

REVIEW ARTICLE

THE ONGOING LIVES OF BOOKS AND THEIR LIBRARIES

Joseph P. McDermott

University of Cambridge

E-mail jpm1001@hermes.cam.ac.uk

Noël Golvers, *Libraries of Western Learning for China. Circulation of Western Books between Europe and China in the Jesuit Mission (ca. 1650–ca. 1750) 1. Logistics of Book Acquisition and Circulation*. Leuven: Ferdinand Verbiest Institute, KU Leuven, 2012.

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Wu Jianzhong, *Libraries and Society in Shanghai 1840–1949*. Shanghai: Shanghai University Press, 2010.

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One early spring afternoon in 1982 I happened to find myself ambling along Fuzhou Road in Shanghai and coming by chance upon a small unattractive bookstore. The brown paint on its outer doors was peeling, the stucco surface of its exterior needed a good scrubbing, and more than a few tiles on its floor were broken. If then no different in appearance from the other bookstores I had earlier visited along this famous Shanghai book street, this store nonetheless boasted a strikingly different kind of stock: it specialized in selling second-hand Western books. While novels abounded on its shelves, the pre-war variety in hard-back and the more recent in paperback, one thick non-fiction volume caught my eye. Entitled *Domesday Book and Beyond*, this classic 1887 treatment of early English history by the great English legal historian Frederic W. Maitland had long been on my reading list. Somehow a copy of it had ended up in this unpromising bookshop. When I opened the virtually virgin pages of this copy and noticed that it could be bought for a proverbial song, I readily leapt to the temptation and acquired it with delight.

The joy, I admit, was not purely intellectual. This volume was a first edition copy of a famous and important piece of historical scholarship, it was in excellent condition but for a few signs of loose binding and some small snaps into the edges of its cover, it was being sold at a ridiculously affordable price, its Cambridge University Press title page boasted a handsome red seal-impression in Chinese characters for a previous Chinese book owner's

name and a seal legend warning: “If you borrow, do not forget to return,” to which this owner had penned in fine ink “Lu bought in London, August 7, 1931”). And, there was the added frisson of my having half a century later found this copy of a famous Western book in a Chinese city some five thousand miles away from its place of publication.

In other words, this book written in England by an English scholar on an English topic and published there as well by an English publisher who had a Chinese story to tell. Somehow it had travelled the full length of Eurasia to arrive at an unattractive Shanghai bookshop, after having been in the collection of a Chinese man who presumably had an interest in law and history and had possibly even earned a law degree in England before returning to Shanghai in the 1930s to begin a short-lived career as a lawyer in the International Settlement (or, was Mr. Lu simply an historian of Europe at a Shanghai university?). And, now this book was to leave China and follow its new owner elsewhere around the world in a new chapter of its transnational history.

It is easily understood then that the book as an object – a package of paper, printed or manuscript that is wrapped in a cover of cloth, paper, or leather – seems destined to be in the forefront of efforts to write a global or transnational history. It is portable, is relatively durable, was produced often in enough copies to have left its place of publication, was usually valuable enough to have been treasured by its owners, and multiple copies of it may even have reached and survived in different parts of the world. In other words, some copies of a post-1500 book in an imperial language like Latin, French, Spanish, Portuguese, English, Arabic, or Chinese could be expected to have transcended political borders and sometimes even to have been intended for a transnational readership (though I suspect Maitland never thought of a readership east of Germany). We usually think that the implicit or explicit frameworks for regional if not global histories in the past were often the religions that passed through Eurasia and the rest of the world to form a transnational readership. Thus, the Christians in China might read a European text on Christianity, Indonesian Muslims an Arabic text from Persia, a Buddhist in America a book on Japanese Zen.

But what happened when books for national readerships went beyond those readerships and entered a separate book world with not just a different set of book customs and production methods but also a different way of reading and kind of readership? This arguably is the story of Greek classics in ancient Rome and of course the Old Testament in Reformation Europe, and of the Chinese Confucian canon in the non-East Asian university today. And it is increasingly one form of book history that is being written in a China with its horizons no longer severely blocked by linguistic disabilities and political restrictions. According to Dr. Wu Jianzhong in his unfortunately little-known study of the Western book libraries in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Shanghai, seventy public or semi-public institutional library collections, many of them with some Western books, were already functioning in 1925. University libraries as well as some private club and association libraries drive that figure even higher. Mr. Lu’s copy of Maitland’s classic would have found a small readership, European and Chinese, in an international city by the 1930s, and I can only wonder what its readers thought about an English past that ill fit Chinese notions of the past and history. Alas, no copy of this title by Maitland appears to exist in any Shanghai municipal or university library today.

