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## Editorial: Special edition: 14th International Verbiest Conference – Encounters beyond the Great Wall

*Pieter Ackerman, Director Verbiest Institute KU Leuven*

The reader will have noticed that our previous Courier was delayed by several months. From the editorial staff we have therefore done everything possible to get this second issue of 2021 to the reader in time. A year ago we reported, then still cautiously hopeful, about the planning of our 14<sup>th</sup> international conference. We were hopeful that we could welcome our guests and speakers in Leuven, as we did before. Unfortunately, the well-known pandemic put a stop to this. But... In no time, our staff members tried to immerse themselves in the world of digital conferences, and from 24 to 27 August, our 14<sup>th</sup> international conference took place, but online. In our digital conference room we welcomed 32 speakers from 7 different countries: Catholics, people of different religion, and non-believers. They gave lectures on their research on “History of the Church in China”, “Religion and the Rule of Law”, and “Mongolian Studies”. Thanks to the presence of about 80 spectators, we could count on some fascinating moments of discussion and the physical distance between the attendees suddenly didn’t seem so large anymore.

In this special edition of the Courier, we would like to present to you some of the lectures that were presented at this conference. We have made a selection from two areas of study. A first set of lectures deals with the field of research that the Verbiest Institute has made its priority: the history of CICM in China. We bring you the opening speech of Father Charles Phukuta cicm, Superior General of Scheut. In his opening speech Father General clearly indicates how scientific research on the history of Scheut in China has been the common thread throughout the almost 40-year existence of the Verbiest Foundation. Prof. Willy Vande Walle clearly shows how a number of Scheut fathers occupy a prominent place in the history of Sinology in his lecture on Fr. Jozef Mullie, just as Simon Zheng Yong Jun does in his historical overview of the main contributions to academic research by the Scheut Fathers. Fr. Peter Baekelmans cicm then introduces us to Fr. Raphaël Verbois cicm, whose attempt to better understand the Buddhist faithful shows how interreligious dialogue, even before Vatican II, was important in the “Encounters beyond the Great Wall”. In Fr. Jeroom Heyndrickx cicm’s keynote lecture at the conference,



*Our Lady of Grace, from the Sanctuary in Scheut (Brussels). In the background Mongolia, the mission field of Scheut.*

Editorial

he introduces us to these “Encounters” and why at the Verbiest Institute we prefer to speak of “Encounter” rather than “Mission”.

In a second part we highlight a number of lectures on “Mongolian Studies”, a field of research we wanted to bring back under the attention during the last conference. And with success. Patrick Taveirne cism gives us a comprehensive overview of the development of the CICM apostolate among the Mongols between 1874 and 1953, and of the often precarious situations in which the missionaries evangelized. In a report by Dr. Uranyo-a, submitted by Dr. Haiying Yang and translated by Fr. Peter Baekelmans cism, we read how the research of Fr. Antoon Mostaert cism from 1934 about the graves of the Erküt people has recently been confirmed by local excavations. Paul Dubçing, scholarship student of the Verbiest Foundation, gives

us a glimpse into the life of the first and only Mongolian bishop Ma Zhong-mou. Jeroom Heyndrickx cism, in his report on the preparation of the 2de CICM Mongolian mission, in which he was directly involved, shows how quickly it was launched. Perhaps too quickly. This is also clear from the lecture with which we conclude this Courier. Bishop Giorgio Marengo cism describes in his missionary musings the very particular character of the complex Mongolian soul, and how we absolutely must take this into account when “whispering the Gospel to the soul of Mongolia”.

Dear reader, in name of the entire staff of Verbiest Foundation Leuven, I want to wish you a Merry Christmas and a healthy and constructive 2022!

## Keynote address 14<sup>th</sup> Verbiest International Conference<sup>1</sup>

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Verbiest Institute KULeuven opens its 14<sup>th</sup> International Conference. Covid-19 was not able to force us to postpone or to cancel it. So far, the Verbiest Conference has already met physically thirteen times, in Leuven, and Beijing, or Taipei. Today we can only meet online, but we are meeting despite the many obstacles.

I speak to you as a member of the Board of Verbiest Foundation-Leuven, which sponsors this conference, and as the Superior of CICM. Forty years ago, CICM established the Verbiest Foundation and gave it the task to promote dialogue and cooperation with China. That history of forty years and also our meeting online today symbolizes that whatever obstacles we encounter on our road of dialogue, they will not stop our efforts to promote cooperation and exchange. This is particularly true for cooperation in academic research.

In 2012 CICM celebrated the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its foundation as a missionary congregation *opting to go by preference to China*. On that occasion, my predecessor Fr. Timothy Atkin, CICM Superior General, gave the keynote address at the opening of the 11<sup>th</sup> International Verbiest Conference in Leuven. He participated in the entire three-day conference together with Luc Colla, another member of the CICM General Government. Their presence made it clear that CICM highly values the importance of international academic research on the history of the Catholic Church in China. We know the confusing facts

Charles Phukuta cism, Superior General of CICM



of that history and the confrontation between the Church and China that developed from it. Therefore, CICM established Verbiest Foundation to encourage dialogue and cooperation with China as a way to overcome these past misunderstandings.

Indeed, we must grow beyond historical prejudice and obtain new insights in history based not on ideological prejudice but on academic research and on historical documents because that leads to the encounter which we are seeking. We know, of course, that historical facts confirmed by academic research can still be interpreted differently by different scholars. Still, the very effort of jointly dialoguing and exchanging on history liberates us from remaining stagnated in confrontational prejudice. It helps us move forward on the way to reach a degree of rapprochement and encounter. That precisely is the goal of dialogue and the fruit we expect from this significant historical research on the History of the Catholic Church in China. Verbiest Institute has been doing this now for forty years. We see good results and fruits of our research, but we know that much more remains to be done by the coming generations.

The Verbiest Foundation-Leuven is aware of its limitations also in the field of academic research. Our most important ambition is expressed in our goal to be an agent to promote more research on history. We owe our success in this field to many important scholars. In this research, Dr. Noël Golvers stands

<sup>1</sup> Keynote address by V. Rev. Fr. Charles Phukuta CICM Superior General at the opening of the 14th International Verbiest Conference online on the History of the Catholic Church in China on August 24, 2021.



Father Timothy Atkin, CICM Superior General with at his right Cardinal G. Danneels, and Archbishop Joseph Ti-kang. Opening of the 2012 International Verbiest Conference in Leuven, Belgium.



Fr. Timothy Atkin, CICM Superior General, and Father Patrick Taveirne CICM at the 2012 International Verbiest Conference.

out with his seven volumes on Ferdinand Verbiest SJ, Francois de Rougemont SJ, and the Jesuit missionaries. They are internationally appreciated as outstanding academics, and have motivated the Verbiest Foundation to continue to promote more academic research.

Already in 1990, during our 3<sup>rd</sup> International Conference, the Verbiest Institute KULeuven welcomed more than 80 scholars representing religious missionary congregations and academic institutions to exchange papers and reports on the topic “*Historiography of the Chinese Catholic Church*.” Archbishop Luo Kouang, then rector of Fujen University, pointed out the need to define the priorities more clearly when writing that history. At that conference, scholars from East and West, like Arnulf Camps OFM, and Paul Rule, introduced the basic principles for writing history, which we still consider today as fundamental to our research. First: our priority is not to write the history of our congregation. Our priority goes to writing the history of the Chinese local Church. How it started? How did it grow? What obstacles did it meet on the way? Secondly, we look at history not from our own, foreign, viewpoint. We look at it through the eyes of the Chinese. The history we write must be Chinese-centered. How did the encounter happen between the Christian faith and the Chinese people, Chinese culture, China as a country? How was the Christian faith coming from the West accepted or not accepted by the Chinese? These approaches must characterize our research and writing of history.

In 2019, the Board of Verbiest Institute decided to give priority in its research to what was initially phrased as the *History of CICM in North China*. At the same time, the Institute adapted the title of the research to *History of the Local Churches in North China*. That change was inspired by the above mentioned historiography guidelines, stating that our research should focus on the local Church that is, Chinese-centered, and not centered on the history of missionary congregations. It is also a response to the requests from local Churches in North China today who feel the need to learn more about their history. But to do this

well, we need more participation of Chinese scholars in this research. Only more direct participation of Chinese scholars can bring our research in line with our own historiography principles and the general call from China for *Sinicization*.

As a direct application of this decision, the Executive Group of the VF Research Project decided to give priority attention to the study and eventual the publication of the documents of our main CICM history of the Church in China researcher, Fr. Joseph Van Hecken. He was appointed in 1966 by the CICM Superior General Omer Degrijse to collect documentation on the history of CICM in China and on the growth of local dioceses in East Mongolia, South-West Mongolia, in the Mongolian Ordos Region, and Suiyuan. He collected 24 volumes of mimeographed material, letters, reports, etc., all crucial material for writing the history of the local Churches in North China. Next to his documentation, we must obtain feedback from the local Churches, testimonies of the faithful and Church ministers, documents from local archives, records of oral history, etc. We need personal encounters with scholars from East and West, with Catholics and non-Catholics comparing their academic research. This is what we have already done during the past 13 Verbiest International Conferences. Today we are happy to welcome scholars from seven different countries participating in this 14<sup>th</sup> conference.

I express my appreciation to the Verbiest Institute to honor its decision to give priority to presenting papers on the History of the local Churches in North of China. As a result, not less than seven papers will be presented on this topic. Following are just some examples.

\* In CICM, we all know the name of Paul Splingaerd who went to China in 1865 with our first four CICM confreres. We know him as one of the five first pioneers, yet we know so little about him, his family, his life, and his achievements. We are grateful to Mrs. Anne Megowan for participating in this conference to present her important study on Paul



Fr. Joseph Van Hecken (top row, 1st left) and Fr. Remi Van Hyfte (top row, 2nd right) with Mongolian Christians.



Participants at the Third International Verbiest Conference in 1990 on "Historiography of the Chinese Catholic Church".

Splingaerd, her great-grandfather whom she calls in her book, The Belgian Mandarin. With his wife Catherine, Paul remained faithful to his dream as a young man to serve the CICM Mission to China. He got married in China, raised a family of twelve children, and developed a remarkable career in cooperation with Chinese authorities, serving the country of China. It is to Anne's credit for making Paul so much better known to us in CICM, but also to China and to many friends worldwide. We thank Anne for allowing the Verbiest Institute to translate her book and make it available today in Dutch, French, and Chinese. And we look forward to more cooperation with Anne in publishing an enriched edition of her present English version of The Belgian Mandarin, The Paul Puzzle, with more data on the Splingaerd family, whose lives were lived all over the world from East to West.

- \* Prof. Dr. Chen Xinyu of Beijing is preparing a study on the tombs of the 252 CICM missionaries who lived, died, and are buried in North China. The way these tombs are honored by Christians in China speaks to us a language that reveals the feelings of Chinese Christians for the work of the missionaries. Moreover, it reveals to us the heartbeat of the Catholic faithful in China today.
- \* Fr. Dr. Peter Baekelmans, CICM, will present in this conference a study on our confrere Rafael Verbois's remarkable attempts to better understand the faith of Buddhist believers. This tells us a story of how missionaries, even in pre-Vatican II times, took steps to engage in interreligious dialogue.
- \* Recently Simon Zheng Yongjun, a doctoral student of Verbiest Foundation successfully defended his doctoral dissertation on Jozef Mullie CICM at Fudan University in Shanghai. Jozef Mullie was the master teacher, introducing generations of CICM missionaries to the Chinese language before leaving for China. For too long the exceptional contribution to Chinese linguistics of Jozef Mullie have remained largely unknown to scholars in China and to the international public. Dr. Zheng Yongjun, now graduated from Fudan University, will direct the Mullie Research Program of Verbiest Institute. He will introduce us to Jozef Mullie, an outstanding linguist and philologist who wrote grammars on the Chinese Literary and Spoken language and made exceptional

contributions to historical and archeological research. Jozef Mullie achieved all his work, while an active missionary in the Rihe (Jehol) Province of China, where he lived close to the Catholic faithful as a parish priest and self-made scholar. He published hundreds of articles in European periodicals sharing information and appreciation for each and every aspect of life in China: Chinese culture, Chinese thoughts, art, politics, etc. It makes him one of our most outstanding pioneers and bridge builders in intercultural exchange between China and Europe during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Last but not least, I must mention here a research field which CICM has a duty to promote and gladly wishes to do so; we have not yet succeeded as we had hoped. CICM worked in North China among the Chinese and also the Mongols. CICM succeeded in founding Poro Balgason, the first Mongolian Catholic parish community in history. Several CICM confreres became famous for their contributions to the study of the Mongolian language and culture. The 3<sup>rd</sup> International Verbiest Conference in 1993 was about Antoine Mostaert CICM and his Mongolian Studies. It successfully gathered important world-famous Mongolian Studies from scholars such as Walther Heissig, Klaus Sagaster, Igor de Rachewiltz, Françoise Aubin, Ts. Chagdarsuren, Rincindorji and published their papers in two volumes.

A few years later, Prof. Igor de Rachewiltz considered that the books from his precious library should be brought together with the books of A. Mostaert and H. Serruys. The three collections considerably enriched the Scheut Memorial Library [SML] in Leuven. That intensified our desire to promote even more research on Mongolian studies in commemoration of Dr. Igor and many great Mongolian scholars.

In 1992, the Verbiest Institute was actively involved in fostering the start of a new CICM Mission among the Mongols in Ulaanbaatar and the initiative of starting the A. Mostaert Center there. This led to our agreement with Ulaanbaatar to jointly organize a conference on Mongolian Studies, alternating every three years between Ulaanbaatar and Leuven. This year it is our turn in Leuven. That's why this 14<sup>th</sup> International Verbiest Conference program includes on the fourth day a program on Mongolian Studies. I am pleased and honored to welcome the



*Prof. dr. Walther Heissig during the third International Verbiest Conference on Antoine Mostaert cicm in 1993.*

Prefect of Ulaanbaatar, Bishop Marengo IMC, who will give a keynote address to introduce that part of the program. The

program of lectures to be presented includes a lecture on the late Bp. Ma Zhongmou by Rev. Fr. Paul Urnu, a priest of the Mongol Mission Poro Balgasu (Inner Mongolia, China). The participation of Bishop Marengo at our conference augurs, we hope, the beginning of a renewed cooperation between our Verbiest Institute KULeuven, the Prefecture of Ulaanbaatar, and the A. Mostaert Center.

Ladies and Gentlemen, even though we are only meeting online, it is clear from the above that this 14<sup>th</sup> International Verbiest Conference offers a rich program. Therefore, in the name of the Board of the Verbiest Foundation and the General Government of CICM, I wish you all a fruitful exchange and a successful conference.

## Joseph Mullie 閔宣化 (1886-1976): Scholar and Librarian<sup>1</sup>



*W.F. Vande Walle – KULeuven*

Joseph Mullie 閔宣化 joined the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (CICM, also called Missionaries of Scheut) on September 7, 1903. He took his vows on September 8, 1904, studied philosophy in Scheut (1904-1906) and theology in Leuven (1906-1909). He was ordained a priest in Scheut by Monsignor van Ronslé on July 18, 1909, and left for China on September 25, 1909.

Mullie occupies a special place in the history of his congregation. There is no other CICM missionary who, like him, has devoted himself so exclusively and for such a long period in his home base to the study of the Chinese languages and cultures. He has emerged as the sinologist par excellence of the congregation, perhaps even the sinologist par excellence of Belgium in his lifetime. Admittedly, he was not the only Belgian sinologue, not even the only missionary sinologue, there were also a few French-speaking clergymen, such as the Jesuit Van Hee and Bruno Delpaire. Van Hee was a sinologist of some standing, who, together with Wieger, among others, compiled the first embryonic catalogue of the Sino-Japanese Department (JapSin) in the archives of the Jesuits in Rome. It is nevertheless true what the Indologist Adriaan Scharpé writes in a present copy of one of his publications offered to Mullie: "To my former teacher Professor J. Mullie, pioneer of Eastern Philology in Flanders".

Mullie's profile is primarily that of a philologist and linguist. After his return to Belgium in 1931, he was charged with, among other things, teaching the Chinese language to his fellow brethren, aspiring missionaries. The General Chapter of

the Congregation in Scheut held in 1930 had appointed him professor of Chinese, phonetics, and missiology in its theological scholasticate in Leuven.

It was mainly with the training of the aspiring missionaries in mind, that Mullie undertook his studies of the Chinese literary language (wenyan). For eighteen years he taught over three hundred missionaries in the Chinese language. His publications were also used outside Leuven, for example in Paris, for the training of students of Chinese. In a sense he has laid the foundations of a Flemish school of sinology by training half a dozen missionaries with outstanding scholarly merits. Two of his students, including Grootaers, worked on the staff of sinological studies at the Catholic University of Peking after the end of the Second World War. A small group earned doctoral degrees in Sinology in Leiden, London or New York.

Although working as professor of Chinese language for the congregation, he was never given the opportunity to put his expertise at the service of a university in Belgium. Apparently, the time was not right yet for sinology at the university. There were, of course, those who were aware of the need to launch sinological studies, but nothing ever came of it in his day. Dom Lou e.g. urged Rector Ladeuze in 1927 to launch a Chinese studies program at the university, but to no avail, although some time earlier Chinese had been studied and taught at the University of Louvain. Indeed Charles de Harlez (1832-1899), appointed professor in Eastern Languages at the Faculty of Philosophy and Literature of the Catholic University of Louvain in 1871, had been an internationally acclaimed sinologue. Other

<sup>1</sup> Only part of the lecture is presented here. The full text presented online at the 14th International Verbiest Conference (Aug. 2021) with footnotes will be included in a separate volume to be published in 2022 in *Leuven Chinese Studies*.

acclaimed specialists were Louis de La Vallée Poussin at the University of Ghent, and Etienne Lamotte at the Université catholique de Louvain. Both were authorities on Buddhism, but for them Chinese was mainly an auxiliary science in the study of Buddhist scriptures. Chinese provided them access to Chinese versions of Sanskrit or Pali texts. But they were not sinologists *per se*, rather philologists and historians. They did not have a command of vernacular Chinese and had also a limited background in the history and society of China. So here in the congregation, at a time when there were many vocations, Mullie set to work putting the study of the Chinese language on a scientific basis. To this end he compiled several works of grammatical and linguistic orientation.

### Background and Training

It should be noted that Mullie was largely a self-taught scholar. Joseph Van Hecken CICM lists the books that made up his linguistic and philological foundation, noting that there was little direction and guidance from academics in teaching positions at the time. Mullie's career shows the typical trajectory of a pioneer. C. De Brabander CICM was his first Chinese teacher. Even at the early stage of his studies, Mullie was allegedly very critical of his teacher. As an autodidact, he studied the works of Professor Vercouillie (1857-1936): *Algemene Inleiding tot de Taalkunde, Beknopt etymologisch woordenboek, and Historische grammatica der Nederlandse taal* (Gent, 1900). Vercouillie made references to the Indo-Germanic languages group, which stimulated Mullie to start the study of Sanskrit with the help of Prof. dr. Richard Lick's *Praktische Grammatik der Sanskrit-Sprache für den Selbstunterricht* (Leipzig 1902).

His self-study also included Gothic, for which he used W. Streitberg's *Gotisches Elementarbuch* (Heidelberg, 1897) and Wilhelm Braune's *Gotische Grammatik* (Halle, 1905). Studying Sievers' *Grundzüge der Phonetik zur Einführung in das Studium der Lautlehre der indogermanischen Sprachen*, he manifested a strong interest in phonetics. The first scholarly article he pu-

blished was indeed "Phonetische Untersuchungen über die nord-pekinesischen Sprachlaute" in *Anthropos* (Vienna, 1913). In Leuven at the university he studied Sanskrit and Pali, but also, presumably through self-study, so-called Indo-Chinese languages: Lolo, Kami, Mewara, Tay, Mon-Khmer. "I studied languages instead of theology," Mullie is quoted as saying. He apparently used the term 'Indo-Sinitic languages'. Later, in 1937 he gave a lecture for the Cercle linguistique of Brussels, on the subject of "L'étude des racines dans les langues indosinitiques" (1937) and in 1951 he gave a lecture the Flemish philologists' congress in Brussels about the pronouns in the Indosinitic languages.

He studied Mongolian with the help of Bertold Laufer's *Skizze der mongolischen Literatur* and Bobrovnikov's *Grammatika mongol'skago yazyka* Skizze (Saint-Petersburg, 1835). He also wanted to study Tibetan under the guidance of Louis de la Vallée Poussin in Ghent, but his request was denied. He devoted much time to the study of Manchu, with the help of Langlès. *L'Alphabet Mantchou* (Paris, 1757); Terrien de la Couperie, "The Djurchen of Manchuria, their Name, Language and Literature" in *Royal Asiatic Society N.S. XXI, Part II*, pp. 433 ff.; and Bertold Laufer. "Skizze der Manchurischen Literatur" in *Revue Orientale IX* 1908, pp. 1-53.

This is a trajectory that reminds one of that of Georges Dumézil (1898-1986), noted philologue and historian of religions.

### In the Mission of Northern China

In 1909 he travelled to Ta-ying-tzû in Bârin to join Father L. Heyns and help him founding a new mission post. He lived near to the Mongols and used the opportunity to improve his proficiency of Mongolian. He could now learn the language and pronunciation from the mouth of the Mongols, acquire a large vocabulary and better grasp of the syntax and structure of the Mongolian language. After two years he was appointed director of the Chinese Sint-Jan Berchmans college in Hata. During the three years of his directorship, he prepared ten school



Fr. Joseph Mullie cicm at the desk.



Fr. C. De Brabander cicm.

books in Chinese on general history (3 parts), church history (2 parts), astronomy, agriculture (2 parts), apologetics, geography (3 parts) and etiquette. The study of Chinese now completely took up all his time and from then on, he occupied himself solely with this language.

On September 14, 1915, he was appointed pastor at Kang-ping-xian, in the southeast of the vicariate of Eastern Mongolia, and the same year the bishop sent him to Shenjing on December 19, 1915. On September 8, 1924, after nine years in Shenjing, the bishop appointed him founder and pastor of Ta-zi-gou, a prominent center, later called Ling-yuan.

On September 26, 1926, Mullie was appointed founder of a new mission in Chengde, the capital of the province Rihe (Jê-ho). This is where the old summer residence of the Manchu emperors was located. Thanks to his proficiency in Chinese, his familiarity with the history of China, and his knowledge of the rules of Chinese etiquette, he had little difficulty in establishing good relations with the city's elite. Thanks to his intercession the Swedish explorer Sven Hedin (1865-1952) was granted all the facilities he needed for his study of the old imperial city. Hedin acknowledged his indebtedness to Mullie in his book *Jehol: die Kaiserstadt* (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1942).

The scientific study of Chinese remained Mullie's major preoccupation. The Swedish sinologist Bernhard Karlgren had meanwhile published his seminal works on the history of Chinese, including *Etudes sur la Phonologie chinoise* (Uppsala, 1915-1919); *A Mandarin Phonetic Reader in the Pekinese Dialect* (ib.) and *Analytic Dictionary of Chinese and Sino-Japanese* (1923). In "The reconstruction of Ancient Chinese" in *T'oung Pao* 1922, he had elucidated his method on the construction of ancient Chinese. Mullie profited hugely from the works of Prof. Karlgren to improve his understanding of the phonetics of the Northern Pekinese dialect spoken in Eastern Mongolia. Another focus of his was the grammatical functions of words and sentences: he noted down the Chinese words with their meaning and their grammatical functions on thousands of index cards. He recorded the results of his research in a monumental work: *Het Chinees Taaleigen, Inleiding tot de gesproken Chinese taal (Het Noord-pekinies dialect)*, three volumes. Printed in China, on the presses of the Lazarists in Beijing (1930-1933). Father Audomar Versichel CICM translated it into English, printed and published it in China under the title *The Structural Principles of the Chinese Language*. 2 vols. Pei-t'ang, 1937.

## Archaeological Findings

Min Xuanhua's "An Exploration of the Old City in the Liao Dynasty in Eastern Mongolia" Jos. Mullie. "Les anciennes villes de l'empire des grands Leao au royaume Mongol de Barin", sent to the famous French Sinology magazine "Bulletin".

