China is ‘noble diamond, sparking divinely in the eye’, according to Joost van den Vondel (1587-1679). The Dutch ‘Prince of Poets’ was not alone in esteeming the Middle Kingdom so highly. Not only was Amsterdam a staple market of Chinese goods and works of applied art. Various efforts of early European scholarship on China were products of the Netherlands as well. The earliest illustrated books, printing types, discussions of Chinese history, and editions of Confucius originated in the Low Countries. We may call this the ‘proto-sinology’ of the seventeenth century, as Chinese studies became an academic discipline only in 1876 when a chair was established at Leiden’s university, followed by Louvain in 1884.

This chapter will explore how the efforts of individual scholars, linked through networks of trade and correspondence that joined Amsterdam, Antwerp and Beijing, resulted in cross-cultural exchanges of knowledge. Even though taking place in the margin of the academic curriculum, they sparked new ideas in the humanities. As Timothy Brook observes, ‘Though regarded as a minor academic discipline today, sinology in the seventeenth century played an important role in the formation of the modern European disciplines of geography, history, and social theory’. We may add different branches of the humanities to this list. Exchanges moved along four related fronts. The first focused on the Chinese language and its script. The second front, building on Renaissance practices of philology, involved the translation of the Chinese classical works into Latin. The third related to music and the visual arts. Finally, knowledge of Chinese history impacted Biblical criticism, paving the way for the role that China (or rather, European images of China) would come to play in the European Enlightenment.

Even though recent scholarship has observed that the Netherlands were ‘Europe’s primary entrepôt for information about Asia’ and that the Dutch perception of China has considerable significance for understanding early modern
European culture generally, the impact of this exchange on the humanities has been neglected. The seventeenth-century Low Countries were not only engaged in global trade but also a centre of the printing, translation and engraving business. As such they formed a major hub of sinological information before it reached Paris, London, Berlin and Saint Petersburg. The images of China that developed during this period gained wider acceptance throughout Europe in the eighteenth century, resulting in 'Chinoiserie' in art and literature from Frederick of Prussia’s Sanssouci utopia to Voltaire’s vision of an ‘Enlightened’ China. Paradoxically, European conceptions of China and Chinese scholarship became increasingly determined by stereotypes over the years. The seminal approach of the seventeenth century, characterized by the varied aims of observation, imagination, and rhetorical opportunism geared towards a European agenda, offered a more open-ended and fluid cultural exchange than what followed afterwards.

The importance of the Low Countries: Religious and commercial missions to China

The role of the Low Countries depended on a fortuitous combination of factors. In seventeenth-century Europe, knowledge about China was limited to the intercontinental networks established by the trading companies and by the Society of Jesus. The Dutch United East India Company established the fastest and most efficient route of communication with China. It helped a small group of Jesuits from the Southern Netherlands, which reached inside the Forbidden City, to become extraordinarily successful. One of them, Ferdinand Verbiest (1623-1688), even became private tutor to the Emperor. The missionaries, in turn, provided publishers, scholars and artists in the Netherlands with first-hand information from their privileged position. Dutch colonial settlements in East Asia sometimes played intermediary roles in this exchange.

Linguistic and cultural affinities apparently trumped religious differences; Jesuits could move relatively freely in the Dutch Republic where there was a large Catholic population. Three visits by members of the Chinese mission made a large impact throughout the Netherlands. The first was Nicolas Trigault (1577-1628) from Douai, the successor of the founder of the Jesuit enterprise in China, Matteo Ricci (1552-1610). In 1614, Trigault returned from China to the Low Countries. During a meeting in Antwerp, the painter Rubens portrayed him wearing a Chinese silk robe and scholar’s hat: the missionary apparently made sure to present himself to greatest effect [Fig. 13]. His edition of Ricci’s papers was translated widely as the first popular source of information on China. This interest
Fig. 13: Pieter Paul Rubens, *Portrait of Nicolas Trigault in Chinese Costume*, 1617, black, red, and white chalk, blue pastel, and pen and brown ink on light brown laid paper, 24.8 x 44.6 cm. Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art
was reinforced when in 1653 another Italian Jesuit, Martino Martini (1614-1661), arrived in the Dutch Republic from China, accompanied by a Chinese assistant. He stayed in Amsterdam for some time to prepare the publication of detailed Chinese maps with the famous printer Johannes Blaeu (1596-1673). Martini’s subsequent visit to the university of Louvain inspired a generation of students to join the mission. Noël Golvers has recently identified over two hundred requests by ‘Indipetae’ (those desiring to go to Asia) from the Low Countries, of which only eight received a positive response. A young teacher of rhetoric, Antoine Thomas (1644-1709) from Namur, wrote seventeen petitions between 1663 and 1675 before he could finally sail Eastward in 1678.1

When Martini set out to return to China in 1657 he was accompanied by Philippe Couplet (1622-1693) from Mechlin and, from the Northern Netherlands, François de Rougemont (1624-1676) and Ignatius Hartoghvelt (1629-1658). In preparing for their exotic expedition, the three young missionaries first went to Amsterdam in civilian clothes to preach in the condoned Jesuit mission.11 After arriving in China, Couplet became a particularly successful strategist, sometimes acting as a political and commercial informer for the Dutch traders.12 Eventually it was his turn to travel from Beijing to Europe in order to further propagate the importance of the mission. In 1683 he disembarked in Holland where he worked for some time on an explanation of the writings of Confucius and a text on Chinese chronology, a topic that greatly attracted scholars in the Netherlands.13

The select group of Jesuits from the Low Countries played a disproportionately large role in exchanges of knowledge.14 In many cases they acted as intermediaries between Rome, Northern Europe and Beijing. One example is the Dutch connections of the famous scholar Athanasius Kircher (1602-1680), based at the Jesuits’ Roman College, who was seen as the expert on China even though he never visited the country. When the Dutch Jesuit Godfried Henskens (1601-1681) considered printing Latin translations of Chinese philosophy, made by an Italian missionary, Kircher intervened and took the manuscripts to Rome where they remained in the Museo Kircheriano for some years.15 Couplet and the Antwerp-born librarian of the Vatican, Emmanuel Schelstrate (1649-1692), were the first to discuss publication again.16 Another Antwerp Jesuit, Daniël van Papenbroeck (1628-1714), an active supporter of Couplet during his stay in Europe,17 eventually acted as an intermediary between Rome and the Dutch publisher of Kircher’s China Illustrata (in Latin and Dutch versions), the most popular book on China of the age, lavishly illustrated by a collective of artists from the Low Countries.18

‘Missionary sinology’, to use Geoffrey Gunn’s term, depended on the fact that from the order’s foundation onward the Jesuits were geared towards education, as
has been amply documented.22 The Ratio Studiorum (1599) outlined a complete training in the arts and sciences.20 Among the artes, it gave pride of place to studying Hebrew and ecclesiastical history whereas poetry, rhetoric and grammar were included in the studia inferiora. Other branches were taught under the name of ‘accessories’, including history and antiquities. The missionaries from the Belgian Provinces all worked as teachers of the humanities before going to China (Trigault taught rhetoric in Ghent for eight years; Couplet taught Greek in Mechlin; Verbiest taught Latin, Greek and rhetoric in Brussels; Thomas taught rhetoric and philosophy in Douai).22 This scholarship focusing on language and letters and the strict selection criteria prepared the missionaries for the confrontation with the Chinese literati. In their foothold at Macao, a Portuguese colony, the Jesuits established the first European university (‘Collegium’) in East Asia. Here, they envisaged to introduce the Chinese to the higher truths of Christianity by convincing them of the correctness of Western reasoning in the arts and sciences. 23 They set up an equivalent of the ratio studiorum that incorporated indigenous study methods.24

Moreover, the Jesuits used their erudition to legitimize, for a European audience, their costly and intellectually challenging missionary work. The Congregatio de Propaganda Fide, founded in 1622, requested the missionaries to report to Rome on a yearly basis. Their letters were often printed (Trigault, for instance, published with the Antwerp printer Verdussen) and although officially restricted literature in Protestant countries, these were widely available in pirated editions.25 As we shall discuss below, not only did the Jesuits present their own work in the positive light of humanistic scholarship, but they also portrayed Chinese civilization favourably.