One common Western way to answer this question about transnational readerships has hitherto been to trace a revolutionary impact of the printing press on early modern European religion (the Reformation), science (Galileo's research and Newton's theories), and learning (the Enlightenment) and then search elsewhere in the world to look for similar signs of cultural change in these other societies. Hence, the countless studies of the influence of a famous nineteenth- or twentieth- century European political thinker or author on a non-European culture. Likewise, even though research over the past century and a half has made it increasingly hard to be certain about precisely what it was that Johannes Gutenberg invented in Mainz, south Germany, in c. 1450, many scholars, not least Elisabeth Eisenstein, spent their careers giving a strongly positive assessment of the printing press's contribution to European culture and by implication culture elsewhere.¹ By the fifteenth century's end it had quickly produced an exceptionally large number of books: an estimated 30,000 titles in 9 million volumes.² Just as transformative in the view of these scholars was the printing press's rapid spread across the breadth of Europe. A copy of Gutenberg's machine reached Bamberg and Strasbourg in the 1450s and Cologne in 1464. Outside of Germany, other printing presses were soon established in Italy (Rome in 1465 and Venice in 1469), France (Paris in 1470, Lyon in 1473), Britain (London in 1475/76), Sweden (Stockholm in 1483), Greece (Salonika in 1515), and Russia (Moscow in 1553).³ From just 14 before 1470, all in Germany and Italy, the number of European printing offices increased almost eight-fold to 110 in just the following decade to include Spain, France, Poland, and England. By century's end, just five decades from its initial use, a printing press had been used in as many as 270 European cities.

It is when we look beyond Europe that the reception for this machine in the following century was often quite different. While its arrival was welcomed in the New World, first in various Spanish colonies – Mexico in 1539, Peru in 1584 – and much later in the English North American colonies – in New England in 1638 – it enjoyed far less success in Eurasian lands east of present-day Poland. It met stiff resistance in the Islamic Middle East, oppressive state and church controls in Russia, seeming indifference in south Asia, and knowledgeable rejection in China and Japan.

Among these unreceptive countries, the staunchest opposition came from the first non-Europeans introduced to the invention: that is, Muslims in the Middle East. In 1485 the sultan banned the introduction and use of the printing press machine for Islamic writing, and the faithful followed his wishes (as his ban did not apply to Arab Christians, Jews, Armenians, and other non-Muslims in the Ottoman empire, these non-Islamic groups showed some interest in printing books, but their printing activities remained very restrained). Only in the 1720s did Muslims begin, very tentatively, to produce Arabic-language imprints in the Islamic world, that is, centuries after books were printed

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- 1 One particularly elegant and strong-minded critique of Eisenstein's claims about the printing press's impact is the insightful review by Anthony J. Grafton, "The Importance of Being Printed," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 11 (1980), pp. 265–86.
 - 2 Jean-Francois Gilmont, "Printing at the Dawn of the Sixteenth Century," in *The Reformation and the Book*, ed. Jean-Francois Gilmont, trans. Karin Maag (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), p. 133; and Henri-Jean Martin, *The History and Power of Writing*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
 - 3 Stephan Füssel, *Gutenberg and the Impact of Printing* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 59–70.

in Arabic by non-Muslims first outside the Islamic world and then within it; even so, this experiment was rapidly terminated.⁴ Hence, the first book printed in Arabic was published in 1514 not in Istanbul but in Venice, where the *Qur'an* itself was first published in 1537/38 (virtually all of this edition was shipped to Istanbul, apparently to be sold but actually destined for a bonfire due, it seems, to its egregious textual errors).⁵ Northward, in the kingdom of Muscovy the first printing press arrived in the late 1550s, only to fall so rapidly and completely under the control of the state-supported Russian Orthodox Church, that by the end of the eighteenth century only one major publishing house had ever been set up in Moscow. Other presses were imported by modernizing Russian rulers, but their activity was frustrated by limited demand in a country with stubbornly low levels of literacy.⁶

Meanwhile, in south Asia the printing press, introduced in 1556 by Jesuits to Goa, remained essentially the tool of Christian missionaries for the next two centuries. Its use was also restricted geographically, to mainly a few locations along the western and then eastern coasts: to Tranquebar by German/Danish Protestants; to Colombo by the Dutch Reformed Church; to Pondicherry by French Jesuits; and to Vepery by the British Protestants' Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge.⁷ Virtually no native Indian use of a printing press with native script fonts is recorded before the late eighteenth century.⁸ In fact, commercial publishing of any sort in India started only in 1777 in Calcutta, when a bankrupt English businessman turned to his former London trade of printing books to pay off some of his creditors and so gain release from debtors' prison.⁹ Whatever the reason for the passivity of the Indian response to Gutenberg's machine – its foreign or Christian