His main archaeological discoveries are those of the tombs of three Liao emperors at Ch'ing-chou: Shengzong (+1031), Xingzong (+1055) and Daozong (+1101). He related his findings in "Les sépultures de K'ing des Leao" (*T'oung Pao* XXX 1933, pp. 1-25) and "Les anciennes villes de l'empire des grands Leao au royaume mongol de Bârin" in *T'oung Pao* XXI, 1922, pp. 105-231. These discoveries are arguably his strongest claim to end-

uring fame as a sinologist.

By order of the superiors of the congregation, he escorted from Rihe (Jê-ho) the mortal remains of the founder Theofiel Verbist to Tianjin, where it was placed in an elaborately decorated coffin and whence it was shipped to Belgium. Mullie returned to Belgium via the Siberian railway, arriving home on February 1, 1931. Thus, his missionary career came to an end, but his scientific journey would continue, and, if anything, only gain in strength.

## Teaching Chinese at Leuven

Back in Belgium he immediately started teaching Chinese to the future missionaries. His goal was to give his students a scientific foundation in Chinese linguistics, not just proficiency in the spoken language. He believed that knowledge of the literary language was indispensable for the missionaries in China if they were to become a good Sinologist. His standards were high, and not everyone was able to live up to them. Only a few kept up with him, and eventually became adept linguists. The experience taught him that his standard work on the North Pekinese dialect had to be adapted to the abilities of his students. Therefore he compiled a new grammar: *Korte Chinese Spraakkunst van de Gesproken Taal (Noord-Pekinees Dialect)* (Utrecht, 1947).

Mullie's scientific achievements were formally acknowledged when he was appointed professor of Chinese Language and Literature at the University of Utrecht in 1939. His new assignment was soon severely hampered by the outbreak of the war, but from 1945 onwards his university assignments became his major task. Despite the difficult situation in Belgium and Holland because of the German occupation, Mullie regularly traveled from Leuven to Utrecht every week and gave his lectures and seminars for eight hours on Friday and Saturday to a large group of students. During these years he wrote compiled a major scholarly work in Dutch: *De Grondbeginselen van de Chinese letterkundige taal, in drie delen, in 4° 1088 blz.* (1946-1947-1948). This book was the fruit of years of study and research into the Chinese literary language. More than 3000 passages from the ancient classics are analyzed in this three-part work. A few years before, he had published what is probably his best-known work *Le Mot particule Tcheu* (Brill, 1942).



Fr. Joseph Mullie cicm, together with Sven Hedin.

When Mullie reached the age limit in 1956, he stopped lecturing at the University of Utrecht and retired to Leuven. On December 13, 1956, the Queen of the Netherlands appointed Mullie as Commander in the Order of Orange-Nassau, while on 17 Sept. 1958 the Belgian King appointed him to Grand Officer of the Order of Leopold. The Royal Flemish Academy of Belgium inducted him into its ranks as corresponding member on 15 October 1955, as active member on June 22, 1957, and made him an honorary member in May 1972. He gave numerous lectures at the monthly meetings of the Academy in Brussels.



## His Publications

Mullie contributed articles and chapters to numerous (in total 45) periodicals and learned journals.

He also contributed to the Festschrift for Sven Hedin: P. W. Schmidt. *Hyllningsskrift tillägnad Sven Hedin*; to: *Katholieke Encyclopedie*; *Syling* (Elsevier), and *Studies on comparative religion* (Catholic Truth Society).

## Contributions to Sinological studies by the CICM (Scheut) Fathers

Simon Yongjun Zheng, *Verbiest Institute KU Leuven*



### The literature sources

The first article that describes the sinological studies of the Scheut Fathers was probably from Fr. Willem A. Grootaers (1911-1999). It is a short essay published in 1947 in a Chinese Catholic journal. The book "L'action sociale de l'église catholique en Mongolie" from Mgr. Carlo van Melckebeke (1965) also contains a chapter describing the same topic. These early works give us an overview of the contribution of the Scheut Fathers in the field of sinology, but the content could be further extended. According to the statistics reported in van Melckebeke's book, 241 Scheut fathers engaged in sinological studies during a longer or shorter period; and more than 1500 articles or monographs have been published over the years. To develop this subject more we find information in "Bibliotheca Missionum" (1916-1974) and in "Proeve eener bibliographie van de Missionarissen van Scheut" (1939) written by Fr. Willem A. Grootaers CICM and Fr. Dries Van Coillie CICM (1912-1998) published in 1939 on the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of CICM. This bibliography contains a comprehensive list of the writings as well as a brief biographical note of each Scheut Father from 1878 until 1937, mainly from the Mission countries of China, Congo, and the Philippines. We report only the CICM contributions on the Chinese language and historical studies.

### Language

In the early 20th century, only a few foreign missionaries devoted themselves to the study of the Mongolian language.

The CICM Congregation trained some competent scholars in Mongolian studies. Fr. Antoon Mostaert (1881-1971) CICM was the prominent one. His two publications, "Textes oraux Ordos" (1937) and three volumes "Ordos Dictionary" (1941-1944), have earned him a worldwide academic reputation. Fr. Mostaert's career in Mongolian studies began with his publications on translated work. Upon his arrival in China in 1905, he started translating Chinese Christian books into the Mongolian language. These are mainly catechetical books, such as "Cihula nomun surtal" (1914), "Nigen Ujimegce todurhai medeku debter" (1916), "Cihula yosusu tailburi" (1920) and "Arlighahu orunu sunesudun sara" (1921). Besides Fr. Mostaert, Fr. Florent Claeys (1871-1950) has also translated and published several books in Mongolian, such as a 407-page Mongolian prayer book "Jalbaril-un debter" (1931), a 362-page book about the lives of saints "Arighun Kumun-ner-un uiledburis-un duradqal" (1934), and the New Testament "Sine toghtaghal-un tobciya" (1936). These Mongolian Catholic books were of great value to the



*Scheutists in the Beijing Language School (1937).*



Mongol Christians. Even to this day, the Catholic Church in the Mongolian regions still relies heavily on these religious books in their own language.

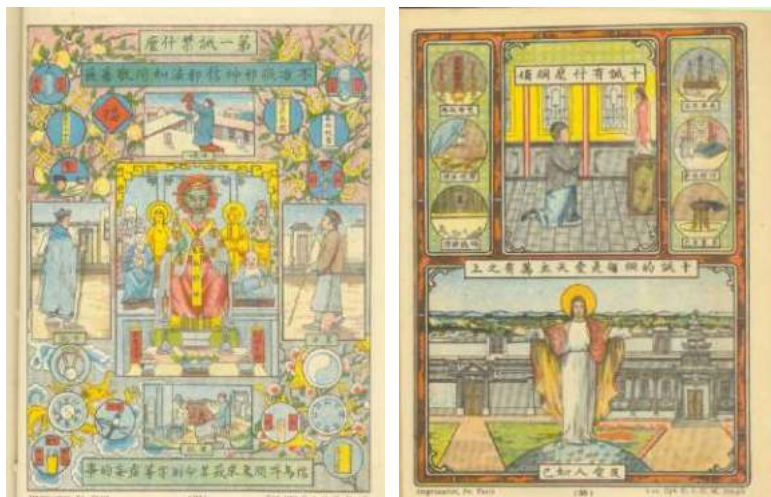
Over the years more Chinese farmers immigrated to the vast land beyond the Great Wall. Han Chinese even became the main population on the territory of the Mongolian plateau. Literature plays a vital role in Chinese society. This led Scheut fathers to engage in the translation of Christian books into Chinese. Their early translations focused on catechism and prayers. Fr. Albert Gueluy's (1849-1924) "History of the Catholic Catechism" (1887) and Mgr. Hubert Otto's (1850-1938) "Morning and evening prayers explained" (1893) are probably the earliest works of this kind. Many Han immigrants in the border area were illiterate. To attract them to the faith Christian literature alone was not enough. Music would enliven their prayer and liturgies. Fr. Jozef Raskin (1892-1943) in Nanhaoqian translated Christian songs in Chinese. There are two hymnals, "Sacred songs", 1928) and "Hymns to glorify the Lord" (Rong Zhu Sheng Ge, 1930) compiled by Jozef Raskin. Fr. Jozef Van Oost (1877-1939) did the same in Sui-Yuan. His book "Twenty Hymns in Chinese with Organ Accompaniment" (*Vingt cantiques sur texte chinois avec accompagnement d'orgue*, 1925) is likely the first-ever organ music book in the Mongolian region. Meanwhile, Scheut Fathers also observed that "visual communication" was a successful method of evangelization among illiterate people. Paintings and images were more practical to provide intuitive comprehension than complex contents in textbooks. Fr. Leo Van Dyck (1878-1951) painted Christian illustrations for the Chinese catechist books. His work "Catechismus in platen" (1927) contains 80 pages, of which 40 pages are Chinese illustrations. Another work of his is entitled "The life of Christ in the parables in Chinese" (*Het leven van Christus in de parabelen in het Chineesch*, 1935); this 84 page book also contains 40 pages illustrations. Most notably, the illustrations of Fr. Van Dyck are in Chinese style and represent a historical attempt towards inculturation – sinicization – of Christian art.

Apart from religious books the CICM fathers also translated scientific books into Chinese. For the children living in the remote area of northern China, these "foreign" books were undoubtedly the only sources of knowledge on science. Fr. Jozef Mullie was the first director of Chifeng college for three years. He translated ten western textbooks into Chinese to be used in schools: books on world history, astronomy, agriculture, geography, apologetics. Fr. Louis Janssen (1876-1950), principal of the college in Songshuzuizi, also translated several books f.e on "Politeness" (*Beleefdheid*, 1916), "Arithmetic in Chinese" (*Rekenkunde*, 1917-18), "Chinese translation of the Latin grammar" (*Chineesche vertaling van Grammaire Latine*, 1918). Also Fr. Jozef Rutten (1874-1950), teacher of Nanhaoqian college translated "Elementary algebra exercises and problems for use by Chinese students" (*Exercices de problèmes d'algèbre élémentaire à l'usage des élèves chinois*, 1909). One of the few Chinese CICM fathers, Fr. Joseph Chang Chou-yi (1903-1991) translated books from French into Chinese, such

as "Meirixunyan"(1927, 1930), "Chou sieou sing-k'i" (?), "Chinese music method" (*Chineesche muziek methode*, 1932), "shunlian shengtijun"(1934-1936)? "Li-yong ki-kouo-ti ki chou"(1938), and etc.

Evangelization by writing and spreading school manuals for children was one important activity. The first concern however for missionaries was to be able to speak with the people and to preach the faith face to face. The early Jesuits spent much time studying intensively the Chinese classics and trying to reach literati, the Scheut Fathers paid more attention to the local spoken dialect. The mother tongue of most of them was Dutch. They needed a Dutch-Mandarin Chinese dictionary for daily use. Fr. Eugeen Grossé's (1880-1953) 356-page "Practical Chinese-Dutch dictionary" (*Praktisch Chineesch-Nederlandsch woordenboek*) was published in 1935 at Tianjin "Bei-yang". It was one of the earliest Mandarin dictionaries in the Dutch speaking world. Other Chinese dictionaries prior to this, were mostly written by Dutch people from the Netherlands working among Chinese laborers in the Dutch East Indies and were therefore dictionaries on the Hakka or Min dialect the language of most Chinese in the East Indies. But regrettably, Grossé's dictionary was not very widespread. During a large flood in 1939, most of the printed copies stored in the basement of the Scheut Mission's procure in Tianjin were swept away. But Fr. Grossé's was not the only dictionary prepared by Scheut Fathers. Next to a very early Chinese-French-Latin dictionary made by Mgr. Hubert Otto in 1904, entitled "Trilingual Chinese dictionary" (*Trois coups de filet dans le dictionnaire chinois*), Fr. Jozef Mullie (1886-1976) also completed a 440-page "word list" which was published in 1933, as part of his monumental linguistics work "Het Chineesche taal eigen". In fact, this "word list" could certainly be considered as a Chinese-Dutch dictionary.

Fr. Joseph Rutten's "Dictionary romanization inter dialectic" (*Lacmeah Jismuj Tyueasfuap Jistian*, 1935) was a creative accomplishment. Across the vast land of China, minority peoples in the provinces all speak their own different dialects. If one system of romanization could be developed to be used for writing all different dialects that would greatly benefit all



Catechetical illustrations by Fr. Van Dijk cicm.

foreign missionaries. That's what Fr. Rutten did. He created an "inter-dialectic romanization" system with the joint assistance of Fr. Heryn Lamasse and Fr. Ernest Jasmin. He also published a series of articles to explain the romanization.<sup>1</sup> But this bold attempt proved to be too complicated and did not meet with success. Still, it was a remarkable achievement in the history of Chinese language studies.

Although the dream of creating an "inter-dialectic romanization" does not seem easy to reach, the Scheut Fathers did not give up making study books or dictionaries for individual dialects. Fr. René Leva (1880-1958) collected numerous local phrases during his time in inner Mongolia and northern Shaanxi, he compiled his three-volume "Particles of the Chahar dialect" (*Particules du dialecte de Chahar*) in 1941 and "Northern Chansi Dialect - Alphabetical List of Phrases with English Translation" (*Le Dialecte Chansi Nord-Liste Alphabétique d'expressions avec traduction française*) in 1944. Fr. Jozef Oost (1877-1939) wrote a dictionary about the local proverbs of Sui-yuan district, "Sayings and proverbs of the Chinese living in southwest Mongolia" (*Dictons et proverbes des Chinois habitant la Mongolie sud-ouest, 1919*).

Remarkable in this field is the contribution of Fr. Edmond Devloo CICM (1891-1974). He published "An Etymological Chinese-English Dictionary" in the CICM-directed Hua Ming Press, in Taipei in 1969. H. Emin. Cardinal Yu Pin, then rector of Fujen



Fr. Edmond Devloo cicm.

University, praised the book in an introductory letter personally written in Chinese calligraphy. In 1970 Father Devloo published yet another remarkable book at Hua Ming Press Taipei: *An Anthology of 3.600 Classified Chinese Proverbs and Wise Sayings*. Luo Kouang, Archbishop of Taipei praised Fr. Devloo and recommended the book extensively in a full-page letter. Edmond Devloo – during several years a teacher of Chinese in CICM seminars – continued his research. Successively in 1973 and 1975 (at age

82 and 84) he published two volumes in Tiger Press, Singapore, the first with 1.300 and the second with 1.200 Chinese parallel inscriptions entitled "Anthology of Classified Parallel Chinese Inscriptions" volume I and II. The first one was introduced and recommended by Bishop Francis Hsu of Hong Kong and Bishop Carlo van Melckebeke cicm, the second was introduced by Bishop Peter Lei then bishop of Hong Kong and again Carlo van Melckebeke cicm. Thanks to financial support of benefactors, Edmond Devloo sent copies of his books to missionaries inviting them to use his books in their apostolate.

In the field of Chinese linguistics however Fr. Jozef Mullie is to be considered the master and pioneer. His three-volume work "Idiomatic principles of the Chinese language" (*Het Chineesch taaleigen, 1930-1933*) is a 2000-page fundamental work for Chinese language teaching which he used in the CICM congregation for decades. As a young student Fr. Willem Grootaers also completed a Chinese language manual, "Four-years course in the national written language" (*Vierjarige cursus in de geschreven nationale taal, 1947-1950*) which he prepared under the supervision of his teacher Mullie. This textbook was initially designed for beginners as Mullie's book was too academic for students with no knowledge of the Chinese language.



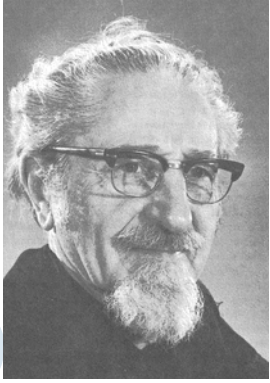
Fr. Jozef Mullie cicm.

Fr. Willem Grootaers however achieved his most remarkable research in Chinese in the field of "Linguistic geography". He was the first person in China to start that specific research method on language and dialect. Willem Grootaers was a student of his own father the famous linguist and promotor of Linguistic Geography at KU Leuven (Belgium). Grootaers advocated that any linguistic scholar should free himself from theories on language. He should go and live among the people and spend time recording the "living" language. His main objective was to gather language material as much as possible, study the vernacular dialects of the region, and examine its evolution through the influence of cultural and historical development. Nevertheless, the linguistic circles in China did not value this method of learning at the time. Ironically, when Grootaers moved to Japan after 1951, his work on "Linguistic Geography" was highly acclaimed. After many years, his multi-reprinted monograph "Genuine Chinese dialect geography" (2003) was finally translated into Chinese. In the preface we read: "let us hope that one day the dialect geography in China will spread its seeds and bear its fruits."

Another eminent scholar of Chinese linguistics was Fr. Paul Serruys (1912-1999). Over 40 of his academic papers have been published in various European and American journals. Before he went to China, he studied Chinese with professor Jozef Mullie in Leuven. In China he was appointed to Datong (Shanxi Province, China) where he engaged in the study of classical Chinese and the local Chinese dialect. His contribution to "Oracle bone script"<sup>2</sup> was a big achievement, but not so widely known. Fr. Serruys' first work on this subject was his paper "Studies in the Language of the Shang Oracle Inscriptions" published in 1974 in T'oung Pao. W. South Coblin (1999) once said "This monumental and seminal work became for many years

<sup>1</sup> Such as "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).

<sup>2</sup> Paul Serruys engaged in the study of oracle bones when he moved to the USA after Mao Zedong came to power.



Fr. Paul Serruys cism.

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". Paul Serruys, who was very devoted to research on the ancient bone inscriptions, always praised his admirable teacher Fr. Mullie with utmost respect<sup>3</sup>.

Indeed, Fr. Jozef Mullie was not only a leading scholar on spoken Chinese but certainly also a scholar with a thorough knowledge of classical

Chinese. His other intensive work on Chinese linguistics is his three volumes Dutch-written monography "The basic principles of the classical Chinese" (*Grondbeginselen van de Chinese letterkundige taal, 1947-1950*). This impressive book – over a thousand pages – has become a landmark in the Dutch-speaking world of sinology that nobody could surpass until today. Not only did its theoretical value benefit the Missionaries of the Scheut Mission, but it also played an important role in the development of Sinology in Belgium.

## Historical and geographical studies

Regarding the historical research of the Scheut Fathers, one of the most outstanding scholars is Jozef Van Hecken (1905-1988). His remarkable research on the CICM history in China has resulted in a great treasure for the congregation. During several years, with the cooperation of many of his confreres, Fr. Van Hecken collected and ordered information on CICM Mission history categorized in five series referring to the apostolic vicariates in which CICM was involved before 1951. This monumental work, written in Dutch and mimeographed, intended for internal use, can also offer today's historians a deeper understanding of the Scheut mission in China<sup>4</sup>.

Fr. Jozef Mullie's substantial articles on Chinese history combined with archaeological research were published in several prominent academic journals in Europe. Perhaps, the most influential article from Mullie is "The ancient cities of the empire of the great Leao in the Mongol kingdom of Barin" (*Les anciennes villes de l'empire des grands Leao au royaume Mongol de Barin*), published in T'oung Pao in 1922. In this article, Mullie utilized a considerable amount of classical Chinese literature to examine the exact location of several vanished ancient cities of the Liao dynasty in East Mongolia, including the capital city "Liao shangjing", which was built in 918 CE. This lengthy article

was first translated into Chinese in 1930 by Feng Chengjun and was reprinted several times afterward; its last edition was in 2014. Japanese historian Takashi Furumatsu (2009) enumerated 11 discoveries in his paper that Mullie contributed to the historical and archaeological studies on the Liao dynasty. He emphasized that Mullie's research profoundly influenced the interest of the Western academic world this field. Furthermore, Mullie has also published a significant article in 1936 about a Liao tombstone with the inscriptions carved in "Khitan" language, entitled "The K'i-tan inscriptions of the Liao dynasty's graves" (*De K'i-tan-inscripties van de graven der Liao-dynastie, 907-1125*). This unique form of script was once used during the 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> centuries by the Khitan people who had established the Liao Empire. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was very little known in the West.

This Dutch written paper from Mullie has drawn much attention to Sinology circles, but he was not the only one in CICM who made such research on "Khitan inscriptions". In fact, Fr. Louis Kervyn (1880-1939) was the first Scheut Father who brought this subject to the attention. Due to the commonly used French language, Kervyn's paper "The tomb of Emperor Tao-tsong of the Leao, and the earliest inscriptions in K'itan language" (*Le tombeau de l'empereur Tao-tsong des Leao, et les premières inscriptions connues en écriture K'itan, 1923*) had a much wider audience than Mullie. On all accounts, Fr. Kervyn and Mullie were the first scholars who started a new chapter on this specific study of the Liao cities and its inscriptions. As historian Tamura Zitsuzo (2002) pointed out in his article, "Those reports (from Mullie and Kervyn) aroused great interest among scholars not only in Japan and China but also in the West."

Around the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the vast land of Northern China, where most of the Scheut Missions were located, experienced interminable wars and quarrels. There were incessant fights among the warlords, and two Sino-Japanese wars. The Scheut Fathers witnessed those events and recorded them in their writings. Some of the early articles regarding the battles in China were from Fr. Joseph Rutten, "The Japanese-Chinese battle" (*De Japanisch – Chinesische krieg, 1895*), Fr. J.B. Steenackers (1847-1887) "The social state of China and the solution of the current crisis" (*L'état social de la chine et la solution de la crise actuelle, 1901*) and Fr. August Van de Velde (1877-1931) "A solemn departure of the sovereigns of the Heavenly Empire" (*Une sortie solennelle des souverains du Céleste Empire, 1906*). Some other similar articles on this subject also contain salient geographical features, such as Fr. Rafaël Verbrugge's article "The land of the Chakars, an occasion for Sino-Japanese con-

<sup>3</sup> In 1985, while Fr. Serruys was living together with Fr. Jeroom Heyndrickx cism in Taipei, he explained that it was thanks to the introduction into classical Chinese language by Fr. Jos Mullie cism that he was able to identify in the bone inscriptions nouns and verbs and so form phrases and clarify their meaning. One of his own students at Washington State University – Prof. Dr. Ding Pang-xin – had, in the name of the Academia Sinica of Taiwan, invited Paul Serruys in 1982 to make a translation of ancient bone inscriptions. During the same year, 1985, the famous pioneer and promotor of research on bone inscriptions Dr. Hu Houxuan, when meeting with Jeroom Heyndrickx cism in Beijing, confirmed the remarkable contribution of Paul Serruys CICM to the translation of bone inscriptions.

<sup>4</sup> The Research & Publication office of Verbiest Foundation intends to translate several of the volumes in English to make the information available for international research.

flicts" (*Le pays des Tchakars, occasion de conflits sino-japonais, 1934*), Jozef Oost's article "Civil war in Soei-yuen" (*La guerre civile au Soei-yuen, 1926*) and "Civil war in Palakai and Eul-che-kia-tse" (*La guerre civile à Palakai et à Eul-che-kia-tse, 1928*). Fr. Jozef Mullie, who was much devoted to linguistic and historical studies, also recorded in his diary some details of the Chinese civil war in Jehol. Shortly after, he wrote a series of articles and anonymously published in a Flemish Newspaper, entitled "In the wartime" (*In de oorlogstijd*). Furthermore, as the Scheut Fathers were actively working in Inner Mongolia and evangelizing amongst the Mongols, they were much more "fortunate" than many other foreigners in China to witness several independence revolutions initiated by the Mongols. Some of the Scheut Fathers wrote about these events, for example, Fr. Cyrillus Van Lantschoot's (1875-1949) article "Episodes of the Chinese Revolution in Mongolia" (*Épisodes de la révolution chinoise en Mongolie, 1912*), Fr. Jozef Van Oost's article "Revolutionary days in Mongolia" (*Journées révolutionnaires en Mongolie, 1914*), and Fr. Rafaël Verbrugge's article "An autonomous moment of Mongolia" (*La Mongolie un instant autonome, 1924-25*).

Regarding the Geographical studies of the Scheut Fathers in China, Dr. Dirk Van Overmeire has once expounded on this subject in his paper "The Embedding of a Scientific into a Religious Mission: the Interaction of CICM China Missionaries with Geographical Societies (1878-1939)". In the book of Fr. Emile Licent, the author has also highlighted several Scheut Fathers who dedicated themselves to geographical research in northern China, such as Fr. Gustaaf Cappelle (1880-1945), Leonard Joosten (1885-1938), Jean Kreit (1889-1924), Florent De Preter (1875-1957) a.o.

