

# Exchange of learning yet failed encounter:

Behind challenges,  
the *Acta Pekinensia*,

an unpublished manuscript

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# Exchange of learning yet failed encounter: Behind challenges, the *Acta Pekinensia*, an unpublished manuscript

## Abstract

Towards the end of the European Renaissance period, a new era of cultural encounter opened in China as in Europe. In the West, despite religious and cultural crises, it was a time of internal reorganisation and global explorations. In the midst of those trouble times, the person of Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) has been seen as an initiator. Attention will first be paid to analyse the reasons for such a role and what gave Ricci so great a success: actually, what did he achieve in the “exchange of learning” at the time, be it in the philosophic or scientific fields? But soon after his death and for no less than a century (1610-1710), Matteo Ricci’s legacy has generated a large array of disputed interpretations, not first or only in the Chinese Empire for his so called “accommodative” approach to Chinese cultural and spiritual traditions, but all the more so in Europe. Ricci’s successors and fellow Jesuits, through their many letters from China and scholarly publications in Europe, did their best in defending their cause. With the European intelligentsia they shared some of the “Chinese learning” they had explored. But they had not foreseen that such a sharing and their humanistic education and culture were fostering at their disadvantage the “enlightenment spirit” of the European political establishment. That was the background of the so called Chinese Rites Controversy in Europe. To quench the many disputes, the Roman ecclesiastical authorities finally sent the Maillard de Tournon legation (1705-1710) to China as if it were to build too late “a bridge too far” to be solid. The proceedings of the legation and of its failure are narrated in the manuscript called *Acta Pekinensia*, soon to be published in the first English annotated translation. In this context of “exchange of learning”, details on the manuscript and its first publication project will be given. Reflections on the challenges hidden in such an exchange and the failed cultural encounter that followed will finally be proposed which could give some hints on the global tasks ahead.

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## The historical context

Towards the end of the European Renaissance period, a new era of cultural encounter began between Europe and China. Laborious contacts between different and long lasting traditions of ‘learning’ were resumed in the midst of new and influential conditions. One of the main actors on the global scene has been the Italian scholar and Jesuit Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), “the most outstanding cultural mediator between China and the West of all time”, to quote the words of Wolfgang Franke.<sup>1</sup> Recalling the historical context in which Ricci entered China could help appreciate better such a praise.

Despite some appearances, the cultural trends of the European “renaissance for a new world”<sup>2</sup> in which Ricci had been formed, had developed in a context of lingering conflicts.

First, there were some similarities with the Cold War period that followed World War II: a continuing state of political disputes, military tension and economic competition including on the seas. In the follow-up of the discovery of the Americas, a cold war on explorations had developed overseas between Portugal and Spain. It had to be mitigated by a treaty, arbitrated by Pope Alexander VI, and signed in Tordesillas, Spain (1494) by the two empires. Its goal was to prevent continual skirmishes from flaring up. The world was divided into two zones of trade and influence. In exchange for the economic advantages of such an agreement, both powers would provide logistic help and military protection to the Christian missions (a kind of tutelage called the *Padroado* of Portugal and *Patronato* of Spain). But as the tensions remained vivid, the trends of the times were really mercantile and not of openness to other cultures.

All the more so that the epoch was marked by an intense ‘revolution in culture’, so to say, that touched upon the place of humankind in the universe. Biblical traditions and astronomic calculations were locked into heated scientific and theological debates over the theory of Mikołaj Kopernik (1473-1543), expressed in his book *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* [‘On the circular movements of the celestial spheres’], published just before the astronomer’s death. The case of Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) and of his observations that supported the Copernican theory of heliocentrism, reached its climax when Galileo was denounced to the Roman Inquisition in early 1615 (five years after Ricci’s death in Peking).

Last but not least, the Council of Trent, in northern Italy, through 18 sessions, had stretched its work all along eighteen years (1545-1563), including interruptions; but its decisions had yet to bear fruit. The ecclesiastical reforms had just begun to be implemented. They were aiming at restoring in the Church the unity in faith and in practice. In such a context of re-focusing some moving landmarks, it is worth noting that Ricci did not look for safe ground in his work but dared explore some local “accommodation” within Chinese culture and traditions.

He had been able to do so thanks to the formation he received mainly from three of his mentors. Among them was Alessandro Valignano (1539-1606), an Italian Jesuit from Naples. In the midst of an Asia under the Portuguese influence of the *Padroado*, Valignano dared launch his policies of inculturation or accommodation which Ricci was to follow in China. These policies were to be proven very beneficial in the field of “exchange of learning”.

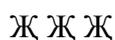
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<sup>1</sup> See Goodrich and Fang, eds., *Dictionary of Ming biography, 1368-1644*, The Ming biographical history project of the Association for Asian Studies, Vol. II M-Z, New York, London, Columbia University Press, 1976, p. 1144.

<sup>2</sup> See: Gianni Criveller, “The Background of Matteo Ricci: the Shaping of his Intellectual and Scientific Endowment”, *Chinese Cross Currents*, Vol. 6, No. 4, 2009, pp. 72-93.

Then there was Roberto Bellarmino (1542-1621), also an Italian Jesuit who later became a Cardinal of the Church. His teaching on theology and his pedagogy on controversies made him one of the most influential catholic thinkers of that period. From him, Ricci might have learned a lot on the art of intellectual debates.

Perhaps more importantly, when Ricci was only 20 years old, there was also, beginning in 1572, the guidance of a remarkable Jesuit at the Roman College, Christopher Klaus or Clavius (1538-1612) from Germany. Mathematician and astronomer, Clavius was the leading authority in the reform of the modern Gregorian calendar.<sup>3</sup> He was one of the main scholars in European astronomy and would continue to influence studies in astronomy for over fifty years through his textbooks, used all over Europe and later relied on by other Jesuits, like Ricci, in overseas far-away regions.



### Was the “exchange of learning” a Ricci’s strategy?

With such a formation as background, and soon after Matteo Ricci reached China, what exactly was his so called ‘accommodation’ policy? Was it really a ‘strategy’?

Historians and specialists in the field have recently made a few sobering remarks. It is true that, by tradition and formation, Jesuits tend in their tasks to pay great attention to the interactive relations between persons or between persons and their social context where they operate. But such an attention is conducive to generate an interactive exchange of influence through which both sides interact with each other. In a recent article, Nicolas Standaert has mentioned several cases of such interaction:<sup>4</sup> for instance, when a friend and scholar, 瞿太素 Qu Taisu (瞿汝夔 Qu Rukui, born in 1549), helped Ricci realise that dressing as a Buddhist monk was not the best approach to Chinese society and culture of the time, Ricci followed his advice and dressed as the *literati* do; or when the difficulties to settle in China in any place were so great that he decided to go to Peking in order to try solving the matter through *guanxi* in the capital, and he tried twice! or more often than not when he noticed that the gifts he could offer (prisms, clocks, clavichord, paintings) that were just European curiosities attracted nevertheless the sustained attention not only of ordinary people but also of the *literati* as well. In this sense, his decisions were made according to context and circumstances and not as any predetermined strategy.

Such being the case, when one reflects about the exchange of learning between China and Europe at that time, one generally thinks first about Ricci’s and his successors’ scientific contributions to the Chinese learning: why should one leave aside what they contributed first to the West through their efforts in adaptation? This paper will try to avoid such a bias. In the following brief survey of Ricci’s manuscripts or published works, mention will be made of the main ones in two sets, in their chronological order.

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<sup>3</sup> The Julian calendar Gregorian reform of 1582: “the motivation for the reform was to bring the date for the celebration of Easter to the time of the year in which the First Council of Nicaea had agreed upon in 325.” The calendar reform was “a refinement to the Julian calendar (introduced by Julius Caesar in 46 BC) amounting to a 0.002% correction in the length of the year. Because the celebration of Easter was tied to the spring equinox, the Roman Catholic Church considered this steady drift in the date of Easter undesirable. The reform was adopted initially by the Catholic countries of Europe. The Gregorian calendar, also called the Western calendar or Christian calendar, is internationally the most widely used civil calendar. It has been the unofficial global standard for decades, recognized by international institutions such as the United Nations and the Universal Postal Union.” [Quoted from Wikipedia].

<sup>4</sup> N. Standaert, "Jesuit Corporate Culture as Shaped by the Chinese", in John W. O'Malley et al. (eds.), *The Jesuits: Cultures, Sciences, and The Arts, 1540-1773*, Toronto: Univ. Of Toronto Press, 1999, pp. 352-363.

## Matteo Ricci's contributions in the exchange of learning

Before any possible contact, Ricci had first to acquire some mastery of the language and of its script. Hence, his first contribution was, as soon as 1588, the compilation of what was to be the first Portuguese-Chinese dictionary (it should rather be seen as a short lexicon).<sup>5</sup> Then “during the winter of 1598” — that is ten years later — “a completely different dictionary, namely, a Chinese-Portuguese dictionary followed. With his Jesuit companion Lazzaro Cattaneo (郭居静 *Guo Jujing*, 1560-1640), who as an excellent musician was able to note the tonal variations, they compiled an alphabetically ordered vocabulary, that included Roman letters transcription with diacritical marks for the five tones.<sup>6</sup> It was entitled *Vocabularium sinicum, ordine alphabetico europaeorum more concinnatum et per accentus suos digestum* [Chinese vocabulary arranged in the usual alphabetical order of the Europeans and according their accents]. Ricci ordered that these “accents” or marks be used by his fellow Jesuits for better clarity in their written communications. Up to now, this work has not been rediscovered.<sup>7</sup>

In his efforts to learn how to speak, read and write the language and its script in order to engage in scholarly discussions with the *literati*, Ricci used his technically trained prodigious memory and learned by heart *The Four Books* attributed to Confucius. He was able to quote them freely, in the natural or even reverse reading order: this feat of course supposed that he grasped the meaning of the text. This explained perhaps that with Michele Ruggieri (1543-1607), his predecessor and first companion, he translated in Latin *The Four Books* under the title *Tetrabibulum sinense de moribus* [literally “The four Chinese books on morals”], never published.<sup>8</sup> With this first translation in a western language in addition to the elaboration of the first system of transcription of the Chinese language, “these two achievements alone justify crediting Ricci with originating Western sinology.”<sup>9</sup>

Last but not least, Ricci's journals have to be mentioned. They have been written in Italian between 1608 and 1610, the last two years of Ricci's life. On his way to Rome as procurator of the mission, Nicolas Trigault (金尼閣 *Jin Nige* 1577-1628) on ship translated the original text into Latin and in 1615 published this version in Augsburg, Germany.<sup>10</sup> Despite its “missionary” original title in Italian *Della entrata della Compagnia de Giesù e*

<sup>5</sup> The manuscript had been lost for years, kept unknown in the Jesuit Archives in Rome. It was fortuitously discovered in 1934 by the Jesuit historian Pasquale M. d'Elia (1890-1963), and only recently reproduced and published in 2001. See: Ruggieri Michele, Ricci Matteo, *Dicionário português-chinês = 葡漢辭典 = Portuguese-chinese dictionary*, Editor John W. Witek (魏若望), Lisboa, Biblioteca Nacional Portugal; Macau, Instituto Português do Oriente; San Francisco, Ricci Institute for Chinese-Western Cultural History, University of San Francisco, 2001.

