


RESEARCH ARTICLE

# History of Sinology in Belgium Until the Open-Door Policy of the Late 1970s

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## Abstract

This article narrates the history of Belgian Sinology both before and since the birth of Sinology (1814) and of Belgium (1830). The overview also embraces a broader group of scholars by including Sinologists who were from Belgium but did not necessarily work there. The first part of the article focuses on Sinological practices by the early missionaries in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The second part covers the nineteenth and twentieth centuries until the Open-Door Policy of the 1970s. This part combines a broad chronological perspective with the history of individual persons and institutions. It includes topics such as the development of oriental studies and studies of religion, the teaching of Chinese language for commercial reasons, and the establishment of Chinese and Oriental institutes within and outside the universities.

## Introduction

The history of Sinology in Belgium depends on both the definition of “Sinology” and of “Belgium.” The birth of “Sinology” actually precedes the birth of Belgium. Belgium, as it exists today, was only established in 1830, following the secession from the Netherlands after the Belgian Revolution. In the two centuries preceding 1830, the territory of present-day Belgium was part of the Southern Low Countries and alternately fell under the authority of various European kingdoms (Spanish, Dutch, French, Austrian). The origin of the word “Sinology” can be traced back to about twenty to thirty years before the founding of Belgium. If one understands Sinology as the study of China, of its language and culture in the broad sense of the word, based on sources in Chinese, then the origin of Sinology in Europe is usually traced back to the establishment of a chair in Chinese and Manchu language and literature at the Collège de France, Paris in 1814. The creation of the word “Sinology” itself coincides with that timeframe. Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat (1788–1832), who first occupied that chair,

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used the term *sinologue* in an essay published in 1811 in reference to an article written by “Sinologus Berolinensis.”<sup>1</sup> This was the pseudonym of Antonio Montucci (1762–1829), who apparently first adopted this name in an article to the Editor of the *Universal Magazine* in 1804.<sup>2</sup> Montucci was an Italian polyglot who was also an autodidact in Chinese. He invented the word *sinologus*, but used it strictly as a pseudonym. Rémusat, for his part, used the French variant *sinologue* as a term to describe scholars who were acquainted with the Chinese language and literature. Next, a certain L.A.M. Bourgeat used the term *sinologie* in the review of another work by Rémusat.<sup>3</sup> In these early mentions, this term was used to refer to (the history of) the study of Chinese language; only later was it extended to comprise history, culture, religion, etc.

However, even if “Sinology” and “Belgium” are of a relatively young age, one could still argue that “Sinological” practices by “Belgians” can be traced back to before the birth of “Sinology” and “Belgium” *strictu sensu*. Indeed, already in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries some Europeans conducted serious studies of both classical and for them contemporary China by means of translations, reports, and descriptions. Most of these early scholars were missionaries who lived in China, and these included missionaries who originated from the territory of contemporary Belgium. Their works are often at the origin of later developments of Sinology in Europe and can function as a mirror for these later developments.

This article adopts this longer historical perspective and narrates the history of Belgian Sinology both before and since the birth of Sinology and of Belgium. Moreover, it embraces a broader group of scholars by including Sinologists who were from Belgium but did not necessarily work in Belgium. The article is divided into two parts. The first “and shorter” part focuses on Sinological practices by the early missionaries. The second “and longest” covers the nineteenth and twentieth centuries until the Open-Door Policy of the 1970s. This part combines a broad chronological perspective with the history of individual persons and institutions. Throughout the article no strict distinction will be made between “Sinology” and “Chinese Studies,” a term that is sometimes reserved for studies about contemporary or modern China.

## Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries

“Belgian” studies in the Sinological tradition can be traced back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when missionaries from the Belgian region (or more broadly the Low Countries) published works about China. Their texts can more or less be divided into two categories: books published in Europe by visitors coming from China, mainly missionaries who returned home temporarily (1.1); and publications or manuscripts from missionaries who reported directly from China without ever returning (1.2).<sup>4</sup> It

<sup>1</sup>*Essai sur la langue et la littérature chinoises* (Paris: Treuttel & Wurtz, 1811). Usage of ‘*sinologue*’ on iii, viii, 62, 133. Reference to ‘Sinologus Berolinensis’ on 6 in note (a).

<sup>2</sup>Sinologus Berolinensis, “To the Editor of the New Series of the Universal Magazine,” *The Universal Magazine: New Series* (January–June 1804), 98.

<sup>3</sup>L.A.M. Bourgeat, “Langues orientales—Littérature chinoise: [Review of] *Plan d’un Dictionnaire chinois*,” *Mercurie étranger* 3:14 (1814), 73 (“histoire de la sinologie”). Bourgeat is identified as “(de l’Isère), membre de la Société Philotechnique, de celle des Antiquaires de France, de l’Académie de Grenoble.”

<sup>4</sup>This part is a selection of an unpublished English text that was translated into Chinese: Zhong Mingdan 钟鸣旦, “Didi guojia (Bilishi yu Helan) de Qingshi yanjiu” 低地国家 (比利时与荷兰) 的清史研究, trans. Wang Xueshen 王学深, in *Bainian Qingshi yanjiu shi: Haiwai yanjiu juan* 百年清史研究史: 海外研究卷, ed. Hu Xiangyu 胡祥雨 (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2021), 212–41.

bears pointing out that, in addition to the publications that were already in circulation in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there are also manuscript sources that were only rediscovered and published in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century.

### *Publications by Visitors Returning From China (Trigault, Martini, Couplet, Noël)*

Direct contacts between China and the Low Countries can be traced back to the early years of Sino-European cultural contacts in the late Ming. Missionaries who had acquired knowledge about China in China itself, returned as visitors to the Low Countries where they spread this knowledge. The first missionary to return from China was the Jesuit Nicolas Trigault 金尼閣 (1577–1628). He was born in Douai, now French Flanders, arrived in China in 1610, and returned in 1614 in order to get support for the Jesuit mission in China. Trigault travelled extensively in Europe: he also came to the Low Countries, where Peter Paul Rubens made a drawing of him in Antwerp.<sup>5</sup> He played a key role in spreading knowledge about China in Europe, publishing among others *De Christiana expeditione apud Sinas* (The Christian Expedition into China, 1615), a Latin translation of a history of Christianity in China written in Italian by Matteo Ricci (1552–1610).<sup>6</sup> It was subsequently translated into various European languages (French, German, Italian, Spanish, and partly in English) and significantly aroused European interest for China. Before its publication, Trigault had already printed a Dutch pamphlet destined for the local readership with a description of China taken from the first chapter of the *De Christiana expeditione*.<sup>7</sup>

The next important visitor returning to the Low Countries from China, the Italian Jesuit missionary Martino Martini 衛匡國 (1614–1661), arrived thirty years later, when the Qing dynasty had already been established.<sup>8</sup> Martini arrived in China in 1643, on the eve of the fall of the Ming court and the invasion of Manchu troops. In the subsequent years, he witnessed the gradual conquest of territory by the Manchu army and the installation of the new Qing regime. In 1650, he was selected to return to Europe to report on the mission. He arrived in Bergen (Norway) in 1653, and spent some time in the Low Countries in 1654, mainly in the printing centers in Amsterdam and Antwerp. With the famous printer Blaeu in Amsterdam, Martini published, among other books, the *Novus Atlas Sinensis* (1655), a beautifully edited atlas of China. It introduced the European reader for the first time to the inner Chinese continent, presenting provincial maps based on (more or less) up-to-date original, native sources and eyewitness observations by the author himself. It was accompanied by a very informative Latin text describing human activities and elements of the economic geography. With the printer Plantin-Moretus in Antwerp, Martini published *De bello Tartarico* (1654), the first contemporary narrative of the Manchu conquest published in Europe. This work became a bestseller in its time, with more than twenty editions and translations

<sup>5</sup>Edmond Lamalle, “La propagande du P. N. Trigault en faveur des missions de Chine (1616),” *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu* 9 (1940), 49–120.

<sup>6</sup>This article presents a selection of the extensive bibliography on these sources from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. For more references, see the free online bibliography: Ad Dudink and Nicolas Standaert, CCT-Database: [www.arts.kuleuven.be/sinologie/english/cct](http://www.arts.kuleuven.be/sinologie/english/cct).

<sup>7</sup>*Waerachtich verhael van eenige merckelycke saecken des vermaerts coninckrijcx van Syna* (Den Bosch: Antoni Scheffer, 1615) (8 pp.).

<sup>8</sup>The collected works by M. Martini are published in his *Opera omnia* (6 vols.), published under the direction of Franco Demarchi and Giuliano Bertuccioli (Trent: Università degli Studi di Trento, 1998–2020).

into French, German, Dutch, Italian, Portuguese, Swedish, and English.<sup>9</sup> Hence, not only the Low Countries, but the whole of Europe quickly became informed about the Qing through this eyewitness report.

Philippe Couplet (1622–1693) was the next missionary who visited the Low Countries after a stay in China. Philippe Couplet was born in Mechelen (Malines) in present-day Belgium, arrived in China in 1659, and was sent back to Europe in 1681 as Procurator of the China Jesuits. There he visited the Low Countries, England, France, and Italy. He set sail for China in 1692 but died during a storm as his ship was about to reach Goa. Couplet is well-known as the editor of *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*, the first major annotated translation of the *Lunyu* 論語, *Daxue* 大學, and *Zhongyong* 中庸 into Latin (Paris: D. Hortemels, 1687; dedicated to King Louis XIV). The translation was the result of the efforts of several other Jesuits, including Prospero Intorcetta (1625–1696), Christian Wolfgang Herdrich (1625–1684), and François de Rougemont (1624–1676). The work also included a lengthy introduction and a *Tabula chronologica monarchiae sinicae* (Chronological table of the Chinese monarchy), which attempted to show that there was agreement between the Biblical (Septuagint) and the Chinese chronology. *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* is a major work because it was the first systematic introduction of Chinese thought to Europe. Philippe Couplet is also known for the publication of the life of Candida Xu (Hui) 許 (1607–1680), the granddaughter of Xu Guangqi 徐光啓 (1562–1633).<sup>10</sup> It is a very valuable source, not only depicting the spectacular growth of the Christian mission in the Jiangnan area, but also more precisely illuminating the role of female Chinese Christians, especially widows such as Candida. It is also important because it contains detailed descriptions of local ritual practices that complement information in Chinese ritual books or novels of the early Qing.

The next translation of classical texts directly from Chinese can be found in the work by the Jesuit François Noël (1651–1729), from Hestrud (in the north of France, which belonged to the then-Flanders region). In Prague, in 1711, he published *Sinensis Imperii Libri Classici Sex, nimirum Adulorum Schola, immutabile medium, liber sententiarum, Memcius, Filialis Observantia, parvulorum Schola*.<sup>11</sup> It includes a translation into Latin of the Four Books (*Daxue*, *Zhongyong*, *Lunyu*, and *Mengzi* 孟子), along with the *Xiaojing* 孝經 (Classic of filial piety) and Zhu Xi's 朱熹 *Xiaoxue* 小學 (Elementary learning). The erudition of Noël is noteworthy, because, more than any other early translation, he used early Qing commentaries on the Chinese classics.

### *Missionaries Reporting Directly From China (de Rougemont, Verbiest, Thomas)*

There were three other missionaries from the Low Countries who, despite never returning, were important for transmitting information about the Qing to Europe. The first is

<sup>9</sup>The full title of the English edition: *Bellum Tartaricum, or the conquest of the great and most renowned empire of China, by the invasion of the Tartars, who in these last seven years, have wholly subdued that vast Empire. Together with a map of the provinces, and chief cities of the countries, for the better understanding of the story* (London: John Crook, 1654).

<sup>10</sup>There are three editions: in French, Spanish, and Dutch: *Histoire d'une Dame chrétienne de la Chine* (Paris: Michallet, 1688); *Historia di una gran señora, Christiana de la China, llamada Doña Candida Hui* (Madrid: Antonio Roman, 1691); *Historie van eene groote, christene mevrouwe van China met naeme mevrouw Candida Hui* (Antwerpen: Knobbaert, 1694). The Dutch version is the most extensive one.

<sup>11</sup>(Prague: Universitatis Carolo-Ferdinandae, Collegio Soc. Jesu ad S. Clementum). Noël and his works have only recently been the object of research. See e.g. Paul Rule, "François Noël, SJ, and the Chinese Rites Controversy," in *The History of the Relations between the Low Countries and China in the Qing Era (1644–1911)*, edited by Willy F. Vande Walle & Noël Golvers (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2003), 138–65. See also CCT-database for recent articles.

François de Rougemont, who was born in Maastricht (now in the south of the Netherlands). He arrived in China in 1658 and spent most of his active career in the Jiangnan area. As mentioned earlier, he was one of the collaborators on Couplet's *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*. Another work by de Rougemont that was printed in the Low Countries is *Historia Tartaro-Sinica nova* (Louvain: M. Hullegerde, 1673). Meant to be the continuation of Martini's *De bello Tartarico* (c. 1650–1668), it provides an eyewitness report of the Manchu campaigns, especially in South China against Coxinga (Zheng Chenggong 鄭成功), and a description of the military and political situation in the North, including in Beijing. The text includes two series of, respectively, four and twenty Chinese characters, which are among the earliest series of Chinese characters produced by a Flemish printer.<sup>12</sup> In addition to the printed books, de Rougemont left behind an exceptional source: a private *Account Book* in manuscript form, which covers the period 1674–1676 when he was in Changshu 常熟 (Jiangnan). It not only gives a very detailed picture of the missionary's daily life in inland China, but is also an extremely valuable source for early Qing economic history, as it contains information such as the local prices for many commodities.<sup>13</sup>

The second Belgian missionary who remained in China is probably the most famous one: Ferdinand Verbiest 南懷仁 (1623–1688). He came from Pittem in present-day Flanders, arrived in Macao in 1658, and spent most of his life (from 1660 onwards) in Beijing. In 1669, he was appointed (Vice-)Director of the Astronomical Bureau (Qintianjian 欽天監). He is especially known for his close relationship with the Kangxi emperor as informant about Western sciences, technology, and thought. His texts give a unique insight into court life in the early period of the Kangxi reign. His most important printed contemporary work is *Astronomia Europaea*, published in Dillingen in 1687.<sup>14</sup> It describes how European astronomy, namely the European way to calculate the Chinese calendar and to predict lunar and solar eclipses, succeeded in resuming its former position at the Qing court after the persecution under the Oboi regency (1664–1669). In the second part of *Astronomia Europaea*, Verbiest reports on the achievements of the Jesuits in fourteen distinct mathematical and mechanical sciences between 1669 and 1679. The text confirms the rather close relation that Verbiest as a mentor had with the Kangxi emperor, who frequently requested his instruction. The circulation of *Astronomia Europaea* is an excellent example of how Jesuit knowledge about Qing China was broadly dispersed in Europe and ended up in a wide variety of places.<sup>15</sup> Besides the printed texts, there are also manuscript documents, of which Verbiest's letters are the most important. They give an insider's view into court life and especially into his relationship with the Emperor, in addition to providing perspectives on the missionaries' activities and international relationships. Originally published in

<sup>12</sup>Noël Golvers, "The Earliest Examples of Chinese Characters Printed in the Southern Low Countries (Leuven, 1672; Antwerp, 1683)," *De Gulden Passer (Tijdschrift voor boekwetenschap/ Journal for Book History)* 94.2 (2016), 319–33.