However, compared to academic writing on historical or geographical subjects, many more travel narratives were published by the Scheut Fathers. Probably the diverse and complex landforms of China garnered a great deal of attention from these people of the low countries. One of the earliest travelogues appeared in 1866, shortly after the first Scheut Fathers arrived in China. The author Fr. Frans Vranckx (1830-1911) told the story of their whole trip from Brussels to Xiwanzi in his book. This Dutch-written travel account "The Belgian missionaries in Mongolia: the story of their journey and arrival" (*De Belgische geloofszendingen in Mongolie: verhaal hunner reis en aankomst*) was the first-ever publication of the Scheut Fathers. Thereafter, similar writings were consecutively published. "Voyage to Mongolia" (*Op reis naar Mongolie, 1897*) from Fr. Jozef Van Hilst (1870-1955) and "From Scheut to Central



Fr. Rafaël Verbrugge  
cicm.

Mongolia, travel stories selected from the diary" (*Van Scheut naar Midden Mongolie, reis beschrijving uit het dagboek, 1899*) from Fr. Joannes Sintobin (1867-1903) were the early works.

Those travelogues were not only about the missionary's journey from their home country to the Mission destination but they also described their venturesome excursions through Asia, such as crossing Tibet and Xinjiang. Fr. Emiel Indemans (1866-1912) was one of the earliest Scheut Fathers who explored the Xinjiang region; he published two articles about his adventure, "Voyage to Ili and the report from the Ili Mission" (*Zeereis naar Ili en Verslag van de Ili Missie, 1890*) and "Round-trip from Beijing to Ili, through entire China, Gobi desert, passing over the heavenly mountain to the Ili Mission" (*Rondreis naar Ili van uit Peking, door geheel China, de woestijn van Gobi, over het Hemelsch gebergte naar de Missie van Ili, 1891*).

The 419-page travelogue "Crossing through Asia" (*Dwars door Asia, 1899*) from Fr. Constant De Deken (1852-1896) could be qualified as a monograph in many aspects. This book was based on his diary, describing what he saw and experienced during the journey from Central Asia to Tibet. After the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Fr. Rafaël Verbrugge was presumably one of the most prolific writers on this topic. He wrote over 20 articles until the 1940s. In those writings, Fr. Verbrugge described the various landforms in different regions of China and Mongolia. One of his monumental works was published in 1938 in Paris, under the titled "The land of Tchahars, a study on regional geography" (*Le pays des Tchahars, étude de géographie régionale*). In this work, the author not only contributed detailed information on the geography of Tchahars he also gave a subtle analysis of the local economy and immigration matters.

It is rather interesting to know that many of these travel accounts of the Scheut Fathers were written in their native Flemish language. One of the reasons for this perhaps is that many of these articles originated from their diaries or private correspondence. By reading these texts in Flemish, it could inspire their compatriots in Flanders to take more interest in this mysterious land of the East. More importantly, these travel narratives could also objectify the boundless imagination of the Flemish people on China in a more realistic manner.

## Conclusion

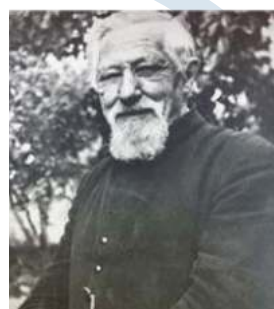
After nearly a century of exploration and study, Scheut Fathers seem to have reached the peak of their research in sinology in China. In 1947, the Verbiest Academy was officially established in the capital of China. This academic institute was designed to bring together all CICM scholars so they could jointly develop their research in sinology. A publishing house was also set up in conjunction with their new series of publications entitled "Scheut Editions". However, political evolutions in China forced this newborn institute to end its life. On the 25<sup>th</sup> of July 1951, Verbiest Academy in Beijing had to close its doors.

# The Missionary Legacy of Fr. Rafaël Verbois, CICM



Fr. Peter Baekelmans cicm – Sedos, Rome

The Belgian missionary Father Rafaël Verbois, CICM, took a genuine interest in Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism and had a good relationship with Buddhist monasteries in the Inner Mongolia region of Wangzimiao in the 1920's, now one hundred years ago. His interest lives on in a certain way in my own life as a missionary, especially in the theological dialogue with Japanese Esoteric Buddhism. I shall try to explain the importance of his encounter with Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism from my own encounter and study of Japanese Esoteric Buddhism.



Fr. Rafaël Verbois.

Besides his work as a missionary caring for his flock, most of whom were poor farmers that were threatened regularly by marauding bands, he became interested in the Buddhist religion. He made friends with the abbots of monasteries in the neighborhood, besides making detailed sketches of the different parts of the monasteries, temples, describing the sculptures and paintings of Buddhist deities, bodhisattvas, protectors and wrathful deities, and the didactic scenes on the punishment in hell.<sup>1</sup>

Fr. Raphael Verbois began his missionary work in 1910 in Songs-huzuizi in Jehol Province. About 200 km northeast of Beijing lies the town Chengde, once capital of Jehol Province. (...) Chengde was also a center of Tibetan Buddhism where many monasteries were built. Two of them were still functioning at the time of Father Verbois and remain imposing buildings to this day; one is a replica of Potala Palace in Lhasa, the other of Tashilunpo Monastery in Shigatse, Tibet.<sup>2</sup>

This interest in other religions was unusual for missionaries of his day. Then the idea was that once a Catholic, one had to do away with all the Buddhist statues in the house because they represented pagan worship. Even in Japan, missionaries ordered the newly baptized to throw the Buddhist statues and Shin-objects into a nearby river as a sign of conversion. Ancestor worship was also considered pagan worship. Notwithstanding this, he felt free enough to enter into dialogue with Buddhism and was actually appreciated by the local Buddhist monks.

It was around that time that Father Verbois was offered fifty-four miniature paintings “out of eternal gratitude” by a young monk who left the imperial monastery at Wangzimiao for higher studies in Lhasa, Tibet. The paintings had been pinned to the wooden wall in the monk’s room at the monastery.<sup>3</sup>

Our talk will center around the value of this precious gift to Fr. Rafaël Verbois and how it helps to understand Esoteric Buddhism’s art, theology, and rituals better.

## A precious gift

These paintings, actually “mandalas”, namely objects to aid one in one’s spiritual development in meditation, were bought from the aging Fr. Verbois in 1977 by the then-Director of the Ethnographic Museum of Antwerp, Dr. Adriaan Claerhout, where they have remained ever since. Because of the number 54, there is the idea that there should be another set of 54 paintings as the sacred number in Hinduism and Buddhism is 108, but so far none has been found. I was contacted to search for it in the CICM archives at KADOC, Louvain, by the late Chris De Lauwer, curator of the MAS (Museum aan de Stroom, Antwerp), which I did in Sept. 2012,<sup>4</sup> but without success. We hope and pray that the missing 54 paintings might still come to light, but it may be that this set is complete, as I shall explain later. Anyway, with the present images we can get a good idea of how Esoteric Buddhist meditation is done, and I would like to show you some similarities with the Catholic way of performing rituals and contemplating the Divine. The catalogue for the Exhibition *Buddha & Mind* first in New York at the Rubin Museum of Art, New York in 2014-15, and later at the MAS museum, Antwerp, in 2016-17, contains in addition to the introduction three specialized studies of the 54 mandalas, and lastly the mandalas themselves.

This series of paintings, called *Meditation on the Mandala of Sarvavid Vairocana*, teaches us the way Esoteric Buddhism understands ‘god’. We used to think in the West that there is no god in Buddhism, but I am about to finish a book entitled *the ‘god’ of Buddhism*, based on my experience of Esote-



<sup>1</sup> *The All-Knowing Buddha, A Secret Guide* (New York: Rubin Museum of Art and BAI, 2013), 7.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

ric Buddhism where the head of the Buddhist pantheon is called *Vairocana* in Tibet or *Mahavairocana* in Japan. This is an “all-knowing god” (*sarvavid*), but also an “all-present god”, as cosmic Buddha, and “all-benevolent” as he encompasses all the compassionate supernatural powers (*siddhis*) of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. This figure is very similar to the God of the Bible who is *omniscient*, *omnipresent*, and *omnipotent*. Of course, the comparison is not that simple as Vairocana is the embodiment of the *Dharmabody*, one of the three bodies of the Buddha, and symbolizes the *Great Emptiness*.



the two great virtues of Vairocana, Wisdom and Compassion. Thus, in a way Vairocana unites the earlier wisdom-school, Theravada, and the later compassion-school, Mahayana. Together they form the Buddhist Trinity. One of the last studies of the

The gift Fr. Verbois received from this young monk in 1923 is indeed special as these teachings are secret and should not be given to outsiders in Esoteric Buddhism. It took me a while before I found a Buddhist priest in Japan who was willing to introduce me to the Shingon Esoteric Buddhist practice, needed to become a Buddhist priest, where one learns how to perform a fire ritual, called *goma* (from the Sanskrit *homa puja*), over a span of three months. In the context of my doctoral research into a “sacramentology of religions”, I received every initiation for the Buddhist priesthood, except for the final one. The Buddhist name I received at the Tokudo ceremony (literally, ‘way of virtues ceremony’ in which one promises to keep the Buddhist precepts) was *hiten (asari)*, which means ‘flying in heaven’, and refers to the little angels in Buddhist mandalas moving on clouds (see for instance leaf 53, left upper corner, in the catalogue).

late linguist Fr. Willem Grootaers, CICM (1911-1999), was the publication of his notes when he was in China, going around to temples, jotting down the different kinds of Buddhist trinity.<sup>6</sup> Even in Japan he loved to go around by bicycle to register the different dialects in the country and became a teacher of the Japanese language to Japanese, very much like the late Jos De Roo, CICM (...), who wrote “2001 Kanji”, in which he explained the world of Chinese-Japanese characters to Japanese and foreigners alike. Many of our missionaries have been, and still are, linguists and anthropologists *avant la lettre*. In early Esoteric Buddhism the Buddhist trinity was a typical form, which developed into a four-faced Buddha. One face is depicted a bit larger to indicate the supremacy of Vairocana. And then later into a group of Five Wisdom Buddhas,<sup>7</sup> adding to the trinity Bodhisattva Aksobhya (vajra family) and Amitabha (lotus family), again a wise and a compassionate divine being. In the 54 paintings, Vairocana is sometimes depicted alone, sometimes as three-faced (leaf 8, 17), or as four-faced (leaf 9) but also as five separate wisdom Buddhas, all equal size (leaf 13-16), sometimes combined with their counterparts making ten Buddhas in total (see leaf 23). The author identifies the album as being a support for a visualization practice based on the tantra text *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations (Sarvadurgatiparisodhanatantra)*.<sup>8</sup>

### One Cosmic Buddha with many faces.

The first article by Christian Luczanits discusses the many ways Buddha Vairocana, the supreme Cosmic Buddha, is depicted in Esoteric Buddhism. Most of the bronze statues are gilded, or gold leaf is used for the paintings. The Buddha is likened in this way to the sun that illuminates the darkness of ignorance, or the light that floods the netherworld and guides beings from there (see e.g., leaf 6).<sup>5</sup> The Japanese translation of Mahavairocana is *Dainichi*, meaning “the great light”, symbol of the wisdom with which the Buddha illuminates the whole world. This is the meaning of the term “all-knowing” (*sarvavid*) Buddha. Saint Francis Xavier used the term *Dainichi* as the word for God at the beginning of his mission in Japan, till he understood the close connection with Buddhism.

The evolution of the mandalas from one to three to five Buddhas is interesting. Simply stated, there is one Buddha, with two virtues, making three Buddhas, existing in five kinds of wisdom. The fourth Buddha points out that all three Buddhas are one, and to make clear that these four are also one, a fifth Buddha comes up, Vairocana, in the midst of four other Buddhas. In Tibet, the Five Buddha mandalas sometimes become mind-bogling when within each of the five Buddhas once again finds five Buddhas depicted, and again five Buddhas and so on. My doctoral study shows the link between the threefold structure (power, method, aim) of the compassion mandala in Shingon as the essence of Mahavairocana’s enlightenment, and the fivefold structure (preparation, epoche, intention, intuition, repetition) of the wisdom mandala as the practice to become enlightened. First on the level of meditation, but later also on

Buddha Vairocana is mostly depicted with two attendants next to him, the wise Bodhisattva Vajrapani and the compassionate Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara (see e.g., leaf 12), representing



<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>6</sup> Willem Grootaers, Li Shih-Yü, and Wang Fu-shih, *The Sanctuaries in a North-China City, A complete survey of the cultic buildings in the city of Hsüan-hua (Chahar) by the Survey team Fujen University August 1948, Institut Belge des hautes études Chinoises, Bruxelles, 1995, 245 pp.*

<sup>7</sup> In the catalogue the Five Buddhas are called “meditation Buddhas”; from the Sanskrit term *dhyana*. I have taken the Chinese-Japanese term here.

<sup>8</sup> See for more info, *Ibid.*, 13-23.



the ritual level of the Three Mysteries in Shingon, the Sacraments in Catholicism, and the “sacramentology” in Religious Studies. In many theologies one can find a similar threefold and fivefold structure to come to the Truth, which refer to a two-fold aspect of faith, namely the *unity of faith and practice*, referred to as compassion and wisdom in the Two Great Mandalas in Shingon. The Two Mandalas are meditated upon in a ritual way during the *kegyo* practice to become a Buddhist priest in their school, a practice I took part in in the context of my doctoral research. The practice takes place in four times a three-week training course in which one learns step by step to perform the fire ritual called *goma* (from the Sanskrit *homa puja*). This training is based on a ritual performance, using *mandalas* as focus and *mantras* (sacred words) and *mudras* (secret hand gestures) as support. These three ritual objects represent the thought, speech, and body of the Buddha, and are called therefore the “Three Mysteries” (*sanmitsu*) of Mahavairocana. They must become one in the practitioner. That is why they also call this practice “Esoteric Buddhist Yoga”. In the picture below one can see a part of the liturgical manual for *kegyo*, with mudras above and mantras, written mostly in calligraphic Sanskrit with the reading in Katakana besides, directly under them.

### Full Moon Meditation Manual

The second article by Karl Debreczeny discusses the historical context of the Vairocana Album. The temple in Wangzimiao Fr. Rafaël Verbois referred to was probably *Khoshigun sume* (Ch. *Hongcisi*), a Tibetan monastery located on Mount Gurban Tulgaguri (Ch. Dingzu shan). It was founded in 1707 by the local Mongolian ruler Jamsu (Ch. Zhamusu) of Aokhan Banner and partly subsidized by the Qing Imperial Court.<sup>9</sup> It was the largest monastery in the area, with 200 buildings and 500 Tibetan monks in residence during the Qing dynasty (1644-1911), but it had declined considerably by the Republican period (1912-1949) and was destroyed by fire in 1947.

*In the biography of the most prominent early-twentieth-century local Mongolian lama associated with this temple, San Lama ? (Tsedenbal, 1867-1939), it states that this was an ancestral temple (Ch. zumiao) where Mongolian princes of Aokhan went to study Tibetan Buddhism. So? it seems likely based on this temple's close family association, taken together with the high quality of this album, that the album was made for, or at least belonged to, a prince of Aokhan, possibly a son of the local Jasag ruler who became a monk at Wangzimiao or one of the other eight Aokhan monasteries such as the more scholarly Orui-yin süme (Ch. Pushansi).<sup>10</sup>*

<sup>9</sup> See for more info, *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>11</sup> In Shintoism, the central divinity is mostly represented in the divine form (Jp. *shintai*) of a round mirror, resembling the Shingon Full Moon Disk. Maybe an influence of Shingon on Shintoism? The mountain religion Shugendō is such a syncretic movement of the two religions. On the other hand, Shintoism is the local religion of Japan, much older than the “foreign” religion of Buddhism.

<sup>12</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, Living Christ* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1995), 151.

This shows that Fr. Verbois had some good acquaintances among the high-level monks. It reminds me of my personal encounter with the Shingon Buddhist village Koyasan in Japan. This is a UNESCO Cultural World Heritage site near Nara where there are more than 120 temples, with about 500 monks. My friendly relationship with *Dai-acarya* (Great Master) Rev. Habukawa Shodo, former head of the Shingon administration and a specialist of the Shingon rituals, and with a Shingon priest in the neighborhood of Nara, Rev. Yamanouchi Yugen, bear a great similarity. Fr. Verbois received 54 mandalas, and I received from Rev. Habukawa Shodo over a span of 8 years the gift of participating in the *esoteric* Buddhist practice of *kegyo*. This experience of esoteric Buddhist practice makes me understand more easily the meaning of the 54 mandalas of Fr. Verbois.

In Shingon, there is the “Full Moon Meditation” (Jp. *gachirinkan*) that dates back to the 7-8<sup>th</sup> century AD. During the Full Moon Meditation, the practitioner sits in front of a mandala that depicts a white circle against a black background. The idea is that one concentrates on this circle first, then one tries to visualize it mentally (here it grows from a new moon gradually to a full moon), and then to internalize it, and lastly to become one with it. The white circle is the full moon, representing the Great Emptiness, which is the essence of Vairocana, his *dharmabody*.<sup>11</sup> One can say therefore that this is a way to express the emptiness of the mind. Sometimes a bright white light is seen in meditation (or in prayer) when the mind is fully at peace. Yogis in the Himalaya stimulate this kind of meditation by staring at the setting sun and then closing their eyes and keeping the image alive in the mind or building it up again. This effort is typical of visualization exercises in Esoteric Buddhism. When I saw this mandala of the Full Moon for the first time I had to think of a Catholic monk or nun sitting in front of the Holy Sacrament, which is also a round white object, reflecting the universal sacrifice Jesus Christ made. Another similar practice for beginners is the meditation on the letter A (Jp. *ajikan*), the meditation on the Sanskrit letter A. In Sanskrit, the letter A is used for the negation of things, and thus this refers to the emptiness of Vairocana, the primordial Buddha. The Great Emptiness (*sunyata*) can be linked to the Christian negative theology in which God always remains a hidden reality to human beings, a “hidden god” (*deus absconditus*, to quote Luther). This led me to conclude in my latest study that the ‘god’ of Buddhism is basically a hidden god. The Buddhist *Dharma* is beyond all human understanding. The Buddha was therefore not against god but against our conceptual thinking about god.<sup>12</sup>



From all this, I conclude that the 54 mandalas of Fr. Rafaël Verbois form a manual for the “Full Moon Meditation” in Tibetan Esoteric Buddhism. For instance, leaf 51 refers to the internalizing of the full moon through the use of a mantra. The result is that the full moon resides in the person, as well as the person residing in the full moon. This is the basis of the Shingon practice where one must imagine “the Buddha entering me, me entering the Buddha” (*nyuga-ganyu*). In Mahayana Buddhism an ample use of mantras is made as a way to enlightenment. Esoteric Buddhism is also called “*mantrayana*” (mantra-vehicle) because the use of mantra becomes even more developed. The late Jan Van Bragt, CICM, was specialized in Japanese Pure Land Buddhism where the mantra “*Namu Amida Buddha*” is repeated incessantly (Jp. *nembutsu*) by believers.<sup>13</sup> He confided to me his difficulty in accepting this faith in the “power” of mantras. It also took me a long time before I could accept its validity for religious life. It was necessary to understand “Shingon”, which means “true word” and is the Chinese translation of the term *mantra*.

Also, leaf 52 refers to having mastered the practice, sitting in a colored circle. The vertically vajra held in the hand is a symbol of reaching enlightenment, on becoming a being of wisdom, a “*vajrasattva*” (maybe with a Tantric meaning behind it). At the beginning of the practice, the monk only has the “*wish to enlightenment*” (*bodhicitta*, see leaf 4). The last two images are very Chinese in concept, not only because of the figures but also because in Chinese art the sage is depicted amid the mountains (leaf 53). Here, the practitioner has become an object of devotion for all, emperor, locals, warriors, angels, and even for the beings in hell. And finally, the practitioner himself becomes Vairocana Buddha with wisdom and compassion as his main virtues (leaf 54). The ideal in (Shingon) Esoteric Buddhism is “to become a Buddha in this body” (*sokushinjobutsu*). The 54 mandalas show an influence of Chinese art and religion, but basically are aiming at the same experience as the Full Moon Meditation in Shingon: emptiness (*sunyata*), which is the essence of (Maha-)Vairocana.

### A manual for ritual practices

The third article Elena Pakhotova is interesting because it points out that the 54 images were probably used for *ritual* meditation. It is indeed true that ritual practice is at the center of the Esoteric Buddhist meditation practice and that mandalas serve this purpose. Esoteric Buddhism is therefore also called a “ritualized” Mahayana Buddhism. Through the ritual practice I followed at Koyasan I can well understand the way this must have been done. Revealing the esoteric practice is not my aim here, out of respect for the religion itself, but I can explain this Esoteric Buddhist yoga by the way a priest performs the Eucharist. The Catholic priest uses sacred words, sacred actions, and

sacred objects to bring the Eucharistic offering alive. A little example is when the priest pours water ritually into the wine (sacred objects), says silently the words “through the mingling of water and wine you shared in our humanity so that we can share in your divinity” (sacred words), and has the universal sacrifice of Christ in mind (sacred actions). These three become one through the whole process. In Shingon, this union is called *Kaji* of the Three Mysteries and produces a power (*kajiriki*) with which one can bless people, called *kaji-kito* (litt. *kaji* prayer).

A nice detail in leaf 24 is that the practitioner is joining his hands in prayer as Christians do. When I saw a similar Buddhist statue in the graveyard of Koyasan, I really thought it was a Christian tomb, but that was out of ignorance on my part. The more than 500 *mudras* that are used in Shingon have two “mother-*mudras*”. One of which is the one with the fingers outside, called *gebaku-in*, and refers to the effort the practitioner must make to retain the power given by the Buddha during meditation inside. Building up this power through ascetic practice is an idea found all over Asia. Terms such as *kajiriki*, *ojas*, *tejas*, *shakti*, *siddhi*, express it. Esoteric Buddhism too searches for *empowerment* through this supernatural power to become enlightened sooner or/and to help others to become enlightened. The main practice in Esoteric Buddhism (and Tantra Yoga) to develop this power is “Deity Yoga”, the devotion to a chosen deity, which can also be found in the *Yoga Sutras* of the Hindu Yoga philosopher Patanjali. They all consider this to be “the fast track” to enlightenment, a kind of “theism” within Eastern religions. Union with the deity Vairocana is the purpose of the 54 images. These mandalas are therefore mostly accompanied by “liturgical manuals” that explain which rituals (mantras, mudras, use of ritual implements) have to be done with which (part of the) mandala.

The ritual it refers to, according to Elena Pakhotava, is not for the meditative practice to become enlightened but for a *funeral ritual*. Thinking of the well-known “Tibetan Book of the Dead”, one might indeed think of these 54 images as a pictorial representation of what a person should reflect on at the moment of death. The fact that the set comes from an ancestral temple makes it even more plausible because the monks and priests were supposed to pray for the deceased, the ancestors. But as long we do not have the liturgical manual accompanying these images, we cannot be sure. The idea that it might be based on the *Purification of All Bad Transmigrations Tantra* is uncertain also. In my opinion, nothing in the 54 images refer to a kind of reincarnation story. In that case, images of the various forms of hell where one is purified of bad karma through several punishments would be plentiful. On the other hand, the reference she gives in footnote 35, mentioning a nineteenth century work written by Kelzang Thupten Wangchuk (1856-1916), *The*

<sup>13</sup> Many of Van Bragt’s writings on the topic were collected, as well as his translations of well-known Pure Land theologians, and published posthumously by the Center for the Study of Religion and Culture of Nanzan University, Nagoya Japan, an academic research center he founded and headed for seventeen years.



*Ritual of the Mandala of the All-knowing Buddha Called Stages of Manifest Realization from the Clarification of the Meaning of its Tantra*, seems a much more likely source to understand this series of mandalas and would be well worth exploring.