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- 4 Geoffrey Roper, "The History of the Book in the Muslim World," in *Oxford Companion to the Book*, eds. Michael Suarez and Woudhuysen (Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 321–39, 332. Hebrew typographic printing began in the Ottoman empire in 1493 and in Morocco in 1515. Armenian type was used from 1567 in Turkey (i.e., Constantinople) and then from 1638 in Iran. Syriac type was used for Syriac and Arabic in Lebanon in 1610 (it was the first Arabic book printed in the Middle East), and Greek books were printed in Istanbul in 1627. This Muslim tardiness has been attributed to religious or social conservatism, deep attachment to manuscripts and scribal culture, sultans' bans on printing, and scribal fear of unemployment (Thomas Allsen, *Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 184, acutely observes that in the Arab world Rashīd al-Dīn was alone in lauding the great benefits of printing). Although the matter appears not to have been deeply researched, one cannot but note the importance of non-Muslims (i.e., Jews and Christians) in Middle Eastern printing before 1819–20, the founding date of the first Muslim printing press in the Arab world at the state-run Būlaq Press near Cairo. Commercial presses appeared later on in the nineteenth century, but only under strict supervision by the state.
- 5 Geoffrey Roper, "Early Arabic Printing in Europe," in *Middle Eastern Languages and the Print Revolution*, eds. Eva Hanebutt-Benz, Dagmar Glass, and Geoffrey Roper (Westhofen: WVA-Verlag Skulima, 2002), p. 131; and Hartmut Bobzin, "From Venice to Cairo: On the History of Arabic Editions of the Koran (16th–early 20th century)," in *ibid.*, pp. 153–54.
- 6 Gary Marker, *Publishing, Printing, and the Origins of Intellectual Life in Russia, 1700–1800* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), p. 19. Over the entire seventeenth century Russian imprint production amounted to fewer than 500 titles, usually issued in runs of between 1,200 and 2,400 copies.
- 7 Graham Shaw, *Printing in Calcutta to 1800* (London: Bibliographical Society, 1981), pp. x and 52; and Dennis E. Rhodes, *The Spread of Printing, Eastern Hemisphere, India, Pakistan, Ceylon, Burma, and Thailand* (Amsterdam: van Gendt, 1969), pp. 11–19, and Illustration 1. Note that the earlier presses published only intermittently.
- 8 J. Mangamma, *Book Printing in India, with Special Reference to the Contribution of European Scholars to Telegu (1746–1857)* (Nellore, India: Bangorey Books, 1975). Though printing was overwhelmingly practiced by Christian missionaries, five books in Tamil script were printed by the Portuguese Jew Henrique Henriques from 1577.
- 9 Shaw 1981, pp. x and 52; and Mangamma 1975. Between 1780 and 1790 seventeen weekly and six-monthly periodicals started in Calcutta (Abhijit Gupta, "The History of the Book in the Indian Subcontinent," in *Oxford*

origin, India's low rate of literacy and lack of demand, the relative expense of imprints, the power of scribe castes, the respect for the tradition of transmitting texts privately from teacher to disciple, or a simple satisfaction with the practice of transcribing texts onto banana leaves – moveable-type printing took root in India only very slowly: more than two centuries after it had been introduced, three centuries after its 'invention' by Gutenberg in Germany, and more than seven centuries after its first 'invention' in China.¹⁰

Clearly, one way to interpret this cold reception of the printing press outside of Europe and its colonies is to attribute it to the static and closed condition of legitimate knowledge in these backward cultures. Before anyone accepts that traditional Western view uncritically, he or she is well advised to consider the fate of Gutenberg's wood-and-metal assemblage in East Asia. The Chinese and Japanese did not have to wait until the nineteenth century to be introduced to the printing press, and when it arrived in East Asia in the sixteenth century, it also had a limited impact, but for very different reasons. Initially, in fact, it won a warm reception in Japan. Into a book culture dominated by manuscript reproduction for secular writings and woodblock editions for Buddhist texts, the Jesuits in 1590 had imported a printing press from Goa to publish mainly Christian texts in the Japanese language but in a non-Japanese (that is, Romanized) script. Then, in 1593 a rival font of moveable type for Chinese characters, seized in Korea by invading Japanese soldiers, was brought back to Japan, where the nascent Tokugawa government started using it for secular imprints. As the Jesuits took their printing presses with them to Macao on their expulsion from Japan two decades later in 1613, moveable-type printing in Japan was thereafter carried out overwhelmingly by the Tokugawa government without recourse to a Gutenberg-like press. From the second quarter of the seventeenth century, however, "as publishing became increasingly a commercial enterprise, the more economic method of printing from woodblocks . . . soon replaced moveable type."¹¹ In the mid-nineteenth century Western printing technology – by then improved over Gutenberg's printing press – would return, to replace woodblocks in the 1880s.

Elsewhere in pre-1850 East Asia, outside of the Spanish colony of the Philippines,¹² Gutenberg's invention won even fewer converts. In the late sixteenth century the Chinese printing world, based overwhelmingly on woodblock production, was thriving as never before.¹³ Europeans, *pacé* Matteo Riccii, were often not impressed with the

Companion to the Book, pp. 343–44). Even so, virtually all materials and equipment had to be imported from Europe.