It seems that the Jesuits of the Provincia Flandro-Belgica had an added incentive for studying China: they expected it would benefit their mission in the Protestant Netherlands. The association of the Jesuits with the Chinese was often used to discredit the order in Protestant countries. In effect, however, tradesmen in the Dutch Republic were greatly interested in any information the missionaries could provide about this remote part of the world. When Martini travelled back to Amsterdam from Brussels, his expenses were paid by the magistrates of the Dutch East India Company. Martini, in turn, tried to ensure financial benefits and privileges on the Company’s ships.26

Finally, we should note that besides the Catholic orders, there were also Protestant missionaries in East Asia. As shall be argued below, studying their efforts completes our picture of the interwoven scholarly exchanges between the Middle Kingdom and the Low Countries.
Studying Chinese: Guanhua, Sinkan and Manchu

The year 1600 marks the beginning of the Chinese century in the Netherlands. A Chinese visitor, known as Impo, was baptized in Middelburg. There may also have been anonymous others who, like him, replaced Dutch sailors on trading ships from East Asia. At the same time, the arrival of the first porcelain cargo in Middelburg in 1602 sparked the fashion for Chinese curios that would soon spread throughout Europe. Chinese books arrived in the collections of Dutch scholars such as Ernst Brinck (1582-1649), Jacob Golius (1596-1667), Otto Heinrichs (1577-1652), Johannes de Laet (1581-1649), Joseph Scaliger (1540-1609), Gerard Vossius (1577-1649), and Bonaventura Vulcinius (1538-1614). Alongside the fascination with exotic objects, many were attracted to speculations about the antiquity of these writings and the nature of the Chinese characters.

Trigault's visit provided an initial source of reliable information on the Chinese language. He was among the first missionaries to have excellent knowledge of Guanhua, the variant spoken by the elite. At the end of the sixteenth century, the Jesuits had realized that mastering spoken and written Guanhua was essential for being taken seriously by the Chinese class of literati. The missionaries from the Netherlands became particularly active in pleading for the introduction of a liturgy in Chinese rather than in Latin. Trigault (helped by native assistants) translated Catholic theological and philosophical texts – and some of Aesop's fables –, while he also assembled an extensive library for the Chinese' future instruction that included modern authors such as Erasmus and Lipsius. His efforts culminated in a system of Romanization of Chinese. According to Hsia, this was the most important lexicon and guide for the learning of Chinese prior to the modern era. The Xiru ermu zi (A Source for the Eyes and Ears of the Western Literati) published in 1626, consisted of a dictionary and language tool with Chinese characters arranged by vowels, consonants, and diphthongs. It remained in use until the nineteenth century.

Trigault's visit to the Netherlands sparked theories about the nature of Chinese writing. In Antwerp, the polyglot Herman Hugo (1558-1629) elaborated the idea that the Chinese characters were ideograms that were universally understood throughout East Asia. His De prima scribendi origine (Antwerp 1617) repeated some of the missionaries' observations, to which Hugo connected the ideal of a universal script: ‘When individual letters are qualified to denote not words, but the things themselves, and when all these [letters] are common to all people, then everyone would understand the writing of the various peoples even though each one would call those things by very different names.’ In 1635, the first professor of Amsterdam's Athenaeum, Gerard Vossius, formulated the same ambition. He used Trigault's accounts for a statement in De arte grammatica (Amsterdam 1635)
that ‘The Chinese and Japanese, although their languages differ just as much as Hebrew and Dutch, still understand one another if they write in this manner. For even if some might pronounce other words when reading, the concepts would nevertheless be the same.’ Vossius was farther off the mark when he wrote that ‘for the Chinese, there are no fewer letters than there are words: however, they can be combined together, so that their total number does not exceed 70,000 or 80,000.’ This number was clearly an exaggeration. In fact, the quantity of the characters fascinated Dutch scholars, one of them even rating it at no less than 120,000.

Vossius’s younger colleague Jacob Golius, professor of Arabic at Leiden’s university, fanatically collected Chinese books of which he, however, understood nothing. When Martini arrived in 1654, Golius therefore asked his superiors permission to go to Antwerp ‘in order to speak and confer with a certain Jesuit or a Chinese, both come from China, and thereby to obtain the knowledge of certain characters and secrets of the Chinese language.’ They met in the collection of Chinese objects, grandly named ‘Musaeum Sinense,’ of the Antwerp elderman Jacob Edelheer (1597-1657). Golius must have been especially excited by speaking in Latin to Martini’s certainly not unlettered’ Chinese companion, Cheng Mano (1633-1673). The exchange resulted in Golius’s short treatise ‘De regno Cattayo additamentum,’ to be included in Martini’s Atlas Sinensis (Amsterdam 1655). Incidentally, this involved the first properly printed Chinese characters in Europe and seems to have established Golius’s fame as a sinologist: Kircher sent him his book on China in 1665 (for which Golius, in exchange, sent the Jesuit some exotic rhubarb seeds). Golius was probably responsible for another discussion of China as well, which was included in 1668 in an account of a Dutch trade mission to Beijing.

Martini presented Golius with additional Chinese books which made his collection one of the most important in Europe (about eighty volumes). After Golius’s death, some of them came in the hands of Adriaan Reland (1676-1718), a famous scholar of Judaism and Islam. His Dissertationum miscellanearum (Utrecht 1708) discussed the difficulties of the Chinese language. Echoing Hugo and Vossius, Reland explained how the script was also used for unrelated languages in neighboring countries, which he demonstrated in a glossary of characters and their pronunciation in Chinese, Japanese and Vietnamese. In his commentary, Reland seized the opportunity to underscore that all these languages originally derived from Hebrew, which he saw as the mother of most languages, of Europe, Asia and Africa, excluding only those of America.

Reland reacted implicitly to a heated debate originating in the 1640s: the philosopher Hugo Grotius (1583-1645) and the linguist Johannes de Laet had discussed the putative Hebrew origin of all languages, including the American
The debate was so touchy because it impacted the validity of the Biblical account. Circumventing the issue of Hebrew, the Harderwijk-based professor Georg Hornius (1620-1670) argued for an Egyptian origin even for Chinese. He based this idea on the observation, already expressed by Golius, that the ancient forms of the Chinese characters bore some resemblance to Egyptian hieroglyphs.

As I have discussed elsewhere, the purported ‘hieroglyphical’ essence of Chinese greatly attracted scholars in Northern Europe. Authors from Hugo and Vossius to Jan Amos Comenius (1592-1670) and John Wilkins (1614-1672) used the Chinese characters to discuss the possibility of writing in signs that could be universally understood and its consequences for the philosophy of language. Ultimately the Chinese script contributed to Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz’s (1646-1716) search for a *characteristica universalis*, a language that could be read without a dictionary. The development of this linguistic discussion, from Trigault’s first-hand expertise to fanciful speculations that eventually involved Biblical and philosophical questions, typifies how many ideas about China fared during the first century of their European reception: they became increasingly stereotypical and fantastic. The discussions about pictographic writing were more revealing about European preconceptions than about China.

Yet the Protestant mission accompanying the trade expeditions resulted in a few accurate linguistic works. In 1624, the Calvinist minister Justus Heurnius (b. 1587) departed for the Dutch East Indies, where the city of Batavia (modern Jakarta) had a thriving Chinese community. After a few years he had compiled a dictionary with the aid of a Chinese who understands Latin ... in which the Dutch and Latin words are placed first and alongside the Chinese characters (a copy remains in the British Library). This was one of the first of its kind (Trigault had worked on a Portuguese-Chinese dictionary, but the manuscript disappeared after it was misplaced on the shelves of the Vatican Library). Although he added a synopsis of the Christian religion in Chinese, the minister seems to have had commercial opportunities in mind in particular: it is a work which will be of great usefulness to posterity, as soon as the Chinese trade is opened, as we hope.

Other Protestant missionaries studied the language of Sinkan (or Xingang), a now extinct precursor of the Siraya language spoken in Taiwan. From 1624 onwards, the Dutch in their colony on Formosa (present-day Taiwan) had pioneered the Romanization of the local tongue (in fact an Austronesian language). The minister Daniël Gravius ordered two bilingual books to be published in Amsterdam, written, according to the introduction, ‘In Dutch and Formosan ... in order to ascertain the successful dispersion of the Dutch language.’ In 1659, the missionaries founded a college for Formosan youths with Sinkan and Dutch as
working languages. As their model they used Comenius’s innovative pedagogical work, *Portae der saecken en spraecken* (Gateway to Things and Languages, Amsterdam 1658). Yet when the pirate Zheng Chenggong captured Formosa in 1662, the Dutch presence came to an end.