<sup>13</sup>Noël Golvers, *François de Rougemont, S.J., Missionary in Ch'ang-shu (Chiang-nan): A Study of the Account Book (1674–1676) and the Elogium* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1999).

<sup>14</sup>Text, translation, and notes by Noël Golvers, *The Astronomia europaea of Ferdinand Verbiest, S.J. (Dillingen, 1687)* (Nettetal: Steyler, 1993).

<sup>15</sup>Noël Golvers, *Ferdinand Verbiest, S.J. (1623–1688) and the Chinese Heaven: The Composition of the Astronomical Corpus, its Diffusion and Reception in the European Republic of Letters* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2003).

1938 with eighty items,<sup>16</sup> a revised and updated edition with fifty-four extra items, totaling 134 letters from and to Verbiest, was edited in 2017.<sup>17</sup>

After Verbiest's death in 1688, Antoine Thomas 安多 (1644–1709) succeeded him as the main Jesuit mathematician, geographer, and astronomical expert advising the Kangxi Emperor. Thomas was from Namur (present-day Belgium), arrived in Macao in 1682, and was called on by the aging Verbiest to join him in Beijing in 1686. He is less well-known than the previously mentioned Jesuits, yet the sources that remain from his hand or that are related to his actions give uncommon insights into Qing history, society, and court life.<sup>18</sup> For instance, *De Bello Cam Hi Imperatoris Tartaro-Sinici contra Tartaros Erutanos, Feliciter confecto anno 1697* is a little-known manuscript narrating the history of the war between the Qing and the Zunghar Qan Galdan (1644–1697).<sup>19</sup> As Vice-Provincial of the Jesuits in China (1701–1704), he was also involved in the Chinese Rites Controversy. For instance, Thomas organized a survey among the Christian communities in the whole of China, requesting their opinion about the matter.<sup>20</sup> Some sixty letters with about 430 signatories which Thomas gathered and sent to Rome to make their voices heard, provide unique insights into the sociological composition of the local Christian communities and their networks at the beginning of the eighteenth century.

While the above-mentioned protagonists can all be considered “Belgian” in a broad and somewhat anachronistic sense, it remains to be seen whether their work can be labelled as “Sinological.” This relates to the question of what that term precisely means. Not only do the sources discussed above predate the official founding of Sinology departments in Europe, they are also rarely the result of systematic studies of China based on academic disciplines as they developed in the nineteenth and twentieth century. Still, they include studies of Chinese culture based on Chinese sources, be it classical works and their commentaries or contemporary geographical works. Moreover, many of the publications, such as the descriptions of the Manchu conquest, would today be considered “contemporary China studies.” They contain eyewitness observations, and often write on these events from an outsider perspective. Finally, several manuscript sources that these missionaries sent to Europe are, strictly speaking, not Sinological works, but they continue to hold value for Sinological historical research today as they contain a wealth of information on seventeenth-century Chinese local economy and religious rituals.

### Late Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

With a reduced number of missionary contacts and merely occasional economic relations, such as the short-lived Royal East & West Indian Ocean Shipping Company, also called Ostend Company (1722–1731),<sup>21</sup> the Southern Low Countries basically

<sup>16</sup>*Correspondance de Ferdinand Verbiest de la Compagnie de Jésus (1623–1688), directeur de l'Observatoire de Pékin*, ed. Henri Josson & Léopold Willaert (Brussels: Palais des Académies, 1938).

<sup>17</sup>Noël Golvers, ed., *Letters of a Peking Jesuit: The Correspondence of Ferdinand Verbiest, SJ (1623–1688)* (Leuven: F. Verbiest Institute, 2017).

<sup>18</sup>*The Itinerary of Antoine Thomas S.J. (1644–1709), Scientist and Missionary from Namur in China*, edited by Michel Hermans and Isabelle Parmentier (Leuven: F. Verbiest Institute, 2017). Four other articles on Antoine Thomas are also included in *The History of the Relations between the Low Countries and China*.

<sup>19</sup>Davor Antonucci, “Antoine Thomas: A Historian of the Qing-Zunghar War,” in *The Itinerary of Antoine Thomas S.J.*, 219–52.

<sup>20</sup>Nicolas Standaert, *Chinese Voices in the Rites Controversy: Travelling Books, Community Networks, Intercultural Arguments* (Rome: Institutum Historicum S.I., 2011).

<sup>21</sup>Eduard J. Baels, *De Oostendse Compagnie* (Oostende: Erel, 1972). It was dissolved in 1731 under the pressure of the English and Dutch, who saw their interests in these regions harmed by the new Company.

had no colonial or commercial contacts in the Far East in the eighteenth century. This was also the situation when Belgium was founded in 1830, and it offers a potential explanation as to why there was little interest in the academic study of China in the country, notwithstanding the birth of Sinology in France. It took some thirty more years before commercial relations between Belgium and China gradually developed. A first “Sino-Belgian Commercial Treaty” (Zhong Bi tongshang tiaoyue 中比通商條約) was signed in Beijing on November 2, 1865. In the 1870s, there were further contacts between Belgian diplomats and the Chinese official and general Li Hongzhang 李鴻章 (1823–1901), a major figure in the Self-Strengthening Movement. These contacts eventually resulted in Li paying an official visit to Belgium during his European tour of 1896. These contacts resulted in Belgium being asked to construct the Beijing–Hankou railway line (1900–1905) and becoming involved in several industrial projects, such as the exploitation of the mines in Kaiping (Hebei, from 1901 onwards).<sup>22</sup> Aside from some tenuous links, the interest in studies about China, however, was largely disconnected from these events.

### *Development of Oriental Studies and Studies of Religion*

In general, the early development of Sinology in Belgium followed the development of Oriental studies alongside the institutionalization of religious studies as a scientific discipline in Europe in the nineteenth century. Unlike the two previous centuries, when those learning the language, making translations of original documents, and reporting about China were missionaries in the field, this new group of scholars studying the Orient were Europeans who, while remaining in Europe, acquired a sufficient knowledge of Oriental languages to study the culture and religion of these countries, mainly through the study of texts. The eighteenth-century intellectual movements in Europe played a role in this development. The criticism of the Enlightenment led to a more profound study of the ancient languages of the Bible—hence the focus on Oriental languages—to an extent and detail that had never before been accomplished. Another important influence was the arrival of Sanskrit texts in Europe, followed later by texts in the languages of the Far East.

Developments in Belgium followed—with some delay—these major evolutions. The foundation of the study of Oriental languages, though, can in a certain sense still be traced back to the sixteenth century. In Louvain (Leuven), for instance, the *Collegium Trilingue*, an institute dedicated to the study of Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, was founded in 1517. In the following centuries, other eastern languages related to Bible studies were added.<sup>23</sup> This explains why, after the re-establishment of the Catholic University of

For an overview of mid-Qing Chinese objects in Belgian collections, see Benedicte Vaerman, Sara Vantournhout, and Nicolas Standaert, *Route chinoise: À la recherche de la Chine en Belgique* (Europalia China) (Brussels: Fonds Mercator, 2009).

<sup>22</sup>Jo Gerard, “Léopold et Li Hung Tchang,” in *La grande aventure chinoise des Belges* (Namur: Wesmael-Charlier, 1982), 66–71; Jean-Marie Simonet, “1830–1930: Le siècle des Belges en Chine,” *Encres de Chine* 5 (1987), 13–23; Lin Jinshui 林金水, “Sino-Belgian Relations During the Reign of Leopold II: A Brief Historical Account Based on Chinese Documents,” in *The History of the Relations Between the Low Countries and China*, 439–459; *A Belgian Passage to China (1870–1930)*, edited by Johan J. Mattelaer and Mathieu Torck ([Gorredijk]: Sterck & De Vreese, 2020).

<sup>23</sup>For a general introduction to this institute: *The Leuven Collegium Trilingue, 1517–1797: Erasmus, Humanist Educational Practice and the New Language Institute, Latin—Greek—Hebrew*, ed. Jan Papy (Leuven: Peeters, 2018).

Louvain<sup>24</sup> in 1834 (it had been closed in 1797), courses in Oriental languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac, Arabic) were first developed at the Faculty of Theology, since they were considered ancillary to biblical exegesis. In 1841, however, Félix Nève (1816–1893), specialist in Vedic studies, created the first course in Sanskrit at the Faculty of Arts, from which Indology and Buddhist studies developed, alongside the study of other cultures of the Near and Far East.<sup>25</sup> This relatively late development of the study of India and the Far East is partly due to the absence of Belgian colonial interests in these areas. A lineage of three scholars with a large contribution to the textual approach in oriental and religious studies can be reconstructed.

### *Charles de Harlez de Deulin*

The study of Chinese and China at the Catholic University of Louvain, and more broadly in Belgium, began with Charles de Harlez de Deulin (1832–1899), who took over Nève's Sanskrit course in 1877.<sup>26</sup> He is a typical example of a self-made Orientalist. He first studied law, then he was trained and ordained as a priest, and subsequently became interested in the East and dedicated himself to becoming an autodidact in Indo-Iranian languages. Appointed in Louvain, he taught Avestan (Zend), Pelhevi, and ancient Persian from 1875 onwards. As a specialist in Avestan studies, he became known for his translation of the *Zend-Avesta*, the primary collection of sacred texts of Zoroastrianism. In the 1880s, he turned his attention to China and learned Manchu and Chinese. Already in 1892, Henri Cordier (1849–1925), the French founding editor of *T'oung-Pao* 通報 and compiler of *Bibliotheca Sinica*, noticed his enormous academic production in these fields.<sup>27</sup>

In Manchu studies de Harlez published, among other works, *Manuel de la langue mandchoue: Grammaire, anthologie, lexique* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1884), *Textes mandchous traduits pour la première fois* (Louvain: Istas, 1884), and *La religion nationale des Tartares orientaux: Mandchous et Mongols, comparée à la religion des anciens Chinois, d'après des textes indigènes, avec le rituel Tartare de l'empereur K'ien-long* (Bruxelles: Hayez, Académie royale, 1887).<sup>28</sup> In Sinology, he published

<sup>24</sup>Throughout this article the term “Louvain” will be used for the pre-1968 period. It is the English and French name for what is called Leuven today. In that town a university (Studium Generale Lovaniense; Academia Lovaniensis; Universitas Lovaniensis) was established in 1425 which lasted until 1797, when it was abolished by the French Republic. Under the Dutch Republic, between 1817 and 1835 it was the State University of Louvain. Between 1835–1968 it became the Catholic University of Louvain. When this university split in two, the French speaking section moved to Louvain-la-Neuve (Université Catholique de Louvain) and the Dutch-speaking section remained in Louvain (KU Leuven or Katholieke Universiteit Leuven).

<sup>25</sup>*Les études orientales à l'Université de Louvain depuis 1834: Hommes et réalisations*, edited by Luc Courtois (Brussels: Safran, 2021). For some sources on Oriental Studies at the University of Louvain, see Willy Vande Walle and Paul Servais, eds., *Orientalia: Oosterse studies en bibliotheken te Leuven en Louvain-la-Neuve* (Leuven: Universitaire Pers Leuven, 2001).

<sup>26</sup>Étienne Lamotte, “Notice sur le chevalier Charles de Harlez de Deulin, Membre de l'académie,” *Annuaire de l'académie royale de Belgique* 1953 (Brussels: Palais des académies, 1953), vol. 119, 414–40; Étienne Lamotte, “Harlez de Deulin (Charles, chevalier de),” in *Biographie nationale* (Brussels: Émile Bruyat, 1964), vol. 32, 279–81.

<sup>27</sup>Henri Cordier, “Half a Decade of Chinese Studies (1886–1891),” *T'oung Pao* 3.5 (1892), 555–58.

<sup>28</sup>This is a translation of *Manjusa-i wecere metere doroi bithe*, i.e. *Hesei toktohuha Manjusai wecere metere kooli bithe* (Imperial Commissioned Code of Rituals and Sacrifices of the Manchus 欽定滿州祭神祭天典禮) completed in 1747.



(partial) translations and text commentaries on several ancient texts: the *Yijing* 易經,<sup>29</sup> *Yili* 儀禮,<sup>30</sup> *Guoyu* 國語,<sup>31</sup> and *Mozi* 墨子.<sup>32</sup> More specifically, regarding publications on (texts by) Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200), he translated selections from Gao Panlong's 高攀龍 (1562–1662) *Zhuzi jieyao* 朱子節要 (Essentials of Master Zhu), an anthology of Zhu Xi's conversations and writings.<sup>33</sup> In 1889 a translation of Zhu Xi's *Xiaoxue* 小學 (Elementary learning) followed, with selections from Chen Xuan's 陳選 (1429–1486) commentary.<sup>34</sup> In the same year, he also translated the *Jiali* 家禮 (Family rites).<sup>35</sup> One year later, he translated selected passages from the *Xingli jingyi* 性理精義 (Essentials of nature and principle).<sup>36</sup> De Harlez was also interested in Confucian state rituals: his *La religion et les cérémonies impériales de la Chine moderne: d'après le cérémonial et les décrets officiels* (Bruxelles: Académie royale, 1893) is the translation of juan 1–16 of *Da Qing tongli* 大清通禮 (Comprehensive rites of the Great Qing), a handbook on how to perform rituals at court (commissioned by the Qianlong emperor in 1736, completed in 1756). This short overview illustrates well Charles de Harlez's textual approach to Chinese culture and religion, which was characteristic of his time. With his interest in Qing rituals, both Chinese and Manchu, de Harlez was also to a certain extent much ahead of his time, because these ritual texts have only recently gained renewed scholarly attention. In addition, he produced publications on topics as diverse as the *Laozi* 老子, infanticide in China, medicine, perception of colors, military regulations, and Chinese and Manchu religion. Charles de Harlez also took on an active role in promoting new humanistic studies. In 1881, he founded the first scholarly journal of Louvain University in the humanities: *Le Muséon: Revue internationale de linguistique, d'histoire et de religion*.<sup>37</sup>

While many Oriental languages were added to the curriculum of the Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Theology in Louvain, upon his retirement de Harlez was not succeeded by a specialist of China. He can nevertheless be considered the origin of a lineage of Belgian scholars focusing on Buddhist studies well into the twentieth century. However, while for de Harlez the study of Buddhism and of China coexisted in parallel, leading him to conduct many studies of Chinese and Manchu texts unrelated to Buddhism, these later scholars studied Chinese (and Tibetan) solely as part of studying Buddhism.

### Louis de La Vallée Poussin

Charles de Harlez's most famous disciple was Louis de La Vallée Poussin (1869–1938).<sup>38</sup> Son of a French father and Belgian mother, de La Vallée Poussin first

<sup>29</sup>*Le texte originaire du Yih-King, sa nature et son interprétation* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1887) and *Le Yih-king: texte primitif rétabli* (Brussels: Hayez, 1889).

<sup>30</sup>I-Li: *Cérémonial de la Chine antique* (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1890).