## The order of the 54 Mandalas

It is not actually clear who made the comments on the 54 mandalas in the new catalogue, but one can deduce that it must have been Elena Pakhoutova as the whole series is interpreted as a funeral ritual. She concludes from a comparison with other known Chinese albums that the 54 images appear to be incomplete, meaning that some images are missing and that their order might not be fully correct either.<sup>14</sup> She discerns six sets of images within the 54 images, and takes an artistic approach by comparing the setting and the consistent depiction of the subject while interpreting them in the context of a funeral ritual.<sup>15</sup> The earlier study of Tsering Tashi Thingo in 1980, on the other hand, shows very clearly the meditator's progress in experiencing emptiness, symbolized by the evolution in the description of the full moon disk.<sup>16</sup>

Thingo received a religious education as tulku (incarnation). He orders the 54 images according to the process in which the meditator concentrates on emptiness, the Full Moon Disk, which represents Vairocana, and how the person becomes "all-knowing" (omniscient) too. He places for instance leaf 51 as image 42, where the practitioner becomes one with the mantra, an important step in Esoteric Buddhist meditation, and leaf 36 becomes almost the last one, namely image 52, where the meditator has reached the highest insight in emptiness as the source and goal of all things. Here, Thingo shows a deeper understanding and knowledge of the esoteric Buddhist teachings and rituals. One can compare this mandala, image 52, with one of the last *Ten Ox-Herding Pictures* in Zen where the ox as well as the monk disappear and only a big empty circle (Jp. *enso*) remains, to indicate the experience of emptiness (*sunyata*). The last two paintings are very similar in essence too with image 53 (leaf 2!) and image 54 (leaf 54).

Why then "only" 54 images? Probably, because the practitioner has to assimilate and become one with them, bringing the

number to 108 upon completion. It is a pity thus that Elena Pakhoutova did not follow up on this well-founded study by Thingo to interpret the series in the catalogue.

## Conclusion

The 54 images that Fr. Rafaël Verbois brought with him from China to Belgium must actually have been "a secret guide" to find enlightenment in the Tibetan-Mongolian tradition of the last centuries. There are several possible didactic functions of these images:

- 1) The set might have served as a *first introduction to Esoteric Buddhist practice*.
- 2) Or, as an elaborated "*meditation on one deity*" (Jp. *issonbo*), in this case a ritual meditation on Vairocana Buddha.
- 3) The series might have been used in connection with *funeral rituals*, as explained by Elena Pakhoutova in the catalogue of 2013.
- 4) It could also have been part of a *liturgical manual to become a Tibetan Buddhist priest* because, as is the case in the Shingon tradition, the practitioner starts with the meditation on the Five Buddhas (Wisdom Mandala in Shingon), to arrive at the union of the Three Buddhas (Compassion Mandala in Shingon).
- 5) But, most likely, it is a well-developed *Full Moon Meditation Manual* which depicts the way to enlightenment in the Esoteric Buddhist tradition. This is at least in accordance with the way Tsering Tashi Thingo has interpreted and explained the 54 images in his Treatise for the Ethnographic Museum of the city of Antwerp in 1980. The Full Moon Meditation practice in Shingon dates back to the 8<sup>th</sup> century AD. Thus, we find in the 54 Mongolian mandalas an elaboration of the meaning and the mental process behind the Shingon mandala.<sup>17</sup>

It was especially the quality of the paintings that made the MAS Museum, called at that time the *Ethnographic Museum of the city of Antwerp*, interested in acquiring Fr. Rafaël Verbois' 54 mandalas. In doing so, they have safeguarded his CICM missionary legacy for future generations to come, as a source of cultural and religious knowledge and an encouragement for interreligious dialogue.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>15</sup> *The All-Knowing Buddha*, 44.

<sup>16</sup> Tsering Tashi Thingo, *Leidraad bij de meditatie over de Sarvavid-Vairocana-Mandala*, (Schoten: Verhandeling van het Etnographisch Museum van de Stad Antwerpen, nr. 4, 1980).

<sup>17</sup> I offered long time ago colored copies of the 54 prints to Koyasan University in Japan as the research in Tibetan mandalas is greatly advanced there.

# Encounters beyond the Great Wall<sup>1</sup>

Jerome Heyndrickx cicm – Verbiest Institute KU Leuven

Verbiest Institute KU Leuven decided that in its Academic Program priority would be given to research on the history of *CICM and the Local Church in North China* and that this would be published in a new series called *Encounters beyond the Great Wall*. One may wonder: why not call it *Mission beyond the Great Wall*, which was the title of a book published earlier by Verbiest Institute? We would like to explain the reason for the change.



The title *Mission* is obviously correct. It refers to the Mission of the Lord Jesus as in Mt. 28, 18-20. It also fits the story of CICM in China. CICM was founded precisely to preach the gospel which was also the reason why Founder Theophile Verbist and the CICM pioneers went to China in 1865. But there are some sensitivities connected with the term *Mission*. Some historical events, for example colonization, the Opium War in China, add a negative connotation to the term *Mission* in the minds of friends outside the Church. Influenced by this negative connotation, even many faithful in the West have second thoughts when they hear the words *Mission* or *missionaries*. But Vatican II confirmed the use of the term *Mission* as valid.

However in the document *Ad Gentes*, Vatican II introduced a new, broader and richer theological view of *Mission* which perfectly describes and fits the CICM history in China. *Mission* is not seen as a one-direction movement which consists in only giving without receiving. *Mission* is about exchange. The missionary brings the gospel message. The new local Church community accepts and celebrates the message and joins the Universal Church Community. In the process both the missionary who announced the gospel as well as the Universal Church Community change. They are enriched as they welcome new friends who share with them values from their own cultural, social and religious heritage. The local Church community does not live isolated from society in its own country. It is totally integrated in its own culture and actively participates in developing and building up its country and society. As a result not only the new Christian community but also its country, its people, their culture and religions are involved in the exchange which is part of *Mission*.

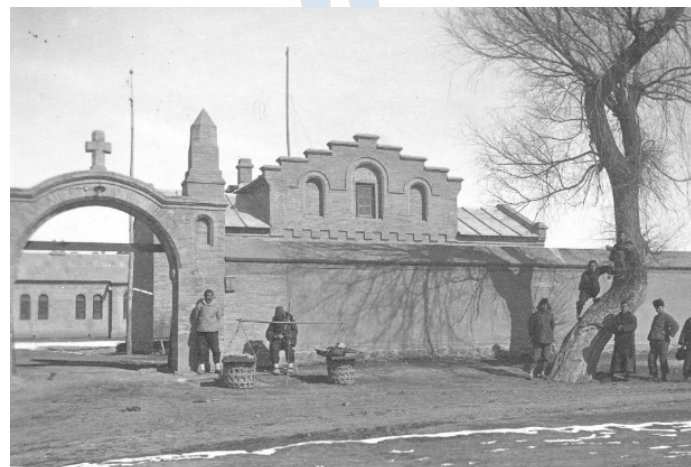
We have learned that *Mission* is about much more than missionaries preaching the gospel and baptizing people. It is about exchange among people from inside and outside the Church; exchange among Christians as well as believers of other religions, non-believers and atheists. What they exchange is not limited to faith or religion. It includes human values which

people share when they work, grow and dialogue with each other every day. They learn to know and appreciate each other. Growing and dialoguing among peoples culminates in encounter which means rapprochement, closer unity.

This Vatican II insight takes nothing away from the traditional vision of *Mission* which stresses proclamation of the gospel. It adds new insight on how evangelization happens. The missionary opts to go to and live in another country, he adopts a new culture and is actively present there. By his presence, his integration and active participation in society, he brings Emmanuel (God with us) present without however imposing this faith. It happens by announcing the gospel message within the whole process of being present and the dialogue of togetherness which culminates in encounter. In this process faith is accepted not imposed. This Vatican II richer, deeper, broader vision of mission fits perfectly the story of CICM in China.

The CICM (Scheut) missionaries lived and worked together with Chinese and Mongols to build up their country. They preached the gospel while searching with people for a deeper sense of life. That's what we call *the way of Encounter* which happened beyond the Great Wall. That CICM story started with Founder Theophile Verbist. He decided that his missionaries would go and preach the gospel in foreign countries *by preference among the Chinese peoples*. That's what we call the *CICM Option for China*. They went to China and worked there for 90 years. During that time a total 679 CICM missionaries participated in that *Mission*.

Inner Mongolia and in fact the whole of North China was proposed to them as their territory for evangelization. It was an underdeveloped region, with almost no roads where people travelled only on horseback, donkey or camel and it was uns-



Entrance to the hospital in Suiyuan.

<sup>1</sup> This is the text of the Keynote Address delivered on August 26, 2021 during the 14th Verbiest Conference in Leuven.

afe because of bandits. They knew little or nothing about this situation when they left their own country but they blindly accepted living in a new country. That was considered part of their vocation as missionaries. North China became their home for the rest of their life. They lived with the Chinese and Mongol people, learned their difficult languages, grew accustomed to the food, the habits and traditions. They preached the gospel as best they could in the local languages and succeeded in founding a local Church community of people who accepted and celebrated the gospel message which they preached.

Preaching and baptizing was only part of their activities. They actively participated in caring for all the daily concerns of the people. They developed a whole net of schools for boys and girls. They built clinics in the whole region of North China with one modern well-equipped hospital in the center. They developed a big agricultural project to fertilize tens of thousands of hectares of farm land by digging canals and irrigating it with water of the Yellow River. Besides all that a good number of the missionaries became self-made experts by specializing in studying the languages, literature, ethnology and philosophy of their new home country. All that shows how intensely they participated in all aspects of peoples lives.

The new Christians came to understand and appreciate their gospel message. Others did not understand nor accept the message. This in itself was not surprising but the political evolution of those times. The authorities even misinterpreted the reasons for their presence. As a result, when the People's Republic of China was established (1949) the missionaries were all expelled from China. Their *Option for China* which started in 1865 ended 90 years later with the *Exodus from China* of the CICM missionaries in the years 1950 to 1955. They were expelled as criminals, some of them spent years in prison, a few did not survive prison. All this caused much disappointment and suffering, but was considered part of the *Option for China*. Thirty years later, in 1983, Verbiest Foundation was founded by those expelled CICM missionaries who pleaded for reopening dialogue with their second homeland, which they never abandoned. That is the correct interpretation of the story of CICM in China.



Dr. Geens cicm, Carlo van Melckebeke cicm and the ICM sisters at Suiyuan hospital.

*Encounter grown from life in good and bad days* is the title that fits best to tell this story. It is a story of active participation by CICM missionaries in the good and bad times not only with the local Chinese faith community but with the whole people, the country and its culture. Preaching the gospel was an important part of it. That's how we understand *Mission*: not an isolated activity of the Church but lived in the broad context of the life of people joining in efforts to improve life together and searching for deeper meaning. That requires persevering in dialogue between partners, individuals, countries and peoples, in a movement of step by step finding each other and discovering new insights and values in each other.

A family relation had grown between the missionaries and their new home. In the course of 90 years 254 CICM missionaries had died and lay buried in North China. 88 among them died of typhus, some of them died young, only one or two years after their arrival in China. They knew this danger in advance but gladly paid that price to achieve the result described above. Their living and working in dialogue with the people of the country, the birth of local communities of faith led finally to their encounter with the Chinese and Mongolian people in China.

This was obviously not a story of smooth sailing. At times it was just the opposite. There were misunderstandings, drama even victims. Existing prejudice and suspicion led to conflict. Twenty CICM missionaries died as martyrs during the Boxer Rebellion and the civil war of the 1940's. The tombs of the CICM who died in China were desecrated during the Cultural Revolution (1965-75). That was dramatic! We give all this the place it deserves as we write our history simply because it is part of it – *Veritas liberabit, In 8,32 (truth shall make you free)*. But we do this not with the intention to stir up commotion and confrontation. To do that would block the dialogue which is precisely what we wish to promote. But to hide it and pretend that it did not happen would not be honest.

Chinese Christians had to undergo the Boxer Rebellion and the Cultural Revolution. They were powerless and could only observe it painfully with much regret. They had developed brotherhood in deep appreciation and friendship with those whose tombs were desecrated. Ten to twenty years after the Cultural Revolution Christians expressed their true feelings. The desecrated tombs, even whole cemeteries were quietly restored often decorated with flowers. That was the way Christians expressed gratefulness for what they received. This quiet testimony moved their compatriots as well as the Universal Church. This too will be given a place in our history. Ignoring it would also not be just. The CICM *Option for China History* includes good and bad days. It looks like a mosaic with bright and dark colors.

Speaking of *Mission* today may cause suspicion in the mind of our partners, while using *Encounter* generates understanding,



Fr. Arthur Segers on horseback among the locals.



Fr. Remi Van Meirhaeghe cism and Fr. Henri Bongaerts cism were assassinated in December 1901 during the Boxer rebellion in Xiayingzi. In 1995, they were buried again with great reverence by local believers.

rapprochement. That is why *Encounter* is indeed the right title to name the story of CICM in China. All partners may recognize themselves as part of it. By this we do not mean that in *Encounter* all partners found total unity and agreement on all issues of concern. We know from our faith that full *Communion* will be achieved only at the end of time. We see *Encounter* rather as the fruit of our patiently *seeking the common ground*. Partners

in dialogue discover and learn to appreciate what they *have in common*. This causes joy while making allowance for *differences* which they discovered mutually and still exist. It allows them to live together peacefully in mutual respect. Achieving that historical goal makes *Mission beyond the Great Wall* a meaningful project. Verbiest Institute KULeuven is happy and proud to be part of it.

## The CICM Apostolate among the Ordos Mongols -- 1874-1953<sup>1</sup>

Fr. Patrick Taveirne cism – Verbiest Institute KU Leuven



### The Scheut Pioneers

#### A Faithful Servant Samt'andjimba



Samt'andjimba.

In 1866, one year after the arrival of the Scheut missionaries in Xiwanzi, Fr. Alois Van Segvelt raised a challenging question: besides the care given to our Christians, should we not one day attempt the conversion of the Chinese and Mongol heathen (non-Christians)?<sup>2</sup> In 1868, Provicar Théophile Verbist appointed a young Dutch priest Theodoor (Dorus) Rutjes (呂之仙(繼賢), 1844-96) to study Mongolian. Initial attempts to evangelize southern Mongols by Frs. Remi Verlinden, Dorus Rutjes, Andries Jansen (1842-1913), Edouard Cuissart (1844-1926) and Paul-Piet Hendriks (1846-1906) all failed. Verlinden's long-term plan to convert the Mongols focused on the

training of abandoned adolescent males as future Church leaders, the establishment of small Christian communities, where missionaries could learn Mongolian, and the formation of catechists.<sup>3</sup>

Samt'andjimba constituted the sole link with the Lazarist Mongol Missions after the Lazarist priest Gardi (Pierre Feng) together with his Vincentian confreres had left southern Mongolia in 1866.

During the seventies, Fr. Verlinden cherished the idea of establishing mission stations to the West of Xiwanzi among the Monguor and White Mongols 察罕蒙古爾 in the Qinghai region, bordering on the Tibetan region of Amdo. The much cheaper and closer Ordos Plateau<sup>4</sup> in terms of travel costs and time turned out to be more suitable for a CICM Mongolian Mission. In February 1874, Samt'andjimba guided the caravan of Scheut Frs. Verlinden and Alphonse Devos during their exploration of the Ordos Plateau. They left from the Chinese Christian settlement of Xiyingzi 西營子 "The West Encampment" with its Ro-

<sup>1</sup> A summary of the lecture presented at the 14th International Verbiest Conference, online, 27 August 2021. Many footnotes and Mongol texts are omitted or shortened in this summary so as to present to our readers an easy accessible shorter version.

<sup>2</sup> Han-Mongol Encounters, 222 and J. Heyndrickx, ed., J. Van Hecken, 'Evangelization by the Scheut fathers among the Mongols in East Mongolia', in Antoon Mostaert ba Mongol sudlal [Mostaert and Mongolian Studies], (Ulaanbaatar, 2011), 276-89.

<sup>3</sup> Han-Mongol Encounters, 222, 235, 254n193.

<sup>4</sup> Ordos (Ordus) 鄂爾多. The area within the big bend of the Yellow River 河套.

manesque-style Trinity Church 三一堂 along the caravan route to the West.<sup>5</sup> In April, they crossed the plain of Boro Balgasu. Lying north of the Great Wall, it got its Chinese name Chengchuan 城川 “The City Valley” from the ruins of a ninth-century walled city of Youzhou 宥州 prefecture.<sup>6</sup>

### *From the Ordos Mongols to the Chinese Colonists*

Unknown to the Scheut fathers, a small Han Christian settlement had thrived since 1750 in Ningtiaoliang 寧條梁, a nearby Chinese market town southeast of Boro Balgasu with connections up to Ili 伊犁 in Xinjiang province. The Franciscan friars from Xi’an used to visit the Catholics in Ningtiaoliang before the raid of Muslim White Cap bandits from the Northwest, which reduced the Catholic community from two hundred to forty members. In July 1874, at the site of a ruined farm estate, offered by a Chinese Catholic lay leader (會長), the missionaries established the first Catholic mission station in Otog banner.

The Scheut missionaries also attempted to establish mission stations at locations where Mongols often gathered, such as *Ejen Qoroo* “The Lord’s Enclosure”, the memorial sacred site of Chinggis Khan (c.1162-1227), and Dingyuaning 定遠營 “The Encampment Pacifying the Far-off”,<sup>7</sup> the court of the Alasan special ruling banner prince and a major monastic and trading center northwest of Ningxia 寧夏.<sup>8</sup> Another Mongol mission was established at Bayan Toqai in western Otog banner. However, none of these Mongol mission stations would last very long. Rather, the Chinese mission stations established in their proximity all endured, such as Sandaohé (三道河 1876), Ligangbao (李崗堡 1880) and Xiayingzi (下營子 1881) across the Yellow River in Ningxia prefecture.

As the CICM missionaries soon realized, the southern Mongols’ entrenched practices and beliefs in Tibetan Buddhism, the Chinggisid ancestral cult, and the quasi-feudal system of hereditary Chinggisid rulers created an almost insurmountable barrier for their apostolate. In the other Ordos banners of the Great Temple League, their presence invited such strong opposition from the Mongol upper class that they were either unable to obtain any foothold, or their mission stations were destroyed, and their converts dispersed. The resistance of the Ordos Mongols forced the Scheut missionaries to shift their attention to the Han Chinese colonists.

### *Methods and Obstacles*

The great distances between the scattered Christian communities or mission stations made any type of close-knit ecclesiastical organization impractical. From 1874 to 1883, the CICM missionaries developed three ecclesiastical districts around fixed mission stations at the fringes of the Ordos Plateau. Their initial plan of connecting these districts with intermediate mis-



*Scheut fathers in Sandaohé, with Mgr. Schotte cism in the center.*

sionary residences never materialized.

CICM envisaged the establishment of a contemplative Trappist monastery in the plain of Boro Balgasu, like the more than two hundred Tibeto-Mongolian Buddhist monasteries (*lamaseries*) of Ordos.<sup>9</sup> This idea was never implemented, after the Belgian Trappists declined the invitation. Françoise Aubin noticed that the Scheut fathers still supported Gabet’s idea that missionary work among Mongols ought to start in *lamaseries*. Later on CICM missionaries dropped this plan because the monks became stigmatized as their enemies.

In 1929, Scheut Fr. Gaspar Schotte wrote: “One should not start the conversion of the Mongols like one has done for the conversion of the Chinese: occupying as many stations as possible by dispersing [and isolating] the missionaries; but one should adopt a method more appropriate to the circumstances and the life style of the Mongolians [...] Because of the weak density of a floating and nomadic population, evangelization must be done by creating centers, where the public cult is practiced and where the inhabitants will join at certain occasions and festivals, in the manner religious life actually manifests itself in these nomadic countries. To test this kind of apostolic method I think it will be indispensable to call contemplative orders...”<sup>10</sup> Scheut Frs. Jan-Baptist Steenackers (司福(富)音, 1848-1912) and Alfons Bermyn (閔玉清, 1853-1915) learned Mongolian in an unsystematic way but managed to speak vernacular Mongolian to a certain extent. Like Gabet, Steenackers initially studied Mongolian with an Olot Mongol Buddhist monk. While Bermyn told Sisters in his hometown: “Generally speaking, to understand the Mongols is impossible for me when they speak fast, because they eat up half of each literary words [...] Fortunately, they all know some Chinese and that I know much better, so we do understand each other”.<sup>11</sup>

Although some relatively large dictionaries (I.J. Schmidt 1835; J. Kowalewski 1844–9; K.F. Golstunskij 1893–5) and standard grammars (I.J. Schmidt 1831, A.A. Bobrovnikov 1835 and J. Kowalewski) of written Mongolian appeared during the nineteenth century, it remains unclear which ones were available to the

<sup>5</sup> In Mongolian called *Qadan Qanču* “The Rock Sleeve”, renamed *Nanhaoqian* “The Southern Moat”, *Shàngyì* 尚義 county.

<sup>6</sup> Abbr. *Borbalyas*, in Urdu dialect *boro balgasu* / *balgasu*, “the grey-brown ruins of an old city”, in today’s *Otoy Front Banner*, IMAR.

<sup>7</sup> *Bayanhot*, IMAR.

<sup>8</sup> *Irgai*, today’s *Yinchuan* in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, NHAR.

<sup>9</sup> *Han-Mongol Encounters*, 233-5.

<sup>10</sup> English translation of Schotte’s original French letter in A-CEP, Rome.

<sup>11</sup> *Han-Mongol Encounters*, 306.



Mgr. A. Bermyn cicm.

missionaries.<sup>12</sup> Bermyn compiled an Ordos Mongolian-Dutch dictionary, which was based on Kowalewski's dictionary. Bermyn's unfinished dictionary was eventually burned. In 1900 seminarian Antoine (Antoon) Mostaert used I.J. Schmidt's standard grammar during his ecclesiastical studies in Scheut.

F. Aubin argued that Bermyn "encouraged his missionaries living among the Mongols to continue collecting every piece of ethnographic evidence and vernacular terminology". When CICM missionaries Jan-Theo Braam (巴士英, 1869-1954), Florent Claeys (葛永勉, 1871-1950), and Antoine Mostaert arrived in Ordos they found an atmosphere of quasi-scientific emulation. All of them enjoyed a long-term apostolate in the southwestern Ordos region. This unique CICM treasure of ethnographic and linguistic materials constituted a steppingstone for the development of Mongolian Studies.

In 1908 Mostaert complained: "In this place, Mongolian books are very rare. If one or the other literate Mongolian possesses a couple of books, he won't give them away. It is almost impossible to get hold of them".<sup>13</sup> Apparently, Mongol people regarded manuscripts and other written material as sacred items which were inherited from the ancestors and, as objects of veneration, guaranteed protection and well-being. To let them pass into the hands of unauthorized persons was considered a sacrilege.

## A Transethnic Christian Settlement in Ordos

### Boro Balgasu: the Rise of a Mongol Catholic Mission

The CICM missionaries succeeded in attracting several Mongol households by offering them livestock and Western medicine. Francis Xavier Badai (1852-1925), the first local Mongol convert at Boro Balgasu, used to work as a day laborer hired by Han Chinese farmers before turning to the missionaries, allured by the double salary they offered. In 1875, the Scheut fathers obtained permission from the Otog banner authorities to cultivate a tract of land at Subag-un eki 蘇北海子 east of Boro Balgasu, where they began to settle Mongol households along with some Chinese households from northern Shaanxi, and provided them with livestock, agricultural tools, and seed grain. The Han Chinese farmers were registered as subordinate Mongols (隨旗蒙人). The title to the mission land was held from the grand duke of Otog banner, but hostile neighboring Üüsin banner had claimed this pastureland in a dispute that had festered for decades.<sup>14</sup>

12 *Written Mongolian: Pre-classical / Middle Mongolian, after 1600 Classical/ Literary Mongolian*. Aubin, 'The Young Father Mostaert's Fore-runners', in Antoine Mostaert, 1, 31-45.

13 Cited in Dorothea Heuschert-Laage, "Reflections on the Mission of Boro Balgasu in the Works of Kesigbatu (1849-1917)", *Inner Asia* 19, 1 (2017): 29-63.

14 Johan Elverskog, in *Our Great Qing: The Mongols, Buddhism and the State in Late Imperial China* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), 127-65.

According to Bishop Joseph Agtacin Tegüsibilig 馬仲牧 (1919-2020), the twelve Monguor households of Qinghai probably had been converted before moving to Boro Balgasu. Because of the prestige they enjoyed among the local Ordos Mongols, the Mongolian dialect of Boro Balgasu became assimilated to the Monguor dialect of Qinghai. Samt'andjimba also attracted some family members to settle down in Boro Balgasu. During the great famine, the missionaries' relief work drew many Mongol and Han Chinese converts, whose number soared to one hundred households at one point, but dropped sharply afterwards. Nonetheless, there were many abandoned children of famine victims on the streets of Ningtiaoliang. The missionaries kept these orphans and had them raised by childless Mongols. Thus, the Mongols of Boro Balgasu were called mixed bloods 混血兒.

