

# THE CONTRIBUTION TO SINOLOGICAL STUDIES OF THE SCHEUT MISSIONARIES

Yongjun Zheng<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Introduction.

Having suffered two Opium Wars in the late 19th century, the Chinese Empire had been forced to open its steel doors to the Western world. In the meantime, the century-old anti-Christian policy, which was promulgated by the Imperial edict of the Kangxi emperor (康熙, 1654 – 1722) in 1721, was also repealed by successive unequal treaties and abolished in 1844. There is no doubt that this historic turning point represented a significant “victory” for all Western missionaries, as it enabled them to return to this Far East territory once again after decades of religious oppression. This time not only were the renowned Jesuits present, but numerous new Congregations have also joined this Catholic evangelical army. Among the newly appointed members was a community founded in Belgium – The Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (CICM). Over the course of the first half of the 20th century, this group of religious men significantly increased in size, eventually becoming the largest Belgian Congregation, particularly one with a strong Flemish identity, in China.<sup>2</sup>

These Dutch-speaking Flemish missionaries (commonly called “the Scheutists”)<sup>3</sup> have resided on the vast land of northern China for nearly a century. While engaging in their assigned evangelical activities, they also became fascinated with various topics related to their mission territory, including its language, culture, geography, history, and so forth. Due to this, they deliberately

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<sup>1</sup> Ferdinand Verbiest Institute, KU Leuven.

<sup>2</sup> Wei-ying Ku, “Some Observations on CICM in China, 1865-1955: life of 679 Scheutists,” in *History of the Catholic church in China: from its beginning to the Scheut fathers and 20th century: unveiling some less known sources, sounds and pictures*, ed. Ferdinand Verbiest Institute (Leuven: Ferdinand Verbiest Institute K.U. Leuven, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> While visiting the Scheut Mission House in Belgium to present my recent research on Scheut missionaries in China, a comment I received was that to address all the “Scheutists” in English, it would be best to refer to them as “Scheut Missionaries” rather than “Scheut Fathers”, as CICM contains both “Brothers” and “Fathers”. More importantly, the term “Fathers” may be quite sensitive to these Brothers, as they may feel excluded from the community.

accumulated a substantial collection of first-hand materials about this enigmatic land and examined them carefully in order to formulate an accurate and comprehensive knowledge of it. Over the years, a number of articles and monographs related to China have been successively published in French and Flemish by a group of inquisitive members within the Congregation. These time-consuming studies did not only result in reliable information being provided to the internal missionaries regarding the mission land, but they also laid the first solid groundwork for the emergence of a strong cultural bond between China and Belgium. Through the pen of these missionaries, this ancient “Middle Kingdom” has been brought closer than ever before to all levels of society in Belgium.

Since the term “Sinology” (漢學) first appeared in the academic discourse in Europe during the 19th century, the field has been primarily associated with the study of Chinese philology. The chair at the universities back then was usually called “professor of Chinese language and literature”.<sup>4</sup> Unlike this newly developed discipline at higher educational institutions in Europe, the Sinological studies carried out by the Scheut missionaries during the same period, were truly interdisciplinary in nature. In addition to linguistics, their research also encompassed geography, archeology, folklore, politics, cartography, fine arts, and many others. One of the earliest platforms where their study results were made public was “*De Annalen der Missiën in China en Congo*”, a monthly Scheut mission journal published in both French and Dutch. In 1889, the inaugural issue of this bilingual journal was launched at the Scheut motherhouse in Belgium. Soon after, Sparrendaal, the Scheut mission house established in the Netherlands, also released its own edition exclusively in Dutch in 1901.

Needless to say, those two journals of CICM are essential sources for illuminating the early activities of the Scheut missionaries in China, both historically and academically. In the introduction to the premiere issue of the Belgian edition, the editor-in-chief wrote specifically the following: “This journal is suitable for all the readers. However, you may also find some articles more academic than others, and it may require some readers to make a little bit more effort to understand what we wrote. Because those articles refer to a country which is quite different from ours: her history, geography, religion, moral, culture, language, literature, architecture, archaeology, and so on.

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<sup>4</sup> Upon the establishment of the Chair of “Langues et littératures chinoises et tartares mandchoues” at the Collège de France in Paris in 1814, it marked the creation of the first academic chair of Sinology in Europe. The professorship was assigned to Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat (1788 – 1832), a self-taught Sinologist.

Those pieces of information will be presented to you by the letters or articles of our missionaries.”<sup>5</sup>

As well as being interdisciplinary, the Sinological studies conducted by the Scheut missionaries are also notable for their distinct characteristics and tendencies, namely the study predominantly focuses on Chinese ethnic minorities living in the northwestern frontier regions. The reason for this was derived from both external and internal factors. Externally, the mission posts where the Scheut missionaries held active positions, were geographically located beyond the Great Wall and mainly in the remote, deserted borderlands, such as Inner Mongolia (内蒙古), Hebei (河北), Gansu (甘肅), and Xinjiang (新疆). Internally, the orientation of their studies was heavily influenced by the strategy they adopted in their missionary work, in which the main goal was to reach the faithful from the “grassroots” and, in particular, bring the gospel into regions where people of diverse ethnic backgrounds coexist. In light of these two primary factors, Scheut missionaries’ research has always exhibited a distinct geographical and ethnic identity, which is readily apparent in their efforts in the fields of linguistics and folklore.

It seems that the significant role Scheut missionaries played in China, has often been interpreted only from a missiological or intercultural perspective. The contributions of their achievements to the academic field are relatively neglected by many scholars. The extensive amount of manuscripts, articles, and monographs they left to us today, which cover a wide range of topics related to China, would constitute a significant and valuable source of information that will allow us to explore, understand, and learn about this ancient land from the unique viewpoint of this largely sinicized Dutch-speaking missionary group.

Nevertheless, it is also fairly common to hear criticisms on the scientific work conducted by the missionaries. “A jack of all trades, a master of none” is an adage used to describe a person who is proficient in several disciplines but lacking in depth in any of them. As mentioned previously, the field of Sinological studies that the Scheut missionaries practiced, was broad and expansive; some of them even had a wide range of interests and conducted studies in multi-subject areas. It is thus no wonder that many scholars raise the question of whether those missionary Sinologists could be recognized as professional and academic. Aside from that, from the 19th century onwards, Europe

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<sup>5</sup> “Wat ons tijdschrift zijn zal”, in *Missietijdschrift: Missien van Scheut*, ed. Scheut, Missiehuis (Brussel: Scheut, 1889), 3.

established itself as a global superpower: empires expanded, colonies accumulated, missionaries preached Western values worldwide, the concept of Eurocentrism emerged as a natural outcome. Therefore, it should not come as a surprise that many secular scholars view the writings of early missionaries, particularly those relating to foreign countries and cultures, with a certain degree of skepticism and consider those works to be tainted with prejudice. Burnett Tylor (1832 – 1917), the renowned American anthropologist, once remarked: “The missionaries were so occupied in hating and despising the beliefs of the heathen, that they always misrepresented primitive life.”<sup>6</sup>

There was indeed quite a bit of “misrepresentation” expressed in early missionary writings on the local cultures of the mission lands. Or perhaps it would be more equitable to refer to this “misrepresentation” as “a tendency towards subjective consciousness”. As an example, several early Jesuits, including Joachim Bouvet, Jean-François Fouquet and Joseph de Prémare who came to China during the 17th century, attempted to interpret certain Chinese classics, such as *I-ching* (易經), based on Christian ideology and theology, although this so-called “figurism” method was then considered heterodoxy and ridiculed by many missionaries at the time.<sup>7</sup> The similar phenomenon, which shifted more towards cultural bias in the following centuries, can also be traced in the works of the Scheut missionaries who came to China at the beginning of the modern era. The terms “demonolatry” and “heathens”, for instance, frequently appear in their early writings when they pertain to Chinese folk beliefs. But this was not an invariable situation, especially when the apostolic letter “*Maximum illud*” was issued by Pope Benedict XV (1854 – 1922) in 1919. This new directive from the Holy See has challenged and encouraged all their overseas missionaries to accommodate indigenous cultures, acknowledge their diversity, and study them more objectively and academically. Since then, “indigenization” has become the core message of the Catholic Church.