<sup>31</sup>Koue-Yü, *Discours des royaumes in Journal Asiatique* 2 (1893), 373–419 and 3 (1894), 5–91.

<sup>32</sup>Mi-tze, *le philosophe de l'amour universel* (s.l., s.d.).

<sup>33</sup>Tchou-tze-tsieh-yao-tchuen: *résumé de la philosophie de Tchou-hi* (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1887).

<sup>34</sup>*La Siao Hio ou Morale de la jeunesse, avec le commentaire de Tchen-Siuen* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1889).

<sup>35</sup>*Kia-li, livre des rites domestiques chinois de Tchou-hi* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1889).

<sup>36</sup>*L'école philosophique moderne de la Chine ou système de la nature (Sing-li)* (Brussels: Société belge de librairie., 1890). See a short discussion of these texts in Wing-tsit Chan, "The Study of Chu Hsi in the West," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 35.4 (1976), 557–61.

<sup>37</sup>For a table of contents, see Arnold van Lantschoot, ed, *Le Muséon: Tables des années 1882 à 1931* (Louvain: Muséon, 1932). In 1900 it became a series.

<sup>38</sup>Etienne Lamotte, "Louis de La Vallée Poussin (1869–1938)," *Bulletin de l'École française d'Extrême-Orient* 38.2 (1938), 479–83; Marcelle Lalou and Jean Preyluski, "Louis de La Vallée Poussin,"

studied philosophy and ancient languages at the University of Liège. He then became interested in the languages of the East, which he first learned in Louvain under the direction of Charles de Harlez (Sanskrit, Pali, Avestan), with further specialization in Paris (with Sylvain Lévi (1864–1935), Sorbonne and École Pratique des Hautes-Études) and in Leiden (with Hendrik Kern (1833–1917), the first professor of Sanskrit in Leiden). In 1894, he was appointed professor at the University of Ghent, where French was still the academic language. There, he taught for thirty-five years the comparative grammar of Greek and Latin; a rather light course load which allowed him to devote much time to his personal studies. From 1900 onwards, he taught an optional course in Sanskrit. When his interests turned almost exclusively to Buddhism, he forced himself to study Tibetan and Chinese (the latter when he was already fifty years old). World War I interrupted his teaching. As a refugee in Cambridge, he organized courses for young Belgians, drew up an inventory of the Jaina manuscripts in the library, catalogued the Tibetan papers from Dunhuang in the India Office in London, and gave a series of lectures at Oxford University and the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in 1918. Returning to Belgium after the war, he gradually detached himself from the University of Ghent, which was in the process of adopting Dutch (and no longer French) as its language of instruction, and he made Brussels the center of his activities. In 1921, he organized and became first president of the Société Belge d'Études Orientales (Belgian Association of Oriental Studies). In 1929, he submitted his resignation as professor in Ghent when the state university by law changed its primary language to Dutch, but he continued to teach a few courses at the École des Hautes-Études (Paris) and the Institute of Advanced Chinese Studies (Brussels), where he initiated the journal *Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques* in 1931.

Louis de La Vallée Poussin left a significant body of work, with 324 publications.<sup>39</sup> He was one of the first European scholars to devote himself to the study of Vajrayana (a Buddhist tradition associated with Tantra which spread to Tibet). In line with the textual approach in the study of religions, his work was characterized by many translations and text editions. He was also an expert on the work of the Chinese Buddhist monk Xuanzang 玄奘 (fl. 602–664), about whom he published *Vijnaptimātratāsiddhi: La Siddhi de Hiuan-Tsang*, 2 vols. (Paris: Geutner, 1928–29).

### Étienne Lamotte

The tradition of Chinese and Tibetan studies integrated in the study of Buddhism espoused by de La Vallée Poussin was continued by Étienne Lamotte (1903–1983), more specifically in Louvain.<sup>40</sup> Lamotte was educated as a priest (with studies in philosophy and theology) and studied classical philology in Louvain, where he also started

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*Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques* 6 (1939), 151–263; Étienne Lamotte, “Notice sur Louis de La Vallée Poussin, Membre de l’académie,” *Annuaire pour 1965, Académie royale de Belgique* (Brussels: Palais des académies, 1965), vol. 232, 145–68; Christophe Vielle, “de La Vallée Poussin, Louis,” *Nouvelle biographie nationale de Belgique* 10 (2010), 122–24. Bart Dessen, “La Vallée Poussin, Louis de (1869–1938),” UGentMemorie, Universiteit Gent, [www.ugentmemorie.be/personen/la-vallee-poussin-louis-de-1869-1938](http://www.ugentmemorie.be/personen/la-vallee-poussin-louis-de-1869-1938). These articles include references to several other commemorative biographies.

<sup>39</sup>For a list see Marcelle Lalou, “Rétrospective: l’œuvre de Louis de La Vallée Poussin,” *Bibliographie Bouddhique. Fascicule annexe, XXIII bis* (Paris: Librairie d’Amérique et d’Orient, 1955), 1–37.

<sup>40</sup>Hubert Durt, “Étienne Lamotte (1903–1983),” *Bulletin de l’Ecole française d’Extrême-Orient* 74 (1985), 6–28; Jacques Scheuer, “Lamotte (Étienne),” *Dictionnaire d’histoire et de géographie ecclésiastiques* (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 2008), vol. 30, 163–65.

reading Sanskrit, Avestan, and Armenian. In Louvain, he became a doctor in Oriental Languages (1929) and in Philosophy and Letters (1930). A scholarship (1931–32) allowed him to deepen his studies with the Parisian masters Sylvain Lévi and Alfred Foucher (1865–1952) (for Sanskrit), Jean Przyluski (1885–1944) (for Pali), Marcelle Lalou (1890–1967) (for Tibetan), and Paul Demiéville (1894–1979) (for Chinese). However, it was Louis de La Vallée Poussin who had a decisive influence on Lamotte's scholarly orientation. Over the course of ten years, from 1928 until de La Vallée Poussin's death in 1938, Lamotte had twice-weekly classes with him. Meanwhile, Lamotte was appointed lecturer (1932) and later full professor (1937) at the Catholic University of Louvain. Lamotte also became involved with the Institute of Advanced Chinese Studies in Brussels. At his initiative the periodical *Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques*, initiated by de La Vallée Poussin, changed into a monograph series after World War II.

Adopting the same textual approach as his predecessors, Lamotte devoted most of his research to editing, translating, and commenting on major doctrinal treatises of Indian Buddhism.<sup>41</sup> Several of them, lost in the original version, are only accessible in their Chinese or Tibetan versions. In the 1930s, Lamotte's efforts resulted in the edition and translation of three major works: *L'Explication des Mystères (Samdhinirmocana sutra)* (1935),<sup>42</sup> *Le Traité de l'Acte (Karmasiddhiprakarana) de Vasubandhu* (1936),<sup>43</sup> and *La somme du grand véhicule d'Asaṅga (Mahāyānasamgraha)* (1938–39).<sup>44</sup> These publications were in line with the research done by de La Vallée Poussin.

Unfortunately, the wartime destruction of the University Library in 1940 resulted not only in the destruction of nearly the entire stock of *Mahāyānasamgraha*, but also deprived Lamotte of the personal collection of de La Vallée Poussin, which the library had acquired just a few weeks before the war. Lamotte chose to concentrate his work on an annotated translation of the *Treatise on the Great Virtue of Wisdom*, attributed to Nāgārjuna (after the Chinese version *Da zhidu lun* 大知度論 by Kumārajīva): *Le traité de la grande vertu de sagesse de Nāgārjuna (Mahāprajñāpāramitāsāstra)*. This project occupied him, in parallel with other research, for more than thirty-five years, covering five volumes and more than 2,600 large pages crammed with erudite notes.<sup>45</sup> In 1974, he retired from the Catholic University of Louvain, which had by that time split into a Flemish university (which remained in the city of Leuven) and a new French-speaking university in Louvain-la-Neuve. Étienne Lamotte did not follow the new university to Louvain-la-Neuve, but moved instead to Brussels, where he died in 1983.

As soon as he became emeritus, economic measures at the University of Louvain led to the abolishment of the Buddhist studies program, which he had patiently developed. He bequeathed his personal library to the Hōbōgirin Institute, the Kyoto headquarters of the Japanese branch of the École Française d'Extrême-Orient. A close link united this

<sup>41</sup>For a bibliography, see Daniel Donnet, "L'oeuvre de Mgr Etienne Lamotte," in *Indianisme et bouddhisme: mélanges offerts à Mgr Etienne Lamotte* (Louvain-la-Neuve: UCL Institut orientaliste, 1980), vii–xvi; for 1981–84, see Durt, "Étienne Lamotte," 27.

<sup>42</sup>Edited and translated Tibetan version (Louvain: Bureau du Recueil, 1935).

<sup>43</sup>Edition of the Tibetan version, photographic reproduction of the Chinese translation by Xuanzang, and annotated French translation, *Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques* 4 (1936), 151–263.

<sup>44</sup>Tibetan and Chinese version and French translation, 2 vols. (Louvain: Muséon; 1938–39).

<sup>45</sup>(Louvain: Bureaux du Muséon, 1944–76).

library to the *Hōbōgirin*, i.e. an encyclopedic dictionary of Sino-Japanese Buddhist terminology, launched by Sylvain Lévi and led by Paul Demiéville. In Kyoto, the collection was well taken care of by his former student Hubert Durt (1936–2018), who had been Lamotte’s assistant at the Institute of Oriental Studies in Louvain (1964–65) after having studied classical studies in Louvain and Japanese in Ghent. Durt moved to Japan in 1965, and became a member of the École Française d’Extrême-Orient assigned to the Kyoto Centre in 1970, the same year that he obtained his Ph.D. in Louvain with a thus far unpublished dissertation: “La version chinoise de l’Introduction historique de la Samantapāsādikā: traduction du chapitre introductif du *Chan Kien Liu P’i-P’o-Cha* [善見律毘婆沙 T. 1462] et notes sur les rapports entre ce texte et la tradition pāli concernant l’histoire du bouddhisme ancien en Inde et à Ceylan.”<sup>46</sup> With Durt’s death in 2018, a lineage of Belgian Buddhist scholars came to an end. Yet, in the late 1970s, Buddhist studies were revived at Ghent University and a new lineage was started.

### *Chinese Language for Commercial Reasons*

The above-mentioned lineage of Chinese and Buddhist studies involved the study of Chinese, but not the instruction of modern Chinese by teachers who could speak the language. The introduction of such language courses was a slow process, and the initiative was taken in the Belgian parliament by representatives who pleaded for its necessity for commercial reasons.

One of the first pleas was the intervention of member of parliament Charles-Xavier Saintelette (1825–1898) from the liberal party. The context of his intervention was a debate on subsidies to encourage the publication of works by university professors and to support them on educational missions abroad (December 21, 1877). Saintelette deplored the state of the knowledge of foreign languages at that time (e.g. there were only four professors with a degree to teach English in the whole of Belgium) and strongly pleaded for a more organized way to develop language training. He argued that the study of foreign languages and cultures had not only academic but, more importantly, also commercial advantages. Without the knowledge of these languages, Belgium would not be able to engage with economic developments in the countries to the east of Belgium. Regarding the languages of East Asia, he added in a less decisive way: “I am not here to suggest that you organize Chinese and Japanese language courses, although I do not understand how one can do business with countries without knowing the language.”<sup>47</sup>

It is not clear to what extent his appeal was heeded, but thirteen years later the topic of Oriental language acquisition was again addressed when there was a parliamentary debate on academic degrees and university programs (February 24, 1890). Charles Woeste (1837–1922), member of the Catholic party, likewise called attention to the importance of the study of Oriental languages since “The East is the cradle of the human race” and “the knowledge of oriental languages forms the key to a lot of events

<sup>46</sup>François Lachaud, “In Memoriam Hubert Durt,” École Française d’Extrême-Orient, [www.efeo.fr/base.php?code=954](http://www.efeo.fr/base.php?code=954). See also “Hubert Durt kyōju ryaku nenpu chosaku mokuroku” 教授 略年譜・著作目録, *Kokusai Bukkyōgaku daigakuin daigaku kenkyū kiyō* 國際仏教学大学院大学研究紀要, *Journal of the International College for Postgraduate Buddhist Studies* 15 (2011), 26 pp.

<sup>47</sup>*Chambre des représentants: Annales parlementaires* (Brussels: Chambre des Représentants de Belgique, 1877), 196–197 (Belgian Chamber of Representatives: Session of December 21, 1877).

that remained mysterious or disputed for a long time. (...) My purpose ... is to draw the attention of our studious youth more closely to a study that is not only useful but also extremely attractive.”<sup>48</sup> He was joined in his plea by the liberal Walloon politician Ferdinand Fléchet (1842–1915): “The usefulness from an industrial and commercial point of view is indisputable, because if we send consuls to China and other oriental countries, it is not bad that they know Chinese or the language of the country where they live.”<sup>49</sup> During the same debate, the aforementioned representative Saintelette insisted on the instruction of not only ancient but also modern (Oriental) languages and recommended to the Minister of the Interior and Education “to simply think of a way to add a few language teachers to the State universities [on which the Minister had authority].”<sup>50</sup>

It took eight more years before these suggestions were put into practice, in 1898. First, there was an initiative by King Leopold II (1835–1909), who had received Li Hongzhang at the palace in Brussels in 1896. On February 9, 1898, King Leopold wrote a letter to Jean-Baptiste Abbeloos (1836–1906), rector of the University of Louvain and specialist in Syriac texts, asking him to train translators for Chinese, since Belgium lacked its own translators for diplomats and industrialists. Leopold II was aware that Charles de Harlez had been teaching Chinese but that his health no longer allowed him to take up this charge. “It would be enough, no doubt, for the University of Louvain to send one or two young men to Paris to learn the language of the learned and the daily spoken language in order to be able, under the eminent direction of Mgr. de Harlez, to found a new course.”<sup>51</sup> No action seems to have been taken on this proposal, presumably because Abbeloos resigned as rector of the University in July of the same year.

Ultimately, the teaching of modern Chinese did not start at the University in Louvain but at the state universities of Ghent and Liège, which had both been established in 1817. A royal decree dated November 10, 1898 entrusted Jan Baptist (Jean-Baptiste) Steenackers CICM (1848–1912) with the task of teaching Chinese at these two universities. Steenackers had been a Scheutist missionary in China: first in the Ordos region (1876–86) and then, after a return to Belgium to teach philosophy at the Scheutist seminary, six more years as treasurer for his congregation in Shanghai (1892–98); in 1898 he returned definitively because of health reasons. In Ghent, he taught a limited number of students at the special schools of civil engineering and of arts and manufactures (*Écoles spéciales du génie civil et des arts et manufactures*) until his death.<sup>52</sup> In Liège, he taught during the same period a course in Chinese at the Faculty of Philosophy and Arts. He also taught Chinese at the Institute St.-Louis in Brussels.<sup>53</sup> Steenackers seems to have been the first Chinese

<sup>48</sup>*Annales parlementaires* (1890), 689 (Session February 24, 1890).

<sup>49</sup>*Annales parlementaires* (1890), 690.