<sup>6</sup> These marks borrowed by Ricci are reported to have been invented by ancient Greek scholars of Alexandria. *Ibid.*, p. 185.

<sup>7</sup> Although it had apparently been mentioned later by Daniello Bartoli, S.J. (1608-1685) who calls it *Vocabulario Sinicoeuropeo* [Chinese-European Vocabulary] and by Kircher, who names it *Dictionarium Sinicum*. Daniello Bartoli, S.J., *Dell' historia della Compagnia di Giesù*, 1665 (Bartoli, 1825, v. 16: 196-200). – *Ibid.*, p. 185.

<sup>8</sup> Manuscript in Rome, Bibliotheca Vittorio Emmanuele, *Fondo Gesuitico 1195* [3314]. See: Joseph Sebes, “The Summary Review of Matteo Ricci's *T'ien-chu shy-yi* in the *Ssu-k'u Ch'uan-shu Tsung-mu t'i-yao*”, in *Archivum Historicum Societas Jesu*, Rome, No. 53 (1984), p. 384.

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Sebes, *ibid.* p. 374.

<sup>10</sup> *De Christiana expeditione apud Sinas suscepta ab Societate Jesu. Ex P. Matthaei Riccii eiusdem Societatis commentariis Libri V: Ad S.D.N. Paulum V. In Quibus Sinensis Regni mores, leges, atque instituta, & novae illius Ecclesiae difficillima primordia accurate & summa fide describuntur* [The Christian Expedition among the Chinese undertaken by the Society of Jesus, from the commentaries of Fr. Matteo Ricci of the same Society [...] in which the customs, laws, and principles of the Chinese kingdom and the most difficult first beginnings of the new Church there are accurately and with great fidelity described] / authored by Fr. Nicolas Trigault, Flemish, of the same Society. [See: Binding Friendship – Ricci, China and Jesuit Cultural Learnings, John J. Burns Library, Boston College].

*Christianità nella Cina* [On the entry of the Society of Jesus and Christianity into China],<sup>11</sup> the text is full of precise data concerning the name and geographical position of the country, the natural products, the language and literature, the arts, the government, the customs and popular practices, and the religious traditions of the Chinese society in late Ming dynasty time. The Latin version by Trigault has successively been translated into the main European languages and more recently (1983) in Japanese and Chinese.<sup>12</sup> Such a “description” has inspired many other similar works in the later ages of exchange of learning.

This late and almost posthumous work by Matteo Ricci gives an idea of the many contacts he had had in his 28 years of life in China. Through his friendly relations with many officials, men of letters, doctoral candidates, scholars, Buddhist monks and mandarins, he was able to engage in serious conversations on practical and scientific topics, morals, philosophy of life, religion, etc. Through these contacts, if we sum them up, he made two kinds of contributions, scientific and humanistic, in the exchange of learning with the Chinese intelligentsia of that time.

### Ricci's scientific published works

First, his training had given him a solid scientific expertise in three fields of knowledge: cartography, mathematics and astronomy, where nevertheless his works have not been equally acknowledged.

For cartography, it is well known that as early as his sojourn in 肇慶 Zhaoqing (1583-1589), Ricci had already exhibited in 1584 a map of the whole world, a Chinese version named 輿地山海全圖 *Yudi Shanhai Quantu*, based on a small Italian wall map and made with the help of friends. It has attracted the attention and questions of his many visitors, including the governor 王泮 Wang Pan (1530-1574) who through it realised the position of China among many other countries of the world. He had the map printed in several copies for later use by scholars. Afterwards, as many *literati* and officials manifested great interest in this document, Ricci improved several times its first version, namely: in 1596, in a map carved on a stele, called 山海輿地圖 *Shanhai yudi tu*; again in 1600, in a revised version of the same, named 山海輿地全圖 *Shanhai Yudi Quantu*; and finally in a larger and much refined edition of the first map, this time in six panels, printed in Peking and called 坤輿萬國全圖 *Kunyu Wanguo Quantu* [Complete Map of the Myriad Countries of the World]. Several prints of this last edition were made in 1602, but most of these exemplars are now lost; only six originals are known still to exist, and only two of them in good condition.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> See Ricci, Matteo and Tacchi Venturi, Pietro, *Opere Storiche : Volume I - I Commentarj Della Cina / del P. Matteo Ricci S.I.*. Edite a Cura del Comitato per le Onoranze Nazionali con prolegomeni note e Tavole dal P. Pietro Tacchi Venturi S.I., Macerata, Premiato Stabilimento Tipografico Avv. Filippo Giorgetti, 1911-13, lxxi, 653 p. – Matteo Ricci, *Della entrata della Compagnia di Giesù e Christianità nella Cina*, Edizione realizzata sotto la direzione di Piero Corradini; prefazione di Filippo Mignini, a cura di Maddalena Del Gatto, Macerata, Italy, Quodlibet, 2000, xlxiii, 775 p.

<sup>12</sup> The Chinese versions are based on the Italian original text: 《利瑪竇全集·一、二：利瑪竇中國傳教史上、下》/[意]利瑪竇著 / 羅光,袁國慰 主編/ 劉俊餘,王玉川 翻譯/台北,光啟出版社、輔仁大學出版社, 1986。— See also a 2014 new translation: 《耶穌會與天主教進入中國史》, [意]利瑪竇著, 文铮 / [意]梅歐金譯, 北京商務印書館, 2014-1, 523 頁, 平裝, ISBN: 9787100084529. [Original Work: *Fonti Ricciane : Documenti Originali Concernenti Matteo Ricci e la storia delle prime relazioni tra l'Europa e la Cina (1579-1615)*. Editi e Commentati da Pasquale M. D'Elia, Sotto il Patrocinio della Reale Accademia d'Italia, Roma, La Libreria Dello Stato, 1942, in 3 vol.]

<sup>13</sup> See Wikipedia, [Kunyu Wanguo Quantu](#).

Second, as far as mathematics and astronomy are concerned, the late historian and Jesuit Joseph Sebes (白永年, 1915-1990,) in his precious article already quoted lists eight scientific works dealing with cosmography, mathematics and astronomy.<sup>14</sup> They were included in the 四庫全書總目提要 *Si Ku Quanshu Zongmu Tiyao* or the *Summary Reviews of the General Bibliography of the Four Treasuries Great Encyclopedia*. They are:

1. 乾坤體義 *Qiankun Tiyi* or *Treatise on Heaven and Earth*, printed in 1614, after Ricci's death, divided in three parts and comprising five works that deal with cosmography and geography topics. The treatise tries to reconcile the Western tradition of the four elements with the Chinese tradition of the five phases of change (五行 *wu xing*).
2. 幾何原本 *Jihe Yuanben* or *Elements of Geometry*, the translation and redaction made by 徐光啟 *Xu Guangqi*, based on Ricci's explanations of the first six books of the *Elements*, and published in 1607 in Peking.
3. 測量法義 *Celiang Fayi* or *Method and Theory of Geometry*, that is *Practical Geometry*, text dictated by Ricci to Xu Guangqi on the theory of astronomical measures based on triangles and rectangles plus norms for practical usages.
4. 同文算指 *Tongwen suan zhi* or *Scientific Arithmetic*, that is *Practical Arithmetic*, based on the *Epitome Arithmeticae Practicae* by Clavius, the manual used by Ricci in his lessons given to 瞿太素 *Qu Taisu*, translated by 李之藻 *Li Zhizao* (1565-1630) and published in 1613.
5. 勾股義 *Gou gu yi* or *Theory of the triangle-rectangle*, by Xu Guangqi, a booklet printed after 1617, and based on Ricci's arithmetic illustration of the proprieties of the triangle-rectangle.
6. 渾蓋通憲圖說 *Hun gai tongxian tushuo* or *Astrolabe and sphere with illustrations and comments*, that is *Development of the celestial sphere with graphics and comments*, a work published in 1607 that deals with the stereographic projection of the celestial sphere illustrated with graphics and a detailed description with a table of the position of fixed stars and the declination of the sun, etc.
7. 經天該 *Jing tian gai* or *Treatise on constellation*, a poem of 420 septenary verses compiled by Ricci and translated by Li Zhizao in 1604, unknown date of publication, but Ricci's only poetical venture.
8. 推定歷年瞻禮日法 *Tuiding linian zhanli rifa* or *The Gregorian calendar*, translated in Chinese by Ricci "who adjusted it to the lunar year and gave the manuscript to his converts." It was revised in 1608 and published by Nicolas Trigault in 1625 with the above mentioned title.

## Ricci's other published works

Apart from these scientific writings, most of them composed in cooperation with Chinese scholars and as the fruit of frequent academic conversations and friendly encounters, Matteo Ricci's published works have been mainly of humanistic and philosophic nature. As

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<sup>14</sup> The following paragraphs are based on this article: Joseph Sebes, "The Summary Review of Matteo Ricci's *T'ien-chu shy-yi* in the *Ssu-k'u Ch'uan-shu Tsung-mu t'i-yao*", in *Archivum Historicum Societas Jesu*, Rome, No. 53 (1984), p. 381-383..

such, they deserve to be included in the scope of the “exchange of learning” — and of wisdom — that was reassumed at that time.

The first was Ricci’s celebrated 交友論 *Jiaoyou Lun* or treatise *On friendship*, personally composed in Chinese and published in 南昌 Nanchang as early as 1595. Inspired by the dialogue of the *De Amicitia* by Cicero, the work was praised by 李之藻 Li Zhizao who wrote a Preface, and republished in 1606 in Peking. It has been included in the 四庫全書總目提要 *Sì kù quánshū zǒngmù tíyào* or the *Summary Reviews* section of the *General Bibliography* already mentioned. The work was so important for Ricci that he later translated it himself in Italian: a kind of reverse exchange of learning!

