales](#) (1597-1664) had obtained a prohibition of the Chinese Rites for the Ancestors and Confucius. The Jesuits had permitted their Christians to take part at these Rites, because they had secular character and were compatible with the Christian religion. These Rites had also a great importance for the Confucian state and their prohibition would have made the Chinese Christians rebels and adherents of a heterodox sect. Therefore Martini submitted the problem and his questions to the Holy Office, which was relevant for the matters concerning the faith. In 1656, the Holy Office issued a Decree permitting the Chinese Christians to participate at the Rites.

Without attending the result of his petition, Martini returned to China with ten new missionaries before the end of the year 1654, among them [Ferdinand Verbiest](#) (1623-1688). In 1659, he reached Hangzhou again, where he worked as a missionary and took care for the construction of a new church. This church in Hangzhou was dedicated to the Immaculate Conception of Mary and was later considered to be the most beautiful church of China. But Martini already died in 1661. He was buried on the Christian cemetery of Fangjingnan (South of the Well). When in 1679, his grave was reopened for the second burial ceremony, his body was found uncorrupted and without smell, his white beard had grown. Some Chinese thought therefore that Martini had known the Daoist art of immortality and drunken an elixir, whereas the Jesuits took it as ordeal and proof for Martini's virtue and holiness to refute the adversaries of the Chinese Rites, who had accused Martini to have deceived the Holy See with his petition.

Martini was one of the main informants for Athanasius Kircher's *China ... illustrata* (Amsterdam 1667), as Kircher mentioned in his "Prooemium ad lectorem".

Publications Martino Martini:

- *Qiuyou bian* (1661, Xylography), deals with many quotations with the subject "friendship" in Europe, which had already been treated by Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) in his *Jiaoyou lun* (1595, 1599 and 1603). Published in: Franco Demarchi, Giuliano Bertuccioli (eds.), Martino Martini, *Opera omnia vol. 2: Opere minore* (Trento 1998) pp. 197-348 (introduction, Italian translation, annotations, facsimile), and Giuliano Bertuccioli (ed.), "Il Trattato sull'amicizia di M. Martini", *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* LXVI (1992) pp. 79-120; 331-380.
- *Zhenzhu lingxing lizheng* (between 1650 and 1660), other title: *Tianzhu lizheng*, also: *Linghun lizheng* (About the existence of one true Lord and the immortality of the soul), s.a. Nicolas Standaert, Ad Dudink, Nathalie Monnet (eds.), *Faguo guo jia tu shu guan Ming Qing tian zhu jiao wen xian. Di shi er ce* (Chinese Christian Texts from the National Library of France = Textes chrétiens chinoise de la bibliothèque nationale de France) (Taipei 2009) # 11. It is an abbreviated translation of Leender Leys' (Leonardo Lessius, 1554-1623) SJ book *De Providentia numinis et de animi immortalitate* (1613), in: Franco Demarchi, Giuliano Bertuccioli (eds.), Martino Martini, *Opera omnia vol. 2: Opere minore* (Trento 1998) pp. 483-516 (introduction, Italian translation, annotations, facsimile).
- "Grammatica Sinica", in: Franco Demarchi, Giuliano Bertuccioli (eds.), Martino Martini, *Opera omnia vol. 2: Opere minore* (Trento 1998) pp. 349-481 (introduction, Italian translation, annotations, facsimile).
- *Zeitung Auß der newen Welt oder Chinesischen Königreichen. So P. Martinvs Martini Der Societet JESU Priester / ohnlängst auß selbigen Landen in Hollandt anlangendt / mit sich gebracht hat. Gezogen auß den jenigen Brieffen / so jüngsthin auß Niderlandt nacher Ingolstatt vberschicket worden* (Augsburg 1654), in: Franco Demarchi, Giuliano Bertuccioli (eds.), Martino Martini, *Opera omnia vol. 2: Opere minore* (Trento 1998) pp. 145-171 (introduction, Italian translation, annotations).

- *De Bello Tartarico [in Sinis] Historia, in quâ, quo pacto Tartari hac nostrâ aetate Sinicum Imperium invaserint ac ferè totum occuparint, narratur...* (Antwerpen 1654, 2 editions, Köln 1654, Wien 1654; Romae 1655; Amsterdam 1655, 1661), Italian: *Breve Historia delle guerre seguite in questi ultimi anni tra Tartari e Cinesi...* (Milano 1654; Palermo 1655), German: *Histori von dem Tartarischen Kriege/ in welcher erzehet wird / Wie die Tartaren zu Vnserer Zeit in das grosse Reich Sina eingefalen sind / vnd dasselbe / fast gantz vnter sich gebracht haben* (Amsterdam 1654), Dutch: *Historie Van den Tartarischen Oorloch, in dewelcke wert verhaelt, hoe de Tartaren in dese inse eeuw in 't sineesische Ryck syn gevallen, ende het selve gelyck geheel heben verobert...* (1654; Antwerpen 1654), also: *Beschryvong van het verwoest Sina* (Amsterdam 1660), French: *Histoire de la guerre des Tartares, contra la Chine. Contenant les Reuolutions estranges, qui sont arriuees dans ce grand royaume depuis quarante ans...* (Paris 1654, 2 editions, Paris 1656), English: *Bellum Tartaricum, or the conquest of the great, and most remoued empire of China, by the invasion of the Tartars, who in these last seven years, have wholly subdued the vast empire...* (London 1654), also as second part of: Alvarez Semedo, *The History of the great and removed monarchy of China...* (London 1655), Swedish: *Historia om thet Tartaruske Krijget uthi Konungurijket Sina* (Nidelberg 1674), Danish: *Een liden og kort dog gruelig Historie om de sidste Kriger, som af den Tartariske Nation er ført imod Sinenserne..* (1706).
- *Brevis Relatio de numero et qualitate Christianorum apud Sinas* (Romae 1654; Coloniae 1655). The 44 pages of the booklet should serve as public support of the method of accommodation of the Jesuits. There are also the names of 58 Jesuits, who had worked till then in China, and several statistics about the number of the Christians (in 1650, ca. 150 000).
- *Novus Atlas Sinensis...* (Amsterdam 1655), Dutch: *Nieuwe Atlas van het groote Ryck Sina...* (Amsterdam 1656), French: *Novus Atlas, ou description complète du grand empire de la Chine...* (Amsterdam 1656), Spanish: *Atlas nuevo de la Extrema Asia, o descripción geographica del Imperio de las Chinas...* (Amsterdam 1658) (Italian-English 1981), Meuausgabe: (Trento 2002-2003). Martini published the first Atlas on China in Europe. The Atlas shows maps of the 15 provinces of China and a map of the whole of China and 171 pages with text. Martini included several statistics about the seize of the provinces, cities and the