<sup>50</sup>*Annales parlementaires* (1890), 692.

<sup>51</sup>KU Leuven Universiteitsarchief (archief van rector Abbeloos): “Brief van koning Leopold II aan rector Abbeloos, 9 februari 1898.”

<sup>52</sup>Frédéric Wolters, “Jean-Baptiste Steenackers (1898),” in *Liber memorialis: Université de Gand: notices biographiques: Tome II: Faculté des sciences et Ecoles spéciales du génie civil et des arts et manufactures—Faculté de médecine* (Gand: Vanderpoorten, 1913), 542–44.

<sup>53</sup>*Mélanges de philologie orientale, publiés à l'occasion du Xe anniversaire de la création de l'Institut Supérieur d'Histoire et de Littératures Orientales de l'Université de Liège* (Liège/ Louvain: Institut Supérieur d'Histoire et de Littératures Orientales de l'Université/ Imprimerie Orientaliste, 1932), viii;

language teacher in Belgium, and Liège and Ghent the first universities to offer classes in Chinese.

The teaching of Chinese also developed gradually in study programs for international commerce. For instance, a report for the approval of the budget of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (debated in the session of March 13, 1903) gives an overview of the foreign languages taught at the eight higher institutions of commerce (with a total of 497 students) in Belgium. Chinese is mentioned as one of the languages at Saint-Louis Institute in Brussels, the Commercial and Consular Higher Institute of Mons, the Higher Institute in Antwerp, and the Commercial and Consular Institute in Louvain.<sup>54</sup> No information, however, is provided about the number of students for these classes. Steenackers died in 1912 and the German occupation of Belgium during World War I interrupted the teaching of Chinese at Belgian academic institutions. It would take a long time for this initiative to be re-established.

In the context of these initial commercial exchanges and the need for language learning, it is worth mentioning the presence of Chinese students in Belgium. In 1904, a first group of twenty-four Chinese students arrived in Liège, where they were first taught French by Steenackers and later dispersed to other places. In 1905, there were already eighty-six Chinese students in Belgium, representing more than 20 percent of the Chinese students in Europe. They mainly pursued studies in engineering (mostly mining and railway construction) in Mons, Brussels, Liège, and Namur. After World War I, their number increased even more. Even though these statistics are inevitably tentative, it is estimated that during the period from 1922 to 1929, between 330 and 350 Chinese students were studying in Belgium.<sup>55</sup> Very little is known about their interaction with Belgians who were eager to study Chinese.

An exceptional case, however, is that of Georges Lemaître (1894–1966), a Catholic priest, astronomer, mathematician, and professor of physics at the Catholic University of Louvain. He is known as the first person to theorize that the recession of nearby galaxies could be explained by an expanding universe (1927, a thesis originally rejected by Albert Einstein), and was also the first to propose the “hypothesis of the primeval atom” of the origin of the universe (1931), later called the “Big Bang theory.” It is little-known that Lemaître also learned some Chinese through interaction with Chinese students.<sup>56</sup> In the seminar that he attended for the training to the priesthood in Mechelen, Georges Lemaître came to know a Chinese seminarian, called Edouard Zhang Huai (Tchang Hwai 張懷, 1896–1987). Lemaître taught him French, and in exchange Zhang Huai taught him Chinese. Lemaître’s notebooks in which he wrote down the vocabulary and Chinese characters have been preserved in the university archives in Louvain-la-Neuve.<sup>57</sup> Later, at the University of Louvain, Lemaître

Hsieh Hon Chun, “Les Belges et leurs relations culturelles avec la Chine, 1900–1949” (Ph.D. diss., Université d’État de Gand, 1963), 45.

<sup>54</sup> *Annales parlementaires* (1903), 842–43 (Session of March 13, 1903).

<sup>55</sup> These and the following figures are adopted from Claude Soetens, “Les étudiants chinois en Belgique de 1900 à 1940,” in *The History of the Relations between the Low Countries and China*, 487–508. On the Chinese students in Belgium, see also Yuan Tung-li 袁同禮, *A Guide to Doctoral Dissertations by Chinese Students in Continental Europe 1907–1962* (Washington, DC, 1964), 57–59; Stephan Grauwels, “Chinese studenten in België, 1902–1939” (MA thesis, Ghent University, 1985), and especially Wang Qingyu 王慶餘, *Liu Bi xuesheng shi* 留比學生史 (History of Chinese students in Belgium (1892–1950)) (Taipei: Guangqi wenhua shiye, 2011).

<sup>56</sup> Dominique Lambert, “Mgr Georges Lemaître et Dom Théodore Nève: une histoire chinoise,” MS (shared by the author).

<sup>57</sup> Archives Georges Lemaître de l’Université catholique de Louvain: BE A4006 FG LEM-1142-1448.

became engaged in several initiatives in support of Chinese students in the years 1927–30 (the period of his important scientific publications). In 1928–29, there were thirty-eight Chinese students in Louvain, and one year later fifty-one of a total of 274 (including thirteen women) in Belgium. Lemaître was actively involved in the House (*Foyer*) for Chinese students, of which he was Director for two years. He was also the representative of Louvain University in the “Comité Interuniversitaire Sino-Belge,” founded in April 1928 for the distribution of scholarships for Chinese students in Belgium, which offered a total of 309 scholarships during the years 1929–39. After 1930, Lemaître withdrew from the financial management of the student body, but he continued to maintain good contacts with Chinese students. Lemaître’s archive contains about 180 records of Chinese who studied in Belgium.

### Scheutists

Chinese language training was also offered in the study houses for future missionaries of the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (Congregatio Immaculati Cordis Mariae, CICM), to which Steenackers belonged. This Roman Catholic missionary congregation of men was established by the Belgian Catholic priest Theophile Verbist (1823–1868) in 1862, specially for China. Because the congregation’s origins lie in Scheut, Anderlecht, a suburb of Brussels, these missionaries are widely known as the Scheut Missionaries.<sup>58</sup> Rome assigned the congregation to evangelize the vast spaces of Mongolia, the territory “beyond the Great Wall,” covering the provinces of Jehol, Chahar, Suiyuan (capital Hohhot), and Ningxia (during the Republican era),<sup>59</sup> corresponding partly with present-day Inner Mongolia. The Scheutists were active beyond the Great Wall for ninety years, from 1865 to 1955.<sup>60</sup>

In fact, until after World War II, the CICM study houses offered the best and most intensive training in the (classical) Chinese language in Belgium. They also had teachers with a long experience in China, and several of them were linguists. Already before 1900, Chinese was taught at the study houses in Scheut and Louvain. In the beginning of the twentieth century, the courses were organized better, with a focus on classical language (with textbooks such as *Choix de documents, lettres officielles, proclamations, édits, mémoriaux, inscriptions* by Seraphin Couvreur). In 1920, new manuals became available, which were used for ten years by Jozef Van Durme (1883–1954) and an as of yet unidentified Mr. Wang, possibly the first native-speaker Chinese teacher in Belgium. Van Durme had spent roughly thirteen years in China (1907–1919) before becoming a Chinese language teacher in the Scheut formation centers in Brussels and Louvain, a position he held for twenty-eight years (1920–1948). The program was expanded and became much more intensive under the guidance of Jozef Mullie, who had returned from China for this purpose.<sup>61</sup> Mullie trained a generation of

<sup>58</sup>For a history of this congregation, see Daniel Verhelst and Hyacinth Daniels, *Scheut vroeger en nu 1862–1987: Geschiedenis van de Congregatie van het Onbevlekt Hart van Maria C.I.C.M.* (Leuven: Universitaire Pers Leuven, 1991).

<sup>59</sup>For a map of these mission areas, see François Aubin, “La vision catholique de la religiosité chinoise et mongole: L’expérience des missionnaires de Scheut en Mongolie chinoise (XIXe–XXe siècles),” *Mélanges de l’École française de Rome: Italie et Méditerranée*, 101.2 (1989), 1035.

<sup>60</sup>For detailed studies of their presence in China, see the publications of the F. Verbiest Institute: [www.kuleuven.be/verbiest](http://www.kuleuven.be/verbiest). Biographic data on the Scheut fathers mentioned in this article are based on the biographical files from the CICM archives preserved in KADOC (KU Leuven).

<sup>61</sup>Hsieh Hon Chun, “Les Belges et leurs relations culturelles avec la Chine, 1900–1949,” 46–47.

Scheut Sinologists who engaged, like himself, in academic research about Chinese and Mongolian cultures.

### *Jozef Mullie*

One of the key figures in the linguistic approach to Sinology was Jozef Mullie (1886–1976).<sup>62</sup> When he entered the CICM congregation in 1903, Mullie already had a deep interest in languages and linguistics, and he was encouraged by his superiors to pursue this interest. Subsequently, during his studies of philosophy and theology in Brussels and Louvain (1903–1909), he took the initiative to read many specialized books on linguistics and to learn a fair number of languages, some as autodidact and others through formal education. Besides European languages, he learned the languages of his mission destination (Mandarin, classical Chinese, Mongolian, and Manchu), languages that were typically acquired by comparative linguists at that time (Sanskrit, Gothic), and also some Korean, Russian, Pali, Lolo, Kami, Mewara, Tay, Mon-Khmer, and Tibetan. In 1909, Mullie left for China, where he would spend twenty-two years in Jehol Province, both in the Mongol and the Chinese regions. He spent the last five years of this period in the capital Chengde, before returning to Belgium in 1931. While being involved in missionary work as a parish priest or director of a Chinese school, he continued his work as a linguist. Mullie used Bernhard Karlgren's (1889–1978) works to study the phonology of the Chinese language, in particular the variety of Mandarin spoken in Jehol at the beginning of the twentieth century. Even the smallest details of the phonetics of the North-Pekinese dialect in Eastern Mongolia did not escape his trained ear. He recorded the results of his research in a monumental three-volume work: *Het Chineesch taaleigen: Inleiding tot de gesprokene taal (Noord-Pekineesch dialect)*.<sup>63</sup> Rint Sybesma, professor of Chinese Linguistics at Leiden University, points out that “as a linguist Mullie was most of all an outstanding observer. (...) Importantly, Mullie combined his sharp ear for the characteristics of the Mandarin he was hearing around him with an acute analytic mind, enabling him to formulate a number of insightful generalizations about Chinese grammar that are still useful today.”<sup>64</sup>

Other aspects of the culture also did not escape Mullie's attention: this included the study of Chinese history, customs, or anthropology, and he published on these topics in a wide range of periodicals. His most important discoveries were those of ancient cities of the Liao dynasty (907–1125) and the tombs of three Liao emperors at Qingzhou (now Chifeng in Inner Mongolia): Shengzong 聖宗 (r. 982–1031), Xingzong 興宗 (r.

<sup>62</sup>Joseph L. van Hecken, “MULLIE, Jozef Lodewijk Maria, missionaris, filoloog en sinoloog,” in *Nationaal Biografisch Woordenboek*, vol. 8 (Brussels: Koninklijke Academie van België, 1979), 518–35. Recent Chinese studies on Mullie include Zheng Yongjun 鄭永君, “Min Xuanhua yi Shengmu shengxin hui de Hanyu jiaoxue” 閔宣化與聖母聖心會的漢語教學 (P. Jozef Mullie and his contribution to the Chinese language education in CICM), *Aomen ligong xuebao* 澳門理工學報 2021.4, 103–11; Zheng Yongjun 鄭永君, “Lai Hua Shengmu shengxin hui ji qi heyu Hanxuejia Min Xuanhua (1886–1976) yanjiu” 來華聖母聖心會及其荷語漢學家閔宣化(1886–1976)研究 (A study on C.I.C.M. in China and its Flemish Sinologist Fr. Jozef Mullie (1886–1976)) (Ph.D. diss., Fudan University: Wenshi yanjiu yuan, 2021).

<sup>63</sup>3 vols. (Beijing: Pei-T'ang: Lazarists, 1930–1933). English transl.: A. Omer Verschel: *The Structural Principles of the Chinese Language: An Introduction to the Spoken Language (Northern Pekingese Dialect)*, 3 vols. (Beijing: Bureau of Engraving and Printing, 1932–37).

<sup>64</sup>Rint Sybesma, “A History of Chinese Linguistics in the Netherlands,” in *Chinese Studies in the Netherlands: Past, Present and Future*, edited by Wilt L. Idema (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 127–57; section on Mullie, 147.



1031–1055), and Daozong 道宗 (r. 1055–1101). He described these findings (which included two steles in Khitan script) in two lengthy articles published in *T'oung-Pao*.<sup>65</sup>

After Mullie was asked by his congregation to become a professor in Chinese phonetics and missiology for its theological scholasticate in Louvain, he definitively returned to Europe in 1931, where he trained some three hundred missionaries. In 1939, he was appointed Professor of Chinese Language and Literature at the University of Utrecht (the Netherlands), a position he held until 1956. During these active years, he wrote another three-volume extensive grammar of classical Chinese, *Grondbeginselen van de Chineesche letterkundige taal*.<sup>66</sup> A few years before, he had written *Le Mot Particule 之 Tchê*, a work on the particle *zhi* 之. This had first been published as a long article in *T'oung Pao* and then later as a monograph.<sup>67</sup> He donated a part of his books to the Library of the University of Louvain (Leuven), and the other part of it was acquired by the same University in the early 1980s.

Mullie's legacy goes beyond his publications: he was also an important trainer of future Sinologists. As pointed out by Joseph Van Hecken (1905–1988), when Mullie started giving Chinese lessons to his confreres in Belgium, he not only wanted his students to be well versed in the spoken language, but also scientific researchers in the inexhaustible wealth of the Chinese language. They needed to be very well acquainted with the literary language in order to become good Sinologists. He was strict with his students and pushed them to work hard. Only a few of them could keep up with the teacher, but those few became very skilled linguists.<sup>68</sup> He managed to train an exceptional generation of Belgian Sinologists.

### *A generation of Scheutist Sinologists*

These Scheut Sinologists more or less share the following characteristics: after their initial training in Belgium, they had further language training in Beijing; subsequently they worked “in the field” in the same area of present-day Inner Mongolia where Mullie had resided and, while fully engaged in their pastoral activities, conducted autodidactic scientific research. Near the end of the war in China, most of them spent some time in a Japanese internment camp in Weixian 濰縣 (Shandong)<sup>69</sup> and then lived under (a more lenient) house-arrest in Beijing (1943–45). They resumed their activities until the communist takeover, when they had to leave China. Most of them would go on to pursue formal academic education in Chinese studies, became nearly fully engaged in research, or took up positions as professors at academic institutions in the US or Japan.

*Paul Serruys*. Paul Serruys (1912–1999)<sup>70</sup> entered CICM in 1930 and left for China in 1937. He was (assistant) parish priest in various places around Xicetian 西册田

<sup>65</sup>“Les anciennes villes de l’empire des grands Leao 大遼 au royaume mongol de Bârin,” *T'oung-Pao* 21 (1922), 105–231 (only slightly edited by Pelliot); “Les sépultures de K'ing des Leao 遼慶陵,” *T'oung-Pao* 30 (1933), 1–25 (this article was already submitted in 1924 but Pelliot had lost part of it).