- 10 India (or rather certain people in India) had the distinction of having been indifferent to both moveable-type and woodblock printing. The latter form of printing, known to some Tibetans in the ninth century and practiced in Tibet since at least the early fifteenth century, was introduced to some Indians as early as the ninth century and by no later than the fifteenth century, but it never proved popular; Kurtis R. Schaeffer, *The Culture of the Book in Tibet* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 9; and Sheldon Pollock, "Literary Culture and Manuscript Culture in Precolonial India," pp. 86–87, in *History of the Book and Literary Cultures*, eds. Simon Eliot, Andrew Nash, and Ian Willison (London: British Library, 2006).
- 11 Donald S. Shively, "Popular Culture," in *Cambridge History of Japan, Volume 4, Early Modern Japan*, eds. John W. Hall and James McLain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 726.
- 12 Piet van Der Loon, "The Manila Incunabula and Early Hokkien Studies," *Asia Major* 12 (1966), pp. 1–43, and 13 (1967), pp. 95–186.
- 13 Joseph P. McDermott, *A Social History of the Chinese Book* (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2006), pp. 99–103.

flimsiness of Chinese woodblock printing, but to East Asians Gutenberg's printing press had even greater drawbacks: its cost, its ugly type, its clumsy page arrangements, its unsuitability to Chinese script, and its inappropriate paper and ink. Witness the embarrassing attempt by the secular priest Matteo Ripa (1682–1745) to demonstrate the printing press's superiority for making prints. On the basis of very limited experience he cobbled together a makeshift version of the printing press. Foolish enough to think he could operate it effectively in front of court officials, he handled it so clumsily that he “drew forth the laughter and the jest of eunuchs, mandarins, and many other persons at the court.” Note, by contrast, the aplomb with which East Asians, even one of noble birth, learned how to handle the press's clanking hardware. At least one of the Japanese boys sent to Europe on the Date Mission learned how to print books from a printing press,¹⁴ and in 1604 a Chinese migrant to the Philippines (known in Spanish records as Juan de Vera) published the earliest surviving moveable-type imprint of the Philippines, with types, punches, and matrices made there and not imported.¹⁵ Any effort to attribute East Asian indifference to the printing press to the supposed inadequacies of East Asian craftsmanship is simply wrong.

The conditions that limited the East Asian receptiveness to the printing press were more basic and rest with the inadequacies of the machine itself: this European machine required huge capital outlays before earning its owners one sou of profit; it had high overhead costs; its type fonts were for just twenty-six alphabetic letters and thus useless for a written language without alphabet letters (written Chinese at this time had well over 50,000 Chinese characters); and its ink and paper were not usable for anything resembling a Chinese or Japanese book. Moreover, its operation and its imprints tended to cost more, its maximum print runs for an edition of a popular title (and thus money-maker) were often smaller, its exposure to state censors and tax collectors more vulnerable, and the shape of its Westerner-punched characters unattractive to readers accustomed to the proper shape of characters written with calligraphic strokes. No wonder then that the printing press brought out of Japan by retreating Jesuits on their expulsion from the country in c. 1614 languished “inactive” in Macao, before being sold off in 1620 to Augustinian friars in Manila. The Jesuits had decided they had no use for a European font in printing books for the Chinese, and but for a few woodblock titles no European-language books at all were printed in Macao for the next two centuries until the re-introduction there of the printing press.¹⁶

In pre-1850 China and Japan, Gutenberg's press then had met its match not from fearful clerics, autocratic rulers, or a thriving manuscript culture as in other parts of Eurasia, but from an alternative kind of technology which its users found more useful, flexible, affordable, attractive, and profitable than the moveable-type options invented first by the Chinese themselves or the version later invented by Gutenberg. Europe and East Asia

14 J. M. Braga, “The Beginnings of Printing in Macao” (Lisbon: Centro de Estudos Históricos Ultramarinos, 1963), p. 3.

15 Van Der Loon, “Manila Incunabula,” pp. 25–27; C. Salmon, “L'edition chinoise dans le monde insulindien (fin du XIXe s.–debut du XXe s.),” *Revue Française d'Histoire du Livre* 42 (1984), pp. 111–34, esp. 112.

16 Braga 1963, pp. 2–9. The first printing press had reached Macao in the 1560s, but the Jesuits soon realized that the traditional Chinese woodblock-printing method suited the Chinese language better than did their printing press and its European font. In fact, the first book in Chinese to be published by a European, the catechism entitled *Tianzhu shilu zhengwen* 天主實錄正文 by Michele Ruggieri, S.J., was published in Macau by woodblock in 1584 (*ibid.*, p. 5).

then had evolved two different primary kinds of book publishing technology, the moveable-type printing press and the woodblock, each functioning in parallel to suit what became its own linguistic, cultural, and economic practices. Technological connectivity between these two kinds of printing was severely constrained, as their technology sets – ink, paper, woodblock or metal type font – and their required skills – block-cutting styles or press control – were not mutually exchangeable. What need then did sensible and prudent Chinese, Japanese, and by extension Koreans have for European printing presses?