population. For a long time, Martini's Atlas was the most complete Atlas of China in Europe. Martini's sources are not clear. He used written and oral information from other Jesuits, experiences from own travels and also ca. 50 Chinese books, which he read on his travel back to Europe.

- *Sinicae Historiae Decas Prima* (Monachii 1658; Amsterdam 1659), new edition: (Trento 2010), French: *Histoire de la Chine traduite du Latin du Pere Martini* (Paris 1692) (the first Chinese history in Europe dealing with the time until the birth of Jesus Christ).
- "Litterae ad P. Athanasium Kircher, 1638, 8 November 1640", in: Athanasius Kircher, *Magnes sive de arte magnetica*, vol. III (1654) pp. 316-318, 348-350.
- Giovanni Bertuccioli, "Le opere minore di Martino Martini (1614-1661), I. Le opere Cinesi", *Rivista degli Studi Orientali* LXVII (1994) pp. 143-170.
- Franco Demarchi, Giuliano Bertuccioli (eds.), *Opera omnia vol. 1: Lettere e documenti* (Trento 1998).
- Franco Demarchi, Giuliano Bertuccioli (eds.), *Opera omnia vol. 2: Opere minore* (Trento 1998).
- Riccardo Scartezzini, Giuliano Bertuccioli, Federico Masini (eds.), *Opera omnia, vol. 3: Novus Atlas Sinensis* (Trento 2002-2003).
- Federico Masini (ed.), *Opera omnia, vol. 4: Sinicae Historiae Decas Prima* (Trento 2010).

Scientific Honors:

In Martini's native town Trento, an Institute, where research is done on him, bears his name.

Martino Martini Bibliography:

- Henri Bernard, "Les adaptations chinoises des ouvrages européens", *Monumenta Serica* X (1945) pp. 1-57; pp. 309-388; *Monumenta Serica* XIX (1960) pp. 349-383.
- Joseph Dehergne, *Répertoire des Jésuites de Chine de 1552 à 1800* (Rome, Paris 1973) pp. 166f.
- Louis Pfister, *Notices biographiques et bibliographiques sur les Jésuites de*

l'ancienne mission de Chine, 1552-1773 (Chang-hai 1932) pp. 256-262.

- Robert Streit, *Bibliotheca Missionum*, vol. V (Freiburg 1929).

Conference volumes on Martino Martini:

- Giorgio Melis (ed.), *Martino Martini. Geografo - Cartografo - Storico - Teologo. Atti del Convegno internazionale. Trento 1614 - Hangzhou 1661* (Trento 1983) (all articles are in Italian and English):

- Osvaldo Baldacci, “Validità cartografica e fortuna dell’Atlas Sinensis di Martino Martini. The Cartographic validity and success of Martino Martini’s Atlas Sinensis”;
- Alessandro Cucagna, “I contenuti geografici delle opere storiche di Martino Martini. The geographical contents in the historical works of Martino Martini”;
- Günter Hamann, “Natura e paesaggio nelle descrizioni di Martino Martini. Nature and landscape in the descriptions of Martino Martini”;
- Giuseppe Staluppi, “Problematiche di geografia suscitate dall’esame del Novus Atlas Sinensis. Problematic questions on geography revealed by an examination of the Novus Atlas Sinensis”;
- Adolfo Tamburello, “Il Giappone nell’opere di Martino Martini. Japan in the Martino Martini’s work”;
- Wu Chuanjun, “Il notevole contributo di MM alla conoscenza geografica della Cina nel XVII secolo. Martini’s outstanding contribution to the geographical knowledge of China in the Seventeenth century”;
- Piero Corradini, “Martino Martini storico della Cina: il De bello Tartarico. Martino Martini as China’s historian: the De bello Tartarico”;
- Carlo Ghisalberti, “Il metodo storiografico di Martino Martini. Martino Martini’s historiographic method”;
- Ma Yong, “Attività di Martino Martini in Cina e sue opere di storia e geografia della Cina. Martino Martini’s activity in China and his works on chinese history and geography”;
- Luciano Petech, “La Cina ai tempi del Martini. China in Martini’s time”;
- Bonifacio Bolognani, “La personalità di Martino Martini: Martino Martini’s personality”;