In regard to China’s linguistic varieties, Ferdinand Verbiest’s efforts were of a more lasting nature. Even though the Jesuits’ main works in Chinese concerned the sciences and scholastic philosophy, his sizeable volumes, which created accurate terminology in Guanhua, were feats of linguistic rigor in themselves. Furthermore, the change from the Ming to the Qing dynasty had meant that the Manchu language had now become the court’s official tongue: Verbiest mastered this too to converse with the Emperor. He compiled the first Manchu grammar (*Grammatica Tartarea*, Paris 1676). When his position as court engineer eventually involved casting a great number of cannon for the Emperor, inscriptions in Manchu documented that Verbiest was the maker. His successor Antoine Thomas found it hard to live up to the standard he had set, lamenting that the attempts at handling ‘the Chinese characters and books’ left little time for spiritual matters.

**Philology: Publishing the Chinese classics**

Travelling on a Dutch ship, Philippe Couplet arrived in Europe to import Chinese knowledge and advertise the mission in Papal, aristocratic and intellectual circles. He brought with him four hundred Chinese Christian books donated by a convert noblewoman, Candida Xu (1607-1680). Moreover, he was accompanied by a young Chinese, son of Christian converts from Nanjing, Michael Shen Fuzong (c.1658-1691). Thoroughly educated in the Confucian texts, he was to help Couplet with various literary projects. These included the first publication in Latin of three of the four Classics attributed to Confucius (*The Great Learning*, *The Doctrine of the Mean* and *Analects*). Assisted by De Rougemont, Couplet had made a compilation of all translations by different Jesuits from the sixteenth century onwards that he called *Confuci Sinarum philosophus, sive scientia Sinica* (Confucius, the Philosopher of China, or the Chinese Learning). Couplet finished a lengthy preface to this book during his stay in the Dutch Republic.

This publication was the missionaries’ chief scholarly accomplishment, demonstrating their linguistic and philological skills. The Jesuit involvement with Confucius had initially been a practical one: they had started translating the *Four Books* for the immediate purpose of teaching the Chinese language to newly arrived recruits. They had recognized that the education of the Chinese elite began with the Confucian Classics. Without mastery of at least some of them, the mis-
misionaries would fail in converting the literati. Meynard concludes, however, that by the 1670s ‘clearly what [Couplet and De Rougemont] intended was no longer a primer in Chinese language for missionaries, but a manual introducing future missionaries to a certain reading of Chinese thought. The Confucian Classics were called upon to testify to the legitimacy of the Jesuit missionary policy.’ The Jesuits hoped to demonstrate that Chinese thought shared some essential tenets with Christianity, on which a project of mass conversion could be based.

Printing this book was no simple matter. Although the missionaries’ diaries had found a large audience, publishers apparently backed off when confronted with this unprecedented and exotic work of Oriental philosophy. It did not help that Couplet, using Shen’s expertise, wanted to include the main terms printed in Chinese characters.

It typifies the interwoven nature of scholarly contacts throughout the Low Countries that the Jesuits first envisaged a Dutch Protestant publisher. Already in the 1670s, they planned on working with Blaeu (who had printed Martini’s Atlas) for some philosophical texts. He had proven to be an effective patron for the Jesuits and a faithful go-between for letters via the Dutch trading company. Blaeu, for his part, counted on the privilege of being the first in Europe to publish important Chinese sources and studies. For the Confucius Sinarum philosophus, De Rougemont again suggested involving Blaeu, the Ypres poet Willem Becanus (1608-1683), and the Antwerp architect Willem Hesius (1601-1690) to make the frontispiece. Yet the deal fell through, thwarted by Athanasius Kircher who, although confirming the choice for the Dutch Republic, preferred Janssonius in Amsterdam as a printer (with whom Kircher had signed a contract for his own books). In any event, funding for Couplet’s idiosyncratic project proved to be a problem. When a different publisher was finally found in Paris in 1687 (a Dutchman recently converted to Catholicism, Daniël Horthemels), he did not want to include the Chinese characters, even though the notation numbers for these had already been set in type in the first few chapters [Fig. 14].

The book deserves our interest: Couplet’s extensive introduction frames the translation as a philological project similar to those dealing with the Latin and Greek classics of Europe. Chapter one establishes the Confucian texts’ ‘First Authorship’. It places Confucius in his historical context and laments the difficulty in reconstructing ancient Chinese history due to the paucity of written documents. Another chapter is on additional ‘Evidence Drawn, Not from the Modern Interpreters, but, as Much as Possible, from the Original Texts’. By including comments from other Chinese authors, Couplet highlights that his interpretive work is confirmed by Chinese authorities.

The book’s introduction tries to separate the oldest text from later additions. Couplet apparently adheres to what Rens Bod has termed the ‘principle of the
Fig. 14: Title page of Philippe Couplet, *Confucius Sinarum philosophus, sive Scientia sinensis* (Paris: Horthemels, 1687)
oldest source’ in philology, even though the Jesuit uses stylistic and biographical arguments rather than those of stemmatic philology. For one, he attempts to explain differences in style by connecting them to different periods in Confucius’s life. This leads to the hypothesis that the sage himself had planned writing an elucidation but his death had prevented this. ‘Such ancient obscurity and such obscure antiquity!’ Couplet portrays the later Daoists and Buddhists as bad interpreters of Confucius because they failed to use the right sources in the right manner; their false religious assumptions apparently derived from false philological practices. Yet, essentially for the survival of Confucius’s ideas, eventually ‘law forbade altering or changing any word in those texts, at any time’.

To back up his approach, Couplet quotes Chinese writers who have themselves criticized the corrupt Buddhist interpreters. This enables him to argue that Confucius Sinarum philosophus presents pure Chinese thought. He highlights not only that the interpretation of Chinese philosophy should depend on the oldest Chinese sources, but also that the Chinese themselves are the best interpreters of Chinese philosophy:

I assure you that the most learned Chinese Doctors ... have always shared the same opinion: we missionaries should not pay any attention to the commentators of the ancient books, but should adhere only to the ancient texts ... and if we find something unclear, hopefully we will be able to find among the Chinese ... some men of prime erudition and authority who can explain to us the most difficult passages.

The ideal missionary apparently excels in linguistic prowess and philological rigor:

A prudent man ... [w]hen he has reached the region where he wants to convert the natives to Christ, if that people has many records of literature and wisdom inherited from their ancestors, then he should not decide for or against them by a quick and rash decision, nor should he blindly condemn or approve the interpreters, whether foreigners or locals, of their ancient books. ... [B]esides asking for God’s support, he should first try to carefully master their language and literature. Then, he can continually read the most important books as well as their interpretations, and examine and evaluate them thoroughly. Meanwhile, he can zealously investigate whether the sincerity and truth of the ancient text is confirmed, or, on the other hand, whether it has been corrupted by the mistakes and negligence of the later interpreters. He can investigate again whether those who work as interpreters have steadily followed the steps of their ancestors or whether they have distorted their teaching and twisted it to fit their errors ... Finally
he should judge whether it was the unanimous mind and doctrine of all, or whether they contradicted themselves and fought each other.78

By presenting his book emphatically as a work of philology, Couplet intends to legitimize the Jesuit missionary work as something grounded on a sound basis in the European humanities. Apparently, only the philological search for the oldest sources can uncover the hidden, yet fundamental relations between Christian and Confucian texts. Couplet’s reasoning depends implicitly on an invalid syllogism: ‘All Christian books are pure; Some Chinese texts are pure; Therefore some Chinese texts are Christian texts.’ This twisted reasoning allows the author to call on the authority of the Chinese themselves to plead for the similarities between Confucius’s original writings and Christianity. He concludes that every missionary should focus on those elements in the Chinese texts that correspond to Christian teaching:

if [the missionary] realizes that nothing firm and true can be found in the above mentioned books and records, he should not touch them and should not make mention of them. But if on the contrary the kings and teachers of the ancients, led by nature, have reached many things which are not opposed to the light and truth of the gospel, but are even helpful and favorable so that it seems that they open the way for the early dawn of the Sun of Justice, then surely the preachers of the gospel ... will not despise these things at all but shall use them regularly, so that they can instill in the tender minds of the neophytes, the foreign ambrosia of a heavenly teaching with the original sap of native teaching.79

