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FERDINAND VERBIEST AND HIS CHINESE BOOKS  
ACCORDING TO HIS CORRESPONDENCE

根据南怀仁的书信分析他的中国书籍

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ABSTRACT

In view of Verbiest's central position in Jesuit contacts with Chinese authorities and calendar specialists in the period 1660-1688, it is worth collecting the few *precise* title references he gives in his letter corpus, which was recently extended and revised (132 items) to include the Chinese works and authors he was acquainted with and which he apparently used. Their number is rather low, and the titles are stemming from expected libraries and collections, and are for obvious reasons mostly found in letters to his European colleagues in China, as European readers were unacquainted with Chinese. But even this low number - which certainly covers only a small part of the real number of books he used - contains some revealing titles; at any rate, it suggests a various, composite reading, and in addition it reflects some unexpected, and rather surprising assessments, with regard to the (absence of) logical structure and of (technical) illustrations.

Among the foreign missions beyond Europe the Chinese was, in the perception of the Jesuits in general and Ferdinand Verbiest in particular, the most arduous one (because of the extreme distance, the risky transoceanic transit, and the costs) but also the most adapted to their proper mission.<sup>1</sup> Contrary to what happened in many other areas, in China the missionaries encountered indeed a highly civilized people, and an extremely hierarchical society, in which learning (study--books and libraries) had a central position and enjoyed high prestige. Therefore, scholarship in all its aspects offered the Jesuits from the beginning a privileged access to the Chinese upper-class (the '*literati*'), and inspired a true "apostolate of the press" and a "strategy of libraries." Traces of these methods are also present in Ferdinand Verbiest's activities and work, and the celebration of his 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary is an excellent occasion to focus on this aspect of his missionary activities.

1. The expected contexts in which he found Chinese books were various, and comprised the college library of the Xitang compound<sup>2</sup>, started since Matteo Ricci's arrival in Peking in 1601; the professional libraries of the Astronomical Bureau *Qintianjian* and the Western College; private libraries of Chinese *literati*, including probably that of the Kangxi Emperor and Chinese book shops.

1 Golvers (2023), 285: "Certe inter omnes utriusque Indiae Missiones nulla est alia, quae hominibus Societatis nostrae videtur magis propria, et quae Instituto nostro videtur magis convenire, quam haec Sinensis. Nam cum Societas litteras et omnis generis scientias singulari studio profiteatur tamquam aptissimum medium, quo *homines ex natura sua ratione praediti* facilius ad veritatem et virtutem inducuntur, inter Orientales et Occidentales Indias nulla est natio, quae in litteris et omnis generis scientiis excolendis aestimandisque Sinis comparari possit, quaeque tam praeclare et distincte de virtute iudicet. Nam de omni re, praesertim morali, plurimos habent libros, et copiosas passim ostentant bibliothecas".

2 Xitang was the early name of Xuanwumen church, and was called Nantang after 1700.

Even when the evidence is meager, the Xitang college library was certainly a double one, with Chinese books next to the main collection of Western books, either in the same room or in another parallel repository. The earliest testimony goes back to Matteo Ricci and his room in 1609:

*Questi (libri) sono il migliore ornamento della mia camera, dove vengono a vederci I principali di questa corte e consenguentemente di tutto il regno, stando da una parte gli scrinii di libri cinesi, e dall'altra de' nostri.*<sup>3</sup>

The only other explicit testimony refers to a period shortly after Verbiest's death (January 1688) but may be representative also for his room: it stems from the Italian globetrotter Gemelli Careri (1651 - 1725), who visited Peking and the Xitang compound between 2 and 22 November 1695, where he had seen the Chinese (and Western) books:

*Tengono (i.e. i Padri Portoghesi) in Peking una buona libreria di libri cinesi e europei, nella quale vidi un mappamondo in lingua cinese, ma in forma quadrata (...).*<sup>4</sup>

Other texts Verbiest locates in the *Bibliotheca Sinicae Astronomiae Restauratae* (an abbreviation of *Bibliotheca Astronomiae Europaeae in Sina restituta*), i.e. the library of the 'Western Academy' near the Xitang, the so-called *Liju*. Another library was the *Bibliotheca Tribunalis Mathematicae* (JA 49-V-19, f° 523 ff.), the library of the *Qintianjian*, and a last collection was the *Archiva plurium Tribunalium Pekinensium*, among them the *Archivum*

3 D'Arelli (2001), 522.

4 Gemelli Careri (1708), 123.

*Tribunalis Astronomiae* where Schall found a copy of a particular book explaining the rites performed while observing an eclipse.<sup>5</sup>