<sup>66</sup>(Leuven: Dewallens, c. 1947–50).

<sup>67</sup>*T'oung Pao* 36 (1940), 181–400, and monograph (Leiden: Brill, 1942).

<sup>68</sup>Van Hecken, “MULLIE, Jozef Lodewijk Maria,” 528.

<sup>69</sup>The camp population amounted to 2,200 persons, including a large contingent of Catholic missionaries and sisters. On this camp, see the article in Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weixian\\_Internment\\_Camp](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weixian_Internment_Camp).

<sup>70</sup>W. South Coblin, “Paul L-M. Serruys, C.I.C.M. (1912–1999),” *Monumenta Serica* 47 (1999), 505–14 (with list of publications after 1977); [Anon.] “A List of Publications of Paul L-M. Serruys up to 1977,” *Monumenta Serica* 33 (1977–78), ii–v.

(Datong, Shanxi; 1937–46), where he studied the local dialects and made descriptions of the local customs (wedding ceremonies, children’s riddles, and popular tales all published in *Folklore Studies*). His research was interrupted by internment in Weixian and house arrest in Beijing, which was followed by two years of study at the Fu-Jen University. After leaving China in 1949, he became a college chaplain at St. Mary’s College (Moraga, California; 1950–62), and did doctoral research work on early Chinese languages at the University of California at Berkeley (Ph.D. in 1956). His dissertation on the Han-era dialect compendium *Fangyan* 方言 was published as *The Chinese Dialects of Han Time According to Fang Yen* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959). He became a professor at Georgetown University (Washington D.C., 1962–65), where he taught courses in classical Chinese and modern Chinese dialectology; and subsequently at the University of Washington (Seattle, 1965–80). Besides offering courses in classical Chinese, he was asked to give a course on the Chinese writing system (starting from the *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字, he worked back to the Zhou and Shang bronzes and bone inscriptions), and he put aside his modern materials to apply himself to this new research field. In his approach, these texts were to be considered first and foremost as embodiments of language, and it was that language which was always to be the primary object of study. The result of this research was the article “Studies in the Language of the Shang Oracle Inscriptions.”<sup>71</sup> In the eyes of his former student and linguist W. South Coblin, this was a “monumental and seminal work” that “became for many years the universal point of departure for further grammatical studies in the inscriptions.”<sup>72</sup> After some time in Taiwan and the US, Paul Serruys retired in Belgium in 1994.

*Willem Grootaers.* The last Scheutist Sinologist of this generation was Willem Grootaers (1911–1999),<sup>73</sup> the son of the academic Ludovicus Grootaers (1885–1956), a well-known specialist of Flemish and Dutch dialects. Willem entered CICM in 1932, during his theology studies (1935–39). He also studied Phonetics and Dialectology in his father’s center at the Catholic University in Louvain, where he was trained in the methodology of linguistic geography. In 1939, he left for China and became assistant parish priest in Datong (1943–45), where he learned and described the local dialect. At the same time, he embarked on the study of the steles, the history, and the cultic practices in the temples in more than 300 villages along the Great Wall. After internment in Weixian and house arrest in Beijing, he became professor at Fu-Jen University in Beijing (1945–48), where he founded a Bureau of Linguistic Geography with as its main purpose the macroscopic classification of dialects. He continued his linguistic and ethnographic field surveys and published the first results in *Monumenta Serica* and *Folklore Studies*. After he was expelled from China, he had a short stay in Belgium where he taught Chinese to Scheutist students. In 1950, he moved to Japan where, after language training, he occupied academic positions at various universities and participated in a large project that resulted in the Linguistic Atlas of Japan: *Nihon gengo chizu* 日本言語地図, 6 vols. (Tōkyō: Kokuritsu Kokugo Kenkyūjo, 1966–1974). After 1983, he resumed contacts with his former students and colleagues in Beijing. With the help of Japanese specialists in Chinese linguistics (especially Dr. Iwata Rei 岩田礼, b. 1952) and the support of

<sup>71</sup> *T’oung Pao* 60 (1974), 12–120.

<sup>72</sup> South Coblin, “Paul L-M. Serruys,” 512.

<sup>73</sup> Willy F. Vande Walle, “Willem A. Grootaers, Linguist and Ethnographer,” in *History of the Catholic Church in China: From its Beginning to the Scheut Fathers and 20th Century*, edited by Ferdinand Verbiest Institute (Leuven: F. Verbiest Institute, 2015), 549–93 (with extensive list of his bibliography).

computational techniques, he continued his studies in linguistic geography in China. He had published about forty works before he moved to Japan, and he wrote 120 publications when living in Japan, including research from his time in China. The article “Initial ‘pə’ [把] in a Shansi Dialect: A Problem of Grammar,” in *T'oung-Pao* 42 (1953), 36–69, is a good example of his research method and of the questions he raised in his early period.

*Hendrik (Henry) Serruys*. The elder brother of Paul Serruys was Hendrik (Henry) Serruys (1911–1983).<sup>74</sup> The brothers Paul and Henry literally divided Asia between them: Henry concentrated on the Altaic fields (plus Chinese), while Paul took Chinese plus everything else which at that time was thought to make up Sino-Tibetan. Henry entered CICM in 1929 and left for China in 1936, where he became (assistant) parish priest in various mission stations on the border of the steppes, an area that was struck by organized crime, violence, and continuous unrest. These conditions were not conducive to scientific research, which he would not be able to focus on until the period of house arrest in Beijing, during which he also met Antoine Mostaert. Henry Serruys left China in 1948 and moved to Arlington, Virginia (near Washington D.C.), where CICM had opened a house (Missionhurst). There, he started his second career as a scholar (taking US citizenship in 1954). He wrote six books and 116 academic articles. One work was published in China at the end of the war: the French translation, with commentary, of *Beilu fengsu* of 1594: “Pei-Lou Fong-Sou 北虜風俗: Les Coutumes des Esclaves Septentrionaux de Siao Ta-Heng 肅大亨,” *Monumenta Serica* 10 (1945), 117–208. This work can be seen as containing the seeds of all his subsequent research. He had definitively chosen his area of focus: the Mongols during the darkest and least-known period of their history, the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and their relations with Ming China. In 1955, he obtained his Ph.D. at Columbia University, and his thesis became his first book, *Sino-ŷürčed Relations during the Yung-lo Period (1403–1424)* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz; 1955). His publications include three monumental volumes on Sino-Mongol relations during the Ming published in the series *Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques* by the Belgian Institute of Advanced Chinese Studies in Brussels (1959, 1967, 1976). His life took a new turning point in 1965, when Mostaert, before returning to Belgium, gave him his collection of Mongolian manuscripts and copies of documents that he and his predecessors had compiled in Ordos. Serruys started the systematic study of these documents around 1970, thus becoming an expert in Ordos para-religious texts and documents, on which he wrote a large number of articles before his death in 1983.

*Antoon (Antoine) Mostaert and Lodewijk (Louis) Schram*. It is worthwhile to add Antoine Mostaert (1881–1971)<sup>75</sup> and Louis Schram (1883–1971)<sup>76</sup> to this overview, even though they were not students of Mullie but contemporaries, and Mongolian specialists rather than Chinese. They are examples, like Henry Serruys, of scholars

<sup>74</sup>Françoise Aubin, “In Memoriam: Le R. P. Henry Serruys (Ssu Lü-Ssu 司律思), CICM (10 Juillet 1911–16 août 1983): Érudit Sino-Mongolisant,” *Monumenta Serica* 36 (1984–85), 555–624; [Anon.] “A List of Publications of Henry Serruys up to 1977,” *Monumenta Serica* 32 (1976), i–v.

<sup>75</sup>Joseph L. van Hecken, “MOSTAERT, Antoon Jules Edmond Maria Jozef, missionaris en Mongolisant,” in *Nationaal Biografisch Woordenboek*, vol. 7 (Brussels: Koninklijke Academie van België, 1977), 622–34. Joseph L. van Hecken, “Antoine Mostaert C.I.C.M. (1881–1971: Apôtre des Mongols et Doyen des Études mongoles),” *Neue Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft* 28 (1972), 30–43, 81–94, 185–99.

<sup>76</sup>See [www.kuleuven.be/verbiest/sml/schram](http://www.kuleuven.be/verbiest/sml/schram).

for whom the initial interest in Chinese language and culture led to the study of other cultures in China.

Mostaert entered CICM in 1899 and left for China in 1905. He settled in Southwestern Mongolia, where he fulfilled parish work in various locations (1905–28). During those years, he studied as autodidact the Mongolian dialect of Ordos and of the Monguor (in Chinese called the Tu people, *Tuzu* 土族), the classical language, the written archaic and middle Mongolian, ethnographic studies, and Chinese phonetics. He moved to Beijing in 1929, where he stayed until his departure for the US in 1948. He was offered a professorship at various universities, but declined because he wanted to devote his time to finishing his work on Mongolian studies. Already in the years 1949–52, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* published a series of his articles (“Sur quelques passages de *l’Histoire secrète des Mongols*”). In 1956, Serge Elisséeff (1889–1975) published an article on him and his publications in that same journal, with reference to the launch of a new series, *Scripta Mongolica*, published by Harvard University Press, in which Mostaert would publish four volumes (1952, 1956, 1959, and 1969). He remained in the US until 1965, when he returned to Belgium after an absence of sixty years. He wrote forty-two books in his lifetime.

A quasi-contemporary of Mostaert was Lodewijk (Louis) Schram, who entered the Scheut congregation in 1902. What is striking about his training is that he was exceptionally granted the permission to study anthropology and history of religions at the University of Leiden (the Netherlands). Schram left for China in 1909 and spent a long time in Xining 西寧, after which he moved to an area in southern Gansu Province, bordering Tibet, which was the crossroad of various remote ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups. Schram became interested in the Monguor, a Mongol group who had emigrated to this region in the fourteenth century. In 1932, Schram published a monograph on the marriage customs of the *Turen* with *Variétés Sinologiques* in Shanghai.<sup>77</sup> After his expulsion from China, he joined the Scheutist fathers in Arlington and successively published three volumes on *The Monguors of the Kansu-Tibetan Frontier* with the American Philosophical Society (the first volume with a preface by Owen Lattimore, 1900–1989).<sup>78</sup> In 1958, he retired in Belgium.

The academic research accomplished by these Scheutist researchers is impressive. It should be underscored that it was preceded by a long-term experience inside China, often in difficult living conditions, before their work became fully available to the academic world following their move to the US or Japan. At that time, there was no place yet at Belgian universities for such scholarship. Fortunately, the books and documents of these scholars, together with book collections by other Scheutists, are now preserved at the Scheut Memorial Library in Louvain (Leuven).<sup>79</sup>

<sup>77</sup>*Le mariage chez les T’ou-Jen du Kan-Sou (Chine)*, Variétés sinologiques 58 (Chang-hai: Impr. de la Mission catholique, 1932); Chinese translation: *Gansu Turen de hunyin* 甘肅土人的婚姻 (Shenyang: Liaoning jiaoyu chubanshe, 1998).

<sup>78</sup>“The Monguors of the Kansu-Tibetan Frontier: Their Origin, History, and Social Organization,” *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 44.1 (1954), 1–138; “Part II. Their Religious Life,” *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 47.1 (1957), 1–164; “Part III. Records of the Monguor Clans. History of the Monguors in Huangchung and the Chronicles of the Lu Family,” *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 51.3 (1961), 1–117.

<sup>79</sup>[www.kuleuven.be/verbiest/sml](http://www.kuleuven.be/verbiest/sml).

### Belgian Institute for Advanced Chinese Studies (IBHEC)

While Sinology with a focus on China as such developed very slowly at Belgian universities, the creation of the Belgian Institute for Advanced Chinese Studies in 1929 would bring scholars together in an interdisciplinary and interuniversity context, giving research a new impetus. The origin of this institute can be linked to initiatives supported by the Republican government in China.

#### Origin

The Belgian Institute for Advanced Chinese Studies (L'Institut belge des hautes études chinoises—Het Belgisch Instituut voor hogere Chinese Studiën) was founded in 1929 under the patronage of the Ministry of Science and Arts and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.<sup>80</sup> Its mission was to engage in activities likely to promote the study and scientific knowledge of China: “the study of Chinese civilization in its most diverse manifestations and in its broadest sense: history, geography, language and literature, religions, art and archaeology, ethnography folklore, etc.” The Institute could organize courses, edit publications, and provide subsidies for study trips or excavations.<sup>81</sup> Its seat was established in the Royal Museums of Art and History in Brussels (Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire—Koninklijke Musea voor Kunst en Geschiedenis). It was the most important Sinological institution in Belgium before World War II.

The history of its foundation shows how Chinese and Belgian political, diplomatic, and commercial interests were joined together to promote the study of China in Belgium. A strategic figure behind the scenes was Han Rujia 韓汝甲, who was born in Guiyang (Guizhou) in 1886. He studied at the translation department (specialization French) of *Jingshi daxuetang* 京師大學堂 (later integrated into Peking University and Beijing Normal University) and came to Belgium in 1907 to study commerce at the University of Brussels.<sup>82</sup> After the establishment of the Republic, the new Chinese government undertook several steps to rehabilitate the image of China in the world and to gain the sympathy of progressive circles abroad. Han Rujia, who had moved to Paris, seems to have played a significant role in this endeavor. He was a strong nationalist and activist who was evidently inclined to take initiatives in the name of China, despite not occupying any official position or having received a mandate from anyone—though he did have some links with the Republican government.<sup>83</sup> First, Han was reported as the intermediary who constituted Sinophile parliamentary committees in various European countries, such as Spain, France, England, Germany, and Belgium in the

<sup>80</sup>On its history, see Jean-Marie Simonet, “L'Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises: Ses origines et son histoire,” in *Liber memorialis 1835–1985*, edited by Herman De Meulenaere and Jean-Charles Balty (Brussels: Koninklijke Musea voor Kunst en Geschiedenis/Musées Royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, 1985), 211–15; Hubert Durt, “Les soixante-quinze ans de l'Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises,” in *Institut belge des hautes études chinoises—Belgisch instituut voor hogere Chinese studiën. 1929–2004*, edited by Catherine Joos, Claire Kirschen, and Jean-Marie Simonet (Brussels: IBHEC/BIHCS, 2004), 11–14; on its archives see Geert Leloup, “Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises,” in *Archives institutionnelles des Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire et archives des ASBL hébergées par l'institution*, edited by Geert Leloup and Valérie Montens (Brussels: Archives générales du royaume; 2008), 131–41.

<sup>81</sup>See “Statuts,” in *Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises (IBHEC)*, No.1, 6.

<sup>82</sup>Wang Qingyu, *Liu Bi xuesheng shi*, 413, no. 275.