In short, despite all the praise from European priests, scholars, soldiers, officials, and merchants about the greatness of the printing press and moveable type – a pitch worthy of a Madison Avenue marketing agency – this metal and wooden machine had few fans outside of Europe and its colonies. Seen objectively by non-Europeans, it was a white elephant and a marketing flop, until the technology itself improved, the local demand for printed matter grew, and its market expanded, particularly through newspapers.¹⁷

It was then a very different book world that Western books entered in East Asia, and, it needs to be said, they often received a far more positive reception than did the machine that printed them. Their binding, type, illustrations, and page arrangements won accolades from Chinese and Japanese readers, the praise made not just in their polite comments to Europeans but also in their private correspondence and records. This assessment should come as no surprise, since both literate and non-literate Chinese usually lavished attention and funds on books and would have appreciated any handsome book, Western or otherwise, that came their way (some Chinese bibliophiles in the Ming and Qing included Korean and Japanese imprints in published catalogues of their collections). This understanding is acknowledged in Noël Golvers's apt description of the two-century (1583–1773) Jesuit mission to China as “a book mission.” Book-loving priests introduced learned books of the West to the country they readily judged more devoted than any other to books and learning. To convert this country to the right books and right learning, the Jesuits thought they needed to translate, print, and disseminate Western writings, the scientific as well as the religious. Taking on this broader cultural mission, they transmitted not just Christian teachings but also key writings on logic and mathematics in classical Greek philosophy and the discoveries of both classical and contemporary European science. European books, elegantly bound and handsomely printed, provided incontestable evidence for the Jesuits' case, for winning the attention of these Chinese to the antiquity of Roman Catholic learning and the great advances in European sciences. The challenge facing the Jesuits, nonetheless, was formidable, if only because the educated Chinese elite they addressed was likewise proud of its Confucian traditions of rational discourse, its advocacy of high ethical standards free of theological underpinnings, and its scepticism towards the existence of deities and claims of their impact on worldly matters.

In devoting these two volumes to the study of European books introduced by the Jesuits to China, Golvers adopts a novel approach to the oft-told tale of Jesuit adventures in the East. Whereas past historians have usually focused on remarkable priests like Ricci and Schall von Bell or on the European ideas these men tried to introduce, Golvers prefers to focus on the books that these Jesuits sent or had sent to China. Not only does he identify

17 Christopher A. Reed, *Gutenberg in China* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004).

many of these books. He also recounts the process of how Jesuit missionaries in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century collected and acquired European books in Europe for eventually twenty Jesuit-run libraries in China (including Macao), and how their eighteenth-century successors maintained, expanded, and looked after these collections under often difficult circumstances.

At first sight, this research seems eminently do-able. A comprehensive catalogue of the Western language books in what became the largest of these Jesuit collections (eventually known as the Beitang Library in Beijing) was compiled by the Flemish Lazarist Father Hubert Verhaeren and published in Beijing in 1949 on the eve of the Communist takeover. This *Catalogue de la bibliothèque du Pé-t'ang* (republished in 1968 and 2010) lists close to 4,200 titles (in 5,133 volumes), provides instructive commentary on many of them, and adds a highly informative account of the collection's complicated history. As much of the necessary legwork for a serious analysis of this Beitang collection thus seems to have been done more than seven decades ago, we may wonder why we have had to wait so long for the story of its formation and evolution to be told in greater detail.

Golvers expertly helps to explain why. Like Verhaeren he shows that this Beitang Library collection and its book catalogue are modern patchwork compilations. The catalogue lists only those old European books which by the mid-twentieth century had for whatever reason ended up in this Beijing library. Furthermore, this Beitang book collection is different from the book collection initially associated with the Beijing library of the same name; in fact, it contains the remnants not only of this earlier Beitang's book collection but also those of the three other pre-1773 Jesuit libraries in Beijing plus other Jesuit libraries elsewhere in Qing China and Macao. In these two volumes Golvers undertakes the considerable task of relating how European books were collected in Europe for the Jesuit mission in China and specifically for libraries the Jesuits set up in Beijing, Macao, Shanghai, Hangzhou, Canton, and over ten other Jesuit houses in China.

To complicate matters, the names of these libraries shifted over time, with the name Beitang initially attached to a relatively large compound of French-occupied buildings in Beijing. Golvers in fact argues that though this Beijing compound was inaugurated in 1702, only from much later in the eighteenth century do we have clear evidence that its library had acquired the name of Beitang. Eventually, after this library and compound were vacated in 1837, the name Beitang was accorded to another Beijing building and book collection formed out of a merger of the old Beitang collection and those of the other nineteen Jesuit libraries in the early and mid-Qing. The ups and downs of the three other Jesuit libraries in Beijing – the Nantang, the Dongtang, and the Xitang – were particularly important for the formation of the new Beitang.

