

Forewords

In the fourth centenary since the establishment of the *Sacra Congregatio de Propaganda Fide* by Pope Gregory XV (1622), this important work entitled the “Catalogue of Chinese Documents in the *Propaganda Fide* Historical Archives (1622-1830)” has been produced. This accomplishment represents the scientific research promoted by the Pontifical Urbaniana University through its Center for Chinese Studies and the Sinology Department of the Catholic University of Louvain.

Thanks to *Instructions for the Apostolic Vicars of Cochinchina, Tonkin and China* (1659), considered to be the “magna carta” of modern missions, the missionaries were asked to give a brief description of the regions they would eventually pass through in their travels and to communicate the same to Rome. Consequently, the Historical Archive of *Propaganda Fide* expanded, being enriched with important documents.

This present work provides immediate access to a rich collection of documents relating to Christianity in China between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, making them available to scholars and researchers who wish to investigate the history of the Church in China. Nevertheless, its interests lie beyond academic research as it also testifies and gives value to the spirit that animated the history of the missionary journey of *Propaganda Fide* in the land and culture of China. The historical introduction by Prof. Eugenio Menegon helps us gain familiarity with this extraordinary documentary heritage, directing its reading in a way that facilitates our interest.

The collection and cataloging of these documents today represents a precious tool for those who desire to delve into the culture and history of the missions in China. It is a story that involves concrete people, facts, and events, illuminating our present reality and helps us to reach the original purpose of Pope Gregory XV, namely, to spread the faith.

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CARD. LUIS ANTONIO GOKIM TAGLE
*Prefect of the Congregation
for the Evangelization of Peoples*

One of the main if not the most important mission of an archives is to serve as the cultural memory of the institution it belongs to. When it comes to institutions like Propaganda Fide, this cultural memory is the very life of the Church in those mission territories where, obeying to Christ commission “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations”, missionaries from all over the world had set out for and lived their lives.

Wherever their mission, Propagandists maintained strict and constant written relationships with the mother-institution and a huge quantity of records and bulk of written data – “fresh news from China”, personal correspondence, deeds and books, reports and instructions just to name a few – bounced their way back and forward across Asia and Europe, to eventually find their safe place in the Historical Archives of Propaganda (APF).

The documents kept in the APF testify to the complexity of missionary work, which included a great variety of activities, from those related to the material organization of the missions, as well as the creation and the maintenance of an informative network which conveyed knowledge about the cultures, languages, territory and state organization of the host lands, to the wonderful accounts – often of great anthropological and philosophical depth – which concerned the process of acculturation of Christianity and the dialogue with local spiritualities and religions.

China, like Asia in general, was an extremely complex and challenging testing ground but, at the same time, by meeting with the culture – or rather, “the cultures” – of China, the missionaries gave an extraordinary impulse to the globalization of knowledge by transmitting, in every direction in which the great information network was practicable, a continuous flow of diversity, novelty, curiosity and reality.

The Chinese documents – to which the present catalogue compiled by Dr. Ad Dudink finally allows a direct access with enriched references – are of inestimable documentary value and will surely provide further material for future missiological, historical, anthropological, and linguistic studies, thereby further confirming the importance held by the missions in the history of global knowledge.

May 2022

LEONARDO SILEO, O.F.M.
Rector of Pontifical Urbaniana University

There are historical events the outcomes of which extend significantly beyond the time-space of their occurrence. They generate long waves which produce, on the one hand, developments along similar, though sometimes unexpected, lines but also prejudices, which grow more and more entrenched with the passing of time. Given the peculiar dynamism of these historical processes, there are not only immediate and direct linear consequences. In fact, sometimes these waves seem just to skim the surface of history, sometimes to disappear sinking under a succession of events, which seem to be substantially distant from the waves themselves, sometimes to re-emerge again with increased clarity and force. However, albeit with some intrinsic differences and nuances, these wave-like dynamics represent a fundamental interpretative tool, and not only with regard to the past.

In this framework and quoting freely the well-known US missiologists S.B. Bevans and R.P. Schroeder, the evangelizing mission of the Church can be understood as a complex reality the fabric of which is intertwined with two key elements: constants and contexts. The term “constants” refers to the founding principles and the key elements of mission, while that of “contexts” regards the plurality of the forms – sometimes coexisting, sometimes superimposed, sometimes even opposed to each other – that those constants assume. So, constants and contexts concern the essential relationship between Christianity and human cultural worlds. Undoubtedly, from the viewpoint of its forms, this relationship has been implemented in different ways, given also the related socio-historical and anthropological context and the correlated and progressive organization of the life, institutions, and mission of the church. Regarding its effects, it has promoted development and transformation giving rise not only to interesting and fruitful experiences of mutually inclusive enrichment, but also to closure and defense, which are at the origin, amongst other things, of coercion and exclusion practices.

In the perspective of a true acknowledgement of the other and otherness – i.e.: based on a knowledge of them that is not prejudicial and undermining as that which is based on imagination – the plurality and ambivalence of the relationship between Christianity and cultures cannot be denied a priori, or arbitrarily simplified. On the contrary, it is necessary to delve deeper and deeper into them, retracing in a precise, objective, and critical way both the related ecclesial (and non-ecclesial) context as well as their specific forms and resulting outcomes. Therefore, it is clear the importance of a close and precise study of the sources, the necessary condition of this study being the patient and meticulous investigation and collection of the preserved documentation to be shared

in the scholarly community thus bringing about new individual and team research projects.

The *Catalogue* can be appreciated also from this perspective. The outcome of a joint project between the “Centre for Chinese Studies”, part of the Faculty of Missiology of the Pontifical Urbaniana University, and the “Sinology Department of the Catholic University of Leuven”, the *Catalogue* is a helpful tool for, a) carrying out further research and investigations in order to understand better the encounter between Christianity and China over a period of time, which has been significant for several reasons, b) to highlight as objectively as possible both the positive aspects and critical elements, c) to identify significant junctures, the outcomes of which have affected (and perhaps still affect) this relationship.

From this point of view, we wish to acknowledge with gratitude the role played by prof. Alessandro Dell’Orto, Missiology Faculty member and Director of the CCS, who is to be credited with the idea of cataloguing the APF documents in the Chinese language, being aware of their value (although they are only a part of the total APF records related to the Chinese mission). He fulfilled his role also as a network-builder, both inside and outside the Pontifical Urbaniana University, as the *Catalogue* could have never been the outcome of a solitary endeavour.

The Faculty of Missiology of Pontifical Urbaniana University supported the Catalogue project in several ways, not only because the “Centre for Chinese Studies” is part of the Faculty but also because the Catalogue project was in line with the Faculty’s commitment to support those academic projects that promote a cognitive approach aimed at fostering the understanding of the relationship between Christianity and cultures, collaborating in various ways with scholars and professors from academic institutions situated in different continents.

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