The first article that elaborated on the Sinological studies of the Scheut missionaries was by Willem Grootaers (1911 – 1999), a lifelong dialectologist who spent a decade as a Scheut missionary in China. This short essay was published in Chinese in 1947 in the journal of Sapientia Press (上智編譯館

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<sup>6</sup> Christopher Herbert, *Culture and Anomie: Ethnographic Imagination in the 19th Century* (Chicago/London University of Chicago Press, 1991), 152.

<sup>7</sup> John W. Witek, *Controversial Ideas in China and Europe: A Biography of Jean-François Fouquet, SJ (1665-1741)* (Rome: Institutum Historicum S.I., 1982).

館刊).<sup>8</sup> Later on, the book “*En Mongolie: l'action sociale de l'église catholique*” authored by Carlo Van Melckebeke (1898 – 1980), also contained a chapter listing a number of the important Sinological works made by his fellow Scheut confraters.<sup>9</sup> Although the contents of these two works have the potential to be expanded to present a fuller picture of the overall subject matter, they nonetheless impart to the reader an adequate impression of the Sinological contributions made by the Scheut missionaries in their time of service.

According to the statistics provided in Van Melckebeke's book, there were 241 Scheut missionaries involved in Sinological studies in over a longer or shorter period of time, and more than 1500 articles or monographs were published up until the 1960's. In order to achieve a deeper understanding of these massive works in greater detail, there are two literature sources that will be very useful: “*Bibliotheca Missionum*” (1916 – 1974) and “*Proeve eener bibliographie van de Missionarissen van Scheut*” (1939).

“*Bibliotheca Missionum*” is a large series consisting of 30 volumes.<sup>10</sup> It provides nearly all the publications in the area of worldwide missions until the 70's. Thereinto, volumes 7 (1931), 12 (1958), 13 (1959), and 14 (1960/1960/1961) are entitled “*Chinesische Missionsliteratur*”, which indicated all the works that was conducted by the missionaries in China. The whole publication took nearly six decades to complete until 1974 and provides nearly all the publications in the area of worldwide missions of that time. It is also interesting to note that volumes 19 and 20 are arranged according to the names of different missionary orders. Each missionary and their writings are listed alphabetically within the order to which they belong. The Scheut missionaries' names are indicated in volume 20, from page 178 until 236.

The second source, “*Proeve eener bibliographie van de Missionarissen van Scheut*”, was authored in collaboration with Willem Grootaers and Dries Van

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<sup>8</sup> Willem A. Grootaers. “Zaihua Shengmushengxinhui Huishi zhi Xueshuyanjie [在华圣母圣心会会士之学术研究 Academic works conducted by the Scheut Missionaries in China].” *Yishi Bao* 益世报 10128 (25 Jan. 1947): 6.

<sup>9</sup> Carlo Van Melckebeke, *En Mongolie: l'action sociale de l'église catholique* (Scheut: Missions de Scheut, 1946), 111-119.

<sup>10</sup> This series was first conceived by Robert Streit (1875 – 1930), a member of the Missionaries Oblates of Mary Immaculate Order. The first volume of this series was published in 1916. After the death of Streit in 1930, his fellow confraters Johannes Dindinger (1881 – 1958) and Johannes Rommerskirchen (1899 – 1978) took over the work as chief editors. See: Robert Streit, Johannes Dindinger, and Johannes Rommerskirchen u.a., *Bibliotheca missionum*, vol. 1-30, Veröffentlichungen des internationalen Instituts für missionswissenschaftliche Forschung (Roma: Herder, 1916 – 1974).

Coillie (1912 – 1998), both of whom are Scheut missionaries. It was published in 1939 to commemorate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of CICM. This bibliography contains a comprehensive list of the writings from 1878 to 1937, along with a brief biographical note of each Scheutist who served primarily in the mission countries of China, the Congo, and the Philippines.

This article presents a number of works compiled by the Scheut missionaries based on the literature sources mentioned above. I have categorized these works into four academic areas, namely linguistics, folklore, history, and geography, while emphasizing the first topic in particular.

## 2. Linguistic studies.

The Chinese word “*Yuyan*” (語言), which can be translated as “language”, has a specific meaning in classical Chinese: answering an individual’s questions is called “*Yu*” (語), while expressing one’s own thoughts is called “*Yan*” (言). Certainly, mastering the local language has always been an inescapable obstacle for all missionaries whose primary occupation was to preach Christian doctrines and convert people through debate, and it continues to be so today. Further to that, one of the most common strategies utilized in the missionary, is the distribution of Christian literature translated into the local language, and this was not an exception for Scheut missionaries in China, who encountered not only the Chinese people but also the Mongolians on a daily basis.

### 2.1. Translation works.

It appears that foreign missionaries who dedicated themselves to the study of the Mongolian language were extremely rare throughout the first half of the 20th century. Due to its unique geographic advantage, CICM has nurtured a handful of highly qualified scholars in the field of Mongol studies. It goes without saying that Antoon Mostaert (1881 – 1971) is one of the foremost scholars. His two publications, “*Textes oraux Ordos*” (1937) and three volumes of “*Dictionnaire Ordos*” (1941 – 1944), have earned him a worldwide academic reputation. Mostaert’s career in Mongolian studies actually began with his publication of translated works. As soon as this talented young linguist arrived in China in 1905, he began translating Chinese Christian books into Mongolian. These publications were mainly catechetical books, such as “Catechism in Chinese” (*Cihula nomun surta*, 1914), “Self-explanatory” (*Nigen Ujimegce todurhai medeku debter*, 1916), “Comprehensive explanation of Christian belief” (*Cihula yosusu tailburi*, 1920) and “Month of the Holy

Souls in Purgatory” (*Arilghahu orunu sunesudun sara*, 1921). Besides Mostaert, Florent Claeys (1871 – 1951) was also an active missionary involved in translation work and published several religious books in Mongolian. Such as a 407-page Mongolian prayer book (*Jalbaril-un debter*, 1931), a 362-page book about the Catholic Saint’s life (*Arighun Kumun-ner-un uiledburis-un duradqal*, 1934), and the New Testament (*Sine toghtaghal-un tobciya*, 1936). These translated books were of substantial value to Mongolian Christians at that time. Even to this day, the Catholic Church in the Mongolian regions still relies heavily on these religious literatures, which are rarely found elsewhere in the world.

With Chinese tenants from the hinterlands immigrating successively to the vast territory beyond the Great Wall, over the years, these Han Chinese have become the primary settlers on the Inner Mongolian plateau. Considering the significance of literature in Chinese society, Scheut missionaries became very conscious of the imperative need to translate Christian literature into Chinese. Translating catechisms and prayers remained a primary focus of early translation tasks. Albert Gueluy’s (1849 – 1924) “History of the Catholic Catechism” (聖教教理史, 1887) and Hubert Otto’s (1850 – 1938) “Morning and evening prayers with explanation” (早晚課彌撒經文解說, 1893) are probably the earliest works of such kind. Nevertheless, we must not overlook the fact that many Chinese immigrants in the northern border area were illiterate. It is evident that Christian literature alone was not sufficient to gain much traction in converting the inhabitants to the Christian faith. With this in mind, the Scheut missionaries acknowledged that their “translation works” should not only be limited to text but should also include the visual arts. They began to see that pictures and images were more appealing to those who had limited access to literacy education and were also a far more effective means to provide intuitive comprehension of Christian stories and teachings. Leo Van Dyck (1878 – 1951) was one of the pioneering figures in the creation of picture-story books featuring Chinese Christian iconographies. His first work, “*Catechisms in Platen*” (問答像解, 1927), contains 80 pages, 40 of which are presented in illustrations. Another work of his is entitled “The Life of Christ in the Parables in Chinese” (救主行實圖, 1935). This 84-page book also provides nearly half of its content with illustrations. Most notably, all the illustrations that Van Dyck used in his books are genuinely depicted

in the Chinese style, and these works showed a positive pattern of localization in Christian art.<sup>11</sup>

Meanwhile, the Scheut missionaries realized that, besides pictures, using music was also an effective method of evangelizing illiterate members of rural society. When Jozef Raskin (1892 – 1943) served in Nanhaodian (南壕墊), he tried to transcribe Western Christian hymns into Chinese style and use his sinicized music to evangelize and entertain the local population. There are two Chinese hymnals compiled by him at the time, “Sacred Songs in Chinese” (聖歌集, 1928) and “Hymns to glorify the Lord” (榮主聖歌, 1930). Jozef Van Oost (1877 – 1939) in Sui-Yuan (綏遠) followed the same path. His book “Twenty Hymns on Chinese Text with Organ Accompaniment” (管風琴中文聖歌, 1925) is most likely the first-ever organ music book to be published in Inner Mongolia.