This unique intersection of ethnic groups, coupled with the conjuncture of human and natural calamities, contributed to the growth and survival of the Mongol Catholic Mission in the southwestern periphery of Ordos. By 1880, the number of converts in Boro Balgasu had increased to forty households and amounted to one thousand Mongol Christians in 1926. It remains to this day the single surviving Catholic settlement among the southern Mongols. This mission station was located on the Sino-Mongol frontier along the Great Wall, where the Mongols had already been exposed to Han-style agriculture and gradually adopted a semi-nomadic and semi-settled lifestyle. Thus, the Han Chinese migration and colonization in many ways paved the way for the missionary enterprise in the Mongol territories, as well as providing potential converts for their expansion.

### Wulong: The Demise of a Mongol Catholic Mission

The success of a Mongol Catholic Mission in Boro Balgasu was by far the exception rather than the rule. Elsewhere the missionaries encountered fierce opposition from the Mongol nobility and clergy. For instance, the disputes with Üüsin banner from the 1870s to the 1890s were especially noteworthy. In 1876, Fr. Verlinden established a small mission station in Wulong 烏龍, where he settled some famine victims from northern Shaanxi. The foreign settlement incited hostility from local nobles and



Father J. Van Hecken at the church of Boro Balgasu as it was rebuilt after the Boxer Rebellion of 1900.

Buddhist monks, and there were incidents: beating of converts and horse theft. The banner officials, however, simply turned a deaf ear to the missionaries' protests.

In 1878, the latter filed a complaint against the Üüsin Jasag, who was also the incumbent league chairman, to the Qing "Office for General Management" (Zongli Yamen 總理衙門) via the French legation. On this occasion, the Court of Dependencies (Lifan Yuan 理藩院) informed the Ordos ruling banner princes that they had to abide by the Treaty stipulations and protect the missionaries and their converts. It became clear that the Treaty provisions regarding Christianity were also valid in vassal Outer Mongolia. When in 1880 Scheut Fathers Alfons Lievens (文士惠, 1854-1917) and Louis Roofthoof (羅廷梁, 1855-1926) entered vassal Outer Mongolia, the Manchu brigade general of Suiyuān 綏遠 City, translated their safe-conducts into Mongolian for the Great Temple and Ulanqab league chairmen and ruling banner princes to protect the missionaries according to the Treaties.

In the meantime, another incident of a more serious nature occurred. A group of Mongols led by an Üüsin noble burned down the Wulong mission and dispersed the converts. He and two other nobles were also responsible for the disturbance in Otog banner, in which over one hundred Üüsin Mongols looted the converts there and occupied a tract of land that had been granted to the mission by the Otog ruling banner prince. Following a joint investigation by the officials of the Lifan Yuan in Suiyuan City, Shanxi, and Shaanxi provinces in 1880, the Üüsin Jasag agreed to punish a Buddhist monk, a Janggjin (a low-ranking Mongol official), and several others for stealing horses from the mission compound, but denied all allegations about looting, the burning of the church, and harassment of converts.<sup>15</sup>

As stated by Fulehonga, the Court of Dependencies-dispatched judicial superintendent of Ningxia in charge of the investigation, the feud between the Catholic Mission and Üüsin banner arose from an incident in 1876 in which Scheut Fr. Jan-Baptist Steenackers shot and killed a noble Damrinjab's dog as it attacked his horse. A bitter altercation ensued; the angry noble had the missionary tied up and his beard plucked, and his Mongol companion, Francis Haljitai, the grandfather of Bishop Tegüsbilig, badly beaten. As Üüsin banner fell under the jurisdiction of the judicial superintendent of Shenmu 神木 county, Fulehonga urged Steenackers to report to Shenmu. The latter, however, was only ready to appear in front of a mixed court in Peking. In his report, the superintendent accused the missionary of being "heterodox" (異端) for not abiding by the Treaties and the "king's rule" (王化). In the end, the Court of Dependencies dismissed the case as a trifling matter of no particular importance.

Thus, the disputes ended up with the demise of the Wulong mission in Üüsin banner. It was one of those rare cases in which the intervention of the French legation and Qing high authorities was less than effective in overturning a decision made on the local level, due to the autonomy of Jasays in admi-

nistering their own banners, backed by the Lifan Yuan officials who were keen to preserve the old social and political order from foreign challenge.<sup>16</sup>

Yi Wang suggested that the Chinese encroachment of Mongol pastures ignited the conflict of 1878. The Üüsin nobles not only destroyed the Wulong mission station, but also proceeded to expel the converts in Otog banner and occupy the pastureland along the border that was disputed between the two banners. Yet Johan Elverskog demonstrated that the conflict originated from the enmity between the two Mongol banners in which both Mongol and Chinese commoners would work together against the Catholic community later.<sup>17</sup> As a result, the Scheut missionaries had to give up the foothold in Üüsin banner and establish instead a Chinese Catholic Mission compound, Xiaoqiaopan 小橋畔 "The Small Bridge Edge". In 1876, Franciscan Bishop Efsio Chiais (高一志, 1808-84), the vicar apostolic of Shaanxi and Gansu at Xi'an City, granted the Scheut fathers ecclesiastical jurisdiction over Catholics outside the passes, including the Black Boundary land.

Regarding the acquisition of land, the Manchu brigade general of Suiyuan received a communication from the Zongli Yamen about the re-negotiation of the Berthemey convention in 1893 and 1895, namely that all missionaries could purchase public property on behalf of the local Catholic Church without the prior consent of local officials. This Mongol archival evidence shows that starting from the 1880s officials of the Zongli Yamen and other central agencies together with local officials in the Chinese provinces no longer distinguished between the area of China proper, the interior provinces, and the area beyond the Great Wall, the outer provinces.

### **The Boxer Catastrophe of August 1900**

In southern Ordos, a leader of the Spirit Boxers / Militia United in Righteousness Catholics called Boxer bandits from Shanxi province had established himself in Ningtiaoliang since late May 1900, where he recruited over two hundred followers. The local officials of Shaanxi province suppressed them and threw him into prison. The area remained relatively quiet through July, thus allowing time for the missionaries to reinforce self-defense forces in Xiaoqiaopan. There a stockade had been constructed in 1895 to guard against possible attack by the Muslim White Cap bandits of Gansu province, making the church a stronghold for the fourteen missionaries nine Scheut fathers and five Franciscan friars from Shaanxi province and over three hundred Catholics taking refuge there.

On August 7, the Boxers attacks began upon the release of the leader. While the Yihetuan targeted mainly the Han Catholic settlements within the Black Boundary land, the Mongols of Otog



Mgr. F. Hamer cism.

15 Antoine Mostaert, *Transforming the Frontier*, 341.

16 *Transforming the Frontier*, 344.

17 *Our Great Qing*, 127-35.



Fr. Snoeks with in the background the defensive walls of Xiaoqiaopan (1935).

and Üüsin banners organized vigilante forces (duguilong 獨貴龍), burning down the churches of Chengchuan, Köber, and Shiber, destroying the homes of Mongol Catholics, and taking them away with their livestock and grain. The siege of Xiaoqiaopan lasted for fifty-two days (forty-nine according to the Scheut sources) during which time hundreds of Yihetuan members, assisted by around two hundred vigilantes and three hundred horsemen from Otog, Üüsin, and Jasag banners, launched a series of attacks, yet the Catholics overpowered them with better weapons and tactics. In the end, the local officials of Shaanxi disbanded the Yihetuan and persuaded the Mongol troops to return to their own banners. The walled church of Xiaoqiaopan remained intact, with a relatively small Catholic casualty figure of one Dutch Scheut missionary and ten converts, as compared to over two hundred Yihetuan adherents and ten Mongol soldiers killed in battle.<sup>18</sup>

On August 23, 1900, the Alasan Special banner authorities expelled the remaining fifteen Belgian and Dutch Scheut fathers from the Sandaohe region (三道河), where several CICM fathers from the eastern part of Southwest Mongolia vicariate had taken refuge. No missionaries or converts, most of them renouncing their faith, were harmed. Others like Bishop Ferdinand Hamer, the Chinese priest Lu Dianying 陸殿英 and about 2,000 Catholic faithful in Tümed and Ordos were all martyred. The CICM missionaries crossed the Gobi Desert toward Urga, where they transited to Belgium via the Trans-Siberian Railroad. The St. James church of Sanshengong 三盛公<sup>19</sup> was converted into a Buddhist monastery, and three other chapels in the area were torn down. Upon their return in 1901, the missionaries accused the Mongol local official Amorjirgal 安九大人 of expelling them by force and plotting to lure them into an ambush. Amorjirgal, on the other hand, blamed the Scheut fathers for being ungrateful, insisting that he had done everything in his power to protect them, by providing them food, animals, silver, and a military escort.<sup>20</sup>

In the aftermath of the Boxer uprising, the Qing officials exacted

payment from the Mongol banners through the official sale and taxation of their territory to settle foreign indemnities. To sell and tax plots, the state set up bureaus for land reclamation (墾務局) to measure, map, and categorize some 1.5 million acres in this area. Sodbilig Shirnuud 蘇德畢力格 and others have shown how reformist writings by Manchu and Chinese officials established these new institutions in order to bring the Mongol jasags under more direct rule.<sup>21</sup> Yigu 貽穀 (d. 1926), the Qing imperial commissioner in charge of land reclamation in central Inner Mongolia, for example, threatened the more obstinate ruling banner princes that they would lose their positions if they did not comply with the 1900 New Policy (Šine Jasag 庚子新政) reforms from 1901 to 1908. In 1904, Yigu dismissed the Qangjin Jasag and the incumbent Great Temple league chairman, Arbinbayar, from the league chairmanship almost certainly because of his resistance to land reclamation.<sup>22</sup> While Yi Wang described this process of dispossession as “multiple levels of negotiations and mutual accommodations”, it eventually led to the integration of the Mongol vassal territories into a nationalized administrative structure.<sup>23</sup>

#### Power Brokers in Otog Banner

Sodbilig Shirnuud noted that the development of Christianity in southern Mongolia was related to the migration wave from northern China during the late Qing dynasty and early Republican era. His study is based on an analysis of local Ordos Mongol archives. These sources demonstrate that the Ordos Mongols were willing to rent out land to Chinese farmers, but not to foreign missionaries.<sup>24</sup> This is confirmed by the missionary sources. According to Fr. Jan-Baptist Steenackers, two circumstances were conducive to the development of agricultural colonies, the availability of cheap arable land after the Chinese Muslim uprising and the crossing of the Great Wall by many land-poor farmers and victims of natural calamities.<sup>25</sup> Following the suppression of the Boxer uprising, the missionaries on behalf of the destitute Mongol and Chinese Catholics demanded indemnities in silver from the local authorities.<sup>26</sup> These indemnities were mainly redeemed with large tracts of Mongol uncultivated land as mortgage. Consequently, Sodbilig argued that the missionaries were instrumental in the conversion of Mongol pastureland into agricultural land and the transfer of jurisdiction from the Mongol banners of the Great Temple league to the adjacent Han Chinese counties of Shaanxi province.<sup>27</sup>

On October 7, 1903, the Catholic Mission represented by Frs. Frans Van den Abbeele (楊光被, 1868-1904) and Jan-Theo Braam signed a second agreement with the three Ordos ban-

18 *Transforming the Frontier*, 365 and *Yelikewen: The Ordos Mongol Church of Chengchuan*.

19 Sandaohe 三道河, today's Dengkou county 磴口縣, Prefecture-level city of Bayannur, IMAR.

20 *Transforming the Frontier*, 365.

21 蘇德畢力格 Sodbilig, 'An overview of proposals on managing the frontier and establishing provinces and late Qing frontier policies', 34-4 (2002).

22 Henry Serruys, 'A Document From 1904 Dismissing an Ordos Prince From Office', *Central Asiatic Journal*, 19 (1975): 206-19.

23 *Transforming the Frontier*, 381; *Our Great Qing*, 127-35; Liping Wang, 'From Masterly Brokers to Compliant Protégées: American Journal of Sociology', 120, 6 (2015): 1641-89.

24 蘇德畢力格 Sodbilig, 'Land Issues between the Catholic Church and the Ordos Mongol Banner', in 特木勒編, *Temur Temule, ed. Multi-Ethnic Groups and Sino-Western Cultural Exchange* (上海人民出版社 Shanghai: People's Press, 2010), 162-77.

25 Steenackers, 'Aperçu sur le Vicariat de la Mongolie Sud-Ouest (Ortos)', *Missions en Chine et au Congo* 59 (1893): 353-8.

26 *Transforming the Frontier*, 365-75.

27 蘇德畢力格 Sodbilig, 天主教與移民墾殖《內蒙古大學學報》(蒙哲)1999年4期; 天主教的傳播與內蒙古地區的移民《中國天主教 Catholic Church in China》2000年2期。



ners of Otog, Üüsin and Jasag regarding the compensation for losses incurred during the Boxer uprising. They agreed to a comprehensive peace treaty under the supervision of the Manchu brigade general of Suiyuan City. After that the CICM apostolate in Ordos no longer met official opposition from Mongol banner authorities.

On April 18, 1934, Scheut Fr. Antoon Mostaert responded to an article published in the *China Weekly Review* of 7 April: 'Where Imperialism Penetrates through the Church' by the journalist C.Y.W. Meng 孟張泳. On the one hand, Mostaert acknowledged that the mission allowed Han Chinese farmers to settle on originally Mongol land and moreover it worked in modest measure, it is true, but efficiently towards the realization of the National Government's plan, aiming at the Chinese colonization of Mongolia. On the other hand, he argued that if the mission was to cede these plots of land again, they should return them not to the Chinese county and provincial officials, but to the Mongol banner and league authorities, from whom the mission initially had leased them.<sup>28</sup>

In 1935, the influential Mongol Buddhist monk, the so-called "Living Buddha" 活佛 Jamyang Šarab 章文軒 (1887-1946) from Aral monastery was able to unite the *duyuyilang* (different groups who had as a common point their aversion to the ruling class) in Otoy banner. He also redeemed most of the Boxer indemnity land and the Catholic Mission agreed to pay the Otoy banner authorities an annual tax of 1,000 ounces of silver.<sup>29</sup>

### 'When the Foreign Enemy Becomes a Dear Friend'

Dr. Dorothea Heuschert-Laage in her illuminating article on the commoner Kesigbatu (Kešigbatu, 1849-1917) noticed that there is a marked disparity between the volume of personal testimonies by CICM members, who reflected on their experiences in Ordos through different forms of written material, and the scarce source material that would allow us to learn about the encounters from a Mongolian perspective.<sup>30</sup>

#### Initial Contacts with the Scheut Missionaries

Šarliy-un sumu, the native place of Kesigbatu, is in the northeast of Boro Balgasu(n) at a distance of about forty kilometers. Among others, Kesigbatu most likely helped the Scheut missionaries to accomplish their collection of Mongolian language material.

As an official for cross-border affairs, it is likely that he was engaged in the indemnity negotiations between Qing repre-

sentatives and the Scheut missionaries following the Boxer uprising. Kesigbatu was also involved in a border dispute between Otoy and Üüsin banners, which concerned the missionaries because they had acquired the relevant territory as part of the Boxer indemnities from Otoy banner.

In their first years of interaction, Heuschert noted that Kesigbatu was working against the Catholic mission and did everything to stop its further development on territory claimed by Üüsin banner.<sup>31</sup>

#### Changing Perceptions of the Missionaries and their Mission

Kesigbatu is credited with several poems dedicated to the presence of the CICM fathers. In her article Heuschert translated several of these to show Kesigbatu's changing perceptions of the CICM missionaries and their mission. The poems fall into two groups: sarcastic tirades against foreign presence in Ordos and lavish eulogies, praising the Church and the Scheut missionaries at Boro Balgasu. Some of these verses became popular folk songs and circulated in many different versions. The revilements include two poems. Neither poem reflects close contacts with nor knowledge of the Scheut fathers but reiterates existing stereotypes.<sup>32</sup>

The first poem is entitled *Qaltar-ud* "The bearded ones". In Urdu dialect *qaltar* means the stained and spotted hair at the snout of animals. Thus, the collective name *qaltar-ud* for the missionaries was derisory. The popularity of the poem probably stemmed from its insinuations about sexual transgressions on the part of the missionaries. Another allusion is to the image of foreigners running away following the Boxer uprising.<sup>33</sup> The second poem is entitled "Li Hongzhang 李鴻章 (1823–1901), who let the wolf in". It leaves no doubt, that the presence of foreigners in Ordos was the result of the decisions made by Chinese officials. The foreign presence in Boro Balgasu brought disgrace to the empire and its territorial integrity, and not to the Mongol *ulus*<sup>34</sup> or Üüsin banner. On another level, the missionaries endangered the interplay between the two orders *qoyar yosun* of *šasin* "religion, teaching" and *törö* "government, state order".<sup>35</sup>

While the poems present the foreign missionaries as ugly and evil, in later years Kesigbatu came to be well acquainted with



Kesigbatu.

28 Taveirne, 'Antoine Mostaert and the Issue of the Catholic Mission's Property in Ordos', in *Antoine Mostaert* 1, 145-75.

29 *Etuoke qianqi zhi* 《鄂托克前旗志》 [Otoy Front Banner Gazetteer] (Hohhot, 1995), 163 and *Les Missions chez les Mongols*, 186-90.

30 'When the Foreign Enemy Becomes a Dear Friend', 29-30.

31 'When the Foreign Enemy Becomes a Dear Friend', 37-42.

32 'Idem', 42-3.

33 'Idem', 43-4.

34 *Complex of herds, grazing-grounds and peoples granted to a Mongol prince, used especially of the larger territorial units held by Chinggis Khan's sons and their descendants.*

35 'When the Foreign Enemy Becomes a Dear Friend', 44-6.



Li Hongzhang.

the CICM members and his attitude towards them changed. Heuschert linked this shift in sentiment to changes in the political climate between the missionaries and Üüsün's Western branch nobility.<sup>36</sup>

The strong influence of the Chinese language in the poems dedicated to the mission can be explained by the popularity of the Christian churches among the Chinese population. While the borrowings from Chinese

thus do not really come as a surprise, it is striking that Kesigbatu did not shy away from using a Buddhist terminology for the accomplishments of the Catholic Church.<sup>37</sup>

This is already made plain by his reference to the “Balasu church of the world age”, which, by using the term *yalab / kalaba* “aeon”, attributes a timeframe from Buddhist cosmology to the church. Among other virtues, the Scheut fathers are praised for their helpfulness (*tedkün / tedkügči*) and grace (*ači*), qualities which are in accordance with Buddhist ethical principles. Their disciples are denoted as *Šabi*, a common term for novices as well as for the lay subjects of a Buddhist reincarnation, while the believers belong to the group of the *buyan-tan*, “the fortunate ones”, which alludes to the Buddhist concept of merit accumulated because of good deeds and thoughts.<sup>38</sup> When complimenting on the achievements of the missionaries, Kesigbatu used a range of terms with Buddhist connotations, such as *ariy-a* “noble, generous” and *činar* “quality, spirit”. He characterized the Catholic faith as *ariyun nom* “pure [holy] doctrine” and *sajin* “religion [teaching]”, terms which suggest that this belief system was not regarded as inferior, but as a functional equivalent to Buddhism.

Since the eighteenth and nineteenth century, Karénina Kollmar-Paulenz argued that *sajin / šasin* and *nom* were no longer solely used with reference to Buddhism, but also in a comparative perspective to define other belief systems like Christianity.<sup>39</sup>

When Kesigbatu was reflecting on the transience of life, he used terms like *maqabud* “material substance, body” and *orčilang* “cycle of existence”, *Samsāra*. [...] What is especially noteworthy is his allusion to the “teaching of taking and discarding”. This concept, which signifies the correct distinction between right and wrong, true and false, good and bad as well as the ability to choose the one and desist from the other, was one of the formative elements of his worldview. In other

words, he made an effort to put Buddhist concepts of the world into a relational context with his experiences at the mission of Boro Balgasu.<sup>40</sup>

Heuschert observed that we may understand Kesigbatu's literary reflections as an act of boundary crossing and of cross-cultural communication. She referred to the German scholar Doris Bachmann-Medick's view on translation as “a social and cultural practice. Hybridity amounts to more than just a blending of cultures. It must be seen as an action space of translation processes”.<sup>41</sup> Even though Kesigbatu was writing in his native language, Heuschert reasoned that “by praising the mission of Boro Balyasu he was translating back and forth between different cultural affiliations and was thus acting in an intermediary space”.<sup>42</sup> Recurring themes in Kesigbatu's poems on the Catholic Church were the unfamiliar sound of the missionaries' language, tall rectangular buildings, and the admiration for the Scheut fathers' ability to take photographs.<sup>43</sup>

His poems on the mission of Boro Balyasu, in the opinion of Heuschert, should not lead us to speculate about Kesigbatu's personal attitude towards Christianity. Rather, the verses must be understood as part of their literary genre, *maytayal*, songs of praise.

The references to Christian teachings—the “heavenly kingdom” (*tngrī-yin oron*) and the “soul” (*sünesü*), which “will reach god” (*sandi-dur kürgen bui*)—can also be read as indications that Kesigbatu was aware of what would be suitable topics for a *maytayal* dedicated to the Catholic Church. Kesigbatu clearly distanced himself from “the other doctrine” and compared those who reject Buddhist instruction to those who reject clear water and instead decide on drinking something extremely salty.<sup>44</sup>

Kesigbatu's poem “Balyasu church of the world-age” reveals that the encounters at the mission gave him reason for a self-reflection, in which he tried to set disparate structures of meaning into relation. Heuschert concluded that Kesigbatu's readiness to relate his knowledge of the missionaries' world to his own conception of life clearly distinguishes this poem from the satirical poems, which read like a general rejection of missionary presence.

According to Kesigbatu, foreigners are dangerous, but if one has the proper method to interact with them, one can benefit. The transition from enemy to friend is possible, but it should be accompanied by a personal development and knowledge enhancement. Establishing a bond of friendship with the foreign missionaries was thus inherently linked to a process of change. The development of personal friendship which he experienced does not seem to have been connected to the missionaries' religious mission. But there can be no doubt that their

36 ‘When the Foreign Enemy Becomes a Dear Friend’, 46.

37 ‘Idem’, 54.

38 *Ibid.*

39 K. Kollmar-Paulenz, ‘Lamas und Schamanen: Mongolische Wissensordnungen vom frühen 17. bis zum 21. Jahrhundert. in P. Schalk (ed.), *Religion in Asien?* (Uppsala: Uppsala Universitet, 2013), 174-7.

40 ‘When the Foreign Enemy Becomes a Dear Friend’, 56.

41 Doris Bachmann-Medick, *Cultural Turns: New Orientations in the Study of Culture*, (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016), 184.

42 ‘When the Foreign Enemy Becomes a Dear Friend’, 59.

43 ‘Idem’, 57.

44 *Ibid.*

shared interest in Mongolian literature formed a link between Kesigbatu and the Scheut fathers.<sup>45</sup>

## The Cultural Knot

### *Obstacles to Christian Conversion: Ethnocentrism and Quasi-Feudalism*

French Lazarist missionaries like Gabet and Huc had a positive impression of the Mongols compared to the Chinese. They considered Mongols to be just, serious, and very pious people, sometimes naïve and superstitious. Scheut missionaries likewise imagined that, in the grasslands, they had discovered the ideal primitive simplicity and the authentic way of life of the Old Testament patriarchs. “In general, one can say that the Mongol is frank, open, hospitable, while the Chinese is deceitful, cunning, the enemy of any stranger ... The religious sentiment, superficial among the Chinese, is deeply rooted in the heart of the Mongol”.<sup>46</sup> Such a black-and-white picture may shock us today, F. Aubin noted, but it would show a lack of historical insight into the mindset and experience of late nineteenth-century CICM missionaries.