To what extent Verbiest – during his manifold visits to *literati* and to the Palace – also had access to Chinese books he does not report, but showing, even exchanging books from one’s own library was a current practice in China as well as in the European *Res publica litterarum*. This is also what the Kangxi Emperor did during his private discussions with Verbiest and other Jesuits, as is at least testified for Western books in his personal library.<sup>6</sup>

which he wrote an epilogue.<sup>8</sup> On the transfer of Chinese books from Changshu to Peking in 1675 we are informed through the Account Book of François de Rougemont.<sup>9</sup>

Outside Peking Verbiest was acquainted with the presence of local *kuli* (‘archives’), more precisely in *Jining zhou* (Shandong), as the place where (Chinese) books of a deceased missionary, viz. the Dominican Coronado were confiscated and preserved: he wrote a letter to the local magistrates to ask for the permission to “visit” these books, and – in view of this consultation – to buy a house on the spot!<sup>10</sup> It

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Chinese books were certainly also acquired by purchase in local bookshops: quite by chance, we know that in one particular year, 1730 2.3% of the yearly income of the Nantang was spent on the acquisition of books, which certainly would have been Chinese books.<sup>7</sup>

Occasionally also visitors from outside Peking brought Chinese books, and showed them to Verbiest. Such was the case of He Yimen (= He Zhuo), Verbiest’s friend, who came from the South and brought some very old (Chinese) books to Peking, and showed them to Verbiest; among them was a newly copied dictionary entitled *Shiyao erya* (‘Synonymic dictionary of mineral materia medica’), which Verbiest read and for

was in all probability also Chinese books, which were meant when Verbiest refers to the search for mathematical books throughout China as a pretext for crisscrossing the Chinese countryside.<sup>11</sup>

5 Jossen (1938), 48.

6 Verbiest (1687), 54.

7 Golvers (2013), 158.

8 Golvers (2023), 161 – 162; 268 – 269.

9 Golvers (1999), 359: “*In famulum licentiatu Qu’uei def-erentis libros ad P(atrem) Ferdinandum*”.

10 Golvers (2017), 410: “*Tengo noticia que en el k’u li de aquella ciudad aun ai un caxon de libros, que fueron de dicho Padre. El amparo de V(uestra) P(aternidad) que imploro esta en alguna carta para el chi cheu, o otro algun favor mediante el qual pueda yo visitar le, y con el fundamento del caxon de libros que esta en el k’u li darle noticia de alli antes aver avido yglesia, y que quiero comprar casa para tener en que morar las veses que alli fuere* »”

11 Golvers (2017), 639: “*O que peço he 1º q(ue) V(ossa) R(everência) diga ao S(enho)r Argolicense q(ue) guardê o dit[t] o lu piao em secreto, para q(ue) os outros vicarios e provicarios não me pidão o mesmo e o negotio se faça mais sospeito, quando tantos Europeaos com pretexto de buscar livros de mathematica andão correndo polla China* »”.

## 2. Titles

As for *particular titles*, his letters offer evidence for the next titles, either Jesuit or native Chinese works.

Peking) and even in libraries in Rome, viz. in the *Biblioteca Vaticana* and the *Collegio Romano*; cf. also infra s.v. *Te Lun*;

From this evidence, it emerges that Verbiest's Chinese reading was broad, and consisted of: (1) professional, if not 'technical' books relating to Chinese calendar affairs and their interpretation; (2) Jesuit publications in Chinese on the Western calendar and its functioning... (3) Confucian classics, including the Book of Rites (*Liji*; the commentaries...) (4) administrative documents, more precisely Chinese petitions to the Emperor (*Zou Shu*; *Te lun*); (5) Christian texts, such as *Da ke wen*, including also some of his own texts; (6) general: *Qun shu kao*.

## 2.1. Jesuit publications in Chinese

*Ceu xu*:<sup>12</sup> i.e. *Zou shu*, collection of Schall's *Memorials to the Throne*, with regard to astronomical and calendric affairs: According to Verbiest's apologetic letter of 1661, these Memorials were repeatedly re-printed and diffused throughout China: "*omnium provinciarum praefecti saltem praecipui horum supplicum libellorum notitiam habuerunt, qui cum reliquo corpore mathematico adhuc hodie passim imprimuntur et disperguntur*".<sup>13</sup> Verbiest refers to copies in the archives in China (the various ministries and offices also outside

*Kim xin*:<sup>14</sup> a still unidentified Jesuit work ("que temos posto")?