If you think this is chaotic and confusing, then recall that in pre-1850 Europe relatively few libraries, Jesuit as well as non-Jesuit, enjoyed a settled existence for a long period of time. In China, fires, earthquakes, mergers, and foreign invasions were arguably the least of the troubles that Jesuit libraries had to endure. Imperially-ordered government seizures and confiscations, the 1773 Papal dissolution of the Jesuit order, the subsequent transfer of its Beijing book collections into the caretakership of other clerical orders, their removal of some of these books to a Buddhist temple and others to a Russian Orthodox Church monastery on the outskirts of Beijing, the burial of others in a Beijing graveyard in the face of yet another imperial attack on the “heterodoxy” of Christianity, and the eventual late

nineteenth-century combination of these scattered remnants in an old building to the north of Beijing (newly honoured with the name Beitang), all played havoc with the books that so many Europeans had striven to collect for China. No wonder that about 60 per cent of the titles mentioned in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Jesuit sources as books collected for Jesuit libraries in China are not found in Verhaeren's 1949 *Catalogue de la bibliothèque du Pé-t'ang*. Indeed, the rough treatment accorded these books in Beijing seems to encapsulate the overall trials suffered by the Jesuits in their efforts to introduce European Renaissance learning to the educated elite of Ming and Qing dynasty China and to convert these men to the Christian faith. The sheer survival of these 4,200 titles is moving testimony to the dedication of the missionaries as well as to the linguistic disability or indifference of their intended readership in Beijing.

In fact, the real tragedy in the history of these libraries would seem to have been the Chinese disregard for much of the practical learning in these Jesuit books. By the time many Chinese paid serious attention, little of these books' learning was still current in Europe. Like the Confucianism of the officials and scholars who fervently opposed the introduction of Jesuit learning to China, it had become of interest principally to antiquarians and cultural historians, not to the rulers of the Middle Kingdom. It would be later versions of European learning that would be taken up more avidly and that would prove far more unsettling and destructive than anything emanating from Rome or the Beitang.

Golvers, however, is not interested in tragedies, Jesuit or Chinese. With his eyes glued to the exceptional Jesuit efforts to acquire the original books, transport them to China, and then keep the collections up-to-date with the latest scientific advances back in Europe, he concentrates on the heroic dimensions of this Jesuit adventure (hence, I suspect, the disappointingly limited information on the post-Jesuit, that is, post-1773 fate of these books). This arduous challenge has had Golvers delve into Jesuit historical archives throughout Europe, trawl their extensive collections of documents, and then build up an account of how seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Jesuits struggled to establish and maintain Western libraries of all sizes more than five thousand miles away from their books' places of publication. Even though Golvers has not gained access to possibly the most compelling and relevant evidence – the surviving European books catalogued by Verhaeren and now kept, at least in part, in a branch library of the National Library of China – he builds up an exceptionally detailed account of the origin and formation of these book collections, including even the names of individual volumes' individual donors in central Europe. The fact that we emerge from these two volumes with a much better idea of how these libraries were initially formed, how their books were transported, and how they were used in different parts of China from c. 1650 to c. 1750 is testimony to the exceptional amount of energy that Golvers has exerted in what has clearly been a labour of love.

These two volumes aim to “construct step by step a coherent picture of the Western book culture of the Jesuits in China.” In clarifying the Jesuit acquisition policies and practices for these libraries, Golvers introduces letters, want lists, and a host of suggestions made by Jesuits inside and outside of China about what should be done for and with these libraries. The first book takes us through the book world of Western and Central Europe of the early seventeenth century, as Trigault and an assistant travelled from one bishopric and Jesuit house to another, all to acquire books or funds to purchase books for China. The benefaction of Pope Paul V very quickly gained fame in Church circles

throughout Europe, even though we have had to wait until Golvers to learn how one Spanish aristocrat donated books to a particular Jesuit in thanks for his efforts to *prevent* her son from being accepted for the mission. The focus of the contents in the first cache of books fell on mathematics and astronomy, largely because knowledge of these sciences was how the Jesuits thought they would most easily secure their presence at the court and thus attain their ultimate goal of converting the emperor and his subjects. Books written by and about Jesuits were particularly favoured as book donations to their Chinese libraries. Jesuits in China in *c.* 1700 actively sought information and support from Chinese scholars on the controversial matter of Confucian ancestral rites. But, tellingly, there is minimal sign of any Chinese individual's impact on the choice of book titles for "China," as the books sent there "were (almost) exclusively requested from or suggested from the missionaries' own point of view." The sole exceptions Golvers has found of books (or rather types of books) requested by potential converts concern the emperor Kangxi, himself a Manchu, and an otherwise unknown Greek convert in Siam.