In the opinion of the Mongol scholar Temur Temule 特木勒, it was the European missionaries’ ethnocentrism that caused their failure to convert Mongols rather than the Mongol nomadic lifestyle or Tibetan Buddhism.<sup>47</sup> Yet British medieval historian Peter Jackson in his discussion of Latin missionaries’ methods and obstacles during the thirteenth and fourteenth century argued that the “conversion experience” itself does not possess any kind of uniformity and it is beyond the historian’s reach. He suggested some reasons for the restricted appeal of Western Christianity to the early Mongols and their nomadic subjects like Mongol ancestor worship, heavy dependence on shamans and fortune-tellers, syncretistic openness to all faiths, even-handed treatment of all confessional groups, religious inclusivism, and the salience of magic.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, Tibetan Buddhism proved to be more attractive to Mongols.

Yi Wang pointed out that within the context of the nineteenth-century Ordos quasi-feudal rule of the Chinggisid princes (jasays) and the high-ranking Buddhist reincarnations (qubilyan, qutuqtu), Ordos Mongols could not freely depart from the banner that they were born into or the monastery to which they belonged. Indeed, the Scheut fathers in Boro Balgasu often complained about the continuous harassment of the Mongol Catholic converts by Ordos’s banner officials and Buddhist monks.

Heuschert’s case study of the commoner Kesigbatu has demonstrated that there also exists a cross-cultural intermediary space or “in-betweenness” for communicating and translating

between the different social and cultural affiliations.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, in his *Two-Way Mirrors*, Eugene Chen Eoyang 歐陽楨 engages in cross-cultural study, shedding light not only on the object of study but also on the subject conducting the study. The book’s leading metaphor is that of the shop window, which is at once transparent (allowing a view of the merchandise on display) and reflective (offering an image of the prospective shopper). Eoyang shows the different and oppositional premises in Eastern and Western poetics juxtaposed not as contradictory but as complementary, allowing for a mutual illumination of values. Eoyang concludes by speculating on the continuing development of comparative literature, a discipline particularly well suited to new modes of discourse both reflective and reflexive, as illuminating as a two-way mirror.<sup>50</sup>



Itinerant Mongolian Fortune Teller.

### *From Buddhism to Christianisation: The Wind-Horse Prayer Flags Controversy*

Practices and beliefs do change over time. One example is the unique worship of the “wind horse” prayer flags by the Ordos Mongols. The wind-horse prayer flag is an original mundane lay folk and auspicious Tibetan symbol, which only gradually became Buddhized.<sup>51</sup> The Scheut pioneers considered these to be “superstitious flags” and demanded that Catholic converts remove them. Following his visit to Boro Balyasu in May 1992, a native Ordos Mongol scholar Oγonosčoytu (Yang Haiying 楊海英 / Ohno Akira 大野旭) opined that non-Christian neighbors regard the Mongol Christians without *kʻt-mori* prayer flags as heretics or desert people. The attitude of the CICM missionaries towards these prayer flags changed over the years. Bishop Joseph Tegüsbilig noted that Fr. Frans Maertens (馬如龍, 1916-87) was inclined to accept the *kʻt-mori* prayer flags. But Tegüsbilig instead of just tolerating these prayer flags planned to Christianize them, by replacing the Tibetan incantations with pictures of sheep and the Mongolian trifurcated iron standard (*seisam*) by the cross.<sup>52</sup>

### *Transmitting the Catholic Faith: The Creation of a Mongolian Christian Literature*

From 1914 to 1921 Fr. Mostaert revised the Mongol vernacular translation of Jesuit Fr. Jacques François Dieudonné d’Ollières’ (方守義, 1722-80) “Catechism” *Čiqul-a nom-un surtal* 要理問答 in literary Mongolian and several other Mongol translations of

45 Ibid.

46 Aubin, ‘The Young Father Mostaert’s Forerunners’, in Antoine Mostaert, 1, 31-45.

47 Temule 特木勒, ‘Rediscovering the Mongols: James Gilmour as a Transculturator’, in Gaby Bamana, ed., *Christianity and Mongolia: Past and Present (Proceedings of the Antoon Mostaert Symposium on Christianity and Mongolia. Ulaanbaatar, August 2006)*, 54-78.

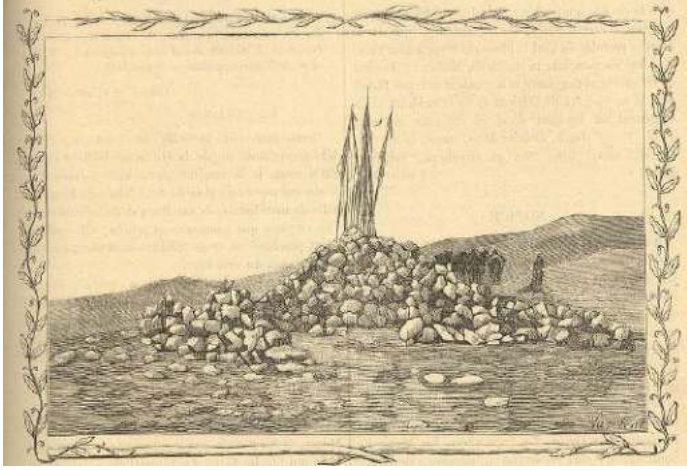
48 *The Mongols and the West*, 296-330.

49 ‘When the Foreign Enemy Becomes a Dear Friend’, 59.

50 Eugene Chen Eoyang, *Two-Way Mirrors: Cross-Cultural Studies in Globalization* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005).

51 Samten G. Karmay, *The Arrow and the Spindle*: (Mandala Publishing, 1998), 415.

52 ‘Catholicism in the Ordos Today’, in Antoine Mostaert 1, 205-23.



Drawing of a Mongolian “Obo”, a place of worship for spirits (from *Missions en Chine et Congo*, 1892).

Chinese Catholic texts by Öljeyijab (1870-1939), such as Polish Jesuit Fr. Joannes Twrzy’s (戴爾第(塗狄), 1846-1910) “Explanation of the catechism” *Čiqul-a yosun-u tayilburi* 要理解條解, MEP bishop Étienne Raymond Albrand’s (白斯德望, 1805-53) *Motifs de conversion* “Clear Understanding in the Twinkling of an Eye” *Nigen üjimegče todoorqai medekü kemekü debter* 一目了然 and Lazarist Fr. Paul Joseph Wang’s 王君山 (1837-1913) “Month of the Souls in Purgatory” *Arilyaqu oron-u sünesüd-ün sar-a* 煉靈聖月.<sup>53</sup> Öljeyijab was a Mongol Christian scholar hailing from Jeyünger banner, who specialized in translating Chinese Christian devotional literature into Mongolian. At that time Boro Balyasu did not yet have a Mongol printing press. A Mongol calligrapher copied the translated texts with a brush. After careful proofreading, these were sent to the Jesuit T’ou-sé-wé 土山灣 orphanage press in Shanghai to be lithographed.<sup>54</sup>

Oyonosčoytu noted: “The texts of the Mass and the hymns are recited in literary Mongolian, a legacy from the missionaries... As regards the hymns, some of them are based on traditional Mongol melodies, but all of them have greatly contributed to the propagation of the faith”.<sup>55</sup>

The French Fidei Donum Fr. Pierre Pallusière in his article “Sing us Some Ordos Song! Translation and Literary Composition of a Christian Catholic Hymnal in Mongolian” analyzed some thirty-five Mongol hymns, *maytaqal*, which he found in the archives of the Catholic Mission in Ulaanbaatar. With the help of F. Aubin, he was able to identify its authors: Scheut Fr. Florent Claeys and the Catholic faithful Cyril Mantogal (Manduyal, 1886-1942), a silver smith and calligrapher, who composed them at Boro Balyasu in the 1930s.<sup>56</sup> Cyril Mantogal was the son of Francis Haljitai, Fr. Steenackers’ companion, and the father of Bishop Tegüsbilig 馬仲牧.

Fr. Pallusière pointed out that this hymnal not only shows the authentic work of translation and original composition

in Mongolian dedicated to the transmission of the Christian faith, but also the openness of the Scheut missionaries, from the very beginning, towards Mongolian language and culture which they endeavored to master, to respect and to preserve in their writings: so as “to make it their own flesh and blood”. Fr. Palussière is convinced that southern Mongol Catholics have found in these Mongol hymns, *maytaqal*, songs of praise, the essential materials to persevere in their faith, as witnessed by Oyonosčoytu.<sup>57</sup>

#### **Religious Ethnology: Folklore Ordos and Lamaism**

*Maximum Illud* advocated that the demands of auxiliary sciences such as ethnology become part of the missionary formation. In 1956, Fr. Antoon Mostaert published his article: ‘*Matériaux ethnographiques relatifs aux Mongols Ordos*’ (Ethnographic Materials relating to the Ordos Mongols) in the *Central Asiatic Journal*, while he stayed at Missionhurst in Arlington, Virginia. For his article he borrowed some materials from Fr. Braam’s unpublished manuscript “Folklore Ordos”,<sup>58</sup> which Braam had written with the assistance of Bermyn, Mostaert himself and Jozef Van Oost (彭嵩壽, 1877-1969)<sup>59</sup> in 1908-9. A list of questions compiled by the editors of the ethnographic journal *Anthropos* served as a guide in organizing these materials. In 1906, Fr. Wilhelm Schmidt (1868-1954), SVD, had founded this journal in Vienna. The manuscript was sent to *Anthropos*, but it was not accepted for publication for being non-scientific. Claude Prudhomme noted that Schmidt emphasized the need for collaboration with universities, as he feared the development of a cheap kind of Catholic religious ethnology for missionary consumption. The Religious Ethnological Weeks which Schmidt and others launched in Louvain in 1912 would never equal the success of the Missiological Weeks since 1919.<sup>60</sup>

In the 1920s, Fr. Van Oost, a musician and prolific writer who did not know Mongolian, wrote a chapter on Lamaism 喇嘛教 (literally, “teaching of the lamas”, Tibeto-Mongolian Buddhism) in his *Au pays des Ortos (Mongolie)* [In the Country of the Ordos], in which he criticized monks for their lack of education and moral degeneration. At the same time, he noted the religious similarities between Tibeto-Mongolian Buddhism (Lamaism) and European Catholicism and the pervasive influence of Tibetan Buddhism in Ordos Mongol society.

Fr. Mostaert did not really study Tibetan Buddhism in great depth, since he wanted to focus on the study of the Mongoli-

53 *Annals of the Congregation of the Mission ‘A Collection of Edifying Letters’, 21 (1914): 318-22.*

54 Antoine Mostaert 1, 148-9, 275; 2, 13-35, J.L. Van Hecken, ‘La littérature mongole chrétienne’, *Neue Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft – La Nouvelle Revue de science missionnaire (NZM)*, 3, 2 (1947): 118-27 and *Études mongoles: I. La Littérature mongole chrétienne. II. Les Travaux linguistiques (Schöneck / Beckenried: NZM, 1947) and Chloë Starr, ‘Chapter 2: The Christian Imprint: The Shaping of Republican-Era Theology’, in Chinese Theology: Text and Context (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2016).*

55 Antoine Mostaert 1, 210.

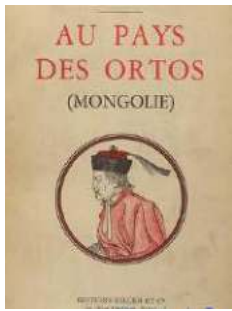
56 《也里可溫:鄂爾多斯城川蒙古教會》[*Yelikewen: The Ordos Mongol Church of Chengchuan*], 13.

57 Pierre Palussière, ‘Chantez-nous quelque chant des Ordos. Traduction et composition littéraire dans un hymnaire catholique en langue mongole’, in Aigle Denise, Charleux Isabelle, Goossaert Vincent & Hamayon Roberte, eds., *Miscellanea Asiatica: Mélanges en l’honneur de Françoise Aubin / Festschrift in Honour of Françoise Aubin (Monumenta Serica Monograph Series 61. Sankt Augustin, Nettetal: Institut Monumenta Serica, Steyler Verlag, 2010), 517-44; Van Hecken, ‘La littérature mongole chrétienne’, *NZM*, 3, 2 (1947): 118-27 and 《也里可溫:鄂爾多斯城川蒙古教會》[*Yelikewen: The Ordos Mongol Church of Chengchuan*].*

58 This manuscript *Folklore Studies* is now kept in the archives of CICM-Scheut at KADOC-KU Leuven, 6529.

59 Ann Heylen, *Chronique du Toumet-Ortos: Looking through the lens of Joseph Van Oost, Missionary in Inner Mongolia, 1915-1921 (Leuven University Press & Ferd. Verbiest Foundation, 2004).*

60 Prudhomme, ‘Science pour la mission, science de la mission. Quel rôle pour la papauté?’ 211-4.



an language and not on Tibetan or Sanskrit. In his article '*Matériaux ethnographiques relatifs aux Mongols Ordos*' he simply avoided the subject by saying that it was well known.

Scheut missionaries in southwestern Ordos did not develop a dialogic relationship with the Mongol Buddhist monastic community in contrast to the southern Norwegian Lutheran missionary Karl Ludvig Reichelt (艾香德, 1877-1952) at Jingfengshan 景風山 in Nanjing 南京 during the 1920s. Reichelt's dream was to bring the Christian message to the Buddhist monks of China in such a way that they would see in it not the destruction, but the fulfillment of all that they valued most highly: to interpret Christianity to Buddhists (and in some measure also Buddhism to Christians) in the setting of a retreat and study centre designed and built for the purpose.<sup>61</sup>

Yet some CICM fathers did develop friendly relations with some lay Buddhist adherents. In a personal conversation on 17 August 2016, Professor O.R. Otgonbaatar from the Institute of Language and Literature of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences informed Heuschert that CICM members regarded Kesigbatu as a personal friend. On the occasion of Tsendiin Damdinsüren's (Цэндийн Дамдинсүрэн, 1908–86) publication of Kesigbatu's works, Fr. Antoine Mostaert wrote a letter to Damdinsüren affirming that there had been friendly ties between Kesigbatu and the mission.<sup>62</sup>

#### **Antoine Mostaert: Linguistics and Mongolian Studies**

The CICM collections of southern Ordos' folktales and songs, as well as observations on customs and taboos related to birth, marriage, illness, death and daily life have been widely used by linguists, anthropologists, sociologists and historians. Mostaert, like his confrères, had no formal training in anthropology, but his knowledge of the Mongolian spoken and written language and his long-term exposure to Mongol daily life made him into an ethnographer, historian and linguist. He wrote: "Since linguistics, history and folklore are closely related and complement each other, I had to pay attention to the history and folklore of the Ordos during my linguistic studies". For Mostaert, the key to a better understanding of Mongolian culture remained the study of the local spoken and written language. The advice of two slightly younger confrères Benoni De

Wilde (狄文華, 1885-1945) and Jozef Mullie (閔宣化, 1886-1976) gave him the opportunity to surpass his predecessors. While in Belgium, both confreres managed to receive an introduction to modern linguistics and informed Mostaert about the new discipline.<sup>63</sup>

Following the confiscation of Mission land by the Suiyuan General Bureau for Land Reclamation in 1926-7 Mostaert left the Mongol mission station of Boro Balyasu to continue his Mongolian Studies in Peking. In 1929, Scheut Fr. Gaspar Schotte wrote that it was his health which forced him to leave the mission of Poro Balgaso; he had neurasthenia with phobia which made him fear to be alone at his mission station and having to bear all responsibilities. Later on, Mostaert published his most important works such as *Textes oraux ordos recueillis et publiés avec introduction, notes morphologiques, commentaires et glossaire* (1937) and *Dictionnaire Ordos* (1941-4),<sup>64</sup> a cornerstone in Mongolian Studies, in *Monumenta Serica* at Fu Jen Catholic University.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Eric John Sharpe, *Karl Ludvig Reichelt: Missionary, Scholar and Pilgrim* (Tao Fong Shan Ecumenical Centre, 1984).

<sup>62</sup> 'When the Foreign Enemy Becomes a Dear Friend', 46n31.

<sup>63</sup> F. Aubin, 'Idem', in *Antoine Mostaert* 1, 40-1 and J. Heyndrickx, ed., J. Van Hecken, 'Evangelization by the Scheut fathers among the Mongols in East Mongolia', 287-8 in *Antoon Mostaert ba Mongol sudlal*.

<sup>64</sup> Antoine Mostaert, *CICM, Dictionnaire Ordos* (Peking: Fu Jen Catholic University, *Monumenta Serica Monograph Series* 5, 3 vols. 1941-2, 1944; Second Edition, photomechanic reproduction, 3 parts in 1 vol. (London, New York, 1968); Third Edition, Reprint (Ulaanbaatar: CICM-AMC, 2009) and Cao Namu, ed. 《鄂爾多斯辭典》 *Dictionnaire Ordos with Han Chinese & Mongolian scripts* (Huhehaote: Nei Menggu Renmin Chubanshe, 2009).

<sup>65</sup> Taveirne, 'Eurasian Cultural Encounters beyond the Great Wall: the Case of Inner Mongolia in the late Qing and early Republican Era', in Wu Xiaoxin, *Narratives from the Hinterland*, 363-6 and 'Bibliography of Mostaert's works', in *Antoine Mostaert* 1, 275-9.

# A 1934 discovery by A. Mostaert cism on the tombs of the Erküt-people was recently confirmed in Inner Mongolia

## Introductory note

In 1934 Fr Antoine Mostaert cism (1881-1971) discovered and reported the presence in Ordos (Inner Mongolia) of tombs of the Erküt people, descendants of the Nestorian Christians (10<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century). He generally indicated the region in Ordos where the ancient cemetery must be located. Recently a Mongolian lady researcher Uranyo-a confirmed the research of Mostaert. The report of Dr. Uranyo-a was sent in by Dr. Haiying Yang in Japanese and translated by Fr. Dr. Peter Baekelmans cism.



## Preface by Haiying Yang

The following is a research report by Uranyo-a, a Mongolian woman writer living on the Ordos Plateau in Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, China. She is a member of the administrative organization called Caqar (Caqar qariy-a) of the Üüsin banner (Üüsin qosigu=banner) in Western Ordos. The Caqar Mongols were subordinates of the last great Mongol Khan, Ligdan Qayan, but when Mongols were conquered by the Qing dynasty in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, some of them joined the Ordos Mongols. Uranyo-a is a member of the descendants.

Among the people of Caqar, to whom Uranyo-a belonged, were Erküt people. Fr. Antoine Mostaert reported on the Erküt people in 1934. They were seen as descendants of the Nestorians, who had probably been in Mongolia since ancient times. Fr. Antoine Mostaert reported that there was a cemetery of these Erküt people near the Great Wall but did not actually see it. Later, in February 1992, I also followed Antoine Mostaert's record and made a survey along the Great Wall, but I could not find any Erküt cemetery because I could not get the coopera-

tion of the local Chinese people. This is probably because the Mongols and Chinese have always had a tense relationship.

However, the situation gradually changed. The female writer, Uranyo-a, finally located the site with great effort. And she found many gravestones. However, since China is wary of Western religions and their believers, the writer's writings could not be published in China. Therefore, the following text was published in *Asia Studies*, Vol. 16, Spring 2021, Shizuoka University. I have passed it on to Father Jeroom Heyndrickx in the hope to have it published in Europe. This is also the artist's wish.

## Cemetery Survey of Mongolian Nestorians by Uranyo-a

I was inspired to write this reportage after coming across the work *Ordosica*, written by Fr. Antoine Mostaert from Belgium.<sup>1</sup>

In this work, he mentions that

“the Erküt are Nestorian Mongols”. Mostaert writes that the cemetery of the Nestorian Mongols Erküt is located at a place called Bulu-yin Gatuu (Chinese = Nian Gedaliang). He also says that it is known as (Qiganliang).

On November 11, 2019, as part of my research on place names, I visited the Shaanxi Province Henshan County Archives. The purpose was to ascertain the origin of the place name “Qiao-



jiang,” how the Chinese characters are written, and to find a place called Bulu-yin Gatuu. No records of these two place names were found in the archives, and the place names “Qiganliang” in the documents kept there are all written with the characters (qiganliang). In response to our question as to whether (qi) and (qi) were misspelled, several people in the archival room confirmed that the correct spelling was (qiganliang), but they said that people in those days already had a hard time keeping records and therefore probably did not bother about the accuracy of the spelling.

We later on met with Dr. Liu Yubo, the head of the local history office of the Yokoyama County government. He introduced us to the local history, local magazines, and gave us the names and contact information of some of the people involved. He

<sup>1</sup> See, *Bulletin of the Catholic University of Peking*, 1934.

also contacted Mr. Zhang Zongyi, the secretary of Boluo village, where we were going to conduct our field survey, and arranged for him to prepare a copy of the newly published *Boluo Village Local History*. After arriving at the village, we not only got the local magazine, but also got to know the village mayor, Mr. Liu Xiaodong.

Mr. Liu's father, Mr. Liu Tianyue, is a researcher of local history and local magazines, and he gave us his address and contact information. I was able to confirm that the Chinese character for the name of the place was written with the character for "flag", namely that which is held up at the end of a pole. So, I wanted to find out why this place was named.

If I could not trace it back to the archives, I decided to do some field research, so I visited an old friend, Zhang Paixing. He was a local farmer I had met several times before. He is one of the people who told me about the legend of the Mongolians who used to fly the flag here. The agricultural land on the top of Qiganliang was allotted to him. With his nephew, Zhang Zhan-sheng, I asked about the different ways of writing Qiganliang. According to them, Mongolians used to fly flags in this place, so the character for "go" as in Chinese chess would not be correct. When I asked about the writing of place names in local official documents, government battalion seals, and documents, and how it was recorded in the family history of Mr. Zhang's family, I was told that it was indeed written as in the old family tree that had been kept for generations. If we count backwards from their generation, we can assume that this family tree was written 100 years ago. However, there was no mention of the origin of the word *Qiganliang*.

Mr. Zhang Sengsheng told us that he had dug up something when he was working on the top of Qiganliang with a bulldozer, and he was willing to show it to us. Mr. Zhang said that he heard from his predecessors that Mongolians used to come to this area on horseback. He said that there was no particular exchange because of the language barrier, and that the Mongols worshipped their ancestors here.

According to Mr. Zhang, there were many Mongolian cemeteries in a place called *Mahuang Fen*. The place that is called "cemetery", is slightly higher than the well-groomed ground and covers an area of about 10 square meters, with a weed called *mahuang* growing on top. According to Mr. Zhang, the hemp plant is not native to this area, and the Mongolians brought it from Inner Mongolia and planted it on top of the graves, which led to its increase. With the tomb of our ancestors in front of us, we walked carefully clockwise, staring at the tomb. To the southwest of the tomb was the Cave of the Badger. Turning to the north, we found what looked like a kaki-colored stone altar, half buried in the earth. The altar has some kind of pattern on it. There was also a square stone slab, about a foot in size, lying in the mallow grass. The surface of the stone slab

was dark brown, probably because it had been exposed to the sun and wind.

I think this partly corresponds to the description of "Bulu-yin Gatuu" in Mostaert's work. Mostaert said that he heard from local Mongolians that Erkut, or the Nestorian people, were from the small town of Könüg in the northern part of Huai Yuan county (present-day Yokoyama county, Shaanxi province) outside the Great Wall of China, about 40 kilometers away from the Wushin banner of "Könüg-ün Boru Tolu?ai." There was a small temple there, surrounded by trees, and as the Chinese, or Han people, moved there one after another about 100 years ago, the Nestorian people gradually moved away, but most of the communal cemetery was left intact. The last time Mongolians visited the cemetery, they saw the cemetery surrounded by a fence and a millstone for grinding rice, called Bulu. The name *Bulu-yin Gatuu* may have been derived from this feature. There were more than 200 graves, and the deceased were buried according to their religious affiliation. In front of each grave was a 34-foot-tall tombstone inscribed with the name and life story of the deceased. Based on this description and the stone slab I found at the site, I suspected that this was probably the cemetery of the Nestorian people, Bulu-yin Gatuu. However, regarding the number of graves, I couldn't find any other tombstone with writing on it.

After the field-work survey, I reread Dr. Erkeszen's book *Cagan sülde kiged tegün-ü dagagsad*.<sup>2</sup> The contents of his book can be summarized as follows: Around 1696, to rearrange the sanctuary dedicated to Genghis Khan, the Naiman Cagan Ordun (the Eight White Palaces), a special group of 500 ritual specialists, the Darqad, were organized. The shrine of Esi Qatun, which had been worshipped since the Yuan dynasty, was also welcomed into the ritual system of the Naiman Cagan Ordun, but Nestorians could not become a Darqad. Since then, the Nestorian Mongols have lived in Ordos Plateau to this day.