Aside from translating religious texts into Chinese, Scheut missionaries also translated a number of Western scientific handbooks to aid in the development of local education. For children living in the remote area of northern China, using these “imported” handbooks for schooling was undoubtedly revolutionary at the time. Particularly in such conservative and rural communities where Confucianism was prevalent, these translated Western books served as the only objective source of information for those seeking to obtain modern knowledge. Jozef Mullie (1886 – 1976), as the first director of Chifeng College since 1920, started translating numerous Western textbooks into Chinese for his fledgling institution. More than ten different subjects of handbooks were translated by him, covering various topics such as world history, astronomy, agriculture, geography, and apologetics. However, Mullie was not the pioneer to integrate the translated Western handbooks into Scheut schools in China. Jozef Rutten (1874 – 1950), a teacher at Nanhaodian College, is likely to have been the first person to make such an effort. His French-written book “*Exercices et de problèmes d'algèbre élémentaire à l'usage des élèves chinois*” (基礎代數練習和解疑) was translated into Chinese by him in 1909. Later, Louis Janssen (1876 – 1950) the principal of Songshuzuizi College, also translated several handbooks for his school's use, such as “Politeness” (禮貌撮要, 1916), “Arithmetic in Chinese” (可算指南, 1917 – 18), “Chinese translation of the Latin grammar” (中譯拉丁文法, 1918). Additionally, a handful of Chinese national Scheut missionaries also played a significant role in translations during that time, as they had a greater capacity

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<sup>11</sup> In this article, all Chinese titles are the original titles indicated in the books. In the event of a book with no Chinese title, it will not be translated by the author.



for translating texts into their mother tongue. Among them, Joseph Chang Shouyi (常守義, 1903 – 1991) stands out as an example. He translated several works from French into Chinese, such as “*Meiri Xunyan*” (每日訓言, 1927), “*Shuxiu Xingqi*” (淑修性氣, s.d.), “*Zhongguo Yueli*” (中國樂理, 1932), “*Xunlian Shengti Jun*” (訓練聖體軍, 1936), and “*Liyong Yiguo de Jishu*” (利用已過的技術, 1938), etc.

## 2.2. Lexicography.

The dissemination of Chinese Christian literature and providing western education were only adjuncts to the process of evangelization. The true priority for missionaries was to be able to convert the local inhabitants by socializing with them in person and preaching the gospel face-to-face. Unlike the early Jesuits, who were heavily involved in the study of Chinese classics and aimed to reach literate society, the Scheut missionaries were more concerned with the local rural communities and focused on speaking Chinese in its vernacular form.

In view of the fact that most Scheut missionaries were native Dutch speakers, the absence of a Dutch-written Chinese dictionary, specifically one in Mandarin, was immediately noticed. However, as Chinese dictionaries in French and English were easily accessible to many of them, the first Dutch-Chinese dictionary compiled by a Scheut missionary only emerged in the 1930s, and that was Eugene Grosse’s (1880 – 1953) “*Praktisch Chineesch-Nederlandsch woordenboek*” (華尼字典). This work was published in 1935 in Tianjin (天津), and it is regarded as one of the earliest Mandarin dictionaries in the Dutch-speaking world. Since Chinese dictionaries were, prior to this, mainly written by Dutch people from the Netherlands, and their so-called “Chinese” was actually the *Hakka* (客家) or *Min* (閩) dialect, which were widely used among Chinese laborers in the Dutch East Indies. Unfortunately, this work by Grosse can be rarely found today because most of its copies were lost in the flood disaster of 1939 in Tianjin.

When it comes to the earliest Chinese dictionary from the pen of a Scheut missionary, it should be, to my knowledge, the “*Trois coups de filet dans le dictionnaire chinois*” (華匯撈字三網). It is a trilingual dictionary compiled by Hubert Otto in 1904 in which each entry is presented in Chinese, French, and Latin. And Jozef Mullie, one of the most well-known linguists within the Congregation, also put together a 440-page “word list” as the third volume of his monumental work “*Het Chineesch Taaleigen*” (1933). For all intents

and purposes, this “word list”, whether in terms of substance or function, should certainly be regarded as a decent Mandarin-Dutch dictionary.

Among all the lexicographical works of the Scheut missionaries, Joseph Rutten’s “Dictionary Romanization Inter-dialectic” (*Lacmeah Jismuj Tyuea-sfuap Jistianh*, 方言際辣體漢字字典, 1935) demonstrates exceptional creative inventiveness. It is widely understood that across the vast land of China, different minorities or provinces have their own dialects that are so varied from one another. If using one system to romanize all the dialects, foreign missionaries would benefit from a great convenience. In response to this need, Rutten created an “inter-dialectic romanization” system with the joint assistance of Hery Lamasse and Ernest Jasmin (both members of the Society of Foreign Missions of Paris, MEP) and published a series of articles related to this new method of phonetic transcription.<sup>12</sup> But over and above expectations, this bold attempt did not elicit a favorable response from the public, as it has been proven too complicated to use. Whatever the outcome, the efforts undertaken by these three innovative missionaries have left an indelible mark on the history of Chinese phonetic studies.<sup>13</sup>

The unenthusiastic response to the creation of this “inter-dialectic romanization” did not deter the Scheut missionaries from continuing with their plans to compile dictionaries or study guides for a particular dialect. René Leva (1880 – 1958) collected numerous local phrases during his time in Inner Mongolia and northern Shaanxi (陝西) and compiled two books accordingly. “*Particules du dialecte de Chahar*” (察哈爾方言類編) was published in 1941, followed by “*Le Dialecte Chansi Nord - Liste Alphabétique d'expressions avec traduction française*” (晉北方言詞典) three years later, in 1944. Likewise, Jozef Van Oost, who spent decades in the apostolic vicariate of Suiyuan (綏遠), wrote a dictionary about the local proverbs of the region. His work, entitled “*Dictons et proverbes des chinois habitant la Mongolie sud-ouest*”, was launched in 1918. Edmond Devloo’s (1891 – 1974) “Anthology of 3600 classified Chinese proverbs and wise sayings” (分類格言選集) is another example of a dictionary dealing with Chinese proverbs. It was only

<sup>12</sup> David Prager Branner, *The Chinese Rime-Tables: Linguistic Philosophy and Historical-Comparative Phonology* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 2006), 223-224.

<sup>13</sup> Some of the articles that Joseph Rutten published relating to “inter-dialectic romanization” are: *Quelques réflexions sur la Romanisation interdialectique des PP. Lamasse et Jasmin* (1934); *Nouvelles publications en romanisation interdialectique* (1935); *Lettre à propos de la romanisation interdialectique* (1935); *Quelques pages du dictionnaire chinois du Père Jasmin* (1936); *Note à propos de la romanisation interdialectique* (1936), etc.

in 1970 that this work could be published, a few years before the author's death.