Admired for his prodigious memory, as already mentioned, he shared his expertise in a short treatise called 西國記法 *Xī guó jìfǎ* or *Western countries mnemotechnics*. History does not tell if he succeeded in forming imitators...<sup>15</sup>

But he had had some opportunities to charm the circles of his friends with some of his poems with performance on the clavichord, as the following work could testify: 西琴曲意八章, *Xī qínqǔ yì bā zhāng* or *Eight songs for the western clavichord*, eight poems in Chinese performed on Chinese melodies. The manuscript was finished in 1601, annexed in certain editions to the 奇人十編 *Qírén shí biān* or *Ten chapters by a non-conformer* (see below).

The last category of Ricci’s writings to be mentioned in this exchange of learnings is his ethical and religious manuscripts, some not published. For instance, the 天主教要 *Tiānzhǔjiào yào* or *Essentials of Christian doctrine*, a booklet containing the main prayers and articles of the Christian faith; or based on the precedent, but published only in 1615, the 天主教要解略 *Tiānzhǔjiào yàojiěluè* or *Declaration of the Christian doctrine*: both were the first collective commentaries by Ricci, Diego Pantoja (龐迪我 *Peng Diwo*, 1571-1618) and Alfonse Vagnoni (高一志 *Gai Yizhi*, 1566-1640) on the Lord’s prayer, the *Ave Maria*, the Creed, the Decalogue, the Beatitudes, etc. — a work in preparation for what would later become Ricci’s major work in the field, the 天主實義 *Tiānzhǔ shí yì* or *The real meaning of ‘Lord of Heaven’*. It had been in preparation since the very beginning of Ricci’s life in China. A first draft had been finished as early as 1593 and used by fellow Jesuits in the field. Ricci translated it into Latin in order to request approbation from his superiors who suggested some modifications. But due to various circumstances and travels, Ricci’s manuscript reached him back only in 1601, after his arrival in Peking, so that the first amended and completed Chinese edition was finally published in 1603, with a laudatory preface by the scholar 馮應京 *Fang Yingjing* (1555-1606) who gives to Ricci the honorific title of 子 *Zi*, *Master*. The book is made of two parts of four chapters each, and presents a summary of Christian apologetics in the form of dialogues during which a Chinese scholar asks some questions and presents his objections to a Christian scholar who replies. Such an “exchange of philosophical learnings” between Christianity, [Neo-] Confucianism and Buddhism has been included in the *Summary Reviews* section of the *General Bibliography*, already mentioned supra.<sup>16</sup> But Joseph Sebes remarks: “There are also some discrepancies in the title of the book. The copies extant today and published before 1615 have the title 天學實義 *Tiān xué shí yì* or *The true*

<sup>15</sup> See 张之燕, “未盛放的花朵 — 明末利玛窦的记忆法” – ZHANG Zhiyan, “A Flower not in Bloom: Matteo Ricci’s Art of Memory in Late Ming China”, in 《神州交流—Chinese Cross Currents》, January 2011, Vol.8, No. 1, pp. 70-81.

<sup>16</sup> In “Part twenty-four, Philosophers Class, Second subdivision of related works, of miscellaneous non classified authors, p. 76 [or p. 2,628]. See J. Sebes, *ibid.*, p. 387-8.

meaning of the heavenly doctrine. The discrepancy is due to the fact that after 1615 the term 天學 *Tiān xué* is used for Christianity.”<sup>17</sup> More on this remark below.

In the last years of his life, Ricci still composed two other short works on morals which were famous among the *literati* at the time of their publication: in 1604, 二十五言 *Èrshiwǔ yán* or *Twenty-five sentences* [on morals], and in 1608 奇人十編 *Qírén shí biān* or *Ten chapters by a non-conformer*, published first in Peking, and one year later in Nanjing and Nanchang. It is a collection of ten paradoxes aimed at some Buddhist topics in the form of dialogues with high standing personages. After Ricci's death, his friends collected other documents entitled 辯學遺牘 *Biàn xué yí dú* or *Apologetic correspondence*, published in 1615 in Peking. As a follow-up to the success of the “paradoxes of a non-conformer”, just mentioned, this collection is made of the critics sent by the famed Buddhist Master 祿宏 Zhu Hong (1535-1615) from Hangzhou and Ricci's written replies. All these religious and philosophical publications are mentioned in the *Summary Reviews* section of the *General Bibliography*.

At the end of this brief mention of Ricci's works which were part of the ‘exchange of learnings’ at the time, one might perhaps ask which of them have been the more influential? One would suggest that three of them can be selected: the first by its date of publication because it has explained through what kind of mediation learnings could be exchanged: 交友論 *On friendship* (1595, Nanchang). The second is a seminal and scientific one, the *Elements of Geometry* by Euclid, in a Chinese translation based on Ricci's explanations and done by Xu Guangqi in a Chinese elegant redaction: 幾何原本 (1607, Peking). The third would be Ricci's life work, 天主實義 *The real meaning of ‘Lord of Heaven’* (1593-1603, Peking).

On this selection, some observations are in order. The selection does not prove a strategy, as already alluded to, but it illustrates that the exchange of learnings has been from the very start an interactive process among friends, and most importantly on the scientific level. In fact, towards the end of his long chronicle of his journals, Ricci notes:

“Dr. Paul,<sup>18</sup> who seemed to think about nothing else than the authority due to the Fathers and the things of this Earth of ours<sup>19</sup> in order to better promote Christianity, took advice from Fr Matthew to translate any one book of ours on natural science, to show to the *literati* of this kingdom with what diligence Ours<sup>20</sup> investigate the things and on what beautiful fundamentals they argue and prove; and through this, they would come to understand that, in the things of this Holy Religion of ours, it was not lightly that we moved ourselves to follow it. And speaking of various books, it was resolved for the time being that the best of all would be to translate the books of the *Elements* of Euclid, because mathematics in China was estimated, and in it all say to feel a fundament and do not want to be taught anything unless scientifically, sensing that without this book you could not do anything, especially as the demonstrations of this book are very clear.”<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> J. Sebes, *ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Paul Xu Guangqi.

<sup>19</sup> Ricci alludes here to the terrestrial matters of the time, like cartography for navigation, Copernician astronomy and the Julian calendar Gregorian reform of 1582, which he studied earlier under Clavius in Rome. Later on in China, Jesuits proved no strangers to the importance of calendar accuracy.

<sup>20</sup> « Ours » : this is the traditional Jesuit way of speaking about other Jesuits.

<sup>21</sup> Original translation of : « *Il Dottor Paolo, che pare che non pensava altra cosa che autorizzare i Padri e le cose della nostra terra per promover con questa più la christianità, pigliò consiglio col P. Matteo di tradurre qualche nostro libro di scienze naturali, per mostrare ai letterati di questo regno con quanta diligentia i Nostri investigano le cose, e con quanto begli fondamenti le affermano e provano ; da dove verrebbero a intendere che nelle cose della nostra Santa Religione non si erano leggermente mossi a sequirle. E parlando di varij libri, si risolsero per adesso il miglior di tutti sarebbe*

In other words, the Chinese translation and publication of Euclid's *Elements of Geometry* was initiated by Paul Xu, not by Ricci. The Jesuit explained to Xu Guangqi the *Elements* as being the scientific training very useful for many practical learnings – 實學 *shí xué* – so dear to Xu: cartography, cadastre, astronomy, calendar reform, etc. In this respect, most of Ricci's earlier scientific publications mentioned supra have shown to be very welcomed by the Chinese intelligentsia.

This observation leads also to the hidden origin of an equivocation present in this exchange of learnings. The Western learning – 西學 *xī xué* – which Ricci at his friend's invitations shared with them, was fitting what Xu Guangqi was looking for – 實學 *shí xué* – practical learning, from cartography and geometry to astronomy – 天學 *tiān xué*. But for Ricci, a man of European Renaissance, these scientific disciplines were meant as keys through which 天 *Tian*, the Creator creates “the myriad of things” in the Universe.

In a recent article, Professor Benjamin A. Elman writes:

“The Jesuits in late Ming China saw the “investigation of things” [格物 *ge wu*] and “exhaustively mastering principles” [窮理 *qiong li*] as a necessary way station to the doctrinal transmission of the experience of God to the Chinese they hoped to convert. Because of the physico-theology lurking in the Jesuits teleology of nature, however, the investigation of things was ultimately “to find God” for the Jesuits and “to fathom principles” of the Tao for the Chinese. Despite this theological twist to the Jesuit interpretation, the Jesuit conception and practice of *scientia* was ingeniously presented by some of the Chinese who collaborated with the Jesuits, such as 熊明遇 Xiong Mingyu (1579-1649), as roughly corresponding to the natural studies of the Chinese. Both sides saw an order and purpose in the cosmos and on earth, which the Jesuits linked into a physico-theology that used theology and geography to delineate God and nature as one. Most Chinese literati also saw the earth and heavens as a harmonious whole, but their teleological view of nature framed arguments for the design of the cosmos around an eternal and always changing Tao rather than around the chronology of a divine providence informing the cosmic order in Christianity.”<sup>22</sup>

In other words, as the scholastic saying says: “*Quidquid recipitur ad modum recipientis recipitur*,”<sup>23</sup> that is: “Whatever is received, at the mode of the receiver is received” or “Whatever is understood, at the mode of one's understanding is understood.” Hence the need for discovering the hidden risks involved in inter-cultural exchange of learning in general, and in particular in the equivocation imbedded in the term 天學 *tiān xué*: what most of the Chinese *literati* took as the ‘celestial learning’ of the West remained for Ricci and his sympathisers like Xu Guangqi the ‘Heavenly Learning’ of the Christian Doctrine. Even after clarification through philosophical discussions (as with Zhu Hong, mentioned supra), the equivocation would continue to carry some damaging side effects in later ages, as we shall see, when the inter-cultural exchange resonates back among the ‘Enlightenment’ circles of the European intelligentsia.