This stress on philology seems to have been directed not just at prospective missionaries themselves, but rather at the Republic of Letters in Europe. By claiming that philology had allowed him to unveil Christian elements in Chinese philosophy, Couplet gave Confucius the same status as some of the Greek and Roman authorities. Humanists in Europe would have recognized this procedure: it was identical to how pagan antiquity had been incorporated in Christian scholarship. As had been argued, some pagan texts had even prophesied the New Testament. Allegedly, the authors had had knowledge of priscus philosophia, primeval Christian wisdom before Christ’s actual birth. Confucius, now, could be given a place in the same typology, on a par with the Hebrew prophets or, more radically, with the pagan Sibyls, the female soothsayers from places other than the Middle East who had preceded Moses.80

Even though Couplet himself did not explicate these ultimate conclusions,81 it is clear that he tried to fit Confucius into the scholarly framework that linked the
philological principle of the oldest source to the quest for the most ancient wisdom. In fact, Couplet’s most original addition to standard humanistic practices in Europe was not his search for proto-Christian elements but his stress on the Chineseness of his account. This latter emphasis was obviously a central tenet of his visit to Europe, staged as a display of authenticity with its cargo of Chinese books, Shen Fuzong’s presence, and his ambition to print Chinese characters.

Unsurprisingly in the light of the Low Countries’ engagement with China, what purported to be a vernacular version of the *Analects* appeared first in a Dutch translation. Pieter van Hoorn (b. 1619), who had chaired a trade mission to Beijing in 1665, was a good friend of Couplet, Blaeu and Joost van den Vondel. He saw a manuscript of the *Confucius Sinarum philosophus* twelve years before its appearance in print. He published an excerpt in Batavia in 1675: *Eenige vorname eigenschappen van de waren deugdt, voorsichticheydt, wysheydt en volmaecktheydt, getrooken uyt den Chineschen Confucius* (Various Outstanding Properties of True Virtue, Wisdom and Perfection drawn from the Chinese Confucius). It was soon followed by French and English imitations. All three works were not, in fact, literal translations: they presented the *Analects* as a series of moral truisms, without the stress on philological and linguistic integrity that marked Couplet’s edition.

Yet lettered circles in Amsterdam were confronted with a serious scholarly reaction to Chinese thought in December 1687, when the monthly journal *Bibliothèque universelle et historique* published a sixty-eight-page review of Couplet’s book. The Amsterdam-based Calvinist scholar Jean le Clerc (1657-1736) gave a precise summary of Confucius’s views including passages translated from the Latin into French. In striking contrast to Couplet’s view, Le Clerc interpreted Confucius’s role as one of transmitter rather than as primary author.

Even though Couplet’s efforts did not have the wide impact on the Western humanities that he may have expected, his visit did not fail to impress scholars throughout Europe. Arriving in Paris in 1686, Couplet and Shen aided Melchisédech Thévenot (c.1620-1692) in putting together a *clavis sinica* (‘key to Chinese’) and in describing Chinese books in Louis XIV’s library. Shen then left for England in 1687, where he sat for Rembrandt’s pupil Godfried Kneller (1646-1723) and catalogued the Sinica in Oxford’s Bodleian Library [Fig. 15]. Robert Boyle (1627-1691) interrogated the foreign guest on the nature of the Chinese script and its characters, which fascinated Protestant scholars so much as they pondered the possibility of a philosophical language. Furthermore, Couplet himself eventually inspired proto-sinologists in Germany and England: Christian Mentzel (1622-1701), Andreas Müller (1630-1694), Andreas Cleyer (1634-c.1698), and Thomas Hyde (1636-1703).

In the Netherlands, Couplet was a special source of information for Nicolaas Witsen (1641-1717), a former student of Golius and mayor of Amsterdam,
Fig. 15: Godfried Kneller, Portrait of Michæl Alphonsus Shen Fuzong (c.1658-1691), 1687, oil on canvas, 212 x 147 cm, London, Royal Collection
who had been appointed governor of the United East-India Company. Witsen had already spoken to a traveller from China in Amsterdam in 1670 to discuss a topographical question. In 1683 he met Couplet in Amsterdam, apparently in order to confirm the details of his book *Noord- en Oost-Tartarije* (North and East Tartary, Amsterdam 1692). The former mayor also seems to have envisaged continuing the work on translating Confucius. For this, he arranged a subsequent meeting with the travelling Chinese doctor Chou Mei-Yeh in 1709, who stayed for six weeks in the Dutch Republic before returning to China.

Finally, we should note that the most significant Chinese impact on European belles-lettres at the time may have been Couplet’s and Shen’s meeting the playwright Vondel in Amsterdam, inspiring the latter to write the first European tragedy set in China, *Zungchin of ondergang der Sineesche heerschappye* (Zungchin or the Downfall of Chinese Rule, Amsterdam 1667). It would soon be followed by another one, *Trazil of overrompelt Sina* (Trazil or the Conquest of China, Amsterdam 1685), by Johannes Antonides van der Goes (1647-1684).

**Theories of music and the visual arts**

From Matteo Ricci’s work onwards, translated sayings by ‘ancient saints and sages’ of the West had played a role in attempts at converting the Chinese. These editions were facilitated as in contrast to the other missions territories, the Chinese had a thriving indigenous press. Moreover, the Jesuits combined their publications with the arts of spectacle, including music and painting.

Verbiest’s writings in Chinese, which were probably the most important introduction of Western learning in China, reflect the activities at the imperial court where he held a special position with more than a hundred Chinese pupils. His sizeable books for the Emperor included excerpts (now lost) from Kircher’s *Musurgia* (Treatise on Music, Rome 1650), optical and acoustical theories, and explanations of mathematical perspective and the camera obscura. Musical theory returned in the writings of Verbiest’s successor, Antoine Thomas, likewise recruited from the Belgian Provinces. We should understand these books, some of which were carefully illustrated, not simply as aimed at humanistic exchange but rather as elucidations of the instruments and other curios that the Jesuits imported from Europe as gifts, the organs and bell chimes they made for the court and the paintings in their chapels.

The China mission exploited innovative techniques to impress the foreign audience. Verbiest demonstrated projection devices to Emperor Kangxi, giving him ‘insight into opticks by making him a present of a semi-cylinder of a light kind of wood; in the middle of its axis was plac’d a convex-glass, which being
turned towards any object, painted the image within the tube to great nicety.’ The new invention of the ‘Magick-Lantern’ was particularly effective: a machine which contained a lighted lamp, the light of which came through a tube, at the end whereof was a convex-glass, near which several small pieces of glass painted with divers figures were made to slide.” These same devices were used in Europe to present the Jesuit mission. Martini illuminated the Netherlands’ understanding of China by projecting slides. Most of these images, intended at ephemeral display, do not survive; we do have, however, various Vue d’optique images (coloured engravings viewed through a convex lens for a seemingly three-dimensional scene) based on Dutch drawings of Chinese scenes. In China and in Europe, the Jesuits apparently staged their mission as a visual spectacle of knowledge.

Even though the Jesuits saw the arts of spectacle as essential to proselytizing, they failed to appreciate Chinese music and painting. Trigault wrote that ‘the whole art of Chinese music seems to consist in producing a monotonous rhythmic beat as they know nothing of the variations and harmony that can be produced by combining different musical notes.” In regard to the visual arts, Ricci’s authoritative criticism had a long afterlife (extending to the nineteenth century). Even the Dutch trade missions to Beijing which in one case included an artist, Johan Nieuhof (1618-1672), to document China visually, repeated Ricci’s view that the Chinese ‘do not understand how to make shadows ... and how to temper their colors with oil. This is the reason why their paintings appear very dead and pallid, and look more like dead corpses than like living figures.” Supposedly, the Chinese had attained competence only after the Jesuits taught them to work with the oil medium.