<sup>83</sup>Ge Fuping and Pierre-Etienne Will, “Pelliot et l'Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises (1919–1945),” in *Paul Pelliot: de l'histoire à la légende*, ed. Jean-Pierre Drège and Michel Zink (Paris: Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, 2013), 273–74.

years 1912–1913.<sup>84</sup> During World War I, Han spent two years in Japan (1916–1918) with a scholarship from the American government.<sup>85</sup>

The aftermath of the Peace Treaty of Versailles (1919) indirectly contributed to the reinforcement of the Chinese nationalist theses among political and intellectual circles in Europe, despite the transfer of the Shandong concession from Germany to Japan.<sup>86</sup> In this context, Han Rujia returned to Europe, officially having been sent by the Ministry of Transport to investigate the state of transportation.<sup>87</sup> However, he also became actively involved in the establishment of Institutes of Advanced Chinese Studies in various European countries, with financial support from the Chinese government. One of the earliest of these institutes was the Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises in Paris, established by the French socialist politician Paul Painlevé (1863–1933) and Han Rujia in 1920. The Institute had a difficult and controversial start, because the idea to make it a cultural showcase created and financed by the young Chinese Republic led to the initial exclusion of local Sinologists such as Paul Pelliot (1878–1945).<sup>88</sup> Han also promoted the creation of the Belgian Institute of Advanced Chinese Studies. Although he is not mentioned as one of its founders nor as a participant in the board meetings, he managed to gain support for the project from the socialist politicians Emile Vandervelde (1866–1938), Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs (1925–1927),<sup>89</sup> and Camille Huysmans (1871–1968), Minister of Arts and Sciences (1925–1927), who earlier as Secretary General of the Second International had had frequent contacts with Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925). In 1927, Han was also in contact with the Sinologist Jesuit Louis Van Hée and his disciple Carl Hentze (see below). All this support ultimately led to the establishment of the Belgian Institute in 1929.<sup>90</sup>

Significant for the 1920s is that the question of financing the Institute was the responsibility of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In agreement with the Chinese authorities, it was decided that the Institute would receive a grant from the Sino-Belgian Commission for Education and Philanthropy (Commission Sino-Belge d'Instruction et de Philanthropie) established in Shanghai in 1925 in accordance with the agreements concerning the liquidation of the Boxer Indemnity. This was an arrangement similar to the financing of the Paris Institute. The capital of the Belgian Institute of Advanced Chinese Studies was nominally fixed at 40,000 US dollars.<sup>91</sup>

The Belgian Institute for Advanced Chinese Studies was established as a non-profit organization and placed under the presidency of General Raoul Pontus (1868–1947), who was secretary-general of the Société d'Études Sino-Belge, a commercial association founded in 1902 by Raoul Warocqué (1870–1917), a Belgian industrialist who also invested in railroads and coalmines in China.<sup>92</sup> The secretary of the Board was the priest

<sup>84</sup>E.g. “La República Xina-Hain You Kia,” *El Poble Català*, 10, no. 2.951 (11 April 1913) (Biblioteca de Catalunya) (*Archivo China España, 1800–1950*, consulta 15 de septiembre de 2021, <http://ace.uoc.edu/items/show/102>).

<sup>85</sup>Ge and Will, “Pelliot et l’Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises (1919–1945),” 274.

<sup>86</sup>Simonet, “L’Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises,” 211.

<sup>87</sup>中華民國官職資料庫 (nccu.edu.tw).

<sup>88</sup>On this history and Han’s role, see Ge and Will, “Pelliot et l’Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises (1919–1945),” 271–95.

<sup>89</sup>On Vandervelde’s policy towards China, see Jens Vermeersch, “Emile Vandervelde en China,” *Belgisch Tijdschrift voor Nieuwste Geschiedenis/ Revue Belge d’Histoire Contemporaine* 23.1–2 (1992), 91–130.

<sup>90</sup>Simonet, “L’Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises,” 211.

<sup>91</sup>Simonet, “L’Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises,” 213–14.

<sup>92</sup>Simonet, “L’Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises,” 212.

Bruno Belpaire (1885–1979), an autodidact with also an interest in Tang literature.<sup>93</sup> Among the initial patrons of the Institute were the presidents of the four Belgian universities at that time (Ghent, Brussels, Louvain, Liège), as well as (former) Belgian ambassadors and investors in China, and representatives of the banking world and religious congregations.<sup>94</sup> Carl Hentze and Louis Van Hée were appointed as the Institute's director and deputy director, respectively.

### *Two Figures: Outside and Inside Academia*

Before proceeding with a description of the Institute, it is worthwhile to pause at two scholars, who were also at its origin. One of these scholars did not belong to academia, while the other did.

*Louis (Aloïsius) Van Hée (Vanhée).*<sup>95</sup> Louis Van Hée (1873–1951) was born in Belgium but had an exceptionally international education for his time: he attended the first three years of secondary education at a school of the White Fathers (Missionaries of Africa) in Algiers (Algeria), and the two final years in an apostolic school in Littlehampton in England. He entered the Society of Jesus directly in Shanghai (1893), where he had his full Jesuit formation and was ordained a priest in 1905.

Van Hée seems to have excelled in Chinese, to the extent that during his philosophical and theological studies he was appointed “assistant to the director of Chinese (Jesuit) periodicals” (from 1899), a position that he continued to hold after his ordination in 1905. The director in question was Li Wenyu 李問漁 (*hao Di* 杓) (1840–1911), the most prolific Chinese-Christian author of the late-Qing period and the first Chinese editor of a Chinese-language newspaper in modern China's emerging publishing capital Shanghai. In addition to having published seventy monographs, Li was the founder and editor-in-chief of two long-running newspapers: *Yiwen lu* 益聞錄 (*I-wen-lou*, lit. “Record of Useful News”), founded in 1878 and continued under different names until 1911,<sup>96</sup> and *Shengxin bao* 聖心報 (*Messenger du Sacré-Coeur*), a monthly journal that appeared from 1887 to 1949.<sup>97</sup> The first newspaper offered the latest in “Western knowledge and science” (*xixue* 西學) through translations from leading Euro-American journals. It appears that Van Hée specialized in these articles about science and technology, which he also offered to other periodicals in China.<sup>98</sup> As early as 1903,

<sup>93</sup>Most of his works were published in the late 1950s and early 1960s, but they were severely evaluated by scholars such as Angus C. Graham (1919–1991), A. F. P. Hulswé (1910–1993) and D. R. Jonker (1925–1973), because of his insufficient knowledge of Chinese.

<sup>94</sup>IBHEC, no.1, 3.

<sup>95</sup>“Louis Van Hee,” *Archivum Provinciae Belgicae Septentrionalis*, nr. 6517; *Catalogus sociorum et officiorum Provinciae Franciae Societatis Jesu*, 1893–1914, [www.sjweb.info/arsis/Catalog-1892.cfm](http://www.sjweb.info/arsis/Catalog-1892.cfm).

<sup>96</sup>*Gezhi yiwen huibao* 格致益聞匯報 (*I-wen-lou et Revue scientifique*) between 1898 and 1899; and *Huibao* 匯報 (*Revue pour tous*) from 1899 to 1911.

<sup>97</sup>Joachim Kurtz, “The Works of Li Wenyu (1840–1911): Bibliography of a Chinese-Jesuit Publicist,” *Wakumon* 或問 11 (2006), 149–58. Joachim Kurtz, “Messenger of the Sacred Heart: Li Wenyu (1840–1911), and the Jesuit Periodical Press in Late Qing Shanghai,” in *From Woodblocks to the Internet: Chinese Publishing and Print Culture in Transition, circa 1800 to 2008*, ed. Cynthia Brokaw and Christopher A. Reed (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 81–109, here 104.

<sup>98</sup>For an overview of the periodicals in which Van Hée's articles were published, see Yang Huiyu 杨惠玉, “Lun He Shishen, Pei Chuzi, Ge Shi dui Zhongguo gudai shuxue de renshi” 论赫师慎、佩初兹、葛式对中国古代数学的认识 (On Studies by Van Hée, Petrucci, and Gauchet on Ancient Chinese Mathematics), *Shanghai jiaotong daxue xuebao* 上海交通大学学报, 2010.5, 55.

Van Hée edited a selection of these articles under the title *Qianqi wanmiao* 千奇萬妙 (*La science amusante*).<sup>99</sup> In 1907, Van Hée was appointed professor (of French) at Université l'Aurore (Zhendan daxue 震旦大學). After an extra period of Jesuit formation in Belgium (1910), he carried out one year of apostolate in Nanjing, where he was struck by typhus, which obliged him to return definitively to Belgium and which affected him for the rest of his life.

As far as his health allowed him, he continued to be engaged in publishing. He is probably best known as the author of about fifteen articles and short monographs on the early (Flemish) Jesuit missionaries in China. In this regard, he was one of the first to study the texts of these missionaries as a “Sinologist” (an expression used by Paul Pelliot in describing Van Hée),<sup>100</sup> studying the Chinese writings of these missionaries and not merely their work in European languages. As such, he contributed in a significant way to the work of other scholars on missionaries, such as early research on Ferdinand Verbiest by Henri Bosmans S.J. (1852–1928),<sup>101</sup> and on Adam Schall von Bell by Alfons Văth S.J. (1874–1937).<sup>102</sup> This focus on Chinese sources also allowed Van Hée to address less well-known topics, such as the use of the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola in the early Jesuit mission in China.<sup>103</sup> He was, moreover, the author of some eight articles about mathematics in China in *T'oung Pao* (mainly published between 1911 and 1914), thus being the first to introduce this research topic in Sinological periodicals.<sup>104</sup> In the years 1927–1929, he was involved in the creation of the Belgian Institute for Advanced Chinese Studies and was temporarily its vice-director. During World War II, he was asked to revise articles on China for the Herder Verlag in Freiburg im Breisgau (Germany), a publishing house that specialized in Catholic theology. He was also the private teacher of Carl Hentze.

*Carl Philipp Hentze.* Carl Philipp Hentze (1883–1975), originally an artist, was born in Antwerp into a German merchant family and received his art education (in painting) both in Germany and Belgium. Around 1910, Hentze first came into contact with Chinese art at the Berlin Ethnological Museum, which ultimately motivated him to study Sinology. In 1912, he moved to Berlin, where he began to acquire knowledge

<sup>99</sup>Under the Chinese name He Erzhan 赫爾瞻; 2 ce (Shanghai: T'ou-sé-wéi [Tushanwan 土山灣], 1903).

<sup>100</sup>Paul Pelliot, “Nécrologie: Henri Bosmans S.J.,” *T'oung Pao* 26 (1929), 190–199, here 191.

<sup>101</sup>Louis Van Hée, *Ferdinand Verbiest, écrivain chinois* (Brugge: Louis De Plancke, 1913); summarized by Henri Bosmans, “Les écrits chinois de Verbiest,” *Revue des questions scientifiques* 74.1 (July 1913), 272–98; they also collaborated on the preparation of an edition of Verbiest's correspondence.

<sup>102</sup>His role is recognized both on the title page and in the introduction of Alfons Văth, *Johann Adam Schall von Bell S.J., Missionar in China, kaiserlicher Astronom und Ratgeber am Hofe von Peking 1592–1666: Ein Lebens- und Zeitbild* (Cologne: Bachem, 1933).

<sup>103</sup>*La pratique des exercices de Saint-Ignace dans l'ancienne mission de Chine* (Enghien: Bibliothèque des exercices, 1920).

<sup>104</sup>For a list, search in the electronic index of *T'oung Pao* under “Vanhee” (later he more commonly used Van Hée): <https://brill.com/view/journals/tpao/tpao-overview.xml?language=en>. See also “Le Hai-tao souan-king de Lieou,” *T'oung pao* 20 (1921), 51–70 on the *Haidao suanjing* 海島算經 (a mathematical work providing practical solutions of surveying from a distance using geometry) by Liu Hui 劉徽 (fl. 3rd century). See also Yang Huiyu, “Lun He Shishen,” 55–56; Yang Huiyu 杨惠玉, “Lun xifang hanxue zazhi *Tongbao* ji qi dui Zhongguo keji de guanzhu” 论西方汉学杂志《通报》及其对中国科技的关注 (On the Western Sinology Journal *T'oung Pao* and Its Study on Chinese Science and Technology), *Fudan xuebao* 复旦学报, 2007.4, 77; Yang Huiyu 杨惠玉, “He Shishen guanyu Zhongguo buding fenxi yanjiu de tanxi” 赫师慎关于中国不定分析研究之探析 (On L. van Hée's Study of Chinese Indeterminate Analysis), *Shanghai jiaotong daxue xuebao* 上海交通大学学报, 2006.5, 43–47.



of Chinese language, history, and culture, while his painting activities increasingly receded to the background. After the war, he returned to Belgium and stayed for four years in a Jesuit college in Louvain where he became a student of Louis Van Hée. He remained connected to the arts, and in 1925 he co-founded *Artibus Asiae*, the well-known journal of East Asian Art, with the art historian Alfred Salmomy (1890–1958) from Cologne. On the basis of his academic merits, Minister Camille Huysmans appointed him lecturer in Chinese written language, cultural history, archaeology, and art history of China at the Higher Institute for Art History and Archaeology of Ghent University in 1926. This position had been vacant for a decade after the departure of Steenackers. Hentze's first major publication was on Chinese tomb figures.<sup>105</sup> In 1932, Hentze was promoted to professor. Together with Van Hée, he stood at the origin of the Belgian Institute for Advanced Chinese Studies, of which he became director and where he taught for many years. In 1942, he became full professor of Sinology and director of the Chinese Institute at Frankfurt University, where he retired in 1951. He is the author of ten monographs and forty articles on a wide range of art historical subjects, including Shang bronzes, lunar myths and symbols, ancient jade objects, and funerary rituals, some of which were elaborated in comparative perspective with ancient South America.<sup>106</sup>

### Activities

The Institute grew rapidly in the first ten years of its existence.<sup>107</sup> Academically speaking, it became the major Belgian center for the study of China in the pre-war period. The yearly reports mention a substantial number of courses, though the number of students is rarely documented.<sup>108</sup> One of the Institute's most active members was Louis de La Vallée Poussin, who had retired from Ghent University. Until his death in 1938, he taught courses on (Chinese) Buddhism, and he was joined in his lectures by Etienne Lamotte from 1935 onwards. De La Vallée Poussin also used his academic network to increase the international reputation of the Institute and to found the Institute's publication *Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques*. The first issue included articles by Paul Demiéville, Henri Maspéro (1883–1945), Paul Pelliot, and Arthur Waley (1889–1966); the first two issues of the *Mélanges* received the Prix Stanislas Julien in 1935. After World War II (from Volume 11, 1956–1959), these *Mélanges* were transformed

<sup>105</sup> *Les figurines de la céramique funéraire: matériaux pour l'étude des croyances et du folklore de la Chine ancienne* (Hellerau bei Dresden: Avalun, 1927); *Chinese Tomb Figures: A Study in the Beliefs and Folklore of Ancient China* (London: Goldston, 1928).

<sup>106</sup> Manfred Porkert, "Carl Hentze (1883–1975)," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 128 (1978), 5–11 (with a bibliography of his publications); *Liber Memorialis* (1960) of Ghent University: [www.ugentmemorialis.be/catalog/000000698](http://www.ugentmemorialis.be/catalog/000000698); Greta Beckmann, *Carl Philipp Hentze (1883–1975): Sinologie und Künstler—eine Wiederbesinnung* (Gossenberg: Ostasian, 2012): chapters "Aus dem Leben Carl HENTZEs," 1–11; "Schriften von Carl HENTZE," 123–64.