### 2.3. Grammar.

When we move on to the topic of Chinese grammar, there is no doubt that Jozef Mullie is fully deserving of being called a pioneer and master in this field. His three-volume work entitled "*Het Chineesch taaleigen*" (1930 – 1933) contains nearly two thousand pages devoted to explaining the grammatical rules of spoken Chinese in great detail.<sup>14</sup> This work, which took Mullie decades to complete, has served as the primary source of Chinese language instruction within CICM for a considerable period of time. Since Mullie was appointed professor of Chinese at the Dutch University of Utrecht in 1940, this monograph has become an indispensable guide for mastering vernacular Chinese, both for his Scheut confraters who served in the mission and for his fellow students who studied in the Netherlands.<sup>15</sup>

Willem Grootaers, who has previously been mentioned, also contributed a manual on spoken Chinese grammar, entitled "*Vier-jarige cursus in de geschreven nationale taal*" (1947 – 1950). This textbook, supervised by his old teacher Mullie and only existing in a stereotyped edition, was initially designed for beginners. This was done so because Mullie's "*Het Chineesch taaleigen*" seemed far too academic for those young Scheut missionaries with little or no knowledge of Chinese. Grootaers was not an expert in Chinese grammar alone, his most outstanding achievement in Chinese language studies was most known in the field of "linguistic geography". He was the first person in China to initiate dialect research in this specific field, which he learned from his father, Ludovic Grootaers (1885 – 1956), a professor of dialectology at the University of Louvain. According to Grootaers, any linguist should free themselves from rigid theories, live closely with the group of speakers in question, and place a high priority on recording the "living" language as a top goal. His ultimate focus was to collect as much linguistic material as he could, examine the vernacular dialects of the area, and trace the

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<sup>14</sup> This work was originally written in Dutch; its English version, entitled "The structural principles of the Chinese language," was translated by A. Omer Versichel, a Scheut missionary as well. The first volume of the English version was published in 1932, and the third and fourth volumes came out in 1937.

<sup>15</sup> More about Jozef Mullie and his Chinese linguistic works, see: Yongjun Zheng 郑永君, "Laihua Shengmu Shengxin Hui Jiqi Heyu Hanxuejia Min Xuanhua (1886-1976) Yanjiu [来华圣母圣心会及其荷语汉学家闵宣化(1886-1976)研究 A study on C.I.C.M. in China and its Flemish Sinologist Fr. Jozef Mullie (1886-1976)]" (Doctorate Thesis, Fudan University 复旦大学, 2021); Yongjun Zheng, "Fr. Jozef Mullie Contribution of the Chinese Language Education to the Missionaries of Scheut (C.I.C.M.) 闵宣化與聖母聖心會的漢語教學," *Journal of Macao Polytechnic Institute 澳門理工學報*, no. 4 (2021).

evolution of these dialects under the impact of cultural and historical development. The linguistic circles in China, however, did not value this method of researching at the time. Grootaers was only able to achieve widespread acclaim for his work on linguistic geography when he relocated to Japan after 1951. In 2003, his multi-reprinted book “Genuine Chinese dialect geography” (中國方言地理學) has been translated for the first time into Mandarin.<sup>16</sup>

Another eminent scholar of Chinese linguistics who needs to be mentioned, is Paul Serruys (1912 – 1999). Over forty papers written by him have been published in a variety of European and American journals.<sup>17</sup> Under the profound influence of his teacher Jozef Mullie, whom he admired highly and for whom he was always very grateful, Serruys devoted much of his life to the study of classical Chinese and Chinese dialects.<sup>18</sup> A significant contribution made by Serruys in his later career, was to the study of Chinese “Oracle Bone Script”(甲骨文), which has not received as much attention as it should. In 1974, he published his first article on this topic in *T'oung Pao* entitled “Studies in the Language of the Shang Oracle Inscriptions”.<sup>19</sup> According to W. South Coblin: “This monumental and seminal work became for many years the universal point of departure for further grammatical studies in the inscriptions and is still a cornerstone of this field in Europe and North America”.<sup>20</sup>

Paul Serruys, in his most respectful manner, consistently praised Mullie, whose grammatical methods for his research on the ancient Chinese Oracle bone script were of invaluable assistance. Indeed, Jozef Mullie was not only a leading figure on spoken Chinese among the Scheut missionaries, but also a scholar who mastered classical Chinese in a comprehensive fashion. “*Grondbeginselen van de Chinese letterkundige taal*” (1947 – 1950), published in three volumes by him in Dutch, represents the culmination of his extensive research into classical Chinese syntax. With over a thousand pages

<sup>16</sup> W. Grootaers (贺登崧), *Hanyu Fangyan Dilixue* [汉语方言地理学 *Genuine Chinese dialect geography*], trans. Shi Rujie (石汝杰) and Yan Tianli (岩田礼) (Shanghai: Shanghai Jiaoyu publishing house, 上海教育出版社, 2018).

<sup>17</sup> “A List of Publications of Paul L-M. Serruys up to 1977,” *Monumenta Serica* 33 (1977).

<sup>18</sup> Paul Serruys's works on classical Chinese include the following:: Paul L. M.Serruys, “The Function and Meaning of Yün 云 in Shih Ching—Its Cognates and Variants,” *ibid.*29 (1970).;Paul L-M Serruys, “Studies in the language of the Shih Ching: I the final particle Yi,” *Early China* 16 (1991).;Paul L-M Serruys, “The Word for 'Salt' in Shuo Wen,” *Oriens* 11, no. 1/2 (1958).;Paul L-M Serruys, “Five word studies on Fang Yan(first part),” *Monumenta Serica* 19 (1960).;Paul L-M Serruys, “Five word studies on Fang Yan(second part),” *Monumenta Serica* 21 (1962).;Paul L-M Serruys, “Five word studies on Fang Yan(third part),” *Monumenta Serica* 26 (1967).

<sup>19</sup> Paul L. M. Serruys, “Studies in the Language of the Shang Oracle Inscriptions,” *T'oung Pao* 60, no. 1/3 (1974).

<sup>20</sup> W. South Coblin, “Paul L-M. Serruys, C.I.C.M. (1912-1999),” *Monumenta Serica* 47 (1999): 512.

in total, these impressive volumes have become a milestone in the Dutch-speaking world of classical Chinese study, which nobody, in my opinion, has been able to surpass till this day.

With regard to the study of classical Chinese, we should not forget Hubert Otto, an early Scheut missionary who came to China in the late 19th century and eventually became the Apostolic Vicar of Gansu at the age of 39. This passionate missionary was also one of the first within CICM to devote considerable effort to studying classical Chinese and publishing works on this subject. In 1913, Otto published a 335-page monograph, entitled “*Étude sur les classiques chinois*”. Earlier than this, he had translated a series of Chinese classics, such as “*Seu-chou ou les quatre livres, traduction*”, (1897) and “*Cheu-king ou le livre des Vers, un des classiques chinois, traduction*” (1907). At the time, those works constituted a small portion of the classical Chinese handbooks available to Scheut missions in China.

### 3. Folklore studies.

#### 3.1. Custom and Rites.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, folklore studies emerged as a discipline addressing cultural and sociological issues. Focusing on traditional matters, in which religion, custom, and social phenomena pertaining to a particular region or ethnic group are of central interest to folklorists. Due to the fact that the Scheut missionaries lived closely with their local converts and attempted to learn all facets of the indigenous lifestyle, their observations and records on natives, whether made with consciousness or not, were often considered first-hand accounts for the study of Chinese folklore at that time.

In the vast land of northern China, customs can diverge greatly between localities as a result of the various ethnic groups that are scattered across the whole region. Louis Schram (1883 – 1971), a Scheut missionary who served in Gansu province in northwest China, where Monguor people (Tu people 土人 in Chinese) lived, authored a book entitled “*Le mariage chez les T'ou-jen du Kansou*”. This work was first published in 1932, resulting from his years of fieldwork and close examination of the marriage rituals of this ethnic group. A translation of this work into Chinese was only completed in 1998,

which eventually led to Schram gaining a belated but highly respected academic reputation among Chinese ethologists.<sup>21</sup> Besides Schram, the studies on the Monguors were also attended to by other Scheut missionaries. Among the participants that deserve to be mentioned are Antoon Mostaert and Leo De Smedt (1881 – 1951), who jointly authored a work on the topic of the Monguor language and published it in 1933. In this monograph, “*Le Dialecte monguor parlé par les Mongols du Kansou Occidental*”, 521 pages are devoted to a scholarly description of the Monguor dialect from a linguistic perspective, which was a groundbreaking study in this unique subject.<sup>22</sup> Likewise, in the far western region of Chinese Qing territory, Tibet, the adventurous Scheut missionaries also left their footprints, and a folklore account of the Tibetan ethnic group was once written by a Dutch Scheutist named Antoon Popelier (1884 – 1953). This research on Tibetan culture, entitled “*Volkenkunde rondom Thibet*” (1924), was most likely the first of its kind published in the Dutch-speaking world.