This failure to appreciate Chinese art mirrored the Chinese scholars’ point of view. The Jesuits confronted them with prints from the Netherlands and oil paintings, but the Chinese (unlike the Japanese) remained unimpressed. To quote one of the literati, ‘Students of painting may well take over one or two points from [Europeans] to make their own paintings more attractive to the eye. But these painters have no brush-manner whatsoever; although they have skill, they are simply artisans and cannot consequently be classified as painters.” In short, the literati regarded naturalistic art as mechanical and trivial, while the Jesuits had a blind spot towards calligraphy. Both factors limited the Jesuit artistic venture in China.

The only Western scholar who formulated a positive view of Chinese art was Isaac Vossius (1618-1689), son of the Dutch Republic’s literary ‘emperor,’ Gerard Vossius. He did not visit China but knew its paintings and applied art through the many imports in Dutch households; it is probable that he himself collected Chinese objects. Isaac’s uncompromising enthusiasm for China has been said
to surpass even Marco Polo’s. In any event, it inspired him to criticize European painting for its dependence on dark tones, and praise the Chinese for their clear draftsmanship:

Those who say that Chinese paintings do not represent shadows, criticize what they actually should have praised. ... The better the paintings, the less shadow they have; and in this respect they are far superior to the painters from our part of the world, who can only represent the parts that stand out by adding thick shadows. The [European painters] obey in this matter not nature, nor the laws of optics. For these laws teach that when any object is put in diffuse light, so that no shadows catch the eye, the aspects that are most close at hand and stand out most must be shown with rather clear lines, but those aspects that are farther away and recede must be shown less distinctly. When someone obeys this rule of painting, his art will emulate nature, and the more outstanding parts will appear to come forward even without conspicuous shadows.

Vossius was unique in praising the Chinese for their failure to represent shadows. In his view, spatiality should not be constructed with exaggerated contrasts that are not found in nature, but only with subtly fading contours. We should note that he discusses Chinese art by using a central dichotomy of Western artistic theory: line versus tone (or design versus colour). This division was particularly relevant in the seventeenth-century Netherlands, where painters of strong chiaroscuro were pitted against those who preferred a clear language of classical forms.

Vossius stated that the Chinese were in fact superior to the Europeans in almost all arts and sciences – they needed the West only for mathematics and astronomy. He concluded that China was better not only at painting, sculpture, architecture and music but also at medicine, botany, pharmacology and technical inventions (such as the compass, the manufacture of gunpowder and the art of printing). Vossius’s main contribution to the Western appreciation of the Middle Kingdom, however, related not to art but to history.

The impact of Chinese history

A key element of Western interest in China was the suspicion that the country had older written documents than Europe. The philologists’ search for first sources and the fascination with prīsca philosophia made this an irresistible topic of speculation. Moreover, humanists in the Netherlands had already been studying chronology ever since Joseph Scaliger had realized that Biblical history could not accommodate
the antiquity of Egyptian accounts. Dutch interest in China was therefore automatically interwoven with calculations of the origin of the world, a serious matter in which historians, theologians and astronomers held stakes.

Duyvendak has traced the earliest discussion of the Chinese calendar to three scholars based at Leiden: Scaliger, Golius and Claudius Salmasius (1588-1653). They had come across the Chinese system of identifying certain years with the names of certain animals. Yet the chronology’s full extent was only disclosed by Martini’s visit. He had read Chinese sources such as the official Annals that documented an uninterrupted Chinese civilization from 2900 BC onwards. This feat planted a seed that would blossom in the climate of philosophical and religious scepticism fostered by Dutch Cartesianism from the 1650s onwards. After all, sacred history could not accommodate Chinese texts and monuments that were apparently untouched by the Flood (which according to the Hebrew Bible occurred in the year 2349 BC). Isaac Vossius came to the radical conclusion that the Biblical text was unreliable, as he argued in De vera aetate mundi (The Hague 1659).

Unsurprisingly, more orthodox scholars reacted appalled, first among them Georg Hornius (whose musings on the Chinese script we have mentioned above). His own Dissertatio de vera aetate mundi (Leiden 1659) pointed out the danger of Vossius’s theory which implied ‘that until now no church in the West has admitted a true version of the Holy Scriptures’. Taking aim at Vossius’s preference for exotic authorities above the Church Fathers, he asked rhetorically: ‘What do we think of the Seres, commonly called Chinese, whose precise chronology antedates the Flood by seven or eight centuries? ... We think that their chronology is false, even though they speak about the eternity of the world and about Panzonis and Panzona, Tanomus, Teiencomus, Tuhucomus, Lotzizanus, Azalamus, Arzionis, Usaoonis, Huntzujuis, Hautzibona, Ochenteju, Eztomlonis. China’s antiquity was apparently contaminated by monstrous fables’. Yet this altercation only seems to have strengthened Vossius’s belief in the superiority of Chinese scholarship. Afterwards he even developed a utopian vision of Chinese society, a political and ideological unity starkly contrasting with Europe – no less than a realization of the Platonic Republic. Vossius’s stance that connected China to radical thought would soon become a commonplace among philosophers of the early Enlightenment (inspiring, for instance, Pierre Bayle’s identification of Spinoza with Confucius). By that time, the assumption of primeval wisdom shared by the ancient Chinese and the Hebrew prophets was replaced by another argument, foregrounding natural religion – shared by all rational human beings – as more important than revealed doctrine.

Whether Vossius’s Sinophilia was merely a cover for his libertine ideas or whether he was inspired by genuine interest in a foreign culture, is a moot point.
Jonathan Israel, studying Vossius in the context of Spinozism in the Dutch Republic, calls his remarks a rhetorical ploy for promoting a radical agenda. As I have argued elsewhere, this may be only partly true. In any account, Vossius’s writings made clear once and for all that Western scholars should take China seriously. It was probably in reaction to his heretical ideas that Philippe Couplet decided to add a discussion on chronology to the masterpiece of Chinese learning in Latin, the *Confucius Sinarum philosophus*. This ‘Tabula chronologica monarchiae Sinicae’ (1686) was a 109-page chronology listing all Chinese emperors from the mythical king Huangdi to 1683. The text, which Couplet finished during his stay in the Dutch Republic, defended the orthodox view of sacred history and highlighted similarities between the Chinese chronology and calculations based on the Septuagint.

**Conclusion**

Rens Bod’s overview of the history of the humanities has argued for a comparative approach of Europe, Asia and the rest of the world to chart structural parallels. There were, indeed, strikingly similar developments in, on the one hand, the European humanities from the late-sixteenth century onwards and, on the other, seventeenth-century Chinese civilization. To quote Standaert, ‘the means of reproduction of knowledge were more or less similar.’ Both areas witnessed an increasing flood of printed books. In China and Europe, vigorous intellectual discussions, backed by a well-established educational system, took place in public meetings at academies, where scholars greatly respected classical learning, books and antiquities. Yet this chapter has tried not just to point out such parallels, but rather to analyze the explicitly cross-cultural efforts established by the seventeenth-century scholars themselves.

It is particularly noteworthy that within decades of the first European attempts to master the language of the Chinese literati, the ideals of European humanism in ‘defending the text’ and establishing the original source were applied to Chinese studies. In the field of comparative linguistics, however, the search for origins gave rise to misguided theories about a Hebrew or even Egyptian provenance for Chinese. When it came to the visual arts, Western and Eastern scholars formulated their mutual incomprehension. It seems that Biblical history and criticism ultimately benefited the most from confrontation with the Chinese accounts.

The Low Countries deserve special attention when analyzing this cultural engagement. The area was obviously a cradle of European ‘Chinoiserie’ as the visual imagery, imported porcelain and its imitations in particular, determined Chinese themes and styles in the applied arts throughout Europe – so much so that the
The ubiquity of East Asian material culture formed the backdrop for the interest in Chinese civilization. Eventually, the tradesmen’s unique infrastructure and their hunger for information on China, paired to the scholarly ambitions of the Netherlandish missionaries as relatively independent from Portuguese and French doctrines, made possible many ‘firsts’ in terms of printing, translation and interpretation – at least for individuals who were able to benefit from their mediating position like Trigault, Couplet and Verbiest. Combined with the willingness of a scholar such as Isaac Vossius to explode accepted European opinions, this could result in the radical Sinophile stand that would become commonplace in eighteenth-century France, Germany and England.