In Volume 2 we learn probably as much as we can about the Jesuit libraries' physical structures, operations, and layout and their books' contents. As in Jesuit houses in Europe and elsewhere, their libraries in Beijing were considered indispensable to the success of their mission. How libraries in China looked, what size their collections and buildings attained, and how their books were catalogued and arranged are just a few of the questions that we have had trouble answering and that Golvers carefully explains, often aided by clear knowledge of general rules and practices in Jesuit houses elsewhere. Thus, in addition to a general library accessible to all house residents, some houses are shown to have allowed individual priests to keep collections of books temporarily in their private rooms for study. The Jesuit libraries, the general as well as the more private, tended to contain both Chinese and European (in classical and modern languages) books, all of which were to be regularly consulted and used by the Jesuits for advice, teaching, and research. Written mainly in Latin, Portuguese, Italian, and French, the European books addressed both scientific (especially mathematics and astronomy) and non-scientific concerns (philosophy, theology, and preaching). Funding restraints for purchases were often severe (less than 2 per cent of the annual budget was set aside for book purchases for a large library in the two years, 1717 and 1730, we have figures for). Although the size of these libraries at any time is unspecified and the peak size for any one of them is obscured by contradictory figures, the size of the Xitang library in the 1660s has been estimated to be "that of an average European college library, whatever that may have been." Also, despite original plans for establishing comprehensive libraries of Western learning, over time the emphasis in the contents of individual collections changed. Not only did the interests and intentions of European donors and the missionaries change, but also the Chinese government's policy towards Christian missionaries and their teachings fluctuated unpredictably. Books in some Jesuit holdings suffered from fires, official and otherwise; other collections fell victim to nature (e.g. worms) and natural disasters. As a result, some libraries, especially those with a long history, acquired both surprising holes and holdings in their collection. The Dongtang collection had strengths in medicine and pharmacology, the Nantang in mathematics, and the old Beitang in spirituality, algebra, geometry, botany, surgery, physics, medicine, and astronomy, but weaknesses in professional manuals, church history, and New Testament commentaries. While some of these gaps were closed thanks to book

exchanges, often they were not. Some of the Jesuit residences outside of Beijing, such as in Nanjing and Kaifeng, even seem to have ceased collecting new European books, while in others outside the capital some science, mathematics, and religious titles were definitely available.

As readers of Golvers's previous publications will know, he is a dogged archaeologist of the archive. He seems to love digging through mountains of papers to unearth neglected nuggets of information and then to present his findings to his readers in great detail. Whereas many researchers hide their efforts in the footnotes, Golvers prefers to show them in the text, a practice that, I suspect, helps explain why his previous books, all concerned with Jesuit endeavours in China, have not received the attention they merit. While tighter editorial work could have easily halved the length of the text of these two volumes under review (the lists of arcane book titles would be more happily placed in appendices, and the excessive description and explanation of research methods and approach in Volume 2 should have been reduced to a page or two of forewarnings to the reader), the level of archival detail found in these books will eventually win Golvers the gratitude of serious researchers freed now from spending weeks in dark and dank European archives in pursuit of this contextual information. In addition to these archival discoveries, readers willing to put up with numerous diversions, that is, strings of stories that in the end are usually sewn together, will find many insights about the peculiarities and particularities of each of these Jesuit libraries.

Finally, as a way of pointing to the remaining third and final volume of this study of the history of the Beitang's books, Golvers attributes to these Jesuit collections an "openness to the outside world and their relative and controlled accessibility to non-Jesuits, in this case Chinese literati and authorities." Essentially how this was achieved will be the main theme of his third and final volume. Even though this concern will probably take us beyond the c. 1750 cut-off date of these two volumes, it will inevitably have us consider the relevance of two questions that so far have attracted very little interest from Western Sinologists: the history and role of the Chinese books in the Jesuit collections in Beijing and the eventual Beitang collection and the emergence of an unexpected Inner Asian demand for the Chinese translations of Jesuit science.

Understandably, Verhaeren's interest did not lie in the Beitang's Chinese books; it is not even clear that he read or wrote Chinese. Golvers mentions the presence of these Chinese volumes and yet appears to put off exploring their significance to the next volume. Yet how helpful is that postponement in this instance? The Jesuits were aiming to bridge European and Chinese cultures, some Chinese became Jesuits and thus members of the Jesuit houses in Beijing, and the total Beitang Collection itself was a hybrid collection that would have had a hybrid readership. This issue gains particular urgency from the relative size of the Chinese book collections in the four Jesuit libraries in Beijing. Their number during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is, to my knowledge, not known and perhaps not knowable. But from the early twentieth century come reports of very large holdings of Chinese books in the merged Beitang Collection: a Chinese survey of 1938 put their extant figure at 80,000 volumes (*ce*).¹⁸ But undoubtedly, that number was higher earlier on, if only

18 Fu Xuancong 傅璇琮 and Xie Zhuohua 谢灼华, *Zhongguo cangshu tongshi* 中國藏書通史 (Ningbo: Ningbo Publishers, 2001), vol. 2, p. 1051.

because at the time of the Boxer Rebellion in 1900 “not a few Chinese books” were purchased by the celebrated French Sinologist Paul Pelliot from the Lazarist fathers then responsible for the Beitang’s upkeep. As Fang Hao, the prolific Chinese Jesuit author on Chinese–Jesuit relations, has related on the basis of a story he heard directly from “an old priest,” “Everyone in Paris knows that the top French Sinologist Paul Pelliot took away not a few treasures from the Dunhuang grottoes. But who in Paris knows that [eight years earlier] he had already snatched Chinese-language books from the Beitang Collection as well?”¹⁹ Admittedly, many European books have likely been lost from these Jesuit libraries in the intervening centuries, and Chinese and European terms and units for the words “volumes” and “books” often do not easily correspond. Nonetheless, it is hard to avoid concluding from these numbers that over time the Chinese language component of the Beitang Collection had come to dwarf the European-language collection of just 5,133 volumes (for 4,200 titles), despite all the attention lavished on the European works and the neglect shown the Chinese collection (which nonetheless included old manuscript copies and Song and Ming imprints). By the end of Golvers’s second volume we are forced to wonder if in his account we have had “the tail wagging the dog.” Also, in a tale of Eurasian knowledge exchange and cultural interaction, have we perhaps missed an essential part of the story (be it “sinification” or European loss of interest in China) taking place in the very buildings being studied?