Clearly, the Han Chinese tenant farmers who successively migrated to the northern borderlands were always the main population with which the Scheut missionaries interacted on a daily basis. The studies related to the folklore of the Han Chinese therefore became more numerous, more detailed, and more comprehensive than those of other ethnic groups. Several works on this topic have been published as offprints or monographs. An early example of which is Florent Lauwers’s (1874 – 1939) 46-page work “*De Chineesche familie*” (1913), and Arthur Segers’s (1874 – 1935) 238-page book “*China, het volk, dagelijksch leven en ceremoniën*” (1932) represents a later publication. Due to their realistic, objective, and relatively bias-free viewpoints, these writings served as valuable materials for Dutch-speaking readers to gain a realistic glimpse into the lives of the Chinese people. It stands in stark contrast to some of the Western media at the time, which was “obsessed with contempt for China”, and often portrayed the image of this ancient nation as primitive, impoverished, and backward.<sup>23</sup> A variety of reasons were behind this, one of which, perhaps also the most logical motive, was to consolidate the superiority complex of the European imperialist powers and promote an ideology that was Eurocentric in nature.

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<sup>21</sup> Jerom Heyndrickx, “Louis J.M. Schram, CICM: Missionary and Ethnologist,” in: *From Antoine Thomas S.J. to Celso Constantini: Multi-aspect Studies on Christianity in Modern China*, ed. Ku Weiyang and Zhao Xiaoyang (Beijing/Leuven: Social Sciences Academic Press/Ferdinand Verbiest Instituut KU Leuven, 2011).

<sup>22</sup> E. Gaspardone, “A. Mostaert et A. de Smedt : Le dialecte monguor parlé par les Mongols du Kansou occidental, 1ère à 3ème parties,” *Bulletin de l’École française d’Extrême-Orient* 33, no. 1 (1933): 1014.

<sup>23</sup> Ingrid Schuster, *Vorbilder und Zerrbilder. China und Japan im Spiegel der deutschen Literatur 1773-1890* (Bern: Verlag Peter Lang AG, 1988), 179.

A large number of articles were also contributed by Scheut missionaries about the lifestyle of Han Chinese. “*De Verkeerde wereld*” (1898 – 1900), which appeared in the Scheut mission journal “*Missiën van China en Congo*”, was one of the earliest. In this lengthy work, published in installments and under the author’s anonymity, more than 30 aspects of Chinese people’s lives in northern China were described.<sup>24</sup> In understanding the Han culture of the late 19th century, the insights provided in these articles are very useful. Paul Dols’s (1873 – 1938) “*La vie chinoise dans la province de Kansou, Chine*” (1915 – 18) and “*Fêtes et usages pendant le courant d’une année dans la province de Kansou, Chine*” (1937), provide a detailed account of local Chinese customs based on his years of experience living in a mission area where Chinese, Hui Muslims, Mongols and some other ethnic minorities co-inhabited. Another interesting article about the lives of Han Chinese in the northern frontier region was from the pen of Rafaël Verbrugge (1872 – 1957). This serialized article, “*La vie des pionniers chinois en Mongolie aux prises avec un sol ingrat*” (1921 – 1925), is particularly notable for its detailed information on Chinese tenant farmers residing beyond the Great Wall. Reading articles of this kind will enable us to acquire a deeper grasp of how different ethnic groups in China, with diverse cultural backgrounds and religious beliefs, may interact and impact one another. As well as how external forces, such as villainous climates, economic hardships, and political uncertainty, could play an important role in shaping the lives of people who are surviving and thriving in a remote, but multicultural environment.

Upon reviewing many of the works describing the lifestyle and customs of the indigenous people, it appears that “marriage” was one of the most popular topics of interest to some Scheut missionaries. As early as 1886, an article on Chinese marriage, entitled “*Geschiedenis van een huwelijk volgens Chineesch gebruik*”, was published by Hubert Otto in “*Annalen van het genootschap der H. Kindsheid*”, a Flemish quarterly mission journal based in Gent. Following this, Jozef Rutten’s “*Note sur les mariages indigènes*” (1924) and Jozef Kler’s “*Quelques notes sur les coutumes matrimoniales des Mongols Ortos*” (1935) also dealt with the same subject. Interestingly, Jozef Mullie, who does not seem to devote much time to the writing of folklore, also wrote an article in 1936 entitled “*Het Chineesche huwelijk volgens een nieuwe wet*”, in which he expounded on the evolution in marriage customs and mentalities during the Republic period as compared to the Qing period.

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<sup>24</sup> Een missionaris van Scheut, “De Verkeerde wereld, of de gewoonten en gebruiken van China,” in *Missietijdschrift: Missien van Scheut*, ed. Scheut Missiehuis (Brussel: Scheut, 1898-1899-1900), 33, 34, 65, 67, 109, 111, 125, 141, 155, 172, 189, 200, 212, 225, 245, 257, 282, 285, 302, 318, 337, 429, 442, 449, 477, 493, 509, 526, 541.

A question might arise as to why the Scheut missionaries, who were particularly devoted to celibacy throughout their lives, were motivated to record and understand marriage customs in such a detailed manner. The reason could be partly attributed to the “supreme importance” of marriage within the minds of every Chinese, or perhaps a sense of curiosity also played a role in the interest expressed by those missionaries in this ritual. Schram once mentioned, for the Europeans, if a person does not get married, it is nothing out of the ordinary, however, for the Chinese, marriage is the most important thing in their lives, so much so that it overshadows everything else. In the eyes of many people in China, being unmarried is indecent and considered unethical.<sup>25</sup>

There is a little-known fact that numerous articles on folklore studies of the Scheut missionaries were also published collectively in an internal journal under the editorship of Jozef Mullie. This semi-annual journal, entitled “*Sino-Mongolica: Gedenkschriften der Missionarissen van Oost-Mongolie*”, existed only for four years and was distributed in very limited quantities only among the local Scheut missionaries. Yet, each article in all these 6 issues was carefully selected by Mullie with an eye towards academic quality.<sup>26</sup> These works, presented in either Dutch or French, provide a series of indigenous folklore studies in a number of different aspects, such as Rafaël Verbrugge’s “*De Rijstteelt*” discussing the local food sources, Florent Durein’s (1887–1920) “*Over het chineesch tooneel*” examining the local performance and entertainment art forms. As well as August Delaere’s (1888–1914) informative article “*Eenige Brokjes Geschiedenis over San-cheu-kia-tze en Omstreken*”, a work that offers readers an account of local Lama culture, religious sects, and secret societies, presenting a comprehensive analysis of ethno-regional religious and social concerns.

### 3.2. Religions and Sects.

As evangelists and apologists of the Christian faith, the Scheut missionaries attentively studied the Chinese religion and folk beliefs from the time they arrived in China. Their own mission journal, “*Missiën in China en Congo*”, subsequently became an ideal platform to share their research on this subject

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<sup>25</sup> Louis Schram 许让, *Gansu Turen de Hunyin [甘肃土人的婚姻 The marriage of the Tu people in Gansu]*, trans. Fei Xiaotong 费孝通 and Wang Tonghui 王同惠 (Shenyang: Liaoning Jiaoyu Publishing house 辽宁教育出版社, 1998), 4, 5, 284.

<sup>26</sup> In total, 6 issues were published in this journal: 2 issues in 1920 – 21, 2 issues in 1921 – 22, and 2 issues in 1925 – 26. To date, no original copies of Mullie’s publication in China have been located. The existing copy held in the KADOC is a retyped version made by Willem Grootaers.



at the outset. “*De Chineesche goden*”, written by Cyriel Van Belle (1857 – 1908), is an early achievement of its kind.<sup>27</sup> This lengthy text, published in serial form, introduces, and describes a number of major deities worshipped by followers of Daoism. The illustrations inserted were thoughtfully selected and scattered throughout the pages, providing readers with an additional point of interest.