At the turn of the century, however, it turned out that the Low Countries’ essentially intermediary role meant that interest in China had not taken root. In 1689, the greatest Sinophile philosopher of the age, Leibniz, formulated the ideal of a mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge between Europe and the Middle Kingdom: ‘a commerce of doctrine and mutual light’ which inspired his own extensive interest in China. The groundwork for this notion had been laid by older scholars: Leibniz depended on Verbiest and Vossius. Yet in the eighteenth-century Dutch Republic itself, this legacy was soon forgotten. Witsen’s projected continuation of the Confucian texts came to nothing. When François Noël (1651-1739) eventually finished translating the last of the four Chinese Classics, Mencius, in 1711, he had to find a publisher in Prague. After Vondel, Van Hoorn and Van der Goes, no one continued writing in Dutch on Chinese topics in a serious manner. Whereas the end of the seventeenth century saw information on China being discussed increasingly in the context of specialized academies such as the Parisian Académie Royale des Sciences and the Royal Society of London, no such institution was founded in the Low Countries. As Duyvendak concludes, scholars ‘failed to take advantage of the enormous lead given to the Dutch by the excellent exchange of information in the seventeenth century’.

For reasons that merit additional research, ‘Holland had lost its interest in China.’ As a final note, we may again point out a Chinese parallel. In the Middle Kingdom, the initial interest in European learning waned outside the Emperor’s close circles. Hsia speaks of the Confucian literati’s ‘disenchantment’ with the West in the late seventeenth century. In 1692 Emperor Kangxi, under Verbiest’s guidance, had issued an edict of toleration of Christianity. Yet when news reached him of the Papal condemnation of the Jesuits’ Sinophile stance, he annulled the edict and banned the foreign missions. A century of mutual exchange drew to a close.

words ‘Dutch’ and ‘Chinese’ were eventually used interchangeably. The ubiquity of East Asian material culture formed the backdrop for the interest in Chinese civilization. Eventually, the tradesmen’s unique infrastructure and their hunger for information on China, paired to the scholarly ambitions of the Netherlandish missionaries as relatively independent from Portuguese and French doctrines, made possible many ‘firsts’ in terms of printing, translation and interpretation – at least for individuals who were able to benefit from their mediating position like Trigault, Couplet and Verbiest. Combined with the willingness of a scholar such as Isaac Vossius to explode accepted European opinions, this could result in the radical Sinophile stand that would become commonplace in eighteenth-century France, Germany and England.

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Notes


2 D.E. Mungello, Curious Land: Jesuit Accommodation and the Origins of Sinology (Hono-
lulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985), 135, differentiates the scholarship of the proto-
sinologists from that of the missionaries by pointing out that the former group did not vi-
sit China. It seems, however, that the two categories of scholarship were intricately bound
up in many ways. The collaboration of the Amsterdam cartographer Johannes Blaeu with
the missionary Martino Martini is a case in point. Likewise Athanasius Kircher’s and
Olfert Dapper’s ‘armchair scholarship’ on China relied on the travel reports of Martini and
others.

3 T. Brook, ‘Europaeology? On the Difficulty of Assembling a Knowledge of Europe in
China’, in: M. Antoni Üçerler (ed.), Christianity and Cultures. Japan and China in Com-
parison 1543-1664 (Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 2009), 269-294: 270.

4 D. Lach and E. van Kley, Asia in the Making of Europe, Vol. III: A Century of Advance,
Book I: Trade, Missions, Literature (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press,
1993), 508; E. van Kley, Qing Dynasty China in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Literature
the Low Countries and China in the Qing Era (1644-1911) (Louvain: Leuven University

5 The Dutch origin is especially evident in imitation porcelain, popular throughout Europe,
and in book illustrations that were widely adopted in the applied arts. The illustrated
books by Olfert Dapper and Johan Nieuhof were the basis of Chinoiserie in Germany,
Britain, and Scandinavia. Well-known examples are the pagoda in London’s Kew Gar-
dens and the Chinese designs at Rosenborg Castle in Denmark, all based on Nieuhof’s
illustrations. Cf. G. Boesen, ‘Chinese’ Rooms at Rosenborg Castle, Connoisseur (January
1979), 34-35; L.B. Grigsby, Johan Nieuhof’s Embassy: An Inspiration for Relief Decora-
tion on English Stoneware and Earthenware, The Magazine of Antiques (January 1993),
172-183; F. Ulrichs,’Johan Nieuhof’s and Olfert Dapper’s Travel Accounts as Sources for
European “Chinoiserie”, in: A. Jolly (ed.), A Taste for the Exotic: Foreign Influences on Early

6 For the importance of the interconnected study of the Northern and Southern Nether-
(1623-1695), The Man Who Brought China to Europe (Nettetal: Inst. Monumenta Serica,
1990), 87-120; Karl Davids, Van VOC-mentaliteit naar Jezuïetenmentaliteit: de Societas
Jesu als schrikbeeld, partner en ijkpunt voor de Oost-Indische Compagnie, in: M. Elben
a.o. (eds.), Alle streken van het compass: marietene geschiedenis van Nederland (Zutphen:
Walburg Pers, 2010), 132-135; and Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia,’China in the Spanish Nether-
lands: Belgian Jesuits in the Production and Circulation of Knowledge about Ming-Qing
China’, paper delivered at conference Embattled Territory. The Circulation of Knowledge in
the Spanish Netherlands, Ghent, 9-11 March 2011.

7 Missionaries travelled on the Dutch ships which also carried their mail; this was known
as the Via Batavia, Via Hollandica, or Via Jacquetrensi (on the way back, Dutch journals
appear to have kept the missionaries informed on news from Europe). See J. Wills,’Some
Dutch Sources on the Jesuit China Mission, 1662-1687, *Archivum historicum Societatis Iesu* 54 (1985), 267-294. At all times the Portuguese, French and Italian missionaries were numerically superior. For some numbers see J. Dehergne, Répertoire des Jésuites de Chine (Rome and Paris: Bibliotheca Instituti Historici S.I., 1972), which lists 920 Jesuits of the Chinese Mission (who departed from China or Europe, were born in China, or came from the Japanese mission but were relevant to China) in the period 1552-1813. Thirty-eight among them came from the Low Countries including at least seven born in the Northern Netherlands. One was Procurator of the Mission (Trigault); two became mandarins (Verbiest and Thomas); another was Visitor for the Chinese Mission and Rector (Petrus van Hamme, 1651-1727).

An example of this was the vital communication between Jesuits from the Southern Netherlands on the Chinese coast, the VOC physician Andreas Cleyer and the minister Theodorus Sas in Batavia, and an Antwerp publisher; see N. Golvers, *Ferdinand Verbiest, S.J.* (1623-1688) and the Chinese Heaven (Louvain: Leuven University Press, 2003), 188. To quote Hsia, ‘China in the Spanish Netherlands’: through [their] proximity to the former northern provinces, which became the independent Dutch Republic, and thanks to the large Catholic population in the north, Belgian Jesuits in China could shift from a Portuguese dominated network to the more efficient Dutch route of communication.

On Ricci, see Gerhard Strasser’s chapter in the present book. Douai, presently part of France, belonged to the Spanish Netherlands at the time and had scholarly connections with the Dutch Republic; see P. Begheyn, ‘Nederlandse studenten aan de universiteit van Douai (1605-1625),’ *Gens Nostra* 55 (2000), 75-78.


This was called Huis de Zonnebloem.

In 1662 a Dutch fleet fought the pirate Coxinga in Fuzhou on behalf of the Qing authorities, hoping for a trade opening. Couplet wrote to them in Dutch, see H.J. Allard, ‘Een groet uit China voor Vondel en de Amsterdamse “vrun den” (1662),’ in: J.C. Alberdingk Thijm and J.F.M. Sterck (eds.), *Jaarboekje Alberdingk Thijm* (1897), 1-24. See also J. Bar ten, ‘Hollandsche kooplieden op bezoek bij conciliëvaders,’ *Archief voor de geschiedenis van de katholieke kerk in Nederland* 12 (1970), 75-121. Earlier, Martino Martini had already informed the Dutch about a pending Chinese attack on their Taiwanese colony.