Another concern about the Beitang collection arises not from the books themselves but from their readership. The Jesuits quite rightly did not want these European books to sit undisturbed on shelves in Beijing, yet they would have been startled and probably upset by the identity of some of their readers and what these readers were doing with the knowledge in the books. For in seeking to please the Kangxi emperor, the Jesuits were dealing with a past master in the art of playing one party off against another and of keeping courtiers uncertain and worried about their monarch’s attitude towards them. Having acquired some potentially valuable scientific information from the Jesuits, he used it to restrain the pretensions of his Han Chinese officials (telling them to study Western mathematics) and also to nurture the support he received not from the Jesuits but from their long-term arch rivals at the court, the Tibetan Buddhists.²⁰ Recent research by the Tibetan Cambridge scholar Longban Yongdan has revealed that the Kangxi emperor in 1714 ordered a Mongolian minister and others to make a Mongolian translation of a collection of “26 books” compiled by and mainly written by Jesuits and already translated into Chinese. In 1715, having completed this translation work, the team of court scholars were told to translate the same books next into Manchu and Tibetan. Full of mathematical

19 Fang Hao 方豪, *Fang Hao liushi ziding gao* 方豪六十自定稿 (Taipei: Taiwan Xuesheng Shuju zong jing xiao, 1969), xia, pp. 1833–48, esp. 1839.

20 We still await a thorough study of the texts that entered the Chinese book world from Inner Asia at this time. These texts might have often concerned religion (Buddhism, Islam), but doubtless others, thanks to the Qing troops’ incursions into this area, dealt with geography and military matters. Thomas Allsen has dealt with this sort of textual transfer most interestingly for the Mongol era in his “Mongols as Vectors for Cultural Transmission,” pp. 135–54, in *The Cambridge History of Inner Asia, the Chinggisid Age*, eds. Nicolas Di Cosmo, Allen J. Frank, and Peter B. Golden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009). We await a similar treatment for the Qing, so that we can see what other than territory China might have gained by exploring “the west” by land rather than by sea.

diagrams, charts, some trigonometry and applied mathematics, the Tibetan translation of all these works was eventually published in a woodblock edition. Knowledge of its contents spread widely enough to prompt some Tibetans to hunt down more Chinese translations of Jesuit astronomy, mathematics, and geography and without the emperor's knowledge translate them for their fellow Tibetans back in Tibet in 1717. According to Dr. Yongdan, the translation quality for some of this work was poor and in places confusing, mainly because "the European Jesuits did not want to share their knowledge with anybody [except the Chinese literati and Emperor] and especially not with Tibetan Buddhists who were their competitors."²¹ Nonetheless, the Emperor had the Jesuits train two "lamas" to go to Tibet to undertake a cartographical survey, their work eventually shaping the map of Tibet included in the seminal 1735 Paris publication *Description géographique, historique, chronologique, politique, et physique de l'Empire de la Chine et de la Tartarie chinoise* by Du Halde.

And so, the Jesuits found their Beitang learning shared on imperial orders with representatives of a rival religion quite popular with the ruling Manchu elite. Books that, as Golvers shows, the Jesuits had brought or sent to convert East Asia for Rome were being used against them to enlighten East Asia for the Qing dynastic cause and its own patron-client network. Once translated, these books took on a life of their own, outside the shelter of the Beitang and beyond the reach of their custodians. The irony was that this book resurrection would come from Chinese not Latin versions, be undertaken by Tibetans, Manchus, and Mongolians, and benefit not the makers of the Beitang but the Qing and those Inner Asians who remained subordinate to it. If anything, this story sounds vaguely similar to the intrigues that Protestant Europe commonly attributed to the Vatican and the Jesuits. This time however these European conspirators had met their conspiratorial match, if not their scientific equals. Fortunately, Golvers (who finished these volumes before Dr. Yongdan was able to publish his very recent research) has another volume in which to explore this remarkable chapter in the history of the Beitang collection and its impact in both China and Inner Asia.

21 Lobsang Yongdan, "The Translation of European Astronomical Works into Tibetan in the Early Eighteenth Century," *Inner Asia* 17 (2015), pp. 175–98; and his doctoral dissertation, "Geographical Conceptualizations in a Nineteenth-century Tibetan Text: The Creation of and Responses to the 'Dzam gling rgyas bshad' ('The Detailed Description of the World')" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Cambridge, 2014), pp. 135–38.