<sup>2</sup> *Öbür Mong yol-un soyul-un keblel-ün qoriy-a*, 2010, 34-40.

# The first and only Mongolian Bishop: Joseph Agtaqin Tegusbilig (MA ZHONG-MOU)

Fr. Paul Urnud – Verbiest Institute KU Leuven

## *Mongolia has a long Christian faith history*

For more than a thousand years, Christian faith has been present among the Mongols. During the first three centuries, it was preached by the Nestorians who came to China during the late Tang empire. The Franciscan friar Giovanni (John) di Montecorvino was sent in 1289 as Papal Legate to the Yuan Mongol Empire as response to the Khan's request to send Catholic missionaries. In 1308 he was consecrated bishop of Khanbaliq (today's Beijing) which was the capital of the Mongol Yuan dynasty.

## *Ordos and Otog*

Ordos is a place. The word "Ordos" comes from the Mongolian word *Ordo* or *Ordon* which means residence of a ruler; palace; camp. It is also used to refer to camp bodyguards, and, in this case, it was used to show that these palaces and yurts are different from the rest. Ordos is the plural of Ordo, because overall there are eight Genghis Khan white yurts; this is an important tradition of Ordos-Mongol, many of these traditions and stories were recorded by Fr. Anthoine Mostaert CICM.

Otog Barren is in Ordos. Otog means a group of people living together as a camp in the army. Otog Barren is located southwest in Ordos, it borders Ugushin Barren to the east, Hanggin Barren to the north, the Alasha League to the northwest, Wuhai to the west, Ningxia to its southwest, and the Province of Shaanxi to the south, with the Great Wall as the natural limit in the south.

Borobalgasu is a toponym, a two-parts Mongolian word: Boro and Balgasu. Boro is a color like ash, kind of gray, blue, dark green. Balgasu means castle or town. The town origin goes back to the Tang dynasty (618-907) when a first enclave called You Zhou was built during Yuan He fifteenth year (A.D 820) and was abandoned and ruined laid to waste by the thirteenth century.

## *A glance at Bishop Tegusbilig's life*

Bishop's Mongolian name is Agtaqin Tegusbilig and his Chinese name is Ma Zhong Mu. On November 1, 1919, he was born at Borobalgasu in Otog Barren, in Ordos. Eight days after birth he was baptized and named Joseph. Until he was twelve years old, he helped his family herding cows and sheep at home; part of the cattle belonged to the Catholic Mission, and



*The author, together with Bp. Ma.*

his mother was responsible for milking the cows and supply milk for the priests and religious sisters. During those years, apart from herding he also learned the Mongolian alphabet and to count in Mongolian with the help of his father and the local parish priest, Fr. Claeys Florent CICM. In the school year 1930-1931, he attended the school of Borobalgasu church where his teacher was also Fr. Florent.

In the autumn of 1931, he enrolled into Pei De school, which was an elementary school in Bodorgana (In Chinese called Dui Zi Liang) church, which at the time was the educational institution with the highest reputation in the area. Four years later, in 1935, he joined San Sheng Gong minor seminary for six years. In 1941, he moved to the Hohhot Major Seminary Philosophy College. Two years later, in 1943, he went to Datong Major Seminary (in Shanxi) to finish

his theological studies there, graduating four years later; he was ordained priest by Bishop Carlo van Melckebeke on July 31, 1947, at San Sheng Gong in Inner Mongolia. After his ordination, he prepared himself for the 1948 admission exam of Fu Ren (Fu Jen) university, in 1948, and he was able to enroll in the Agricultural Department of Fu Ren University.

In 1949 Communist troops entered Beijing and that Autumn (October 1st) established the People's Republic of China. That same year, the Agricultural Department of Fu Ren University was annexed to Beijing University. Fr. Agtaqin Tegusbilig did not want to attend courses at Beijing University so, to be able to stay at Fu Ren, he switched to the Chemistry Department. In 1951, two events persuaded him to decide to return to Ordos without graduating. First, the fact that Fu Ren University was finally taken over by the educational administration of the new Chinese Communist Government. All the departments of Fu Ren were included into different public universities, most of them in Beijing Normal University (including the university campus), others in Beijing University, Central University of Finance and Economics, People's University of China. Second was the large-scale movement "to suppress the counter-revolutionary elements" that was launched all over China. When he learned that in Beijing three hundred people had suddenly been rounded up, he decided to leave Beijing and return to Ordos.

In Ordos he carried out his priestly ministry in Ningxia province: in Zhong Wei, Ming Sha, and his hometown Borobalgasu. In 1953, he was appointed parish priest of Kejuur. In 1956, he



was appointed as teacher in Hohhot major seminary. After refusing to join the Patriotic Association, he was sentenced to forced labor as “the leader of Wang Xi Xian clique of counter-revolutionaries” on April 21, 1958; the judge convicted them (10 people) to one hundred years jail term each. He did eight years but three years more were added after he gave a “homily” to the prison’s director.

He was released on April 20 1969 and returned to his hometown. By that time, his siblings and mother had already moved out to Haraergi of Zhuha Sumu. He also went there and worked as a laborer at an irrigation experimental farming program established by the people’s commune. He worked here until April 1979, when the new policy of freedom of religion was enacted in line with the changes brought about by the government after the demise of Chairman Mao.

At that time, he restarted his priestly ministry and carefully searched for every Catholic and led them back to the church. He organized the rebuilding of the local church and other church premises. During these years, he traveled through the whole of Ordos from Borobalgasu to Ding Bian, Jing Bian, Ning Xia and the north of Shaanxi. His pastoral ministry was directed to both Han and Mongol Catholic people of the area.

On November 8, 1983, he was secretly consecrated as Bishop of Ning Xia Diocese. He retired in 2005. On August 25, 2016, he suffered a stroke that made him bedridden. On March 25, 2020, Bishop Joseph Agtaqin Tegusbilig Ma Zhongmu finally passed away; he was 101 years old. His faithfulness, his hard work, his whole legacy is remembered deep in the hearts of those who knew him.

### *The true shepherd who befriended the herdsman and the farmer*

Although the Cultural Revolution was already over, people were like birds, easily startled by the mere twang of a bowstring; lay people were very eager to receive the sacraments, but no one dared to come forward and express their wish loud and clear because they were still afraid that the Cultural Revolution may come back again. Bishop Ma knew people’s worries and looked for them one by one, a family at a time. Then, he had no horse or other vehicles, so he just went on foot; sometimes he had to walk the whole day just to meet an old Catholic in a faraway area. At the beginning, people kept quiet and did it secretly. The bishop’s visit would comfort and encourage them, telling them, “Do not worry, God never forgets us! We are free now!”

Bishop Ma not only took care of the spiritual life of the faithful he also worked hard to improve their living conditions. In the first step, he planted fruit trees like vine, apple, pear, peach, apricot, hawthorn, and Chinese date; he experimented with everything on the church’s farm wondering: what kind of soil does each plant need? How and when to water them? What kind of fertilizer suits them? How to prune them? In the second step, he used the obtained experience to teach others how to



plant, which ones grow easily and are more valuable, fully sharing with the people all the fruits of his experiments. In a similar way, he also experimented with some herbal medicines and grains that may be of use for the people.

Bishop Ma took care of two orphans and supported more than fifty students until they finished their basic education. The bishop also helped local citizens to repair the roads and helped them to bring electricity to their houses, and many other things.

The bishop and some people decided to build a new church in the settlement area, hence, they built a church and some other building at Chagantologai in 1987. It became the only Mongol church until 2014 and it became a sign of hope for the Mongol Catholics, a safe sheepfold on the desert. His sheep were searching for their own sheepfold and came back to celebrate their faith. Still, many sheep were unable to find the sheepfold and the bishop kept searching for them and guiding them to the fold; the bishop was a living image of the Good Shepherd in the gospel (John 10). The non-Catholic local people considered him a living god, and the Catholic faithful called him a saint.

### *Literature Conveys the Logos*

Bishop Ma wrote many poems for people to sing. His poems usually praise God and teach people some important church doctrine; even more, he also composed the music for his poems. One thing that I remember clearly and impacted me is how bishop Ma never stopped his translation work. He translated into the Mongolian language:

- The readings for the daily Holy Mass.
- The history of the apparitions of the blessed Virgin Mary everywhere in the worlds and the messages she shared with humankind on how to grow in the love of God and avoid sin.
- Some catechetical materials.
- The Holy Bible.
- The Roman Missal.
- The “Liturgical Handbook for Priests”.

### *Foster local clergy and religious sisters*

Bishop Tegusbilig fostered vocations of priests and religious sisters among the Mongol people. He also invited priests and sisters from other dioceses to come to his diocese. Nowadays, there are five Mongolian priests and two Mongolian religious sisters. There are also not Mongolian priests and religious sisters serving in the local church.

# Preparing the CICM Mission in Ulaanbaatar. The blitz-start of the 2nd CICM Mongol Mission

Fr. Jeroom Heyndrickx cism – Verbiest Institute KU Leuven

## *An unexpected call on CICM to start its 2nd CICM Mission among the Mongols*

In March 1991 two Mongol diplomats – Mr. Hashbat & Mr. Dorligjav<sup>1</sup> – invited the Vatican to open diplomatic relations with the Republic Mongolia which had recently regained its independence from the Soviet Union. The initial reply of the Holy See was that, since there had never been any evangelization by Catholic missionaries in the region of Outer Mongolia there were no Catholic faithful and therefore it would not be meaningful send a nuncio. The diplomats were aware of this history and answered that Lama Buddhism had been State religion since the time of the old Urga (the former name of Ulaanbaatar) but that their country had recently become a republic introducing freedom of religion instead of a state religion. Citizens were free to choose their religious belief and therefore, Catholic missionaries were invited to come to Mongolia and preach the gospel.

The Holy See welcomed the invitation. The historical records were checked and it was found that CICM had since 1865 been working among the Mongols in China (Inner Mongolia). In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, some CICM missionaries had already made visits inside Outer Mongolia to explore ways for initiating evangelization there. This led – in 1922 – to an agreement between CICM missionaries, their superiors in Belgium and the

Holy See to set up a *Missio Sui Iuris*<sup>2</sup> for Outer Mongolia. Bishop Jerome Van Aertselaer CICM, then bishop of Xiwanzi Apostolic Prefecture was appointed as its superior. CICM prepared to send missionaries to Outer Mongolia, but this plan was blocked in 1924 when, supported by Russia the Mongols fought and won their independence war with from China. Outer Mongolia became the Republic Mongolia and was immediately included as part of the Soviet Union. After finding this historical background, the Holy See responded positively to the invitation of the two Mongolia diplomats and deci-



Mgr. Jeroom Van Aertselaer cism.

ded to get in touch with CICM to reactivate the *Missio Sui Iuris*.

It was a coincidence that during the days after the visit of the diplomats I happened to have an appointment at the Vatican and learned about the visit of the diplomats. That's how I got involved in informing the CICM Superior General Michel De Craene on the visit of the diplomats which was followed by an intensive process of communication between the CICM Superiors and the Holy See. This resulted in early 1992 in the appointment by CICM of a team to start its 2<sup>nd</sup> *CICM Mission to the Mongols*. The Vatican sent Msgr. Gobel – then *Chargé d'Affaires* in Hong Kong – to Ulaanbaatar in September 1991 to prepare diplomatic relations. I was invited by both the CICM Superior General, and the Holy see to travel to Ulaanbaatar from October 18 to 26, 1991 and explore ways for evangelization by CICM.

## *For CICM: a unique opportunity but also a historical challenge and responsibility*

I felt very excited as I travelled by plane from Paris via Moscow to Ulaanbaatar (UB) deeply aware of the historical meaning of this undertaking. Till then no organized Christian evangelization had ever taken place in the region of Outer Mongolia even though already 700 years ago missionaries had made attempts to start. Piano di Carpini OFM (Italy) and later Guillaume of Rubrouck OFM (French Flanders) had been sent respectively by the pope and by the king of France in the years 1250 to explore ways to evangelize but without success. John of Monte Corvino OFM (Italy) later succeeded to establish a flourishing Catholic community of Mongols in Cambalic (Beijing) but that disappeared when the Mongol Yuan Dynasty was replaced by the Chinese Ming Dynasty in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. A few Jesuits – Ferdinand Verbiest, Claudio F. Grimaldi – made occasional contacts with the Mongols in China as they accompanied Emperor Kangxi in the 18<sup>th</sup> century on his visits in Inner Mongolia. Only Dominique Parennin SJ engaged in evangelization in Jehol. But through all these years there was never a permanent community of Mongol Catholics. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the French Vincentians were the pioneers who initiated an organized attempt at evangelization among the Mongols in Chinese Inner Mongolia. Evarist Régis Huc CM and Joseph Gabet CM

<sup>1</sup> Mr Hashbat was ambassador in Bulgaria, I met him later in Ulaanbaatar. Mr Dorligjav was the very young (29 years old) Vice Premier minister of the Republic Mongolia. During the protests against the Soviet-Union he had gone on hunger strike and gained much sympathy of the people. He became a prominent politician in Ulaanbaatar (UB) at that time. During my prospection visit in UB I was received by him and was much impressed by his wise advice.

<sup>2</sup> *Missio sui iuris* (Mission of its own right) is the term used in Church Law for a newly established mission whose jurisdiction ranks below that of an Apostolic Prefecture and an Apostolic Vicariate if there are no or very few faithful. It comes under more direct supervision of the Holy See and has not yet an ordained bishop.

and later Bishop Joseph Martial Mouly CM had a plan to develop evangelization among the Mongols. They baptized a few Mongols and even ordained a priest<sup>3</sup> but they had to interrupt their hope-giving efforts as they were called by their superiors to leave Inner Mongolia.



Mgr. Gaspar Schotte cicm.

CICM took over and succeeded in establishing a Mongol Mission in Poro Balgasu (1874) in the Ordos region. Over the years there grew a well-organized Catholic Mongol community of a thousand faithful, living in Poro Balgasu and spread over the Ordos Region. Their history however was dramatic. Mongol Catholics suffered much during the Boxer Rebellion. In the 1930's-1940's several Catholic Mongol mission stations were attacked and destroyed by the Communist army during its Long March on the way to nearby Yanan.

Yet the Catholic Mongols, after much suffering even survived the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Fr. Joseph Ma Zhongmou, after spending time in prison and forced labour was ordained (unofficial) bishop of Ningxia Diocese. He grew to be 101 years old and, while his Mongol community increased considerably, he ordained several Mongolian priests. Some famous CICM pioneers had contributed to the growth of that Catholic Mongol community: Remi Verlinden and Mgr. Alfons De Vos founders, Alfons Bermyn, Antoine Mostaert, Florent Clayes, Bishop Gaspar Schotte a.o.

But my visit was not to Inner Mongolia (China). I flew to Ulaanbaatar (formally called Urga), capital of the newly established Republic Mongolia, what used to be called Outer Mongolia<sup>4</sup>, North of the PRC. That was the very region where CICM – c/o Bp Jerome Van Aertselaer was asked in 1920 to start a *Missio Sui Iuris*. It was not possible then. Would it succeed now?

The challenge was unique. Shamanism has for centuries been the religion of the Mongols of Urga. Then Lama Buddhism spread in their country and became the official State Religion. But in 1924 the Russians took over. Mongolia became part of

the Soviet Union and for 70 years atheism was imposed. Lama Buddhism was persecuted violently. Thousands of Lamas were murdered by Choibalsan (also called “the Mongolian Stalin”) in the late 1930's<sup>5</sup>. When the Soviet Union disintegrated (1990) Mongolia regained its independence and established the democratic Republic of Mongolia. They developed diplomatic relations with countries all over the world.

The historical uniqueness of the situation was in the fact that in this context Mongol diplomats took the initiative to visit the Holy See, proposed to establish diplomatic relations with the Vatican and, as part of that, formally invited Catholic missionaries to come to Mongolia and preach the gospel. For CICM to be invited to take the responsibility for it at that moment (1991) made this even more unique, unexpected and historical. Only 40 years earlier – between 1950 and 1955 – 252 CICM missionaries had been expelled from China by the Communists, ending 90 years of evangelization among the Chinese and Mongols in Northern China where they had followed their founder Theophile Verbist who in 1865 had initiated the *CICM Priority for Evangelization among the Chinese and Mongols of Northern China*. The invitation that now came from Ulaanbaatar offered CICM, after being expelled from China, the chance to start its 2<sup>nd</sup> *CICM Mission among the Mongols*. An exceptional opportunity, but what a responsibility!

Every start of a new CICM Mission is always preceded by an intensive preparation of the team that is assigned for it. From the historical background of Mongolia briefly described here above it is obvious that the start of evangelization of Catholic missionaries to Mongolia needed to be carefully prepared. How would they start introducing the gospel to people who had so recently gone through such a dramatic, even violent experience? What aspect of the Church will they emphasize as they set out to build a Christian community in Ulaanbaatar (UB)? Would it be the Kerygmatic Church launching open preaching of the gospel calling on conversions? Would they rather stress the institutional aspect of the Church, showing its presence by putting up institutions and buildings? The sacramental Church? Or would they opt for developing a Church for the poor and needy? These are all crucial questions to be addressed by the new team when they prepare their new mission. These would be questions for the new team, to be appointed, and to discuss these issues among them as they start their mission.

My task was mainly to explore ways and possibilities of evangelization in UB. I hoped to meet with some authorities to hear

<sup>3</sup> A layman and a lama who became a Catholic priest Fr. Pierre Tshingltchab (Feng), both converts of Fr. Joseph Gabet cm.

<sup>4</sup> Mongols of the Republic Mongolia are not in favor of using the term. The use of it goes back to as early as 1689, the Conference of Dolon Nor. The Khalkha Mongols, after some internal conflicts with Mongols in China called on the help of the Chinese to clear up the disagreements. During the Conference of Dolon Nor they accepted to be ruled by the Manchu Dynasty of China. It is also since then – in the document of the Dolon Nor Conference – that distinction was made between the Mongols of “Inner Mongolia” and those from “Outer Mongolia”.

<sup>5</sup> During my stay at UB – Oct 18-25, 1991 – the BBC broadcasted that their team had discovered a mass grave in the very North-West of Mongolia, with at least 30.000 bodies of lama's – probably more – who were all killed by a bullet in the head during the 1930's. That was during the regime of Choibalsan during which all Buddhist temples (742 Major Temples) were destroyed except one in UB and another one which is now a museum of art. The news on the mass grave was later reported also on UB radio.

from them what they expected from the missionaries. I planned to meet with people in various sectors of society. From all of them I hoped to learn about the daily concerns and needs of the Mongol people. What could Catholic missionaries contribute? How and where could the missionaries stay and prepare themselves to learn the language, the customs and culture of the Mongolian people?

## Meeting government authorities

Mr. Avirmedding Battor of the ministry of Foreign Affairs was my guide and translator. He accompanied me to meet some important persons of the government. Vice Premier Dorligjav personally received me. I met with Mr Utchirbal, director of the Office for Europe and the USA and with Mr. Gongryn Bars, ambassador at Large, who spoke perfect French.

Vice Premier Dorligjav received me in the impressive centrally located government building in UB. Although young, 29 years<sup>6</sup>, he made a deep impression on me by his advice which I found thoughtful, wise, inspiring, and very helpful.

He said:

- \* *Mongolia is going through a period of deep and rapid change.*
  - *For 70 years the Mongol culture has been destroyed: its traditions, the “Mongol soul”. Today Mongolia fails to find back its own culture tradition and soul. Values of the past were rejected.*
  - *Freedom of religion is an important principle of our new constitution. There is a new spirit of freedom and democracy in the country. This includes respect for all opinions and all religions. We must still learn this. In this sense Catholic missionaries are most welcome to the country.*
  - *However, even though the government welcomes missionaries, you must be aware that the old tradition of the people is Buddhist. Some people may not be very much in favour of new religions coming to Mongolia. One must be patient.*
  - *Putting up church buildings should not be your first concern. That may come at a later stage. Avoid being misunderstood by the people and by some in the government!*
- \* *We want to re-appreciate and preserve our own traditional culture and values. Therefore, we fully appreciate the contributions of your missionaries in the field of Mongolian studies. Their books kept in your libraries are immensely valuable to us.*
- \* *We pledge our full support and cooperation for plans in the field of culture and science. I suggest that you cooperate with the State University. I encourage you to enter into contact with the Institute for Mongolian Studies at the Academy of Social Sciences. Your institute at Leuven University in Belgium can be*



Meeting with Mr Gongoryn Bars.

*an ideal channel to develop programs of exchange and cooperation with our institutions in Mongolia.*

- \* *Very important and urgent is your assistance in the field of social service. We need more help indeed. Especially in the field of food and medicine<sup>7</sup>.*

## Visiting Institutes for Academic Research

As I visited institutes for academic research it was enough to mention the names of Antoine Mostaert or Henri Serruys and all doors opened for a friendly conversation. Concrete proposals for cooperation followed immediately.

## Meeting Prof. Bira Head of the Academy of Social Sciences.

In my two visits with him Prof. Bira was very friendly. We both remembered having met in Paris in June 1982 at an International Congress. He was very straightforward, specific and concrete in what he said and proposed as f.e.:

- *The arrival of the CICM fathers in UB is good news for Mongolian studies. Your Fathers Antoine Mostaert and Henri Serruys are two of the most outstanding Mongolists.*
- *Here in Mongolia, we speak of the “Mongolian Research School of the Low Countries” referring to all the CICM Mongolists: A. Mostaert, H. Serruys, L. Schram, Jan Braam, Florent Claeys and others. We must make their work and their care for Mongolian people and culture better known among the Mongol people.*
- *We should establish a “Mostaert Research Center on Mongolian Studies”. There are plenty of items which we can jointly plan to research and publish, f.e. research at the Vatican Mongolian Archives. Antoine Mostaert has in the past already translated part of this. Let us cooperate in this with your institute in Leuven f.e. by jointly organizing translation of the correspondence of the Popes to the Mongolian emperors. The writings of Piano*

<sup>6</sup> Mr. Dorligjav had been one of the young people who went on hunger strike against the communists in 1989-90 on the public place in front of the government building. He later became vice-chairman of the Democratic Party of Mongolia and was then appointed as vice-premier.

<sup>7</sup> Later the vice-premier sent indeed a list of medicine needed by Mongolia. The government expressed the wish to respond immediately. It was an emergency. The CICM Mission had not yet started and could not efficiently respond to this request. As soon as the new CICM team leader – Fr. Wens Padilla – was appointed and in agreement with him I forwarded the list to Misereor (Germany) c/o Mr Stefan Puhl whom I know personally well. Puhl had visited Ulaanbaatar himself and remained in contact following up projects. He responded quickly and efficiently to the request. I was happy that this first step worked. VF fulfilled its promise to Vice Premier Dorligjav.



Meeting with Mr. Shura, president of the Mongolian Red Cross, in a Mongolian tent.

*di Carpini should also be translated and published.*

### Meeting at the Mongolian State University.

I was received by the president - Prof. Daichagiin Dorji - and by Prof. Khereid J. Bayasakh, director of the School of Foreign Service and Prof. Dr. Surengiin Davaa, chief of studies. The conversation focused on cooperation with Verbiest Institute at Louvain University.

- Prof. Shagdarsuren was working at a French-Mongolian Dictionary based on the dictionary of Mostaert. Why not jointly publish that?
- Let us jointly start a "Mostaert Research Program" or a "Chair Mostaert".

I proposed to invite Mongol scholars to the Mostaert Symposium which Verbiest Institute was planning for 1993<sup>8</sup>.

### Contact with organizations of social welfare and human development

I visited the Red Cross of Mongolia – the Railway Hospital – Red Cross Center for Handicapped – Mongolian National Centre for Children – Médecins sans frontières – UNICEF and United Nations Development Program (UNDP).

All confirmed:

- \* Mongolia is sincere when it proposes to establish diplomatic relations with the Vatican.
- \* Mongolia feels there is a need which can be filled by Catholic missionaries. It is your duty to respond to their expectations.

### The Blitz start of the Catholic Mission at Ulaanbaatar in one year and three months

That is shown by the list of decisions and initiatives following soon after this exploration visit. The blitz start of the Mission was facilitated and fostered by Mongol authorities and the

Holy See soon after the visit of the diplomats. Quick action follow-up was fostered by the newly appointed Mongolian ambassador in Brussels and his call to act. CICM and Verbiest Foundation responded.