Also argued by Hsia, ‘China in the Spanish Netherlands’. The importance of the Low Countries is evident in other activities of the Jesuits as well. For instance, the most productive translator of Jesuit writings in the seventeenth century was Frans de Smidt; others were the Dutchmen Jan Buys and Gerard Zoes. See P. Burke, ‘The Jesuits and the Art of Translation in Early Modern Europe,’ in: J. O’Malley a.o. (eds.), *The Jesuits II* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 24-12.

17 Meynard, Confucius, 15.
19 On the Dutch translation and the pirated edition by Jacob van Meurs, see I.H. van Eeghen, Arnoldus Montanus’s Book on Japan, Quaerendo II (1972), 250-272. The illustrations in Kircher’s book are not attributed to individual masters. The extensive collective of engravers working for him included luminaries such as Cornelis Bloemaert (1603-1692), Gérard de Lairesse (1640-1711), and Romeyn de Hooghe (1645-1708). Others were Lieven Cruyl (1634-1720), Coenraet Decker (1629-1675), Willem van der Laegh (1651-1685), and Theodoor Matham (1606-1676), Jean van Munnichuysen (1654-1701), and Athonie Heeres Sioertsma (born 1626/27).
22 Candidates from outside Portugal usually had to wait longer before they were admitted to the mission, which meant that the Netherlanders spent a relatively long period teaching. Brockey, Journey to the East, 222.
24 Brockey, Journey to the East, 255-263.
26 Henri Bernard, ‘Les Sources mongoles et chinoises de l’Atlas Martini (1655),’ Monumenta Serica XII (1947), 127-144. The interest of Jesuits and Dutch tradersmen in their respective activities in China was mutual. On the one hand, Dutchmen were greatly attracted by Kircher’s book on China: the Amsterdam printer Jacob van Meurs even made a pirated edition of the Dutch translation, see Van Eeghen, ‘Montanus’. On the other hand, the Jesuits had their most active Antwerp publisher, Michiel Cnobbaert, make a pirated edition of Johan Nieuhoff’s report of a VOC mission to China, in which they slightly added the contents for a more favourable view of their own role; see P. Arblaster, ‘Piracy and Play: Two Catholic Appropriations of Nieuhoff’s “Gezantschap”; in: Siegfried Huigen a.o. (eds.), The Dutch Trading Companies as Knowledge Networks. (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010), 129-144. According to Davids, the Dutch trading company’s interest in Jesuit scholarship was unique: English and French traders were merely interested in economic information, see Davids, VOC-mentaliteit, 137-139.
27 Impo was a naval guide who led vice-admiral Wybrand van Warwijck (1566 or 1570-1615) to the Pescadores Islands in 1604. See L. Blussé, Tribuut aan China: vier eeuwen Nederlands-Chinese betrekkingen (Amsterdam: Cramwinckel, 1989), 86.
Some of these books ended up in Leiden University Library where they have remained. On Brinck’s collection containing Chinese curios and texts see E. Bergvelt a.o. (eds.), *De wereld binnen handbereik: Nederlandse kunst- en rariteitenverzamelingen, 1585-1736* (Zwolle: Waanders, 1992), 137-138.

Nicolas Standaert (ed.), *Handbook of Christianity in China*. 1: 635-1800 (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2001), 310; Golvers, *Papebrochius*, 41. This preference was perhaps related to the missionaries’ own affinity with preaching among Dutch-speaking natives, on whom Protestantism exerted a powerful pull. In the winter of 1683-4, shortly after his arrival in Europe, Couplet visited Van Papenbroeck in Louvain in order to solicit support for the Chinese-spoken clergy and liturgy; Van Papenbroeck wrote in support citing many examples from early Church history permitting the use of Slavonic in east European lands. See Golvers, *Papebrochius*, 42.


Herman Hugo, *De prima scribendi origine* (Antwerp: Moretus, 1611), 83-95, 121. Hugo also published Latin versions of letters relating to the mission in East Asia.

‘Si singulae literae impositae essent, non vocibus, sed rebus ipsis significandis, eaeque essent hominibus omnibus communes; omnes omnino homines, etiamsi gentes singulae res singulas diversis nominibus appellet, singularum gentium scriptionem intelligerent’ , Vossius, *De arte grammatica* (Amsterdam: Blaeu, 1658), vol. I, 476-477. Vossius discusses Chinese writing on pages 471-472.

The most complete Chinese dictionary of the seventeenth century, Mei Yingzuo’s *Zihui* of 1615, listed 33,179 characters.


On Golius, see also Fokko Jan Dijksterhuis’s chapter in the present book.


Edelheer was a close friend of the printer Balthasar Moretus (1615-1674) who published Martini’s text *De bello Tartarico*. See Duyvendak, ‘Early Chinese Studies’, 302; on Edel-

Duyvendak, ’Early Chinese Studies’, 322. A handwritten text in Chinese, attributed to this Chinese visitor, remained in Louvain (now in Royal Library, Brussels), which may be the oldest Chinese text produced on European soil; see Golvers, ’De recruteringstocht’, 342. Cheng Ma-no (Portuguese name Emmanuel de Siquiera) ‘was possibly the first educated Chinese to be brought to Europe by a Jesuit’ and went on to study philosophy and theology at the Collegio Romano; see Mungello, Curious Land, 108-9.

Duyvendak, ’Early Chinese Studies’, 300. The Chinese rhubarb seeds came from Leiden University’s hortus botanicus; see Golius to Kircher, June 11, 1665, Archive Pontifica Universitati Gregoriana, Ms 562 f 139.

Johan Nieuhof, Legatio Batavica ad magnum Tartariam Cham Sungtei um (Amsterdam: Van Meurs, 1668), contains an introduction (absent in the original Dutch book) on Marco Polo, that may have been written by Golius. Golius was also approached to translate Nieuhof’s travelogue into Latin, but this was eventually done by Georg Hornius.

Reland’s works include Analecta rabbinica (Utrecht: Appels, 1702) and De religione Mohammedica libri duo (Utrecht: Broedelef, 1705).


De Laet criticized Grotius’s view that all languages derived from Hebrew. See J. de Laet, Notae ad dissertationem Hugonis Grotii De origine gentium americanarum, et observationes aliquot ad melior indaginem difficillimae illius quaestionis (Leiden: Elzevier, 1643).

According to Hornius, pictograms had travelled from Egypt, via China, to the Americas: ‘Fateor non unam scribendi penitus apud Mexicanos et Sinenses rationem, nec tamen penitus diversa fuit ... Cataini scribunt penicillo pictorio et una figura multas literas complectitur ac verbum facit,’ Hornius, De originibus Americanis, 270-271. On Golius see Duyvendak, ’Early Chinese Studies’, 326.


Letter of Heurnius to the directors of the East India Company (1628), see Duyvendak, ’Early Chinese Studies’, 318.

Gunn, First Globalization, 238.

Beyde in Duitsch en Formosaans: het welcke vo orwaar sulcken gezegenden voortganck nam, dat'et, by naerstig achtervolgh vry wat groots beloofden: gelijck ick oock t'sedert hebbe verstaan, dat'et oogmerck tot voortplantinge van de Nederduytsche tale aldaar seer geluckelyck wordt bereyckt’. See E.L. Macapili and Huang Chun, Siraya Glossary: Based on the Gospel of St. Matthew in Formosa (Sinkan Dialect), A Primary Survey (Tainan: Tainan Pepo Siraya Culture Association, 2008).

J.A. Comenius, Eerste deel der schoolgeleertheyd, genoemt het Portaelt: inhoudende de grond- veste der dingen, en onser wijsheyd omtrent de dingen, als mede der Latijnschen tael met de moedertael (Amsterdam: Roy, 1618).


Cf. Verbienst’s fourteen-volume Yi xiang zhi (Beijing 1671). He also rearranged a Guanhua grammar written by Martini (see Gerhard Strasser’s chapter in the present volume, note 27).


Brockey, Journey to the East, 281.

See P. Couplet, Historie van eene groote, christene mevrouw van China met naene mevrouw Candida Hiu ... beschreven door ... Philippus Couplet ... ende in onse Nederlandsche taele door H.I.D.N.W.P. overgheset (Antwerp: Knobbaert by Franciscus Muller, 1694).


In Chinese, Daxue, Zhong Y ong and Lunyu.