*Min lie pu chu*:<sup>15</sup> (= *Min li pu zhu jie huo*, on which we have now the unexpected claim of Verbiest, to have been the co-author, with regard to its "*distributio*" et "*inventio*".<sup>16</sup>

12 Golvers (2017), 377 / 378: "(...) si velit P(ater) Navarrete ad bibliothecam Vaticanam, ubi eiusmodi libri (autographi libelli supplices) olim Summo Pontifici oblatis, ni fallor, servantur, vel eat saltem ad collegium nostrum Romanum, ubi eosdem libros inveniet, atque in tomo illo qui vocatur 'libellorum supplicum P(atris) Adami, Sinice ceu xu [Zhou shu]' appellati, pag. 47, item pag. 72 usque ad 76 inclusive eiusmodi libellos supplices a P(atre) Adamo Imperatori oblatos et ad extensum impressos ipsemet oculis suis videre poterit". The copies "olim" ('once') offered to the Pope may be the items, offered by Prospero Intorcetta during his stay in Rome in 1672; on the copy, originally kept in the *Collegio Romano*, now in the *Biblioteca (...) Vittorio Emanuele II* (BVE), Roma, see Golvers (2005), 41-44.

13 Josson (1938), 72.

14 Golvers (2017), 620: "Me peza que V(ossa) R(everência) nam tomou a occasiam bel[l]issima pera entender os termos disto p'u chú, que la teve com a prezença de nosso Huen-fu juen laò yê, que là vay; com poucas palavras podia enteyrar a V(ossa) R(everência) a muito mais facil do que eu dezeyo aqui com cartas mudas etc. p(or)que elle estando bastantemente no cazo, e cuidado tambem q(ue) qualquer outro que està bem nas letras Sinicas poderà bastantemente explicar o nosso intento, que temos posto no Kim xin<>".

15 Golvers (2023), 261: "Et emblematico modo proposita et non intelligenda, ut verba expressa sonant (sicut expresse dicunt auctores <...> quos vide in *Min lie pu chu kiai xue*, pag. 5 et 10"; the copy of this text, made by Kasper Castner (JS 145, f° 81) has as last character: "(*Min Lie pu chu kiaj*) xao" (in the edition replaced by the pseudo-French "tchao").

16 Golvers (2017), 618: "Quanto toca à explicação do *Min lie pu chu*, sayba Vossa Reverencia (= F.X. Filippucci) que nam he explicação do P(adre) Adamo Schall, mas he totalmente minha explicação et distributio et inventio // Somente tomeo o nome do P(adre) João Schall por mayor credito e autoridade".

*Sin lie hiao hoe*,<sup>17</sup> i.e. a booklet ('libellus') of Adam Schall, in 1 *juan*, entitled *Xin li xiao huo*, i.e. 'Answers on questions / doubts on the Western ephemerides', the woodblocks of which were kept in the Xitang;<sup>18</sup> it was published as a separate volume and summarized in 1645 in the *Xiyang xinfā lishu*, as indicated in the 1661 apology for Schall as "*corpus mathematicum*".<sup>19</sup>

A untitled "*libellus refutans falsa prognostica*, pp. 7, 8 and 9" may be one of Verbiest's Wang-treatises, written in 1669 (*Wang tui ji xiong bian*; *Wang ze bian* and *Wang zhan bian*).<sup>20</sup>

## 2.2. Native Chinese books:

(*Bu de yi*):<sup>21</sup> anti-Christian writing by Yang Guangxian, refuted in the *Budeyi bian* of L. Buglio;

*Chum yûm*: "*qui adhuc hodie est æstimatus in Sina uti Sacra Scriptura in Europa*".<sup>22</sup> a commentary on Confucius, viz. *Zhongyong: Doctrine of the Mean*;

*Cum kia li*,<sup>23</sup> more completely: *Vem cum kia li*, i.e. (*Wen*)*gong jiali*: 'Family Rituals';<sup>24</sup>

*Ch'un ç'ieu* of Confucius,<sup>25</sup> i.e. *Chunqiu*: The Spring and Autumn Annals, a chronicle which spans the years 722 - 481 B.C.; see also next item; *K'ûn xu* <pi> *c'ão*: "*sive examen omnium librorum*", i.e. *Qun shu* <bi?> *kao*; a long fragment, translated in Latin, includes a reference to the *Chunqiu* of Confucius and a Chinese proverb, on what to do in case of an eclipse and on the Latin term "*succurrere*";<sup>26</sup>

*Li ki* <...>:<sup>27</sup> the Classic *Li ji*: "Book of Rites", part of the Confucian canon;

*Li ki hio li kio*:<sup>28</sup> i.e. *Liji \*xue li* <?>, probably an unidentified commentary on *Liji*?

*Lishi Mingyuan* ('Clarifying the origins of calendric matters') of Cao Zhen'gui (1580 - 1667), in Latin '*Declaratio originalis rerum ad calendarium spectantium*', the basis of his long discussion on the true (i.e. non 'suspect' / suspicious) character of the '*Electio dierum*' in the Chinese calendar;<sup>29</sup>

17 Golvers (2017), 850.

18 Golvers (2017), Ibid.: "*in quo P(ater) Adamus etiam disertis verbis declarat: eam non esse doctrinam, quam sequuntur Europaei, neque sibi commissam corrigendam, sed ex antiquorum Sinensium libris mututam describi et in calendario transferri. "Hic etiam libellus, tum per se solum, tum cum corpore mathematico imprimitur ac passim dispergitur, cuius sicut et aliorum libellorum supplicum tabulas domi habemus"*.