- March 1991: Mongol diplomats contacted the Vatican.
- May 1991: the Holy See formally called on CICM to reactivate the *Missio Sui Iuris*.
- Sept 1991 Msgr Gobel was sent to Ulaanbaatar to prepare diplomatic relations.
- Oct 1991: J. Heyndrickx sent to Ulaanbaatar to prepare the CICM mission.
- Dec. 1991: CICM elects a superior and scouts for two more candidates for the mission.
- Early 1992: The Vatican establishes diplomatic relations with Mongolia.
- Febr. 1992: CICM appoints superior and team for the new Mission, confirmed by Rome.
- July 10, 1992: the CICM team arrives in Ulaanbaatar, 10 July 1992 to start the new mission.

That the 2<sup>nd</sup> CICM Mission among the Mongols got a *blitz start* appears also from the list of initiatives and projects launched soon after the formal start of the mission.

### Projects in response to the visit and the invitation of Mr Hannibal, Mongol Ambassador (Brussels) and his call for urgent help to projects in social development.

- In 1993 newly appointed Ambassador Hannibal (Brussels) visited Scheut and Verbiest Foundation Leuven. In Scheut he showed particularly great interest in the Chinese-Mongolian Museum in Scheut. In Leuven he visited the Scheut Memorial Library of Verbiest Foundation (VF) & the collection of Mongolian books of A. Mostaert, H. Serruys, Louis Schram of Fr. Mullie & Mostaert at KU Leuven. In the conversation that followed the ambassador made concrete proposals calling on VF to cooperate in cooperation with Mongolia in Mongolian Studies as well as social development.
- 1993-1995 - Programs in care for handicapped in Ulaanbaatar (U.B.)
  - Ambassador Hannibal introduced two ladies, medical doctors and their institutes for handicapped in Ulaanbaatar. Dr. Baashaanhu was head ophthalmologist, Dr. Adiya director of a rehabilitation Center. In response VF invited them to come to the International Guislain Conference in Gent organized by the *Brothers-of-Charity*.
  - As part of the project for handicapped VF sent in 1994 by air, a cargo of instruments for the Rehabilitation Center in

<sup>8</sup> Which in fact was realized. Prof Chagdarsuren was invited by Verbiest Foundation. He attended the symposium in 1993 and presented a paper on A. Mostaert cfr "La signification d'une étude sur Antoine Mostaert" in *Louvain Chinese Studies IV, "Antoine Mostaert (1881-1971), CICM missionary and scholar"*, Vol. 1, papers, Edited by Klaus Sagaster, pg 47-51. Even as the members of the newly arrived CICM team were still in their learning period, this activity, with their agreement was already underway. It developed new relations for them inside their new country.

Ulaanbaatar – care of *John Goby's Europe* in Brussels, via *Air Cargo Luxemburg*.

- July 1995: project VF & "Farmers League (Boerenbond) and Caritas Staf Vloeberghe, secretary of VF guided Mr. Daniel Declerck. Their cooperation with Dr. Ralph Van Gelder of the Mongolian National Agricult. University looked promising could not be realized.
- September 1995 VF organized a visit to U.B. by Br. R. Stockman fc and Jeroom Heyndrickx cism. Accompanied by Wim Bollen cism they visited the institutes of both Dr. Adiya and Dr. Baashaanhu. From these intensive contacts and exchanges grew a cooperation project, directed by the Brothers of Charity. Their experts ran formation sessions in U.B..
- In early December 1995 Verbiest Foundation sent one hundred wheelchairs from China. Wim Bollen helped to introduce them into the institute of Dr. Adiya.

### **Opening the way for cooperation in academic research on Mongolian Studies**

- ° September 1993: Prof. Shaqdarsuren at A Mostaert Conference in Leuven
  - He presented a paper on Antoine Mostaert. He met there with Prof. Igo de Rachewiltz, Prof. Heissig and many other world famous Mongolists.
  - His proposal that VF and CICM start an Antoine Mostaert Center in U.B. was a welcome topic discussed by all participants.
  - Cooperation between Verbiest Institute with the Scheut Memorial Library in Leuven and the Mostaert Center in U.B. was put in perspective.
- ° September 1995: the new CICM team, after studying the language planned a first building
  - A proposal to set up the A. Mostaert Center inside the newly planned church building in U.B. was discussed and in principle agreed in September 1995. Space would be included inside the church building to start a "Ordos Cultural Center" (also called "Heritage A. Mostaert Center" or simply "Mostaert Center").
- ° In 1992 VF introduced Drs Tunara, a Mongolian Catholic

scholar to the UB Mission In 1992, the year when the Mission in UB started VF offered a scholarship to Mrs Tunara, a Catholic Mongol lady born in Poro Balgasu and who obtained an M.A. degree from Inner Mongolia University. She would do further studies at the UB State University and at the same time intended, as Catholic and as Mongolian scholar assist CICM in the UB Mission.

### **The Mongol Catholic Mission had reasons to celebrate its silver jubilee in 2017...**

- ° The Catholic Mission was visibly present in Mongolia as a Catholic Church community witnessing to the Love of God in Mongolia. After 25 years of evangelization in Mongolia Bishop Wens Padilla cism, had already ordained one diocesan Mongol priest in his Church.
- ° At the time of the silver jubilee celebration in 2017, the UB Local Church included
  - \* 77 missionaries of different nationalities belonging to 10 different congregations.
  - \* Among them were 26 priests, 45 religious sisters, a deacon, three lay missionaries, one lay volunteer and 1300 Mongol Catholics celebrating in six parish communities.
  - \* There was the Theophile Verbist Care Center for children.
  - \* A Vocational School of the Salesian Fathers and other Catholic institutions.
  - \* The Sisters of Mother Theresa built a water well and shared the water with the people.
  - \* The ICM Sisters and different Catholic missionary congregations ran projects and institutions caring for the sick, the poor or people in need.
  - \* The Church in UB was preaching the gospel efficiently by initiatives of social care.
  - \* It fulfilled the promise made to authorities who invited missionaries to come to UB.
  - \* Good bishop Wens deserved all the praise and good wishes which were expressed during the festivities. Little did we realize that disaster would strike so soon. We all remember him with love.

### **Final reflection about the blitz start**

1. We remember the advice given us by Vice Premier Dorligjav It remains meaningful to reflect upon his advice still today as missionaries bringing the gospel...:

- ° Have we been (are we) too much taken up in the haste of a blitz start? Did we (do we) take time to discern and reflect upon his words:



Mongolian and Chinese participants at the international conference in Ghent.



- \* "... be patient...because the old tradition of the people is Buddhist... some people may not be in favor of new religions coming to Mongolia"
- \* "Mongolia does not succeed in finding back its own culture, tradition, soul."
- \* "Putting up church buildings should not be your first concern. That may come at a later stage. Avoid being misunderstood by the people"
- \* I want to thank you for your willingness to help in the field of "social service".

**2. Bishop Marengo in his keynote address answered the call of Vice Premier Dorligjav:**

Whispering the Gospel to the soul of the Mongolian people<sup>9</sup>

How to avoid that local Mongol people might misunderstand the preaching of the Church?

How to help the Mongols find back their soul? Their traditions? How to respond to the hopes expressed years ago by the vice premier Dorligjav in the name of his nation? The message brought by Bishop Marengo in his keynote address to us today gives the perfect answer to the questions raised by Vice Premier Dorligjav in UB in 1991.

Whispering the Gospel to the soul of the people in Mongolia, these words of Bishop Margengo express the pastoral wisdom which will guide the Church in UB to offer to the Mongolian people the service it expects and answer the doubts and hopes in their hearts. If one whispers the Gospel, people may listen more

<sup>9</sup> Quite appropriately Bishop Marengo quoted and explicitly referred in his text to the phrase spoken at the Asian Bishops Synod in Rome in 1998 by the Indian Archbishop Menemparampil, then secretary of the Synod in his allocution: "Whispering the Gospel to the soul of the Asian people". It so happened that our late Bishop Wens Padilla was present there. Together with him I, as expert on China, also listened.

carefully than if one shouts it from the rooftops too loudly. In the Universal Church we may have been shouting too much in the past by showing power through structures and buildings.

In 2017, 25 years after the UB Mission had started, I was impressed seeing the 77 missionaries in UB indeed quietly sharing the gospel. Whispering the Gospel is happening in centres organized by sisters caring for the sick, the poor and needy, in the *Verbist Care centre for children*. The Christian Gospel is whispered when poor people find their drinking water at the well built by the sisters and shared with them. In the Vocational school where hope for the future grows for young people. The homilies of the parish priests and the teaching of the catechists are following in the footsteps of their shepherd Bishop Marengo guiding the flock of Catholics in daily life on how to whisper the gospel to the soul of their people by their daily witness.



# Whispering the Gospel to the Soul of Mongolia

*Missionary thoughts from the Apostolic Prefect of Ulaanbaatar*<sup>1</sup>

*Father Giorgio Marengo, IMC, is the new Apostolic Prefect of Ulaanbaatar*



The Mongolia we found in the early 2000s when as Consolata Missionaries we joined the Apostolic Prefecture was gradually emerging from the ashes of post-communism, which had left the country in a situation of great poverty and instability. Life conditions were not as extreme as when the then Fr Padilla had landed in 1992, but we still experienced poverty and difficulties of different kinds. This was also a free choice: more than in works and structures, we were (and are) convinced that we must invest in authentic relationships with people, starting with the least.

The small yet very active group of Missionaries we found in Ulaanbaatar were all involved in meaningful projects with a wide variety of nuances, but all focused on the poor and the promotion of human dignity; along this praiseworthy commitment for the enhancement of the Mongolian society, the first small catholic communities were moving their first steps, giving life to the sketches of what they would become today's parishes. However, the air was changing and within a few years we all saw a significant improvement in life general conditions. In the wake of the rapid development of the mining sector, which has been the driving force behind a fast-growing economy, the country has taken the path of a substantial progress which eventually marked the exit from the list of the "developing countries", somehow earning a reputation as a "lower middle-income economy"<sup>2</sup>.

The government officials met by Fr. Jeroom Heyndrickx in 1991 had spoken of a need to cooperate particularly in the field of social welfare, as well as cultural research; looking at the tremendous work coordinated by the late Bishop Padilla and carried on by the missionaries who had joined him later, it can be said that the Church has kept her promise, earning the esteem of the local authorities with her commitment to the least and the marginalized. Nonetheless, if in the negotiations preceding the establishment of diplomatic relations between Mongolia and the Holy See the country had shown openness of mind regarding the more specifically religious dimension of the dialogue in progress, in the years of rapid economic growth there has been a change of register: a sense of sufficiency and an undisguised desire to severely limit the influence of religious groups (especially Christians) in the sectors of education and social assistance began to manifest. As

the socio-economic conditions were getting better, the political mood switched to more nationalistic positions; even laws and regulations have undergone considerable changes over the years, with heavy consequences for the involvement of the Church in public sectors.

In addition to this, another problem of legal nature has emerged: given that the Catholic Church in Mongolia is registered as an NGO, the presence of foreign missionaries is regulated accordingly. This legal framework limits considerably the turnover among the missionaries reducing the real possibilities for the entrance of new forces. Therefore, one of the most urgent demands to be addressed is reinforcing the legal status of the Church in Mongolia. After the first almost 30 years of formal presence in this Country, the Church has somehow to update its official recognition within a changed political and legal scenario. Is the recognition of the Church as the representative office of a foreign NGO fitting the identity of the Church herself? What can we do to keep promoting the values of the



*Bishop Marengo (bottom right) when he was pastor in Arvaiheer, with his predecessor Bp. Wens Padilla cism (center).*

<sup>1</sup> A summary of the keynote address by Msgr. G. Marengo Prefect Apostolic of Ulaanbaatar at the opening of the day on Mongolian Studies at the 14th International Verbiest Conference (online) aug. 2021 at Verbiest Institute Leuven (Belgium). The full text will be published in the proceedings of the Conference in the Leuven Chinese Study series.

<sup>2</sup> For reference, see the report of the World Bank at <https://datahelpdesk.worldbank.org/knowledgebase/articles/906519-world-bank-country-and-lending-groups>.



Kingdom with our commitment to social justice and welfare, as well as to secure the basic rights of the Church in this moment? We should be attentive to the “signs of the times” (as Vatican II has wisely reminded us) and possibly find together harmonious answers. It is quite evident that if at the beginning of the missionary adventure led by the courageous group of CICM Missionaries what mattered was to give concrete answers to the primary needs of the population, the changed socio-economic scenario of today’s Mongolia and the growth of the local Catholic community call for pastoral priorities to be brought into focus, in renewed attention to communion between the various missionary agents.

As the pastor appointed by the Holy Father to take care of this Catholic flock, I cannot but focus on their needs and demands. If we look at the evolution of the number of baptized in recent years, we cannot fail to recognize a certain stagnation. Those small communities born over the years around the generous missionaries who were involved in the social sector have been established as real parishes. However, a question arises spontaneously: can people find the right nourishment for their journey of faith? Why are the communities themselves not growing and indeed there are already worrying tendencies towards abandonment of religious practice? Could it be that we must pay more attention to this request for content, for an authentic Christian life? In a word, aren’t we facing a search of

greater depth? If we take this question seriously, we could get closer to what emerged from the speeches of government officials met by Fr Heyndrickx in 1991, when foreseeing the arrival of Catholic Missionaries, they alluded to the need to tactfully approach the Mongolian soul.

### *“Whispering the Gospel to the soul of Mongolia”*

This reference to the Mongolian soul, leads me to share with you some thoughts on an attempt to offer a vision of mission that is suited to the reality of Mongolia, within the broader framework of the Asian continent. Compelled by the request to give a short definition of “mission” in the Asian context, Archbishop Thomas Menampampil, SDB, bishop emeritus of Guwahati (India) has proposed a poetic definition that caught my attention for its beauty and significance. According to him, mission in Asia is “whispering the Gospel to the soul of Asia”. This fortunate expression was first proposed to the members of the Special Assembly of the Synod for Asia (held in the Vatican from April 18 to May 14, 1998) and it immediately stirred up lively interest on the part of many of the Synodal Fathers.

Describing the mission in Asia as whispering the Gospel to its soul, represents for me a valid missiological proposal, particularly fitting for our reality in Mongolia. Why this expression can inspire our ecclesial life here in Mongolia? Because it embraces the beautiful complexity of our call and perhaps it gives us some orientations.

As it has been said even these days by some lecturers, few concepts have undergone a profound change of interpretation like the one of mission. I would add that this term has even covered itself with suspicion and we missionaries were the first to sometimes enter into a sort of fear, or embarrassment: “Can we proclaim the Gospel or not? Is this a ‘dangerous’ operation that undermines the freedom of the others? Do we have the right?” In my doctoral research in Missiology - almost ready to be kindly published by Antoon Mostaert Center in UB - I tried to summarize the crux of the matter, analysing the background of this missionary embarrassment and to overcome it in favour of that evangelical freshness that I perceive in the expression of Mons. Menampampil. Yes, we are not ashamed of our faith in Christ; and since we cannot keep the fire of his love locked into ourselves, we whisper it. Whispering is not offensive to anybody; you whisper when you know the person in front of you; you can’t do it with the first person you meet on the street: that is called propaganda. You rather whisper because you trust the other, a relationship previously being built (or



better, received as a grace). If I don't speak the language of the people I live with, how can I whisper anything? If I don't know the blessings and the sores that mark the common identity of the nation I live in, how can I be at ease when I speak? If I don't know the story of the person in front of me, with all its human load of joys and sorrows, how would I dare to enter his/her intimacy with my whisper? The recipient – so to say - of my whispering is nothing less than the soul (or the heart) of the person; and behind this person, there is a whole nation, with its social psychology. To empathize with it, I must have spent time in listening, reading, studying, asking questions, praying. When this life communion exists, I would find the right words (or other means) to whisper my love for Christ. Because the object of my whisper is the Gospel of Christ.

I feel at home with this expression because it reminds me that missionary life is spent mostly in learning, listening, keeping quiet, praying, waiting, not understanding, or sometimes knowing instinctively; until – by God's grace – our heartbeat tunes to that of the people we were sent to. Presenting mission as a whisper to the soul, makes it clear that we are called to reach the depth of a culture, if we don't want our missionary commitment to resemble only a superficial brushstroke - as St. Paul VI masterfully pointed out in the encyclical letter *Evangelii nuntiandi* (n. 20).

If we take this seriously, there are some clear consequences in our missionary choices: how much time/energy/resources do we dedicate to listening, before starting a project? In my personal experience, it is somehow "easier" to implement a project that is considered valid *a priori* than to sit down and evaluate what circumstances tell us to do. A permanent state of discernment should qualify our missionary actions.

Moreover, we should ask ourselves: What do we know of the heartbeat of our Mongolian Friends? Are we paying sufficient attention to the real empathy we are expected to have with this people?

A final aspect might have already emerged in what I tried to share with you. Yes, whispering the Gospel to the soul of Mongolia is mainly a matter of Spirit. The contemplative dimension of mission is something we hardly hear spoken of. Or rather: we do speak of missionary spirituality, but for the most part it is understood as something preparatory or supportive of the mission itself. The two would be separated. Instead, the experience in Mongolia made me understand at a profound level that praying is the most missionary act we can do. The contem-



plative dimension is essential to the mission, to the point of already being an aspect of its realization.

Even two CICM pioneers of the late XX century – namely Fr Remi Verlinden and Fr Alfons Devos - dreamed of Catholic contemplative orders involved in the work of evangelization in Mongolia<sup>3</sup>. The geographical conformation of the Mongolian nation and the Buddhist tradition with its way of life centred on monasteries, were in their eyes elements that asked to be interpreted from a contemplative point of view.

### **Towards a conclusion**

In the first book of Kings, chapter 19, we hear the story of the prophet Elijah who after the success of an overwhelming victory over the priests of Baal, receives a death sentence from Queen Jezebel and enters a deep state of fear and depression. Precisely in that context, he is invited to a surprising revelation of God. On mount Horeb, the Lord was not in the wind, nor in the earthquake and not even in the fire; the Lord manifested himself to Elijah as the whisper of "a light silent sound" (1Kings 19:12). If God decides to manifest himself like this, shouldn't our efforts to share his love sound like this whisper?

As you can see, what I tried to share with you is not a work strategy or a detailed missionary action plan. Plans and initiatives will emerge from the sincere dialogue among all the missionaries involved in the field, here in Mongolia; perhaps what we need most is to converge on some priorities, on a style of mission that is as appropriate as possible to the reality of today's Mongolia. Without fear of creating new experiences, not necessarily linked to existing models. Therefore, we need the Spirit, the breath of God, the whisper of Him.

<sup>3</sup> P. TAVEIRNE, *Han-Mongol Encounters and Missionary Endeavours. A History of Scheut in Ordos (Hetao) 1874-1911*, Leuven University Press – Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation, Leuven 2004, 250. From the deep well of knowledge contained in this research done by Fr Patrick Taveirne, CICM, I found an interesting reference to a letter of Fr Verlinden dated April 28, 1874 in which he enthusiastically longed for the presence of Catholic monks in Mongolia: *Ibid.*, 233.

# Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation Mission Statement

Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation (VF) is legally established in Leuven, directed by the VF Board, and presided by H. Emin. Card. Jozef De Kesel. During its IXth Chapter (1981), CICM (the Scheut Fathers), after 90 years (1865-1955) of missionary activities in North China looked for a new way to live the *Option for China* written in their Constitutions since 1862 by Founder Theophile Verbist. In 1983 CICM established VF to update its *Option for China*. VF was given the task to develop a new relation of cooperation and exchange with China (the PRC) and Chinese (Zhonghua ??) communities worldwide. Since then, VF honors the traditional CICM Priority Option for China by promoting dialogue, cooperation, and exchange.

For 23 years VF grew and developed in Taiwan thanks to CICM and to the dedication and essential contributions of lay faithful and Church leaders of Taiwan. In 2006 CICM transferred VF to Verbiest Foundation-Leuven in Belgium where it is now legally registered. In view of its goal and openness to the universal community VF does not consider itself as *belonging* to any country or local Church. It sees itself as an International Catholic Community inspired by the gospel and by Vatican II.

The VF community includes members from East and West: diocesan priests, religious missionaries from three different congregations – CICM (Scheut), Clarian Fathers CMF, Brothers of Charity FC (Gent), – non-Christian members as well as lay faithful. Each of the members contributes to the goal of the foundation from his own cultural, social, and historical background. They work in institutes in Leuven (Belgium) and Taipei (Taiwan). The VF Board hopes that it will soon be possible to welcome a VF Board member from the People's Republic of China which is necessary to realize its goal.

VF is open to dialogue with atheism, different philosophies, and religions to foster mutual understanding, brotherhood on a basis of equality and mutual respect while pursuing progress and wellbeing in our modern secularized societies. The VF goal is best expressed in the phrase *Seeking the Common Ground* i.e., we search to discover the issues on which we agree with our partners in dialogue while *showing mutual respect* for the issues on which we do not agree.

VF has developed three activity programs to realize its goal:

- 1- A Program for Pastoral & Social Exchange and Cooperation
- 2- An Academic Research Program
- 3- A Cultural Exchange Program

In Leuven, Verbiest Foundation runs two institutes which are jointly administered. It cooperates with Leuven Catholic University through its Verbiest Institute KUL located in KUL premises. Chinese College Leuven (CCL) is a VF home where colleagues who do research or engage in VF activities accept to live together in a CCL community of Christian Universal Brotherhood.

In Taiwan VF honors and continues the heritage and part of the program inherited from the Taiwan Pastoral Center (TPC). This includes programs for formation of ministers in the pastoral, catechetical and social fields. VF cooperation with Fujen Catholic University is fostered by the Taipei Verbiest Association for Cultural Exchange.

# What is the Ferdinand Foundation? What is she doing?

- CICM (Congregation of Missionaries of Scheut) was founded in 1862 by Theofiel Verbist (Antwerp). Between 1865 and 1955 679 missionaries worked in North China: in Inner Mongolia, in Jehol, Datong, Ningxia, Xinjiang, Qinghai. They evangelized, they built schools, hospitals and developed agriculture. Some Scheut missionaries became famous around the world through their research on the Chinese and Mongolian language and culture. Having been banished from China, after 1949 by Mao Zedong, they opened missions in Taiwan, Hong Kong, in Singapore and later in Republic of Mongolia.
- When China opened again to establish collaboration with the West, Scheut created with the Catholic University of Louvain, in 1982, the Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation, bearing the name of the famous Jesuit missionary eighteenth-century Belgian astronomer, teacher of Emperor Kangxi. His Eminence, Cardinal J. De Kesel (Mechelen) chairs the Foundation. Board members represent different congregations of missionaries: the mission of Scheut, the Claretians, the brothers of Charity.
- The Verbiest Foundation wants to develop a new relationship with the Church of China. Similar to the age old collaboration of missionaries of our countries with China, she wants to stimulate a contemporary collaboration between the Church Belgium and China. This should be based on equality and mutual appreciation.
- The Foundation sponsors the activities of the Institute Verbiest KULeuven (Naamsestraat 63, bus 4018, 3000 Leuven), those of the Chinese College in Leuven (Vlamingenstraat 1) and those of the Institute Verbiest in Taipei. Through these institutes, the Foundation wants to develop research on the history of the Church in China as well as developing there pastoral collaboration with the Church.
- To help the Church in China most effectively, it is better to invest in the training of ministers of the Church. For this purpose, the Foundation offers scholarships for the formation of priests, of nuns and lay people. Note that a formation, insured in China, is preferred. The foundation also aimed at higher institutes in China. Likewise, there are priests, nuns and lay people who are invited to receive special training abroad. After their studies, it is advisable that they return to China to serve their own Church. Colleagues from the Foundation are in touch with bishops and religious communities in China. They make sure that the support is used good and correctly.
- In addition, the Foundation also responds positively to requests for help for (small) development projects in the dioceses of North-West China: Gansu, Qinghai, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, etc.
- Financial support can be sent to: the Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation, Vlamingenstraat 1, 3000 Leuven - Current account: 735-0183437-95 (KBC Bank NV, Mgr Ladeuzeplein 19, 3000 Leuven, Belgium (BIC: KREDBEBB, IBAN: BE76 7350 1834 3795) If you wish, you can always take up contact with our secretariat via [verbiest.inst@kuleuven.be](mailto:verbiest.inst@kuleuven.be)



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