Other than the mission journal, works from Scheut missionaries on Chinese religion and folk beliefs, also appeared in the form of books and academic publications. For example, there are two offprints on the study of Chinese religions contributed by Jozef Mullie. One of which was a work written at the invitation of the Catholic Truth Society in Great Britain, entitled “The Religion of China”. This work was intended to provide a historical overview of several major religions in China, such as Nestorianism, Daoism, Buddhism, Catholicism, and others, facilitating a better understanding of their evolution within the cultural context and their interaction with one another throughout the centuries. In Mullie's second book, “*De oosterse mens*”, he adopts a philosophical approach to a similar subject matter, explaining the emergence of Confucianism in China and how it has profoundly shaped the mentality of the Chinese people and their daily lives ever since. Another Scheut missionary who was truly devoted to the study of Oriental religions and authored influential monographs in this field is Jozef Spae (1913 – 1989). Among his numerous publications, primarily on Buddhism in Japan in fact, there are two monographs that deal with or refer to Chinese religions, namely “*De godsdiensten van China*” (1949) and “Buddhist-Christian Empathy” (1980).

“Figurism”, a controversial methodology employed by some early China Jesuits for interpreting Chinese classics, also somehow found expression in the work of the Scheut missionaries. This tendency is demonstrated in the work of Jozef Van Durme (1883 – 1954), “*Le notion primitive de Dieu en Chine*” (1927), in which he draws upon the concept of Christian God as an approach to review and elucidate the traditional folk beliefs that have been held by the Chinese people since ancient times. Nonetheless, it is impossible for people to fully comprehend the Chinese folk religion without grasping the concept of “*ling-hun*” (靈魂) in its entirety. This term is commonly translated as “soul”, but it is quite distinct from the Western view of the same word that Christians emphasize throughout their faith. In an article titled “*Le Chinois*

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<sup>27</sup> Van Belle, ‘De Chineesche goden,’ in S. Missiehuis, eds., *Missietijdschrift: Missien van Scheut*, Brussel: Scheut, 1895-1896-1897, pp.421, 443, 458, 472, 486, 505, 515, 549, 566.

*et la notion de l'âme*" (1927), Louis Kervyn (1883 – 1944) once elaborated on this unique, yet complex meaning of *ling-hun* in a comprehensible manner, attempting to fill up this fundamental knowledge gap for his Western readers. Jozef Hoogers's (1867 – 1945) article "*Théorie et pratique de la piété filiale chez les Chinois*" (1910) addresses the concept of "filial piety", a characteristic principle strongly adhered to by Christians as part of their Church doctrine and the Ten Commandments, but likewise also a key element and philosophical virtue frequently emphasized within the context of Confucian ethics, Chinese Buddhist, and Daoist beliefs. It is worth noting that, since the 20th century, the description or study conducted by most Scheut missionaries on non-Christian, particularly the Chinese local folk beliefs, has largely departed from their earlier attitudes and the tendency to denigrate the Chinese people as "pagans" and despise their indigenous beliefs as merely superstitious. This was a significant ideological transformation in this point when compared to the preceding articles that they delivered to the public.

Besides Chinese religions, Chinese secret societies, many of which are closely related to indigenous religious sects, were likewise recorded in the writings of the Scheut missionaries. Not only were those sect societies widespread in the northern part of China, but their clandestine, well-organized, yet potentially hazardous activities also often raised serious concerns among the Scheut missionaries. Some of these activities were violent rebellions intended to achieve a specific political goal. A case in point is the "Jindandao incident" (金丹教事件) that occurred in Inner Mongolia in 1891, which was jointly initiated by three local Han Chinese secret societies: Jindan Jiao (金丹教), Zaili Hui (在理會), and Wusheng Men (武聖門). Tens of thousands of Mongols were massacred under their slogan "anti-imperialism, anti-feudal peasant uprising", and the several Scheut mission posts were also subjected to severe attacks.<sup>28</sup> After a few years, another and much more aggressive attack was launched by the secret Society of Righteous and Harmonious Fists (義和拳), better known as "Boxers". This rebellion action, which occurred in 1899 and lasted nearly two years, left a deep and traumatic mark on the entire missionary community throughout northern China.

As a matter of fact, some of the secret societies mentioned by Scheut missionaries in their writings, remain largely unknown to the general public today, therefore making this information even more relevant to folklorists in the present day. For example, Jaak De Groef's (1860 – 1910) article "*Het*

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<sup>28</sup> Burensain Borjigin, "The Complex Structure of Ethnic Conflict in the Frontier: Through the Debates around the 'Jindandao Incident' in 1891," *Inner Asia* 6, no. 1 (2004).

*geheim genootschap der Waterlelie*” (1890) summarizes the activities of “the Society of White Water Lotus”(白蓮教), a secret sect society that originated in Shandong (山東); Koenraad Abels’s (1856 – 1942) article “*Bijzonderheden over de sekte der Tsai-li-ti*” (1892) provides information about the distinctive aspects of the above-mentioned Zaili Hui; Leon Van Damme’s (1870 – 1911) article “*een zonderlinge ontdekking*”(1895), details his discoveries concerning Huangji Dao (黃吉道), a secret society that spread widely in the Central Mongolian region. In addition, some Scheut missionaries also recorded a handful of very local secret societies, which operated within a certain geographical area with relatively few adherents. Such as Florent Durein's article “Cheng-Chen-Chiao” (1921 – 22), which reveals various details regarding the Han Chinese secret society “Shangshen Jiao” (上神教), a lesser-known but surprisingly widespread sect group active in the Majiazi (馬架子) region. The fascination Durein had with Chinese folk beliefs motivated him to gather a substantial amount of information on the subject. But he unfortunately perished from illness in China at an early age.

#### 4. Historical studies.

##### 4.1. Mission history and historical archaeology.

The Scheut Congregation has always placed a great deal of emphasis on the study of history, particularly the mission history. One of the most outstanding scholars in this field is Jozef Van Hecken (1905 – 1988). His remarkable achievements in the Scheut history in China, have left a great treasure for the Congregation. Over the course of years, with the help of many of his confraters, he wrote five large series chronicling the activities of his congregation and its establishment in the Chinese mission. Those series are categorized by each apostolic vicariate in which CIC. was actively engaged up to 1951. Although this monumental work was written in Dutch and initially intended to be used internally, it may nevertheless provide today’s historians with a deeper understanding and knowledge of the Scheut mission in China.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> This series includes the following: Jozef Van Hecken, *Documentatie betreffende de missiegeschiedenis van Oost-Mongolië*, 9 vols. (Leuven: Private uitgave, 1970-1973); Jozef Van Hecken, *Documentatie betreffende de missiegeschiedenis van het aartsbisdom Sui-yuan(1922-1954)*, vol. 1-5 (Schilde: Private uitgave, 1981); Jozef Van Hecken, *Documentatie betreffende de missiegeschiedenis van het bisdom Ning-hsia*, vol. 1-3 (Schilde: Private uitgave, 1978-1980); Jozef Van Hecken, *Documentatie betreffende de missiegeschiedenis van Zuidwest-Mongolie aartsbidom Suiyuan bisdom Ning-hsia*, vol. 1-3 (Leuven: Private uitgave, 1976-1977); Jozef Van Hecken, *Documentatie betreffende de missiegeschiedenis van het apostolisch vicariaat Zuidwest-Mongolie (Ordos)*, vol. 4-7 (Schilde: Private uitgave, 1980-1981).