To expose these debates in greater detail would go beyond the scope of these pages. But at least they would reveal the limits of the “exchange or learning” that was initiated at

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*tradurre i libri degli Elementi di EUCLIDE, percioche la matematica era nella Cina stimata, e in essa tutti dicono senza fundamento e noi volendo insegnare qualche cosa [a] parte e scientificamente, senza questo . libro non si poteva far niente, specialmente per esser le demonstrationi di questo libro molto chiare.» See: Ricci, Matteo, Opere Storiche: Volume I - I Commentarj Della Cina del P. Matteo Ricci, S.I., op. cit., No. 772, p. 356.*

<sup>22</sup> “New Perspectives of the Jesuits and Science in China: 1600-1800”, in *Bucknell Review*, Vol. 47, No. 2 [2004]. See <http://www.questia.com/library/journal/1G1-123082679/new-perspectives-of-the-jesuits-and-science-in-china>.

<sup>23</sup> See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 1a, q. 75, a. 5; 3a, q. 5.

that time, particularly as far as the intellectual traditions are concerned. The reading, for instance, of the Chinese Classics, in particular the *Four Books* of Confucian tradition, and the translation of them in Latin have lead Ricci and his fellow Jesuits to privilege the ancient Confucian way of thinking for its connivance with some Christian tenets (the issues of the divine names, of the familial and official rites, all questions that will be hotly debated in later years).

This learned approach adopted by the Jesuits lead them also to have a negative opinion of the Song dynasty various new schools of thought, of 朱熹 Zhu Xi (1130-1200), the brothers Cheng (程頤 Cheng Yi, 1033-1107 and 程顥 Cheng Hao, 1032-1085), 陸象山 Lu Xiangshan (陸九淵 Lu Jiuyuan, 1139-1192) or even 王陽明 Wang Yangming (1472-1529). On the contrary, the importance given in late Ming time to “practical learning” based on mathematics might have inhibited in the Jesuits some more positive approach towards the ancient Taoist and Buddhist traditions in monasteries of that epoch and in their social context and influence.

Despite these above mentioned ambiguities and lacunae in the exchange of learnings that had accompanied, in Ricci and his followers, their understanding of Chinese culture and society at that time, it remains that their friendly approach was wisely respectful of important traditions – the veneration of family ancestors, of the Emperor and of Confucius the Sage. It deserved them to be friendly accepted.



### After Ricci, some self-defence in the exchange of learning

Ricci’s successors would follow in his steps. For one entire century after Ricci’s death (1610-1710) and beyond, an ever growing exchange of learning continued between China and Europe. But there was some difference or contrast with the earlier period made of fresh contacts with the Chinese society and culture. Then both sides – European scholars and Chinese *literati* – benefitted from new knowledge. The new period saw a growing flow of studies and publications made by foreigners living in China but sent to the European intelligentsia always eager to know China better. Without pretending to be exhaustive, only some important items will be mentioned through which a tentative explanation of what motivated these exchanges will be presented.

The first to be mentioned for its inventiveness is again a dictionary. Its author Nicolas Trigault (金尼各, 1577-1628) arrived in Macao the year Ricci died in Peking (1610). Compiled along many years, this dictionary is curiously called 西儒耳目資 *Xi Ru Er Mu Zi*, that is “an aid for the ears and eyes of Western scholars” (that is an “audio-visual” aid), published in 杭州 Hangzhou in 1626. It uses, with some modification, the roman transcription scheme devised by Ruggieri and Ricci.<sup>24</sup> Obviously the work was intended as a learning tool for newcomers in China.

But some years later, that is in the 1630s, the intercultural landscape in the Chinese context changed: more foreigners having more various and contesting approaches to Chinese culture and society entered with antagonistic purposes against any accommodative attitude towards local customs and rites. That was the beginning of the so called Chinese Rites

<sup>24</sup> Daniello Bartoli, S.J., *Dell’ historia della Compagnia di Giesù*, 1665 (Bartoli, 1825, v. 16: 196-200). *Ibid.*, p. 179.

Controversy. It was to affect the exchange of learning that was just flourishing between China and Europe. Professor Paul Rule sums up the beginning of the crisis in the following terms:

“The Chinese Rites controversy began in the 1630s when the over fifty year old Jesuit monopoly on the China mission, based on the Portuguese *Padroado* and controlled from Goa and Macau, was challenged by the arrival of Spanish Friars, Dominicans and Franciscans, from Manila. They opposed the permission initially granted by the Jesuit superior, Matteo Ricci, and continued by his successors, allowing Chinese Christians to practice ancestor rituals (with a few reservations and modifications regarding superstitious accretions); and they forbade Christian scholar-officials to participate in rituals in honour of Confucius some of which the Jesuits had allowed. The matter was referred to Rome and resulted in apparently contradictory decrees: 1645 (against these Chinese Rites) and 1656 (in favour), on both occasions with certain qualifications. In 1669, the Holy Office declared both previous decrees held, according to the circumstances and evidence presented.”<sup>25</sup>

In such a new context, the case of another important actor in the exchange of learning at that time deserves to be mentioned. Adam Shall von Bell (湯若望, 1592-1666) is not particularly known for his writings. But his long and active presence in China (from age 27 until age 74, 47 years) has revealed some cultural intricacies in the exchange of learning. After two years in Macau (1619-1621) to learn Chinese and teach mathematics, in 1630 he was called to Peking and succeeded the defunct Johann Schreck (鄧玉函, 1576-1639) in the correction and compilation of the 崇禎 Chongzhen calendar, more accurate in the calculation of solar and moon eclipses.<sup>26</sup> Because of this, after the fall of the Ming dynasty in 1644., Qing 順治 Shun Zhi Emperor (1638, ruled 1643-1661) chose him as counselor, made him a mandarin of the 1<sup>st</sup> order, appointed him as Director of the Imperial Observatory and Tribunal of Mathematics, position through which he promoted European astronomy at the centre of the Empire. That also exposed him, after the death in 1661 of Emperor Shunzhi, to opposition on two fronts: first, from the part of Chinese astronomer 楊光先 Yang Guangxian (1597-1669) who, in 1664, challenged him of intentional miscalculation of the time and the place for the funeral of the infant son of the Empress 孝獻 Xiao Xian (1639-1660, the Imperial Noble Consort 皇貴妃 Huang Guifei) that caused her death. Accused and goaled with Ferdinand Verbiest (南懷仁, 1623-1688), both Jesuits were condemned to death. But before the execution took place, they were freed due to an earthquake seen as a bad omen. This 1665 happy ending is also related to the second front of opposition coming from some theologians' suspicions: is the Director of the Imperial Observatory responsible for the astrological practices based on the Chinese calendar? Schall von Bell was later on cleared from any astrological compromising. But one year after his trial and release, he died from poor health due to the harsh conditions of his captivity. Obviously, he had also been exposed to the heat of the Chinese Rites Controversy.

It is due to the development in China as in Europe of the controversy that some self-defence motivations have entered in the exchange of learning and cultural encounter.

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<sup>25</sup> Paul Rule, Introduction to *The Acta Pekinensia*, Vol. I (in preparation, 2014).

<sup>26</sup> The 崇禎曆書 *Chongzhen lishu* (Chongzhen-reign Treatises on Calendrical Astronomy), as a result of the astronomical reform under the leadership of 徐光啓 Xu Guangqi (1562-1633), was based on the Tychonic system constructed between 1629 and 1644 by Johann Terrenz Schreck (1576-1630), Johann Adam Schall von Bell (1591-1666) and Giacomo Rho (1593-1638). See: 石云里 Shi Yunli, “Nikolaus Smogulecki and Xue Fengzuo’s *True Principles of the Pacing of the Heavens*: Its Production, Publication, and Reception”, in *East Asian Science, Technology and Medicine*, 27 (2007): 63-126.

But, as the time had now come for Westerners living in China to share their new knowledge of the land and society with scholars overseas, among the most important works of that period are, by Álvaro de Semedo (曾德照, 1585-1658), *Relazione della Grande Monarchia della China* [Report on the Great Monarchy of China, Rome 1643, in Italian], or the *Nouvelle Relation de la Chine* [A new report about China, Paris 1688],<sup>27</sup> a French version of a manuscript in Portuguese by Gabriel de Magalhaens (安文思, 1610-1677), a work later on translated into English. As the others, this work has been a source for better knowledge and positive understanding.

These descriptions of the various features of China and its culture were soon accompanied by maps.<sup>28</sup> Martino Martini (衛匡國, 1614-1661), who was 29 years old when he reached China (1643), is credited for drawing the best collection of Chinese maps of his time. Known as the *Novus Atlas Sinensis* [Ne Chinese Atlas], it was published during a trip to Europe, in Antwerp (1655).<sup>29</sup> This work, like the maps of China drawn by Ruggieri-Ricci, Semedo or Boym (see below), relied as much on geographical knowledge, gained through travel experiences across the country, as on Chinese sources. The 廣輿圖 *Guang yu tu* [Enlarged terrestrial atlas, ed. 1579] by 朱思本 Zhu Siben (1273-1337),<sup>30</sup> was still lacking of more accurate calculations.

Martino Martini (who died relatively young at the age of 47) is also known for his history of the Manchu conquest, written in Latin under the title of *De bello Tartarico in Sinis historia* [History of the Tartar War in China, 1654], a great success in Europe, with twenty eight editions in eight languages.<sup>31</sup> To this, he added some broader research on Chinese history titled *Sinicae historiae decas prima res à gentis origine ad Christum natum in extrema Asia, sive Magno Sinarum Imperio gestas complexa* [The first ten divisions of Chinese history, affairs in far Asia from the beginning of the people to the birth of Christ, or surrounding the emerging great empire of the Chinese, Munich 1658 and Amsterdam 1659]. In such a work, Martini shared with Ricci the same spirit of accommodation, inserting into the historical narrative some comments on Chinese classical literature, with a favourable interpretation of Confucian values. It was a first but excessive attempt to integrate Chinese and Biblical chronologies.<sup>32</sup>

On some other more modest field of knowledge, the Jesuit Michał Piotr Boym (卜彌格, 1612-1659) is less known a figure. Yet, in the short time he lived in China (1643-1652, in his thirties), right in the middle of the Manchu conquest, he was able to do research on the Chinese flora, particularly in 海南 Hainan, with sketches of plants and notes on their pharmacological usage in Chinese medicine and ordinary life. His *Flora Sinensis* [Chinese

<sup>27</sup> *Nouvelle Relation de la Chine contenant la description des particularitez les plus considérables de ce grand empire, composée en l'année 1668*,

<sup>28</sup> On this special field of cartography in Chinese Studies, cf. Chang Min-min, *China in European maps: a library special collection / compiled and edited by Min-min Chang*. 地圖中國：圖書館特藏 / 編輯者周敏民. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University of Science and Technology Library, c2003. 香港：香港科技大學圖書館, c2003.