<sup>107</sup> The following information is based on the six reports that were published before World War II: *Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises (IBHEC) No.1: Rapports (1929 à 1931)* (Brussels: Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, 1931); *No.2: Rapports (1932 à 1933)* (Brussels: Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, 1933); *No.3: Rapports (1933 à 1935)* (Brussels: Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, 1935); *No.4: Rapports (1935 à 1936)* (Brussels: Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, 1937); *No.5: Rapports (1936 à 1937)* (Brussels: Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, 1938); *No.6: Rapports (1937 à 1938)* (Brussels: Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire, 1939).

<sup>108</sup> An exception is the reference to the course of first year Chinese that was attended by around ten students (*une dizaine d'élèves*) in the report of November 29, 1933; see *IBHEC*, No.2, 14.

into a series of monographs at the suggestion of Étienne Lamotte. After Lamotte's death, the aforementioned Hubert Durt took over as editor-in-chief, a position he would hold for more than forty years, until his death in 2018. The monograph series includes works on Buddhism by de La Vallée Poussin and Lamotte, as well as works by the next generation of Buddhist scholars such as Leon Hurvitz (1923–1992), Charles Willemen (b. 1941), Cristina Scherrer-Schaub (b. 1947), and Michel Mohr. The series also included works by scholars on Mongolian studies, such as Henry Serruys and Antoine Mostaert, as well as an early work on Chinese temples by Willem A. Grootaers. Finally, in the field of Chinese aesthetics, the series included a work by Pierre Ryckmans on painting, and by Georges Goormaghtigh on the art of *qin* music.<sup>109</sup>

From its foundation, the Institute also provided Chinese language courses. Initially Van Hée was in charge of them but, presumably for health reasons, he was replaced by the above-mentioned Scheutist Jozef Van Durme, who taught Chinese language and literature.

One early focus of interest of the Institute was Chinese and East Asian art. Carl Hentze taught classes on the art and archaeology of China and Central Asia. There were several other courses taught by persons who were not Sinologists in the strict sense of the word, but self-made scholars on Asian art. Gisbert Combaz (1869–1941), who also taught at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, was a painter, lithographer, poster artist, and art historian; he gave up his legal career to dedicate himself to art education.<sup>110</sup> He taught courses and published on the evolution of the *stūpa* in Asia, on imperial tombs and palaces in China, and on Chinese painting. There were also courses by Adolphe Spruyt (1871–1956), one of the co-founders of the Institute. Adolphe and his brother Philippe Spruyt (1868–1908) were both medical doctors and had travelled to China to oversee the medical service at the railway construction yards.<sup>111</sup> Philippe arrived in China in 1898 and was responsible for medical care service on the Beijing–Hankou railway project. He died relatively young in 1908, and his collection of 550 stereoscopic glass plates has been preserved in the archives of the Ghent University Central Library. Adolphe worked as a medical doctor on the Bian-Luo 汴洛 railway in Luoyang between 1905 and 1909. During his stay in China, Adolphe Spruyt made medical observations which resulted in a book entitled *Le Chinois: régime, hygiène, mentalité* (Bruxelles: Hayez; 1909) on Chinese diet, hygiene, eating habits, and topics such as superstition and epidemiology. He also visited archaeological sites (e.g. the Longmen caves together with Edouard Chavannes (1865–1918) in 1907)<sup>112</sup> and acquired Chinese antiquities. On his return to Belgium, he donated some of the Han ceramics to the Royal Museum of Art and History. At the end of his life he donated a large part of his remaining collection to the Bijloke Museum (currently STAM) in Ghent. Adolphe Spruyt was the president of the third section of the Royal Museum (covering East Asia) and was closely connected to the Institute, where he taught classes on Chinese art for many years. In response to a request of

<sup>109</sup>For a table of contents of all the issues: <https://chinese-institute.be/publications-2/>.

<sup>110</sup>René Grousset and Jeannine Auboyer, "Gisbert Combaz," *Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques* 7 (1945), i–ix; Simonet, "L'Institut Belge des Hautes Etudes Chinoises," 214.

<sup>111</sup>Charles Lagrange, "The Beijing–Hankou Railway Project and the Belgian Doctors Philippe and Adolphe Spruyt," in *A Belgian Passage to China (1870–1930)*, 100–143.

<sup>112</sup>"Souvenirs d'un Voyage à la Montagne Sacrée de Long-Men," *Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques* 1 (1932), 242–62.

the Chinese Ambassador in Belgium to make the accomplishments of the Nanjing government better known, the Institute also organized a temporary exhibition “La Chine Nouvelle (1912–1936)” in the Museums.<sup>113</sup>

The library of the Institute was founded in 1929 based on the collection of the Sino-Belgian Society, which was permanently housed in the Museums and entrusted to Marthe Van Bomberghen (d. 1964), treasurer of the Belgian Society for Oriental Studies, which was also located in the Museums. She also took care of editing the *Mélanges*.<sup>114</sup> Purchases and donations of Chinese and Belgian origin made this library the most important center of Sinological documentation in Belgium. It included the Japanese reprint of the *Gujin tushu jicheng* 古今圖書集成,<sup>115</sup> donated to Pontus in 1914 by Lu Zhengxiang 陸徵祥 (Lou Tseng-Tsiang, 1870–1949). Lou had been Minister of Foreign Affairs four times in the early years of the Republic and became a Benedictine monk in the St. Andrew Abbey of Loppem (Bruges) in 1927, after the death of his Belgian wife in 1926.<sup>116</sup> This encyclopedia, together with other parts of the collection, were lost in the 1946 fire that burned down a wing of the Museums.<sup>117</sup>

This initial impetus of the Institute was unfortunately radically interrupted by World War II and the burning of the Museums in 1946. It was not until the 1960s that a reorganization of the Institute and its library was undertaken. The Institute remained a point of contact for scholars related to Chinese studies and especially East Asian art under the impetus of Jean-Marie Simonet, curator of the Museums. Conferences and courses continued to be organized, but the focus of research moved to universities where full Sinology programs were gradually being developed.

### *Oriental Institutes and the Institutionalization of Sinology Programs after World War II*

Belgian universities established Oriental Institutes, focusing on languages and cultures from the East, but it took some time before Sinology as such fully developed in these institutes.

#### *University of Liège*

The first Oriental Institute was established at the University of Liège. Semitic languages had been taught there since 1837, and Sanskrit since 1880, followed by Indo-Iranian languages, Assyriology, and Egyptology in the 1890s and early 1900s. As mentioned before, there was also a course of Chinese taught by Steenackers, which ceased after his death in 1912. All these branches of Orientalism were no more than elective courses, which did not lead students to any particular degree. Therefore, in 1922, the Institut Supérieur d'Histoire et de Littératures Orientales (Higher Institute of Oriental History and Literatures) was created and annexed to the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters. It was allowed to confer undergraduate and graduate degrees, but studies of

<sup>113</sup>See overview *IBHEC*, No.4, 23ff.

<sup>114</sup>Simonet, “L’Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises,” 214; *IBHEC*, No.4, 19.

<sup>115</sup>Simonet, “L’Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises,” 214; this is most probably the copy mentioned in *IBHEC*, No.1, 16

<sup>116</sup>Lu Zhengxiang is first mentioned in the committee of patronage in 1933 (*IBHEC*, No.3, 5). His archives with an extensive collection of letters are now located in the KADOC (KU Leuven): <https://kadoc.kuleuven.be/>.

<sup>117</sup>Durt, “Les soixante-quinze ans de l’Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises,” 12–13.

Chinese or about China were not included.<sup>118</sup> It was only in 1996 when a Centre d'études chinoises was again created at the University of Liège, but this was not linked to a degree program. The French Sinologist Alain Arrault (France, b. 1960), who had obtained his Ph.D. in Paris with a dissertation on Shao Yong 邵雍 (1011–1077), was briefly in charge of the center until he became a member of the École Française d'Extrême Orient in 2000. In 2006, the University of Liège opened a Confucius Institute that offers courses to the University. The Associate Professor is Eric Florence (b. 1969), whose work is in the field of political sociology and focuses on the processes of identification and representations of rural workers in contemporary China.

### *Catholic University of Louvain*

At the Catholic University of Louvain, an Oriental Institute had been established in 1936, bringing together all the specialists within the university (from the Theology and Arts Faculties). It aimed at philological instruction of the languages and critical teaching of the history of the ancient peoples of the East. The Institute consisted of four sections: Hamito-Semitic, Indo-European, Far Eastern, and Christian East. In 1966, twenty-three languages and cultures were studied at the Institute. As already mentioned, Chinese was part of the study of Buddhism by Étienne Lamotte, who was director of the Institute between 1950 and 1959, but there was no independent focus on Chinese languages and cultures. Still, there were some classes of Chinese taught by Lamotte's assistant, Robert Shih (Shi Jieyun 史接雲, 1926–1983). He was probably the first native speaker to teach Chinese at a Belgian university, though his Ningbo dialect made his Mandarin at times imprecise. He arrived in Belgium in 1948, obtained a Ph.D. in philosophy on Confucian ethics at Louvain in 1955, and published a French translation of the first three *juan* of the *Gaoseng zhuan* 高僧傳, the compilation of biographies of eminent monks by Huijiao 慧皎 (497–554).<sup>119</sup> Among the small group of his students there were Hubert Durt, Pierre Ryckmans, and Jean-Marie Simonet (b. 1934). Both Simonet and Ryckmans were law students who became friends through their passion for art, calligraphy, and China. Simonet obtained his Ph.D. in Paris under the direction of Rolf Stein (1911–1999) and Nicole Vandier-Nicolas (1906–1987) with a dissertation on the treatise on calligraphy by the Song poet Jiang Kui 姜夔 (1155–1221). After holding diplomatic positions in Hong Kong and Beijing, he became curator at the Museums of Art and History in Brussels where he also took care of the library of the Belgian Institute of Advanced Chinese Studies.<sup>120</sup>

After the split of the university in 1968 into the Dutch-speaking Katholieke Universiteit Leuven in the ancient city of Leuven, and the French-speaking Université Catholique de Louvain in the newly created Louvain-la-Neuve, the

<sup>118</sup> *Mélanges de philologie orientale*, v–xvi.

<sup>119</sup> Shih Jai-Yuin, "Le problème de la nature humaine et la morale dans le confucianisme" (Ph.D. diss., Louvain, 1955); Robert Shih, *Biographies des moines éminents (Kao seng tchouan) de Houei-kiao: Première partie: Biographies des premiers traducteurs (Bibliothèque du Muséon)*, 54 (Louvain: Institut orientaliste, 1968); Philippe Paquet, *Simon Leys: Navigateur entre les mondes* (Paris: Gallimard, 2016), 116–18. Russell Webb, "Robert Shih (1927–5.5.1983)," *Buddhist Studies Review* 1.1 (1983–84), 50.

<sup>120</sup> "La Suite au Traité de calligraphie' de Jiang Kui: Traduction et commentaires pour servir à l'étude de la terminologie et de l'esthétique de la théorie calligraphique chinoise" (Thèse: Doctorat 3ème cycle, Paris, 1969). Paquet, *Simon Leys*, 79–80.

Oriental Institute was also split into two parts.<sup>121</sup> Since most of the professors who dealt with the Far East were French-speaking, the Far East department moved to Louvain-la-Neuve. At the French-speaking university, the problematic succession of Lamotte and the death of Robert Shih were fatal for the study of Buddhism and the Far East. At the Flemish university, the Oriental Institute expanded the program to a four-year curriculum in 1974. Four years later, it obtained the status of a department within the Faculty of Letters and Philosophy and began a four-year program in Studies of the Far East. When China opened its doors in 1978, a Sinology program was established at the initiative of Rector Piet De Somer (1917–1985) and headed by Ulrich Libbrecht (1928–2017). Libbrecht obtained his Ph.D. in Leiden (1971) with a dissertation on Chinese mathematics in the thirteenth century: Qin Jiushao's 秦九韶 (c. 1202–1261) *Shushu jiu Zhang* 數書九章 (Mathematical treatise in nine sections).<sup>122</sup> He became a strong promotor of comparative philosophy and founder of the School of Comparative Philosophy in Antwerp. In the 1980s, he was joined by Willy Vande Walle (b. 1949), who obtained his Ph.D. in Ghent (1976) on Xiao Ziliang's 蕭子良 (460–494) treatise on Buddhist penitence and confession (*Jingzhuzi jingxing famen* 淨住子淨行法門 [Introduction to pure conduct for disciples who dwell in purity and quietude]).<sup>123</sup> He was the founder and head of the Japanese program at Leuven until his retirement in 2015. Nicolas Standaert (b. 1959), who in 1985 obtained his Ph.D. in Leiden under the supervision of Erik Zürcher (1928–2008), replaced Libbrecht after his retirement in 1993. Together with Ad Dudink (b. 1947), who likewise had written his dissertation with Zürcher in Leiden (1995), they further developed the study of the Sino-European cultural contacts of the late-Ming and early-Qing. In 1995, Carine Defoort (b. 1961; Ph.D. KU Leuven 1993), who had written a dissertation on the He Guanzi 鶡冠子 (Pheasant Cap Master), became the second professor of Sinology, with a special interest in pre-Qin philosophy and its reinterpretation in the late Qing and early Republic. She was also the editor of *Contemporary Chinese Thought* for twenty-three years. Several early alumni of the new KU Leuven Sinology program obtained Ph.D. degrees at US universities and pursued academic careers outside Belgium: Roel Sterckx (b. 1969; Ph.D. Cambridge 1997) is professor at the University of Cambridge, Hilde De Weerdts (b. 1969; Ph.D. Harvard 1998) was professor at the University of Leiden before joining the History Department at KU Leuven in 2022, and Griet Vankeerberghen (b. 1964; Ph.D. Princeton 1997) is Assistant Professor at McGill University, to name only a few.

### University of Ghent

The University of Ghent established a Higher Institute of Oriental, Eastern European, and African Linguistics and History within the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters in 1958. It offered undergraduate and graduate degrees.<sup>124</sup> Sinology was gradually

<sup>121</sup>On the history of Oriental studies in Leuven, see *Les études orientales à l'Université de Louvain depuis 1834*. For a short article on the Oriental Institute, see Hubert Durt and Paul Servais, "Het Instituut voor Oriëntalistiek (1936–1968)," in *Orientalia: Oosterse studies en bibliotheken*, 173–75.

<sup>122</sup>*Chinese Mathematics in the Thirteenth Century: The Shu-shu chiu-chang of Ch'in Chiu-shao* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1973).

<sup>123</sup>"Methode van rein gedrag voor de volgeling van het reine vertoeven' (*Ching-chu-tzu-ching-hsing fa-men*): een boeddhistisch compendium over de penitentie door Hsiao Tzu-liang (460–494)" (Ph.D. diss, Ghent University, 1976).