Aside from studying the mission's history, a large number of Scheut missionaries were also interested in studying Chinese history. One of them is the aforementioned Jozef Mullie. His extensive writings on Chinese history, combined with archaeological research, were published in several major academic journals in Europe.<sup>30</sup> Perhaps, the most influential article is the one titled "*Les anciennes villes de l'empire des grands Leao 大遼 au royaume Mongol de Bārin*", published in T'oung Pao in 1922. In this article, Mullie employed a considerable amount of classical Chinese literature to pinpoint the precise location of several vanished cities of the ancient Liao dynasty (遼朝, 907 – 1125) formally located in East Mongolia, including its capital city "Liao Shangjing"(遼上京) which was built in 918. The Chinese version of this article was translated by Feng Chengjun (馮承鈞, 1887 – 1946) and published in its first edition in 1930.<sup>31</sup> There have been numerous reprints since then, the most recent of which was published in 2014. Feng's translation of Mullie's work received wide acclaim from Chinese academic circles, which largely contributed to Mullie's recognition as a prominent archaeologist in China. The archaeological research on discovering long-lost cities in the Liao dynasty also led Mullie further to delve into a specific writing system found on the tombstones of the Liao graves, the Khitan scripts (契丹文字), which became the topic of an important article he published in 1936, entitled "*De K'i-tan-inscripties van de graven der Liao-dynastie, 907-1125*".<sup>32</sup> This unique and now-extinct language and script were once used during the 10th to 12th centuries by the Khitan people, who were the founding nation of the Liao Empire. Mullie's work on Liao, as Japanese historian Takashi Furumatsu pointed out, has certainly contributed to the increase of interest in this specialized field, opening new avenues for research into the history of the Liao Dynasty and its Khitan culture on an international scale.<sup>33</sup>

Mullie was not the only missionary within Scheut who had a particular interest in the Liao culture. In fact, Louis Kervyn (1880 – 1939) was the first

<sup>30</sup> For a list of Mullie's historical and geographical works, see: Yongjun Zheng 郑永君, "Laihua Shengmu Shengxin Hui Jiqi Heyu Hanxuejia Min Xuanhua (1886-1976) Yanjiu [来华圣母圣心会及其荷语汉学家闵宣化(1886-1976)研究 A study on C.I.C.M. in China and its Flemish Sinologist Fr. Jozef Mullie (1886-1976)]," 339-341.

<sup>31</sup> [法]牟里 (Jozef Mullie), *Dong Menggu Liaodai Jiucheng Tankao Ji [东蒙古辽代旧城探考记]*, ed. Feng Chengjun 冯承钧, 1930 ed. (Shanghai 上海: Commercial Press 商务印书馆, 1933).

<sup>32</sup> Jozef Mullie, "De K'i-tan-inscripties van de graven der Liao-dynasti (907-1125)," *Oosterse Gernootschap in Nederland (Leiden)*, no. 6-8 Januari (1936).

<sup>33</sup> Takashi Furumats 古松崇志, "Dong Menggu Liaodai Qidan Yizhi Diaocha de Lishi [The history of the investigation of the Liao dynasty Khitan ruins in East Mongolia - prior to 1945 when "Manchuria" ceased to exist 东蒙古辽代契丹遗址调查的历史—1945年"满洲国"解体前]," *Journal of Liaoning Museum 辽宁省博物馆馆刊* (2009): 56-88.

Scheutist who brought the subject of “Khitan inscriptions” to the attention of the Western academic community. As French was a common language used among scholars at the time, Kervyn’s French-written paper “*Le tombeau de l’empereur Tao-tsong des Leao, et les premières inscriptions connues en écriture K’itan*” (1923) had a much broader readership than Mullie’s.<sup>34</sup> On all accounts, these two Scheut confraters, who collaborated together and shared their findings on this topic frequently and enthusiastically, were both respected scholars whose pioneering research made major contributions to the study of Khitan inscriptions during the early 20th century. In Japan and China, as well as in the Western world, the impact of their scholarly work has been widely credited and appreciated.<sup>35</sup>

#### 4.2. Regional history.

Following the collapse of the Qing Dynasty and the establishment of the republican government, northern China, where most of the Scheut Missions were located, suffered a series of interminable internal strife and wars. Apart from the incessant conflict between warlords, two Sino-Japanese wars also took place in the area. These events were eye-witnessed by the Scheut missionaries and recorded in writing. An early account of the battles in China can be found in the article of Joseph Rutten, “*De Japanisch-Chinesische Krieg*” (1895), J. B. Steenackers (1847 – 1887), “*L’état social de la Chine et la solution de la crise actuelle*” (1901), and August Van de Velde (1877 – 1931) “*Une sortie solennelle des souverains du Céleste Empire*” (1906). A number of articles written by local Scheut missionaries also described the regional battles. Such as Rafaël Verbrugge’s (1872 – 1957) article “*Le pays des Tchakars, occasion de conflits sino-japonais*” (1934), Jozef Van Oost’s article “*La guerre civile au Soei-yuen*” (1926) and “*La guerre civile à Palakai et à Eul-che-kia-tse*” (1928), etc. Jozef Mullie, who was much devoted to linguistic and historical studies, also recorded in his diary some details of the Chinese civil war launched in Rehe. Soon after, he published these stories anonymously in a Flemish newspaper under the title “*In de oorlogstijd*”.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> L. Kervyn, “Le tombeau de l’empereur Tao-tsong des Leao, et les premières inscriptions connues en écriture K’itan,” *Toung Pao* 22, no. 4 (1923).

<sup>35</sup> Jitsuzo Tamura, Yukio Kobayashi, and Shinobu Iwamura, *Tombs and mural paintings of Ch’ing-ling : Liao imperial mausoleums of eleventh century A.D. in Eastern Mongolia*, vol. 1-2 (Kyoto: Kyoto university, 1953), 7.

<sup>36</sup> It is unknown to which newspaper Mullie published this series of articles. Those original articles, which were typed by Mullie and intended to be sent out, can still be found in the KADOC archives. See: Archive Nr.: T.I.a.9.3.(KADOC18-750), Documentatie- en Onderzoekscentrum voor Religie, Cultuur en Samenleving (KADOC), KU Leuven.

Furthermore, due to their active involvement in Inner Mongolia and evangelization among the Mongols, Scheut missionaries were able to closely observe a number of independence revolutions undertaken by the Mongols in order to break away from the Chinese regime. Some of them have documented these events in great detail on paper. For example, Cyrillus Van Lantschoot's (1875 – 1949) article “*Épisodes de la révolution chinoise en Mongolie*” (1912), Jozef Van Oost's article “*Journées révolutionnaires en Mongolie*” (1914), and Rafaël Verbrugge's article “*La Mongolie un instant autonome*” (1924 – 25). Along with extensive archival documents on the subject, these works would serve as excellent sources of supporting literature on the study of Sino-Mongolian relations and history.

### 5. Geographical studies.

In regard to the geographical studies of the Scheut missionaries in China, an in-depth discussion of this topic was once provided by Dirk Van Overmeire in his paper “The Embedding of a Scientific into a Religious Mission: the Interaction of C.I.C.M. China missionaries with Geographical Societies (1878-1939)”.<sup>37</sup> However, the earliest mentions of the geographical work of the Scheut missionaries may well be found in the work of Emile Licent (1876 – 1952), a renowned Jesuit natural historian who served in China for more than two decades. In his monumental monograph, “*Hoang Ho-Pai Ho. Comptes-rendus de onze années (1923 – 1933)*”, Licent frequently emphasized the contributions of these Scheut missionaries to his research. He wrote, “We have always received the heartfelt help of the Belgian missionaries in northern China. Therefore, the trip of our research could be carried out smoothly... The Scheut missionaries are my genuine friends and assistants. In the last nine years of this research project, I have received a great deal of first-hand materials and suggestions from them. Their assistance has been highly beneficial to this publication.”<sup>38</sup> Meanwhile, in his writing, he also particularly highlighted some names of Scheut missionaries who actively engaged in geographical research in northern China, such as Gustaaf Cappelle

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<sup>37</sup> Dirk Van Overmeire, “The embedding of a scientific into a religious mission: the interaction of CICM China missionaries with geographical societies (1878-1939),” in *From Antoine Thomas S.J. to Celso Constantini: Multi-aspect Studies on Christianity in Modern China*, ed. Ku Weiyang and Zhao Xiaoyang (Beijing/Leuven: Social Sciences Academic Press/Ferdinand Verbiest Instituut KU Leuven, 2011).