<sup>29</sup> See Blaeu, Joan, 1596-1673, 朱思本 Chu Ssu-pên, 1273-ca. 1335, Martini, Martino, 1614-1661, *Novus Atlas Sinensis: 1655. Faksimiles nach der Prachtausgabe der Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel*. Einführung von Yorck Alexander Haase, Stuttgart, Müller und Schindler, 1974. Case contains an introductory volume (14 p.; 40 cm.) and a portfolio (50 cm.) containing a photo reprint of 2 chapters of the original text by Martino Martini and all the maps from the 1655 ed. of *Novus Atlas Sinensis*, which was published by J. Blaeu, Amsterdam as part 6 of his *Theatrum orbis terrarum sive Novus Atlas*; title from introductory volume.

<sup>30</sup> See D. E. Mungello, *Curious Land: Jesuit accommodation and the origins of sinology*, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 1989, p. 116-124: “Martini’s *Novus Atlas Sinensis*”, or 奇異的國度：耶穌會適應政策及漢學的起源 = Curious land: Jesuit accommodation and the origins of sinology, 孟德衛著, 陳怡譯, 鄭州, 大象出版社, 2010.

<sup>31</sup> E. Zürcher, “From Jesuit Studies to Western Learning”, in *Europe studies China: papers from an International Conference on the history of European sinology*, London: Han-Shan Tang Books, [Taipei] The Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation for International Scholarly Exchange, 1995, p. 267.

<sup>32</sup> See Mungello, *op. cit.*, p. 124-133: “Martini’s *Sinicae historiae decas prima*.”

Flora] in Latin has just been recently studied, reproduced and translated in Polish, in Gniezno.<sup>33</sup>

Deeper knowledge of Chinese philosophical and sapiential tradition was to be soon presented to the European intelligentsia.

Ignacio da Costa (郭納爵, 1599-1666) did a Latin translation of the 大學 *Da Xue* [The Great Learning] under the title *Sapientia Sinica* [Chinese Wisdom]. At this translation a fellow Jesuit, Prosper Intorcetta (殷鐸澤, 1625-1696) added his translation, also in Latin, of the 中庸 *Zhong Yong* [The Middle Way] under the title of *Sinarum scientia politico-moralis* [Politico-moral science of the Chinese], plus a *Vita Confucii, principis sapientiae sinicae* [Life of Confucius, Prince of the Chinese wisdom] and the first part of the 論語 *Lun Yu* under the title *Sententiae* [Maxims]. All these translations, printed on wood and later on assembled in one volume with their Chinese texts, have been published partly in 廣州 Guangzhou [Canton] in 1667 and in Goa in 1669.<sup>34</sup> To Prospero Intorcetta is also attributed a complete *Paraphrase* of all the Confucian books, a work that he left in Rome in 1671, perhaps under the title *Lucubratio de tetrabiblio Confucii* [Intensive study of the Four Books of Confucius].<sup>35</sup>

More important, due to the influence it has had in Europe, is the collective work called *Confucius Sinarum philosophus, sive scientia Sinensis latine exposita* [Confucius, philosopher of the Chinese, or the Chinese learning explained in Latin, Paris 1687]. The work has a Chinese title 西文四書直解 *Xi wen si shu zhi jie* [A straight forward explanation of the Four Books in Western Language]. Composed mainly by Philippe Couplet (柏應理, 1622-1693), Prospero Intorcetta, Wolfgang Herdrich (思理格, 1625-1684) and François de Rougemont (魯日滿, 1624-1676), this important work has an introduction in two parts. The first includes a presentation of the Chinese Classics and of their main commentators, plus some short notes on Daoism and the 道士 *dao shi*, on Buddhism and the bonzes, on the *literati* and the philosophers, and a table of the 64 hexagrams of the 易經 *Yijing* and their interpretation. The second part explains the world conception of the Chinese, the difficulties encountered by Ricci and the solution he adopted, the original purity of Chinese culture and its notion of God, the Supreme Being. This is followed by the “Life of Confucius” and the translations with commentaries, mentioned above, all done by Intorcetta. Couplet has added various *Chronological Tables* (published in Paris, 1686-1687): two of the sexagesimal cycles (from the year 2952 before C.E.<sup>36</sup> till the beginning of the C.E. and after it until the year 1683) plus a genealogy of the first three imperial families since 黃帝 Huang Di, the Yellow Emperor, with his 86 successors.<sup>37</sup> An English translation of the major part of the *Confucius Sinarum philosophus* has recently been published in Rome.<sup>38</sup>

These translations and commentaries have been done with the help obtained through the compilation of badly needed dictionaries and grammars. As the academic idiom in the West was still commonly the Latin language, mention should be done here of the 文字考 *Wen zi kao* [Research on the Characters], a work by Wolfgang Herdrich about which Philippe

<sup>33</sup> Miazek, Monika, *Flora Sinensis, Michala Boyma SI* = 中國植物志, Gniezno, Collegium Europaeum Gnesense, 2005, 287 p.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 327.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 322 and 328.

<sup>36</sup> C.E.: Christian Era, Common Era.

<sup>37</sup> See D. E. Mungello, “A study of the prefaces to Ph. Couplet’s *Tabula Chronologica monarchiae Sinicae* (1686)” in Heyndrickx, Jérôme, ed., *Philippe Couplet, S.J. (1623-1693) : The man who brought China to Europe*, Nettetal: Steyler Verlag, 1990. Monumenta Serica Monograph Series, XXII, pp. 183-199.

<sup>38</sup> *Confucius Sinarum philosophus (1687) : The first translation of the Confucian classics*, Thierry Meynard S.J., ed. and transl., Rome, Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 2011, vii, 449 pp., Monumenta historica Societatis Iesu, nova series, Vol. 6.

Couplet wrote in 1682: “His great Chinese-Latin dictionary is being printed with this title.”<sup>39</sup> Yet, the whereabouts of the book remain unknown. Intorcetta himself had composed *Grammatica linguae Sinensis* (Grammar of the Chinese language), printed in Europe sometime during the XVII<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>40</sup>

Philippe Couplet, during his stay in Europe (1682-1692), is also reported to have left in Paris a *Chinese Grammar*, which became a reference for others to come, and a *Chinese Dictionary*, very clearly written, work of the missionaries, on which a later dictionary in 9 volumes in-folio by Mentzell has been based.<sup>41</sup>

A man of many talents, Ferdinand Verbiest (mentioned supra) rearranged the Chinese Grammar made by Martino Martini. Furthermore, with him and others, a new field of Sinology was open, the Manchu studies. Known for his proficiency in Manchu language, Verbiest is the author of the first *Grammatica Tartarea* [Manchu Grammar] also titled *Elementa linguae tartaricae* [Elements of the Manchu language] that was printed in Peking.<sup>42</sup>

Apart from his linguistic expertise, just mentioned, Verbiest is also known for his proficiency in astronomy.<sup>43</sup> In his many memorials to the Emperor written in Chinese (for instance the 儀象志 *Yi xiang zhi*, on the theory, usage and fabrication of astronomical and mechanical instruments, a work in 14 volumes, Peking, 1673),<sup>44</sup> Verbiest had obviously to coin new Chinese terms and to explain them. He had similarly to do so when he added some comments to his famous 坤輿全圖 *Kun yu quan tu* [Map of the Terrestrial Globe, Peking 1674], or in the 坤輿圖說 *Kun yu tu shuo* [Explanation of the Map [...], Peking, 1672], a work that contains essential cosmographic and geographic notions,<sup>45</sup> or finally in his many writings in which he had to justify European astronomy in comparison with its Chinese counterpart.<sup>46</sup>

But on the field of Linguistics, the greatest contribution has probably been that of Joseph Henri-Marie de Prémare (馬若瑟, 1666-1736), known for his *Notitia linguae sinicae* [Note on the Chinese language], composed in 廣州 Guangzhou (Canton) in 1728, printed in 4 volumes in Malacca (1831) and later on translated into English (Canton, 1847). According to the French Sinologist Jean-Pierre Abel Rémusat (1788-1832), it is neither a simple grammar nor rhetoric; it is a nearly complete treatise on literature including the usage of particles and Chinese grammar rules, with stylistic remarks, ancient locutions, common idiom, proverbs, most commonly used figures of style with a lot of examples quoted, translated and commented upon when necessary. And Rémusat continues: “The author [...] has sought to render all methods superfluous”, and has supposed that, as he did, everyone “can learn Chinese through practice instead of learning it through theory.”<sup>47</sup> It is certainly through this practice that Henri de Prémare has been able to translate some maxims quoted from the 書經 *Shu Jing*, eight odes from the 詩經 *Shi Jing* and a Chinese tragedy, attributed to 紀君祥 Ji Junxiang (second half of XIII<sup>th</sup> century, 元 Yuan dynasty time), 趙氏孤兒 *Zhao shi gu er* [The Orphan of the House of Zhao], that has inspired Voltaire’s drama *L’Orphelin de la Chine*

<sup>39</sup> Pfister, Louis, S.J., (1833-1891), *Notices biographiques et bibliographiques sur les jésuites de l’ancienne mission de Chine, 1552-1773*, Shanghai, Imprimerie de la Mission Catholique, 1932-1934, p. xxiii-xxv. Chinese edition: 明清間在華耶穌會士列傳：1552-1773 / [法] 費賴之著；梅乘騏，梅乘駿譯。上海：天主教上海教區光啟社，1997, p. 366.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 328.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 312.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 358, and Joseph Dehergne, *Répertoire des Jésuites de Chine de 1552 à 1800*, p. 290.

<sup>43</sup> See Golvers, Noel, *The Astronomia Europaea of Ferdinand Verbiest, S.J. (Dillingen, 1687) : Text, Translation, Notes and Commentaries*, Nettetal, Steyler Verlag, 1993, 547 pp., illustr., Monumenta Serica Monograph Series, XXVIII.

<sup>44</sup> Pfister, *Notes...*, p. 353.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 355.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 356.

<sup>47</sup> Quoted by Pfister, *ibid.*, p. 524. The impressive detailed content of the *Notitia linguae sinicae* is given p. 525.

(Paris, 1755). Among other linguistic contributions, Prémare is also credited for a large Latin-Chinese Dictionary, in-4<sup>o</sup>, etc.