19 Golvers (2017), 850: To the same 'corpus' were also added a series of memorials on astronomical matters: "*Hic notandum quod, quando dantur libelli supplices Regi, rerum quae in iis proponuntur notitia dispergitur per totam Sinam, paene sicut in Europa sparguntur nova quaelibet per gazettas (ut eas appellant), adeoque omnium provinciarum praefecti saltem praecipui horum supplicum libellorum notitiam habuerunt, qui cum reliquo corpore mathematico adhuc hodie passim imprimuntur et disperguntur"*.

20 Golvers (2023), 261.

21 Quoted without title in Golvers (2017), 388; cf. Young (1975), 155-186.

22 Josson (1938), 48.

23 Golvers (2017), 620.

24 Cf. Ebrey (1991), 149.

25 Golvers (2017), 341.

26 Golvers (2017), 342: « 5. [...] Ergo ad quid sollicita illa cursitatio? Numquid etiam sibi persuadebant suum illum cursum usque ad caelum posse pertingere? Quod eiusmodi modus non praetendat supplere sive tueri eclipsata luminaria, expressis verbis dicit auctor libri K'iun xu pi c'ao appellati ».

27 Golvers (2017), 620.

28 Golvers (2017), 350/351: "*Hunc ritum a Confucio, Sinensium philosophorum magistro supremo observatum esse libri Sinenses referent (...). Hunc autem ritum ad eiusmodi grati animi significationem institutum esse et sacrificium lato scilicet analogo modo ac vocabulo appellari expressis verbis dixit auctor libri Sini-ci Li ki hio li kio appellati"*.

29 Golvers (2023), 258.

*Ta ke wen* of the author *Chu vi chum*:<sup>30</sup> i.e. *Dake wen* of Zhu Zongyuan, or Weicheng (courtesy name), of 1643 ca.: ‘Answers on the questions from a visitor’, a religious book. In this letter Verbiest refers to a photographic reprint, which may well fit some other indications;<sup>31</sup>

*Te lun*,<sup>32</sup> i.e. *Te lun*, or ‘Special honors’, indication for a series of honors granted by the Emperor to particularly meritorious citizens (cf. the same indication in some copies of the *Xichao ding’an* of Verbiest);<sup>33</sup>

*Xu kim*:<sup>34</sup> “*in libro Sinico antiquissimo et Classico*”: i.e. the Chinese Classic *Xujing*: quoted in reference to the description / prescription, of what to do during an eclipse;

*Ye kim*:<sup>35</sup> “*liber ille classicus, qui ab omnibus etiam nostris admittitur*”; quoted also in the long technical note on the meaning of the ‘election of days’, surviving in two copies, viz. JA 49-V-19, f° 523 ss. and in another, made by Kaspar Castner, in JS, 145, f° 78 – 81; i.e. *Yi jing*: ‘The Book of Changes’;

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Very rarely does Verbiest give his personal assessment of these Chinese books. A first surprising remark he makes concerns a general lack of logical structure and reasoning in Chinese mathematical books, probably continuing a traditional opinion among Jesuits on Chinese mathematics. Elsewhere, in the manuscript of *Astronomiae Europaeae Mechanica* (1676) he surprisingly enough remarks how few illustrations Chinese technical books contain.<sup>38</sup> Mutual discussions on particular terms and passages we find especially with regard to various editions of *Ta ke wen*.<sup>39</sup>

30 Golvers (2017), 623.

31 D. Sachsenmaier (2001).

32 Golvers (2017), p. 730: “*Envio com esta à V(ossa) R(everênci)a (= Filippucci) hu(n)s poucos despachos em nosso favor, q(ue) deo o Rey no cabo do anno passado, e eu os crescentes no cabo do livrinho Te lun*”.

33 Also in the *Xichao ding’an* of Verbiest – the collection of his memorials to the throne – some documents have this title in the margin (I owe this remark to Ad Dudink).

34 Golvers (2017), 340.

35 Golvers (2023), 257: “*Hic ipse liber, apud Sinas Ye Kim appellatus, expressis etiam verbis demonstrat in explicatione illarum figurarum sive characterum, quos pa gua appellant, quibus etiam in calendario utuntur, omnes autem declarant characters illas tantum similitudines et imagines rerum illarum (...) proponit*”.



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36 Golvers (2017), 350.

37 Golvers (2017), 370; 466; 601; 655

38 Golvers & Nicolaidis (2009), fig. 43 - 55: “*In libris antiquis mathematicorum, qui aliquando in hoc Tribunali fuerunt, nullum reperio eorum fieri mentionem, neque vel minimam adumbrationem*”.

39 Golvers (2017), 623.

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