<sup>38</sup> Émile Licent, *Hoang Ho-Pai Ho. Comptes-rendus de onze années (1923–1933) de séjour et d'exploration dans le Bassin du Fleuve Jaune, du Pai Ho et des autres tributaires du Golfe du Pei-Tcheu-Ly*, 38 vols., Publications du Musée Hoang Ho-Pai ho (Tientsin: Mission de Sienhsien, 1935-36), 90,927.

(1880 – 1945), Leonard Joosten (1885 – 1938), Jean Kreit (1889 – 1924) and Florent De Preter (1875 – 1957), among many others.<sup>39</sup>

Yet, in comparison to academic writing on geographical subjects, travel narratives, which were considered relatively less scientific, were published in much greater numbers by the Scheut Missionaries. The diverse and intricate landforms of China likely garnered a lot of attention from these natives of the Low Countries. However, Scheut missionaries did not just go on exploratory trips in the early days to satisfy their curiosity, but also in an effort to obtain detailed geographical information about the local area for certain specific purposes, such as resolving boundary disputes between the apostolic vicariates and to assist in making the scientific maps of their pastoral areas.<sup>40</sup> The first travelogue published by Scheutists appeared in 1866, the year when the first four Scheut pioneers reached China. The author, Frans Vranckx (1830 – 1911), attempted to retrace their entire journey from Brussels to Xiwanzi (西灣子) in his work. This Dutch-written travel account, entitled “*De Belgische geloofszendingen in Mongolie: verhaal hunner reis en aankomst*”, therefore became the first-ever publication from the Scheut missionaries.<sup>41</sup> In the following years, some similar writings were published in succession. Among which, Jozef Van Hilst’s (1870 – 1955) “*Op reis naar Mongolie*” (1897) and Joannes Sintobin’s (1867 – 1903) “*Van Scheut naar Midden Mongolie, reis beschrijving uit het dagboek*” (1899) were some of the early examples.

Many of those travelogues not only describe the missionaries’ journey from their home country to the mission destination, but also elaborate on their adventurous excursions through Asia and the China Inland. Emiel Indemans (1866 – 1912) was one of the earliest Scheut missionaries who explored the Chinese northwest region, namely Xinjiang. He published two articles about his adventures, “*Zeereis naar Ili en Verslag van de Ili Missie*” (1890) and “*Rondreis naar Ili van uit Peking, door geheel China, de woestijn van Gobi, over het Hemelsch gebergte naar de Missie van Ili*” (1891). Constant De Deken’s (1852 – 1896) 419-page travelogue “*Dwars door Asia*” (1899) could be considered both a scientific monograph and a thrilling novel. Drawing largely on his personal diary, the author vividly narrates the sights and experiences he encountered during his exciting journey from Central Asia to Tibet. From the 20th century onwards, Rafaël Verbrugge, a Scheut missionary as well as a qualified medical doctor with a passion for geography, authored a

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 11, 21, 104, 883.

<sup>40</sup> Carlo Van Melckebeke, *Service social de l’Église en Mongolie* (Scheut: Éditions de Scheut, 1968), 115.

<sup>41</sup> Franciscus Vranckx, *De Belgische geloofszendingen in Mongolie: verhaal hunner reis en aankomst* (Mechelen: Van Moer, 1866).

large number of works about his journeys in China. Over 20 articles were written on this topic by this prolific writer prior to the 1940s. One of his monumental works was published in 1938 in Paris under the title “*Le pays des Tchahars, étude de géographie regionale*”. What makes this account quite different from any other typical travelogue at the time is that, in addition to providing detailed information about Tchahars’ topography, the author also offers an objective and nuanced analysis of the local economy, politics, and immigration issues.

It is worthwhile to note that a large portion of these Scheut missionary travel accounts were written in their native Flemish language.<sup>42</sup> Perhaps this was due to the fact that many of these works were excerpted directly from their private diaries or correspondence with their friends and families. Having the opportunity to read these works without any language barriers, many of Flemish readers may develop a greater interest in this mysterious realm of the East, which consists of completely different landscapes and geographical features than the ones they are familiar with in their own country. In addition, and perhaps most critically, those travel accounts and geographical descriptions, written with objective observations and lively language, provided an invisible path that allowed many of their fellow Flemish compatriots to encounter the real China through the reading of these works, and eventually liberated them from their infinite imaginations that always run wild about this distant and unreachable nation.

## 6. Conclusion.

Having spent almost a century in scientific observation, exploration, and research, Scheut missionaries in China have accumulated a substantial amount of material and have made a significant contribution to the field of Sinology. In 1947, with the support of the superiors of the Congregation and the encouragement of secular academic circles, the Verbist Academy (懷仁學會) was formally established by CICM in the capital of China. In establishing this academic institution, all scholars within the Congregation were able to collaborate closely and concentrate on the development of research in different areas of Sinology. Although the historical turbulence that happened in 1949 severely affected the existence of this institute, a number of monographs published during that period, many of which appeared in the series

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<sup>42</sup> There are a large number of Scheut missionary travelogues published in the monthly mission journal “*Missiën in China en Congo*”, which was printed exclusively in Flemish.



“Scheut Edition”, represented the highest level of Sinological research conducted by Scheut members.<sup>43</sup>

In conclusion, Belgian missionaries from different Congregations have played an important role throughout the centuries-long history of Sino-European encounters. As early as the 13th century, the Flemish Franciscan Willem van Rubroeck (1215 – 1295) arrived in the Mongol Empire, and his writings on China marked the beginning of Sino-European interaction.<sup>44</sup> A few centuries later, several scholastic Jesuits from the Society’s Province of “*Flandro-Belgica*” were sent to Qing China and served at the Empire’s court, among whom Ferdinand Verbiest (1623 – 1688) was undeniably honored as one of the most famous and distinguished Belgians in Chinese history.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that when it comes to the 20th century, it would be difficult to find any other group or individual, neither in China nor in Europe, that could rival these energetic Scheut missionaries from Flanders as the leading forces in expanding Sino-Belgian relations. Certainly, their life and mission were primarily dedicated to reaching out to the “paganish” souls of the Chinese with the Christian faith and western morals, but they also adhered to the integration principle of “When in China, Do as the Chinese Do”, and invested much of their spare time and energy delving into the local language and culture. Over the course of many years of accumulating knowledge and experience, among these so-called “jacks of all trades” have emerged several highly respected Sinologists, whose accomplishments likely still remain unsurpassed to this day. The works that they have left behind, which may be overlooked by many of us due to language barriers or other factors, will be a valuable intellectual resource awaiting to be explored, interpreted, and learned from. As we all know, to gain a deeper understanding of the past, will help us shape a better future.

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<sup>43</sup> Jozef Van Hecken and W. A. Grootaers, “The Half Acre Garden, Pan-Mou Yüan,” *Monumenta Serica* 18 (1959): 371.

<sup>44</sup> Willem van Rubroeck traveled to the Mongol Empire in 1253. He published an account of his three-year journey entitled “*Itinerarium ad Parts Orientales*” (1255) in which he describes various aspects of China, including geography, people, medicine, religions, fine arts, and so forth. This record stands as one of the earliest written references to China in the history of Sino-European relations.

<sup>45</sup> There were 79 applicants from Province of “*Flandro-Belgica*” who applied to go to the China mission (Indipetæa) during 1640 – 1660, but only eight of them were approved and four of these eight missionaries actually made it to China. Namely, Ferdinand Verbiest, Philippe Couplet (1623 – 1693), François de Rougemont (1624 – 1676) and Albert Dorville (1621 – 1662), see: Noël Golvers, “*Litterae indipetæae from the Jesuit provincia Flandro-Belgica 1640/1660-1700*,” in *Light a candle: Encounters and friendship with China: Festschrift in honour of Angelo Lazzarotto P.I.M.E.*, ed. Malek Roman (S.V.D.) and Criveller Gianni (P.I.M.E.) (Sankt Augustin: Institut monumenta seric, 2010), 225-243.