As Matteo Ricci had used a map of the world at the very beginning of his “expedition” in China and concluded it by writing the expedition’s “history” in his journals, so too his successors followed in his footsteps nearly one century later. Among the cartographers, two names must be mentioned, who have worked not at their own initiative but at the request of the Emperor. The first, Jean-François Gerbillon (張誠, 1654-1707) made and published in 1692 his *Carte nouvelle de la Grande Tartarie* [New map of the Great Tartary or Manchuria]. Then, Joachim Bouvet (白晉 1656-1730), one of the six mathematicians sent by Louis XIV of France, arrived in China in 1687. From 1708 to 1715, he worked on a survey of the various provinces and the preparation of maps of the empire.

Histories of various kinds were also written. The same Bouvet is the author of the *État présent de la Chine* [The present state of China, Paris 1697], with engraved figures done in Paris by Giffart but based on Bouvet’s sketches which he had offered to the king of France. The book was followed by a *Portrait historique de l’Empereur de Chine* [Historic portrait of the Emperor of China, Paris, 1697], republished as *Histoire de l’Empereur de Chine* [History of the Emperor of China, La Haye, 1699], where Bouvet makes comparisons between the king of France and the Chinese Emperor. But due to the Chinese Rites controversy, some care was taken to present Chinese civilization in its glorious present state, as Bouvet did, or through its best traditions, as other Jesuits did in their translations.

This care led naturally to the study of the long history of Chinese institutions. Dominique Parrenin (巴多明, 1665-1741), under the title *Histoire de la Chine* [History of China], did a literal translation in French of the 資治通鑑綱目, 前編 *Zi zhi tong jian gang mu, qian bian* [Comprehensive Mirror to aid in Government, first part] of 司馬光 Sima Guang (1019-1086), where history is mirrored in the institutions established for good governance. Yet, Parrenin translated only the part related to the most ancient antiquity of 伏羲 Fu Xi till 堯 Yao!

This summary of the “exchange of learning” acquired in China during the late Ming and Qing dynasties but published in Europe would be incomplete if the name of Antoine Gaubil (宋君榮, 1689-1759) were not added. A man extremely gifted, he wrote a great number of books, and some published in Paris. By browsing on their titles, one immediately notes the great progress done in the knowledge of China. Here are some instances.

First on astronomy: *Histoire abrégée de l’astronomie chinoise* [A Brief History of Chinese Astronomy, Paris 1729], with a supplement on the Chinese cycles and notes on solar eclipses as mentioned in the 書經 *Shu Jing*, the 詩經 *Shi Jing* and the 春秋 *Chunqiu*; a *Traité de l’astronomie chinoise* [Treatise on Chinese astronomy] from the beginning of history till the 漢 Han, and then till the XV<sup>th</sup> century C.E., including tables and Chinese methods of computation, etc. The text is followed by several collections of scientific observations done in different exact scientific disciplines and gathered by his fellow Jesuit companions, including catalogues of comets (one catalogue spanning the year 613 till the year 1539).

Second, on history, he composed an *Histoire de Gen-tchis-can et de la dynastie des Mongou* [History of Genghis Khan and of the Mongol Dynasty, Paris 1739]; an *Histoire de la grande dynastie des Thang* [History of the Great Tang dynasty, Paris 1791]; a *Traité de la Chronologie chinoise* [Treatise on Chinese Chronology].

Third, on geography: some maps, of Canton (1723), and a *Description de la ville de Pékin* [Description of the City of Peking, Paris 1765], and two interesting maps: a *Carte des*

*provinces formant frontière entre la Russie d'une part, et la Turquie d'Asie, la Perse et la Tartarie, de l'autre* [Map of the provinces forming the frontier between Russia on the one hand and Asian Turkey, Persia and Tartary on the other], drawn in 1728 for 雍正 Yong Zheng's brother, and another similar one *Carte des provinces limitrophes de la Turquie, de la Perse et du Mongol* [Map of the provinces bordering Turkey, Persia and Mongolia], drawn in 1729 for the same royal prince. Plus numerous notes taken on his journeys, for instance one about *Les Juifs de Chine* [The Jews of (開封 Kaifeng), 1723].

Gaubil did also some important translations: le 易經 *Yi Jing* et le 禮記 *Li Ji*; the 步天歌 *Bu tian ge* [Song of the walk in the sky], sent with notes to Paris in 1734 — it is a short description of the sky, in verses composed in 600 C.E. by 丹元子 Dan Yuanzi (隋 Sui dynasty, 589-620); and the 書經 *Shu Jing* (Paris, 1770).

## From exchange of learning to controversies

In the “exchange of learning” between China and Europe in modern times, the Chinese rites themselves have been the object of great attention and study by the Jesuits, in various works and numerous documents and letters. All these materials are rich sources of cultural and anthropological information.

Already in 1668, Prosper Intorcetta (殷鐸澤, 1625-1696) had composed quite a long treatise called *Testimonium de Cultu Sinensi* [Testimony on Chinese Cult], published in Paris in 1700 (318 pages in-8<sup>o</sup>). Probably related to it is a larger manuscript, apparently also written by Intorcetta, in which the Jesuit quotes as authorities all the Chinese texts related to these rites in memory of Confucius and of family ancestors.<sup>48</sup> Also in 1700, the same year of this publication in Paris, Joachim Bouvet with four other missionaries presented a memorial to the Emperor asking for an authoritative interpretation of the rites, which were objects of the controversy. The imperial answer was that they were purely civil usages of reverence without any religious significance (see *infra* for more details).

François Noël 衛方濟 (1651-1729), some years later, published in Prague his *Philosophia Sinica* [Chinese philosophy, 1711], in which he gathered quotations of Chinese philosophers related to their notion of the Supreme Being, the meaning of the rites honouring the ancestors and the moral duties in family and social life. Another book followed: *Historica notitia rituum et ceremoniarum sinicarum...* etc. [Historical notice on the Chinese rites and ceremonies... etc., Prague 1711], a book that was ordered to be withdrawn (probably as being too favourable an appreciation of the Chinese rites) and remains extremely rare.<sup>49</sup> It is equally worthwhile to note that Noël had also translated the 道德經 *Daode Jing*.<sup>50</sup>

It is not in the scope of this study to delve more either into the controversy itself or on its aftermath. Yet, parallel with it (if not a part of the controversy), some other research had been done in the same period of time by a few other Jesuits in China, and not less gifted, on the early ages of Chinese culture and language.

In their admiration for the Chinese civilization, they were searching for some hints of similarities between the Chinese culture (including its language) as signified by early Chinese characters or expressed in the 易經 *Yi Jing*. These studies concerned also the religious notions or the narrated events of the biblical traditions, such as the Diluvium and its date. Hence great

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<sup>48</sup> Pfister, *ibid.*, p. 326.

<sup>49</sup> Pfister, *ibid.*, p. 418.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 418.

efforts were made in view of establishing a concordance between Chinese ancient historical records and biblical history. Such research went far beyond the scope of exchange of learning, as it is evident in the work of Joachim Bouvet or Joseph de Prémare with his studies on Chinese philology.<sup>51</sup> Yet, the “Figurative” reading of Chinese ancient culture, by aiming at proving too much, ended in failure.<sup>52</sup>

Such an outcome might have also been the result of the debates stirred up in Europe by the work of Louis Le Comte (李明, 1655-1728), *Nouveaux Mémoires sur l'état présent de la Chine* [New Memoirs on the Present State of China, Paris, in 3 volumes printed in 1696, 1697 et 1701], where an extremely positive image of Chinese civilization was given. This publication stirred up intense debates in Europe at large for its utterly positive image it gave of the Chinese empire, society and culture in defence of the accommodation approach of the Jesuits in their activities in the field.

It was also the time when their many letters, official or private, to their superiors or their friends, have been gathered and published for their informative value of their contents. The first Jesuit editor of the collection, Charles Le Gobien (1653-1708), who had not been sent to China, gave to the first volumes the title *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses* (Paris, 1702).<sup>53</sup> For later volumes added to the same collection, he was to be succeeded by Jean-Baptiste Du Halde (1674-1743) as editor. During his many years of editorial office (1709-1743) Du Halde, in the same spirit of support and defence of the knowledge gathered by his fellow Jesuits in China, assembled and organised their letters in his celebrated work, the *Description de la Chine*.<sup>54</sup> Published in 1736 in La Haye, and five years later in an English translation (London, 1741), this publication in 4 volumes gives a quasi-encyclopaedic information on the Chinese Empire at that time. It has enjoyed a large success among the European intelligentsia. This is in great part due to the fact that the *Letters* on which it is based are “edifying” a new knowledge of China through the “care” with which they have been written that really makes them not strange but “curious” letters. On this issue, Professor Mungello writes:

“For Europeans of that age, the word “curious” had little of the sense of merely attention-arising or prying associated with the word in twentieth-century usage. Rather, the word was used in a sense closer to the Latin adjective *curiosus* which referred to painstaking accuracy, attention to detail and demanded the most “curious” investigation in the sense of being detailed, skilled and accurate. This sense of “curious” is crucial [here] because it provides the historical link between the intellectually-minded Jesuit proponents of accommodation in China and the European proto-sinologists.”<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> See Lundbæk, Knud, *Joseph de Prémare, 1666-1736, S.J. : Chinese philology and figurism*, Århus, Denmark, Århus University Press, 1991. — On other European research for a universal language based on a “*clavis sinica*” and done in XVII<sup>th</sup> century, see D. E. Mungello, *op. cit.*, chapters VI and VII, pp. 174-247, or 奇異的國度：耶穌會適應政策及漢學的起源 = Curious land : Jesuit accommodation and the origins of sinology, 孟德衛著, 陳怡譯, 鄭州, 大象出版社, 2010.

<sup>52</sup> See Witek, John W., *Controversial ideas in China and in Europe: a biography of Jean-François Foucquet, S.J., (1665-1741)*, Roma, Institutum Historicum S.I., 1982. Bibliotheca Institutum Historici S.I., v. 43.

<sup>53</sup> *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses, écrites des Missions Étrangères par quelques Missionnaires de la Compagnie de Jésus*. [Edifying and Curious Letters of Some Missioners, of the Society of Jesus, from Foreign Missions], that is from China, the Levant, the Indies and the Americas, Paris, 1702-1776, 34 vol..