<sup>124</sup>"Plechtige opening van het Hoger Instituut voor Oosterse, Oosteuropese en Afrikaanse Taalkunde en Geschiedenis (30 mei 1958)," *Tijdschrift van de Rijksuniversiteit te Gent: Extra-nummer van De Brug* (July

introduced. With the departure of Carl Hentze in 1943, the chair of Chinese Archeology and Art and Classical Chinese Language had remained vacant. Daniël Ellegiers (1921–2009) was appointed as lecturer in modern Japanese and modern and classical Chinese in 1959. He subsequently became responsible for courses on East Asian political, social, and cultural history. Before his appointment, Ellegiers completed graduate studies in Chinese and Japanese Languages and Literature at the University of Utrecht, where Mullie was one of his teachers, and where he obtained his Ph.D. with a dissertation on the history of Chengde fu 承德府 (1957).<sup>125</sup> Previously, he had lived in Japan (1953–55, of which one year at Osaka University) and in China (Aomen, 1956) with a commission from UNESCO. He was the head of the Seminar on Japanese Language and Culture until his retirement in 1986.<sup>126</sup> In 1971, William Acker (1907–1974) joined the Institute as a professor. He was born in New York, obtained his Ph.D. at Leiden University in 1940 with a dissertation on “Some T’ang and Pre-T’ang Texts on Chinese Painting,” and had been librarian and scientific collaborator at the Sinological Institute in Leiden (1965) and extraordinary professor in East Asian history at the University of Utrecht (1969–1971).<sup>127</sup> After his early death in 1974, the chair remained vacant until Charles Willemen filled it until his retirement in 2007. Willemen obtained his Ph.D. at Ghent University (1975) on “The Essence of Metaphysics: *Abhidharmahrdaya*” (i.e. *A-pi-tan xin lun* 阿毘曇心論 [T. 1550], Heart of the Abhidharma) and revived the earlier tradition of Buddhist studies at Ghent University. Two of his students, Bart Desein (b. 1965; Ph.D. Ghent 1994) and Ann Heirman (b. 1965; Ph.D. Ghent 1998), wrote dissertations on topics in Buddhist studies and were appointed to the department in the late 1990s. They provided a new impetus to research by creating the Ghent Centre for Buddhist Studies (2007), thus not only consolidating but also expanding the research of Louis de La Vallée Poussin with new interdisciplinary approaches.<sup>128</sup> Another early alumnus of the new generation, Jan De Meyer (b. 1961; Ph.D. Ghent 1992), occupied various academic positions in Ghent and Leiden, before devoting himself fully to translation (in Dutch) of classical texts by Daoist masters and modern literature. He was co-founder of *Het Trage Vuur*, a periodical on Chinese Literature in Dutch translation that existed for fifteen years (1995–2010).<sup>129</sup>

### *Pierre Ryckmans, alias Simon Leys*<sup>130</sup>

This overview finishes with one of the best-known Sinologists from Belgium, Pierre Ryckmans (1935–2014). His case shows that the limited presence of Sinology in the

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1958); Ann Heirman 安海漫, “Gente daxue de Zhongguoxue yanjiu” 根特大学的中国学研究, trans. Sun Jian 孙健, *Guoji Hanxue* 国际汉学 25 (2014), 394–400; Mieke Matthyssen and Bart Desein, “China in Belgium: From a Religious, Economic and Political Interest, to the Development of an Academic Discipline,” in *From Sinology to Post-Chineseness: Intellectual Histories of China, Chinese People, and Chinese Civilization*, edited by Shih Chih-yu, He Peizhong, and Tang Lei (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2017), 41–53.

<sup>125</sup>*De stichtingsgeschiedenis van kreits Tsj’eng-tee (Jehol)* (Ghent: Vanmelle, 1957). For a critical review of this dissertation by the Dutch Sinologist A.F.P. Hulswé, see *Museum* (Leiden) LXIII.1 (1958), 65–69.

<sup>126</sup><http://www.ugentmemorialis.be/catalog/00000070>.

<sup>127</sup><https://profs.library.uu.nl/index.php/profrec/getprofdata/4/1/99/0recht>. His publications include *T’ao the Hermit: Sixty Poems by T’ao Ch’ien (365–427)* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1952).

<sup>128</sup><https://www.cbs.ugent.be/>.

<sup>129</sup>On the more recent developments, see Heirman, “Gente daxue de Zhongguoxue yanjiu,” 397–400.

<sup>130</sup>For an extensive biography see Philippe Paquet, *Simon Leys: Navigateur entre les mondes* (Paris: Gallimard, 2016), translated into English as *Simon Leys: Navigator Between Worlds*, trans. Julie Rose

period immediately after the war did not prevent a young scholar from developing his interest in China and pursuing an academic career abroad. His interest was, moreover, very diverse and never limited to China.

Pierre Ryckmans initially studied law and art history at the Catholic University of Louvain. In 1955, as a young student, he received the invitation to join a small delegation of Belgian youths for an official friendship visit to China. During this visit, they had a brief encounter with premier Zhou Enlai. This trip resulted in a fundamental change in Ryckmans' life. Motivated by an interest in Chinese culture, he went to Taiwan in 1958 to study Chinese language and culture and was subsequently researcher and instructor at the Nanyang University in Singapore (1962) and New Asia College in Hong Kong (1963). In 1966, he published his first Sinological work, a French translation of *Fusheng liuji* 浮生六記 (Six Records of a Floating Life) by the mid-Qing writer Fu Shen 沈復 (1763–1825?).<sup>131</sup> In the same year, he defended his Ph.D. in Louvain—Robert Shih was the only China specialist in the jury—with a dissertation that included an annotated translation of the *Huayu lu* 畫語錄 (often called *Kugua heshang yulu* 苦瓜和尚語錄, Sayings on Painting from Monk Bitter Gourd) by the painter Shi Tao 石濤 (1642–1707). This work was published in 1970 in the series *Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques* of the Institute of Advanced Chinese Studies.<sup>132</sup> In the same year, Ryckmans published a book on the Cantonese “rebel, painter and madman” Su Renshan 蘇仁山 (1814–1849?), which received the Stanislas Julien prize.<sup>133</sup> Also in the same year, he started teaching at the Australian National University in Canberra. In 1987 he took on the chair of Chinese studies at the University of Sydney, from which he retired early in 1994. Among the Sinological publications of this academic period figures a translation of the *Analects* of Confucius, into both French and English.<sup>134</sup>

Pierre Ryckmans is also known for his work about the Cultural Revolution, and the Chinese political system in general. His best-known works in this respect are *Les habits neufs du président Mao: Chronique de la Révolution culturelle* (1971) and *Ombres chinoises* (1974).<sup>135</sup> By denouncing the damages inflicted by the Maoist regime, he opposed the left-wing, rather ignorant, intellectual movement in Europe that glorified Maoism and the Cultural Revolution. He chose to publish these works under the pseudonym Simon Leys, out of (justified) concern that he would not be able to return to China after the publication of these works. He also used this penname for his non-Sinological works.<sup>136</sup> Leys was also a regular reviewer and essayist in the

(Carlton: La Trobe University Press/Black Inc., 2017). Review by Carine Defoort in *History of Humanities* (Spring 2019), 207–9. See also Pierre Boncelle, *Le parapluie de Simon Leys* (Paris: Philippe Rey, 2015).

<sup>131</sup>Shen Fu, *Six récits au fil inconstant des jours* (Brussels: F. Larcier, 1966; Paris: Lattès, 2009).

<sup>132</sup>Pierre Ryckmans, *Les «Propos sur la peinture» de Shitao, Mélanges chinois et bouddhiques 15* (Brussels: Institut belge des hautes études chinoises, 1970); republished as *Les propos sur la peinture du moine Citrouille-amère* (Paris: Hermann, 1984; reprint: Paris: Plon, 2007).

<sup>133</sup>*La vie et l'œuvre de Su Renshan, rebelle, peintre et fou, 1814–1849?*, 2 vols. (Hong Kong: Centre de publication de l'U.E.R. Extrême-Orient de l'Université de Paris, 1970).

<sup>134</sup>Pierre Ryckmans, *Entretiens de Confucius* (Paris: Seuil, 1987, 1989, 2004, 2009); Simon Leys, *The Analects of Confucius* (New York: Norton, 1997).

<sup>135</sup>*Les habits neufs du président Mao: Chronique de la Révolution culturelle* (Paris: Camp libre, 1971); *Ombres chinoises* (Paris: UGE, 1974). In English, his best-known books are probably *The Chairman's New Clothes* and *Chinese Shadows*.

<sup>136</sup>E.g. *La Mort the Napoléon* (Paris: Hermann, 1986); translated into English as *The Death of Napoleon* (London: Quartet Books, 1991); *La Mer dans la littérature française*, 2 vols. (Paris: Plon, 2003).

*New York Review of Books*, which republished a collection of his essays under the title *The Hall of Uselessness*.<sup>137</sup>

Pierre Ryckmans' broad intellectual interest combined with his in-depth study of specific aspects of Chinese culture probably contrasts with views on academic life today. Inspired by the Dutch Sinologist Robert Van Gulik (1910–1967), Pierre Ryckmans once said of himself:

I could not get down to a narrow specialization of Chinese studies. What interests me is to follow the slope of all my curiosities, according to my needs at a given moment, at the risk of bringing nothing original from the scientific point of view but with the advantage of being able to draw a considerable spiritual benefit for oneself. For me, China is a life choice, not a profession.<sup>138</sup>

## Conclusion

Studies about the history of Sinology usually take academic institutions and Sinologists at universities as their primary focus. If this article had adopted this approach, it would have been very brief. The history would have started in the 1970s with universities that established full Sinology study programs that have continued until today, and staffed with professors who have China as their primary teaching and research focus. We saw, however, that before the 1970s there were researchers on Chinese matters, even though China or Chinese culture was rarely their major focus and the academic institutions to which they belonged did not offer Sinology programs. China was at the margin of other research interests in the earlier university institutes for oriental studies.

The adoption of a broader perspective, in terms of time (before the birth of Belgium), of persons (Belgian Sinologists outside Belgium), and of institutions (outside the universities) made a full appreciation of Belgian Sinology possible. This allows us to distill four characteristics of Belgian Sinology. It seems that the most interesting history of Belgian Sinology is one that looks across the chronological and geographical borders of Belgium, as well as the strict boundaries of Sinology.

First, Sinology in Belgium was more a history of individual persons than of institutions. This is not only the case for those who mainly functioned outside of any institution, such as Louis Van Hée, but also of scholars who were in fact part of an institution, such as Charles de Harlez and Carl Hentze, working at respectively the universities of Louvain and Ghent. They never went to China—which was not exceptional for European Sinologists—and were originally not trained in Chinese studies, but in one way or another they became fascinated by China, crossed the border of their initial specialization, and turned themselves into autodidacts in language and research about China. In line with the development of both Oriental and religious studies, they mainly adopted a textual approach to the study of China. Despite the limitations of their times, they managed to share their Sinological research through a wide variety of publications and some teaching.

Second, partly because these individual scholars did not belong to institutes in which China was an established field of study, there was little institutional support and continuation of their interest in China. Charles de Harlez was not succeeded in Louvain

<sup>137</sup>(Collingwood, Vic.: Black Inc., 2011); (New York: New York Review of Books, 2013).

<sup>138</sup>Interview with Pierre Boncenne, "Simon Leys: 'La Chine pour moi n'est pas une profession, mais un choix de vie,'" *Lire (Le magazine des livres)* 98 (1983), 27–28.



after his death, Louis de La Vallée Poussin was not replaced in Ghent after he left the university and donated his library to Louvain, and the Buddhist studies of Etienne Lamotte were not continued at the Catholic University of Louvain (neither in Leuven nor in Louvain-la-Neuve), so that his library ended up in Japan. In other cases, such as for Steenackers and Hentze in Ghent, there were very long gaps between their departure and “replacement,” if that term can be used for successors with entirely different research interests and teaching focuses. In the case of Liège, there was no continuation after Steenackers’ death in 1912 until the 1990s. This discontinuity in interest in China at the universities led to an unstable academic environment for training new Sinologists. For instance, in the period immediately after World War II this absence of academic institutionalization of Chinese studies had as a result that young scholars, such as Pierre Ryckmans, had to continue and develop their interest abroad. It is only with the Open-Door Policy that universities, primarily in the Flemish part of the country, started to invest more seriously in Sinology and Chinese Studies. However, considering them from a broader European perspective, they remain limited in scope.

Third, the institutional history of Sinology in Belgium was mostly a history of institutions *outside* the borders of the universities, with occasional academic connections. The most important case is the Belgian Institute of Advanced Chinese Studies, which was the first institution in Belgium with a primary focus on China. By bringing scholars from different disciplines and institutions together, it managed to establish the richest library on China in Belgium before World War II, and to produce a periodical and monograph series that quickly acquired an international reputation. The other example was the training center of the Scheutists. From the end of the nineteenth century onwards it was the best teaching center for Chinese language, though it was only open to future missionaries. Some of its teachers, such as Steenackers and Van Durme, were also invited to teach language courses at universities or at the Belgian Institute for Advanced Chinese Studies. With the arrival of Jozef Mullie in 1930 the Scheutist training center reached a high academic level compared to European language institutes at that time. Due to organizational and financial changes (in the case of the Belgian Institute) and to the policy changes because of the expulsion from China (in the case of the Scheutists), these institutions no longer reached the same level after World War II.

Fourth, the inclusion in this article of scholars doing research on China before the establishment of Belgium, or operating outside Belgium in the twentieth century, reveals a last remarkable characteristic. Unlike many European Sinologists, who usually had little or no living experience in China, the missionaries had lived there for many years. As a result, they were not only interested in “classical China” but also in “contemporary China” of their time. In the seventeenth century, the translation of the Four Books or the geographical description of the empire were not only a study of a past tradition, but of a living one, for which they used then-contemporary Chinese commentaries and works. Moreover, their descriptions of the Manchu invasion, court life, imperial inspection tours, or daily rituals are all reports on “contemporary China” that are now valuable historical documents of external eyewitnesses of that period. This long-term encounter with contemporary interest also applies to Scheutist missionaries who became scholars in the twentieth century. It should be noted that their field experience was not primarily located at Chinese academic institutions (universities in Beijing or Shanghai), but in the villages and small towns of the Chinese hinterland, often at the borders of Han culture. In the case of the Jesuit Van Hée, his time in China also involved participation in the development of modern communication media

(newspapers and periodicals) in Shanghai. The Scheutist encounter with inland China and of Van Hée with sciences not only introduced “contemporary China” to a European audience but also brought a whole range of new disciplines and fields to bear on Sinology: modern linguistics and dialectology, anthropology (including Mongol and Monguor studies), studies of local religious and ritual practices, temple surveys, mathematics, etc. They were the result of a unique combination of field work in the countryside, in-depth historical research, and the acquaintance with the latest developments in the scientific disciplines (linguistics, anthropology, and the like) of their times. After World War II, when these missionaries were able to pursue academic studies, their research flourished and was published in the best academic Sinological periodicals or series in the US, Europe, and Japan. At that time, however, due to the institutional situation, there was no place for them within Belgian universities.

In short, there were many borders for scholars who wanted to engage in Sinological studies: linguistic, geographical, cultural, institutional, and religious. Yet, if there is a history of Belgian Sinology to be recounted today, it is mainly due to scholars who found ways to cross these borders.