<sup>54</sup> The complete title is: *Description de la Tartarie chinoise, enrichie des cartes générales et particulières de ces pays, de la carte générale et des cartes particulières du Thibet, & de la Corée; & ornée d'un grand nombre de figures & de vignettes gravées en taille douce*, La Haye, H. Scheurleer, 1736, 4 vol.. — An English translation followed very soon five years later: *The General History of China Containing a Geographical, Historical, Chronological, Political and Physical Description of the Empire of China, Chinese-Tartary, Corea, and Thibet; Including an Exact and Particular Account of Their Customs, Manners, Ceremonies, Religion, Arts, and Sciences : The Whole Adorn'd with Curious Maps, and Variety of Copper-Plates* (3rd ed.), London, J. Watts, 1741, 4 vol..

<sup>55</sup> See Mungello, *Curious Land...*, p. 13-14, and note 1 on the semantic evolution of the Latin words *curiositas* and *curiosus*.

After Du Halde, two other editors, also Jesuits, Luis Patouillet (1699-1779) and Ambrose Maréchal, have added other volumes in later years (1749-1776) that contain information coming from other parts of the world.<sup>56</sup>

### The manuscript *Acta Pekinensia* in the exchange of learning

The above mentioned publications and exchanges between China and Europe ignited intense debates in the European intelligentsia right at the beginning of the so-called “age of Enlightenment” or the XVIII<sup>th</sup> European century. Arguments supporting or criticising the “accommodation” approach to Chinese culture by the actors of these exchanges in China resonated in Europe, mainly in France and Germany, with reflections ranging from moral philosophy and theology to science of religion, general history, the origin of language and script, philosophy of law and also political theory.<sup>57</sup>

The debates were all the more vivid that, at the same time new information had reached Europe, not a few members of various religious orders had been admitted in China under the Portuguese *Padroado*, as mentioned supra. They generally were opposed to the “accommodation” approach of the Jesuits. With the average delay of about two years, the first news was of the Kangxi Emperor’s *Edit of Toleration* in 1692, which stipulated “*that all temples dedicated to the Lord of Heaven, in whatever place they may be found, ought to be preserved, and that it may be permitted to all who wish to worship this God to enter these temples, offer him incense, and perform the ceremonies practiced according to ancient custom by the Christians [...]*.” But it was followed in 1693 by the decree of Bishop Maigrot, Vicar Apostolic of Fujian, forbidding the observance of the Chinese rites by Chinese Christians. The impact of the Chinese Rites Controversy on the exchange of learning between China and Europe, as shown earlier in this study, was too obvious for not being mentioned here.

In China, to clarify their way of proceeding, the Jesuits obtained on 30 November 1700 a formal approval by the Emperor Kangxi of their Chinese translation of the word “God”, and of their understanding of the Chinese rites to the Ancestors and to Confucius as not being idolatrous or superstitious but civil. “The contents of Kangxi’s verdict are best seen in the printed apologia, the *Brevis Relatio*, published in Peking in 1701.<sup>58</sup> It includes the original memorial and the Emperor’s response both in Manchou, a Latin translation of both, plus the Chinese translation published in the *Peking Gazette* (京報 *Jing bao*), an introduction that explains the sequence of events surrounding the declaration and a long appendix of

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<sup>56</sup> On Du Halde’s master work, see Isabelle Landry-Deron, *La Preuve par la Chine : la «Description» de J.-B. Du Halde, jésuite, 1735*, Paris, Éditions de l’École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 2002, 428 pp.

<sup>57</sup> On these issues, see Mungello, *op. cit.*, and Virgile Pinot, *La Chine et la Formation de l’Esprit Philosophique en France (1640-1740)*, Genève, Slatkine Reprints, 1971, 480 pp. — 中國對法國哲學思想形成的影響, 維吉爾, 比諾著 - 耿昇譯 - 北京, 商務印書館, 2000, v, 735 pp.

<sup>58</sup> *Brevis Relatio eorum quae spectant ad declarationem Sinarum Imperatoris Kam Hi, circa coeli, Cumfucii et eorum cultum, datam anno 1700. accedunt primatum doctissimorumque virorum et antiquissimae traditionis testimonia. Opera Patrum Soc. Jesu Pekini pro Evangelii propagatione laborantium*, xylograph (A Short Account on the declaration by the Kam Hi Emperor of the Chinese about the cult of heaven, Confucius and their own [ancestors], given in the year 1700. Are added testimonies of men of first class supreme erudition and of the most ancient tradition. Through the labour of the Fathers of the Society of Jesus in Peking working for the propagation of the Gospel [Peking, 1701] ). There is a later variant Canton edition, two German editions of 1703, and an English translation: *A Short Account of the Declaration given by the Chinese Emperour Kam Hi, in the Year 1700*, London, 1703. [Paul Rule, Introduction to the *Acta Pekinensia*, Vol. I, in preparation.]

supporting testimonies from various Chinese authorities.”<sup>59</sup> Here is the essential part of the Memorial, quoted in an English version of the Latin translation:

“Although some European learned men have heard about the Rites in which the Chinese are accustomed to honour Heaven, Confucius and dead relatives they have a poor understanding of the reason for these rites, hence they have written to us in the following words:

Since the kindness and munificence of the Great Emperor of China has spread everywhere, and the fame of his clearly admirable name and wisdom has penetrated completely to all kingdoms and it seems furthermore that the practice of the aforesaid Rites must rest on some foundation, we therefore request you to write to us explaining each of these matters.

Our response is thus:

*When the Chinese honour Confucius they do this in order to show their respect for him on account of his teaching which has been passed down. Since they have received this from him how could it not be that they not demonstrate due honour to him for it by bending their knees and lowering their heads to the ground? This is the real reason why the Chinese world has Confucius for its Master and venerates him. And this is the true meaning of the way the Chinese cultivate him. Certainly they do not do so to seek from him intellectual brilliance, understanding or honours.*

*As for the libations and rites which they observe for their dead relatives and those close to them snatched away by death, these are conducted by them to demonstrate the love and reverence due to them and gratitude for the originators of their family and clan. In addition, the ancient emperors laid down the solemn rites wherein each year at stated times in winter and summer honour is exhibited to the dead, both by sons to their parents, and by brothers and others towards those tied to them by bonds of friendship or relationship. This is instituted and expressly done with the intention of expressing in this way, so far as possible, our very great affection for those close to us.*

*As for those tablets which they put up for their ancestors or predecessors, we say they are not erected out of a belief that the souls of the dead reside in them, or to seek good luck and prosperity from them, but a feast is placed before their tablets, and they make oblations, simply to show love and reverence to them as if they were alive and present, and so in this way they demonstrate a constant and perpetual goodwill towards the authors of their family.*

*Regarding the sacrifices accustomed to be offered to Heaven by the ancient kings and emperors, they are those which the philosophers of China call Jiao she<sup>60</sup>; that is sacrifices dedicated to Heaven and Earth, in which they say Shangdi himself, or the Supreme Lord, is cultivated, and for this same reason, the tablet before which these sacrifices are offered, bears this inscription: Shangdi, that is, the Supreme Lord. From this it is clear that these sacrifices are not offered to the visible and material sky but specifically to the Author and Lord of Heaven, Earth and the myriad of things, whom, since they out of great fear and respect do not dare to call him by his own name, are accustomed to invoke under the names of Supreme Heaven, Beneficent Heaven and Universal Heaven. In the same way, when they speak reverently about the*

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Kiao Xe* in the Latin translation i.e. 郊社 *Jiao she*, suburban altars.

*Emperor himself, out of respect in reference to the Emperor they use terms like: beneath the steps of the Throne, or the Greatest Hall of the Palace. These terms differ in themselves but in fact in regard to what is being named, are plainly one and the same.*

*Hence, similarly, it is quite clear that that honorific inscription which was formerly granted to us by the Emperor in which he wrote with his own hand the words Jing Tian (honour Heaven), was really given to us in the same understanding.*

*We foreigners, and subjects of the Emperor, since we are hardly experts in the same Rites, and are ignorant whether what we have written here agrees with the truth, reverently request that he may deign to reply to us with an imperial rescript, and to emend in his reply anything in which it departs from the true understanding of the Chinese.*

When the Emperor had read this, and given it careful consideration and thought, he replied in this way in the Manchu language:

*All that is contained in this document is well expressed, and in complete agreement with the Great Teaching.\* It is the common law of the whole world to offer appropriate respect to Heaven, Lords, Parents, Masters and Ancestors. What is contained in this document is very truthful and there is absolutely nothing that requires amendment.*<sup>61</sup>

\*The Chinese call the teachings of Confucius the ‘Great Teaching’.”<sup>62</sup>

Among the only 200 copies reprinted in Peking,<sup>63</sup> some were sent to Rome and various other places in Europe for information. Yet, with this conflicting<sup>64</sup> intercultural background in Europe, the Church authorities in Rome decided to send to Peking a papal legation led by a young Legate, Charles-Thomas Maillard de Tournon (1668-1710). In his 33 years of age, he received for mission to ask from the Emperor Kangxi two things: first that dispensation from the observance of the Chinese rites be granted to Chinese Christians including officials and, second, that permission be granted to the Pope to have a permanent representative living in China as superior of all Christian missionaries, no matter their religious order and obedience. Both requests were denied for various reasons and the Legation ended in utter understanding and failure.

The detailed chronicle of this Legation is narrated in the manuscript titled *Acta Pekinensia*. Due to the interference of these issues, as just mentioned, with the history of the “exchange of learning between China and the West”, the manuscript, its historical importance and the project of its publication are briefly presented here.

First the complete Latin title of the manuscript translated into English is as follows: “*The Peking Acts or Historical Records of what happened in Peking, day by day, from December 4<sup>th</sup> of the year 1705 when there arrived the Most Illustrious, Most Reverend and Most Excellent Lord Charles Thomas Maillard de Tournon, Patriarch of Antioch, Visitor Apostolic with powers of a Personal Legate*”.

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<sup>61</sup> This is a translation from the Latin translation of the Manchu original in *Brevis Relatio* (Peking, [1701]). ff.11r-13v (from ARSI: Jap. Sin. I.206). [...] [Paul Rule, *ibid.*]

<sup>62</sup> A note in the *Brevis Relatio*, f. 13v. [Paul Rule, *ibid.*].

<sup>63</sup> See Albert Chan, *Chinese Books and Documents in the Jesuit Archives in Rome*, pp. 268-273.

<sup>64</sup> See Gernet, *China and the Christian Impact: A Conflict of Cultures*, Cambridge University Press, 1985, 316 pp. — 中國與基督教：中西文化的首次撞擊 = Chine et Christianisme, 謝和耐著, 耿昇譯, 上海, 上海古籍出版社, 2003, 383 pp.

The redactor and compiler of the manuscript of 1 467 pages was the German Jesuit, astronomer and technician Kilian Stumpf (記理安, 1655-1720), trained as a scientist with knowledge of mathematics and chemistry (he had some expertise in glass making), who arrived in China in 1694. Since he was appointed official notary by his Jesuit superiors, Stumpf gave to his compilation the name of *Acts* as if to stress the official nature of his redaction. Such a term can be understood as having the joint meaning of the proceedings of the events that happened during the time of the Legation's presence in China, and of the collection of documents which were produced or quoted or at the basis of the text. Apart from three introductory sections (a call to the reader, an attestation of the authority of the manuscript and some prolegomena), the text is organised month by month from December 1705 till January 1712, with one unexplained "gap in contents between September 1709 and September 1711."<sup>65</sup> Kilian Stumpf sent regularly his initial draft to Jesuit Giovanni Paolo Gozani (駱保祿 1659-1732) in 河南 Henan who resided in 開封 Kaifeng and was in charge of producing a clean copy neatly hand written and on which, sent back to Peking, Stumpf made occasional corrections or minor additions to the final manuscript. On each page he added his official seal of Notary before successive parts of the document were sent to Rome. Among these additions are marginal sub-headings in his own script, numbered in monthly sequences like sign-posts summarising adjacent paragraphs to help the reader in following the action of the lingering drama.<sup>66</sup>

For safety reasons, the manuscript has been in part successively sent to Rome (the first part was lost at sea in January 1708 when, entrusted to two Jesuits on two different ships, it perished with both men in the wreckage of their ships caused by a storm not far from Lisbon! It was sent again some months later). The single complete copy still existing has been kept in the Jesuit archives in Rome, and another one, in part only for unknown circumstances, is kept at the Vatican in the Propaganda Fide archives.

Since "there was a general prohibition on publishing anything relating to the Chinese Rites in Benedict XIV's 1742 decree, and as it is said maintained later, the document has never been published until now. In any case it would have been very unwise for the Roman Jesuits at a time when they were accused (wrongly) of disobeying the 1704 & 1710 decrees to have published anything on the subject."<sup>67</sup>

Since then times have changed. The project of the Macau Ricci Institute to publish in an English translation an annotated edition of the manuscript was initiated in 2001 during the conference held in Beijing to celebrate the fourth centenary of Matteo Ricci's arrival in the capital. Various scholars experts on the subject joined willingly in the endeavour that has been conducted in three overlapping phases: the transcription on electronic files started first in Poland, done by a team of young expert Latinists of the European College of Gnesno; the translation was assumed successively by quite rare Jesuit Latinists, most of them semi-retired or retired, in the United Kingdom and in Australia; the annotations by the above mentioned historians followed accordingly, in Australia, Germany and Portugal. The whole team hopes that the first volume (out of four) can be published later this year 2014.

As such, the manuscript will end its existence of a silent witness: in fact, as the *Brevis Relatio* states clearly, the whole matter of the controversy in Europe was a failure of some important intercultural effort of understanding through some exchange of learning.

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<sup>65</sup> Paul Rule, *ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> Data based on Paul Rule, note 7 of the English translation of the text of the *Acta Pekinensia*, Vol. One (forthcoming).

<sup>67</sup> Paul Rule, letter.

## Sobering remarks

Some concluding remarks are now in order. The exchange of learning between China and the West was interrupted soon after the suppression of the Jesuit order by the authorities of the Catholic Church in 1773, but more importantly by the political events which have followed and shook Europe on the political scene towards the end of the XVIII<sup>th</sup> century.

The first stages of this exchange ended in ambiguity. The Western learning had some attractive influence for the strength of its mathematical deductions and proofs, particularly in geometry and astronomy. Its application in correcting the Chinese calendar with precision gave it the prestige that the practical learning of the time was looking for. Hence the Western learning was also called “celestial learning” by Chinese intellectuals. Yet for Ricci and his companions, astronomy and mathematics were part of the “Heavenly Learning” conceived as the understanding of the creative work by the Divine Being, “萬物真元” the true origin of the myriad of things in the Universe, whom ancient Confucian traditions called, among other names, the Lord of Heaven, as the Edit of Toleration has alluded to. The Imperial declaration on the Jesuit understanding of the nature of the Chinese Rites, as reported above, should have clarified all the remaining ambiguities inherent in the original understanding of the Western learning. As such it contributes to the exchange of learning beyond scientific knowledge.

Yet during the one hundred years elapsed between the death of Matteo Ricci (1610) and the failed legation of Maillard de Tournon (who died in Macau in 1710), the internal configuration of the European culture changed significantly: through the processes of the European Renaissance, reason was not only, as in the Middle Ages, at the service of religious faith (as Anselm of Canterbury had written: *fides quaerens intellectum* [faith seeking understanding]) .<sup>68</sup> “Learning” (that is to say: *scientia*, knowledge) was more and more the fruit of critical reason. The Galileo Galilei case was one of the paradigmatic instances.

Cultural configurations were not the same as in the past. The Jesuit accommodation approach to ancient Confucianism (because it was seen quite close to Christian ethical values based on divine Revelation) was on the contrary understood in Europe as the discovery, in the early ages of Chinese civilisation and culture, of a moral philosophy based on pure reason. Hence a reverse ambiguity entered, during the « Age of Enlightenment », in the exchange of learning between China and Europe. Its cause was, as Jean-François Billeter writes, that “The Jesuits have not invented anything; they have just adapted to their own goal a vision of China, of its institutions and of its history that existed in China itself.”<sup>69</sup> As such, the image of China transmitted by their publications and letters remained faithful to their living context even if their knowledge of this context was limited to the cities and to the educated intellectuals and officials in quest more for practical learning than for philosophical teaching. After all, neither in the cities or on the countryside of the provinces of China where many of them could not easily, as in Peking, keep contact with Europe, the Jesuits were not writing as anthropologists or social workers, but as observers. Their image of China ought not be seen as biased.

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<sup>68</sup> The motto of Saint Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109), outstanding Christian philosopher and theologian of the eleventh century, best known for his contributions to philosophical theology.

<sup>69</sup> See Jean-François Billeter, *Contre François Jullien*, Paris, Allia, 2006, p. 14 : “Les Jésuites n’ont rien inventé, ils se sont contentés d’adapter à leur propre fin une vision de la Chine, de ses institutions et de son histoire qui existait en Chine même.”

But their letters and publications stimulated more the critical reason of their time than they were understood as a pure defence for their endeavours. As earlier the “celestial learning” was a refraction of the “Heavenly Learning” the Jesuits intended to share, so too later the European reading of their apologies was a distortion of their intended goal. This was due to a lack of some deeper understanding of what was at stake. “Whatever is received, at the mode of the receiver is received” and in consequence risks to be misunderstood. Compare for instance the varied influence of the Chinese learning on Voltaire, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Leibnitz, Spinoza or other important thinkers of the European Enlightenment age.

For these reasons and because the “exchange of learning” between different cultures is always in a process of maturation, it often runs the risk to remain partial or distorted: it is either done on the superficial layers of the cultures involved, or what is exchanged has already become outdated in the culture of origin. This is particularly true at the level of social, political, ethical and spiritual values in general. Paul Valéry (1871-1945), a French poet, essayist and philosopher, dared write in 1919, after the end of the First World War: “All of us, civilizations, we now know that we are mortal.”<sup>70</sup> Should it not be even more valid to say the same of theories and ideologies often imported from abroad and under which not a few human societies have to live due to epochal circumstances, yet which have become outdated in their own culture of origin after changes of the historical context have occurred? This is partly what Hegel (1770–1831) called “the cunning of reason” in history.<sup>71</sup> Great therefore are the risks of any outdated exchange of learning, as we have observed in the shifts that have developed between European Renaissance times and the Age of Enlightenment. But in the order of values, « the heart has its reasons which reason does not know”, as Blaise Pascal (1623-1662) wrote. He also noted elsewhere, as in a kind of dialogue: “But China obscures”, you say; and I [Pascal] answer, “China obscures, but there is clearness to be found; seek it.”<sup>72</sup> Wisdom more than learning has to discern it.

Finally, the failure of the Tournon legation was due to ignorance based on two accounts of an obstinate refusal to learn: first for some a priori theological reasons, refusal to acknowledge the testimony of Chinese intellectuals on their own understanding of their rites the way they were understood by Matteo Ricci and his successors, as the *Brevis Relatio* shows clearly; and, second, refusal to acknowledge that the Empire of China had never conceived in its past to have permanent embassies on its territory. To say the least, the legation was not fit for exchange of learning.

Despite the progression of some academic mutual learning both ways until that time, the interruption of the exchange under examination (in mid-Qing dynasty, at the turn of the XVIII<sup>th</sup> and XIX<sup>th</sup> European centuries) has had dramatic consequences for ages to come and until now. From the hidden legacies of that failed cultural encounter, in this regard, Mark Twain has left a serious warning: “History does not repeat itself but it often rhymes.”

China and Europe have painfully learned that historical issues go far beyond poetry.

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<sup>70</sup> Paul Valéry (1919) *La Crise de l'esprit*, « Nous autres, civilisations, nous savons maintenant que nous sommes mortelles ».

<sup>71</sup> Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte* [Lectures on the Philosophy of World History], “Die List der Vernunft”. — “Much of the work is spent defining and characterizing *Geist* or spirit. The *Geist* is similar to the culture of people, and is constantly reworking itself to keep up with the changes of society, while at the same time working to produce those changes through what Hegel called the “cunning of reason”. — See Moldenhauer, Eva and Karl Markus Michel (Ed.) (1986). *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte* (in German). Frankfurt a.M., Suhrkamp Verlag. [from Wikipedia].

<sup>72</sup> Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), *Pensées* IV [On the Means of Belief], 277.55 : « Le cœur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît pas ». — IX [On Chinese history], 593.8 : « Mais la Chine obscurcit », dites-vous; et je réponds: « La Chine obscurcit, mais il y a clarté à trouver; cherchez-la. ». — Pascal, *Thoughts*, The Harvard Classics, 1909–14.