They used the translations of Confucius by Prospero Intorcetta in particular, who is credited on the title page; Couplet speaks in the introduction in the first person plural to highlight the collaborative nature of his work.

Meynard, Confucius, 16.

Brockey, Journey to the East, 243-286, has called attention to the Jesuits’ appropriation of indigenous methods of scholarship.

Meynard, Confucius, 10.

Prospero Intorcetta had already wanted to print his Politico-Moral Learning of the Chinese in the Dutch Republic, see Golvers, ‘Unobserved Letter’.


The numbers can still be seen in copies of the first edition. According to Golvers, the choice for Horthemels was inspired by Couplet’s being ‘attracted to his Flemish-Dutch countrymen’, Golvers, ‘Confucius’, 1160.


Rens Bod, *De vergeten wetenschappen: een geschiedenis van de humaniora* (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 2010), 195.

For instance, Couplet sees the *Yijing* as a less authentic text without the status of a classic arguing that ‘though these poems have great authority, the style is quite difficult and obscure because of their always-laconic shortness, of their usual metaphorical style and also because of their ornamentation with very old proverbs’, Meynard, *Confucius*, 101.


This was a true statement: the rejection of modern interpretations of Confucius was a Chinese tradition, see Mungello, *Curious Land*, 262.

Translation from Meynard, *Confucius*, 222.

Meynard, *Confucius*, 223.

Kircher had already interpreted Egyptian wisdom in this manner and used this approach as the basis for his Chinese studies. The French Jesuit Joachim Bouvet (1656-1730) was most explicit in linking Egyptian proto-Christianity to the ancient Chinese wisdom, using the hieroglyphical origin of Chinese writing as an argument. His main work was translated into Dutch: ‘t Leven en bedrijf van den tegenwoordigen keizer van China (Utrecht, 1699).

Couplet provides the framework for Bouvet’s ‘Hermetic’ arguments pointing out that the holy Writers and Fathers ... familiar with pagan testimonies remote from human reason but revealed by God, such as the prophesies of the Sibyls or the statement by Trismegistus ... or the image of Serapis which is thought to show an image of the Most Holy Trinity’, in Meynard, *Confucius*, 216.

Pierre de la Brune, *La Morale de Confucius, philosophe de la Chine* (Amsterdam: Pierre Savouret, 1688); *The Morals of Confucius, A Chinese Philosopher, who Flourished above Five Hundred Years before the Coming of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, Being one of the Choicest Pieces of Learning Remaining of that Nation* (London: Randal Taylor, 1691). The English translation seems to be made from the French, as De la Brune is again named as the author. Couplet himself also envisaged making a French translation, which did not materialize; see Golvers, ‘Confucius’, 1161.

The review fills pages 387-455 of the December 1687 issue, the statement on Confucius is on p. 400. The citations from the *Analects* are in pp. 441-450. Other reviews appeared in *Bainage histoire des ouvrages des savans* (Rotterdam, September 1687) and *Journal des savans* (5 January 1988), probably by Pierre-Sylvain Régis. See Mungello, *Curious Land*, 289-291.
The painting is now in the British Royal Collection.


Witsen (Amsterdam) to Vossius (London), 6 November [1670], 'hebbe hier met een persoon gesproken, die uit Sina of Katai komt welke des menings mede is als myn Heer' on a topographical question. Leiden University Library, UBL Ms Bur F11, fol. 160v.


The doctor accompanied Johan van Hoorn, Governor-General of the Dutch East Indies, to the Netherlands. See Leonard Blussé, 'Doctor at Sea: Chou Mei-Yeh’s Voyage to the West (1710-1711), in: Erika de Poorter (ed.), *As the Twig is Bent . . .: Essays in Honour of Frits Vos* (Amsterdam: Gieben, 1990), 7-30.


Verbiest’s was the most ambitious project in the field of sciences and (natural) philosophy, according to Nicolas Standaert, ‘Jesuits in China’, in: T. Worcester (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Jesuits* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 169-185: 179; Libbrecht confirms that ‘One of the most important facts in the introduction of European and [sic] Chinese astronomy in the seventeenth century was . . . the building of the new instruments for the observatory in Peking by the Flemish Belgian Jesuit Ferdinand Verbiest’. U. Libbrecht, ‘What Kind of Science did the Jesuits Bring to China?’, in: F. Masini (ed.), *Western Humanistic Culture presented to China by Jesuit Missionaries (17th-18th Centuries)* (Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1996), 221-234: 221.

F. Verbiest, *Astronomia Europaea sub imperatore Tartaro-Sinico Câm Hý appellato ex umbra in lucem revocata à R.P. Ferdinando Verbiest Flandro-Belga e Societate Jesu Academica Astronomicae in Regia Pekinensi Praefecto anno M.DCLXVIII* (Beijing, 1669), documents the author’s presentation of Western music and optical devices at the imperial court. Verbiest
also expanded on Giulio Aleni’s effort to explain the European system of disciplines in the arts and sciences to the Chinese, see Standaert, Handbook, 606. E. Verbiest, *Kunyu tushuo* (Illustrated Explanation of the Entire World, 1674) has many illustrations derived from Netherlandish and German engravings; see Standaert, Handbook, 810.


The respective specialists were Filippo Grimaldi and Tomé Pereira. The Jesuits sent at least four artists from the Low Countries to China. Albert Brac (b. 1622) from the Dutch Republic and Ignatius Lagot (1603-1621) and Henr Xavíer (b.1608) from the Southern Netherlands all worked as painters in Macao. The Maastricht-born artist Henrik van Vlierden (b.1608) departed for China in 1644. See Deheugne, *Répertoire des Jésuites de Chine*.


Gauvin Alexander Bailey, *Art on the Jesuit Missions in Asia and Latin America: 1542-1773* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 88. See also Nicolas Trigault, *De christiana expeditione apud Sinas* (Cologne, 1618), 22-23, and d’Elia, *Fonti Ricciane*, 31-32. Ricci’s criticism returns unmodified after 250 years in M. Corner, *China: Pictorial, Descriptive, and Historical* (London: Bohn, 1853), 221: ‘The defects of the Chinese as sculptors and painters are sufficiently known from specimens of their works which abound in Europe. Their painters have no notion of perspective, and very little idea of chiaro-scuro, or light and shade.’


This becomes clear from the fact that the main Chinese Jesuit artist, Wu Li (1632-1718), who instigated a completely new genre of Sino-Christian poetry, remained true to the style of the literati in his paintings. Wu accompanied De Rougemont on one of his mission tours in the Guangzhou area.

Vossius is called ‘Emperor’ in Franciscus F.N. Junius’s introduction to G. Vossius, De quartor artibus popularibus (Amsterdam: Blaeu, 1650), no pagination.


See Weststeijn, ‘Vossius’s Chinese Utopia’.


In fact, Vossius prefers the Greek Septuagint which states that the world was 1,200 years older than the Hebrew Bible suggests. The Septuagint states that the world was created in the year 5200 BC, the Vulgate in the year 4004 BC; the deluge was computed to have happened in the years 2597 and 2349 respectively; see Jack Finnegan, Handbook of Biblical Chronology (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 191, 184.


Hornius, Dissertatio, 34, 50. Hornius identified the Flood with a natural disaster in the time of emperor Yao and proceeded to associate Chinese rulers with figures from the Old Testament.

See Weststeijn, ‘Vossius’ Chinese Utopia’.


Westerhuis, ‘Vossius’ Chinese Utopia’.


Bod, Vergeten wetenschappen, 19, pleading for a ‘future world history’ of the humanities.


124 ‘Commercia inquam doctrinae et mutuae lucis’, Leibniz to Giovanni Laureati, 11 November 1690. See G.W. Leibniz, Leibniz korrespondiert mit China (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1990), 11.

125 For Verbiest and Leibniz, see Gerhard Strasser’s chapter in the present book. Part of Verbiest’s Astronomia Europaea is included in Leibniz’s Novissima sinica (1697). For Leibniz and the chronological issues sparked by Vossius, see Li Wenchao, ‘Leibniz, der Chronologiestreit und die Juden in China’, in: D.J. Cook et al. (eds.), Leibniz und das Judentum (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2008), 183-208. Van Papenbroeck informed Leibniz on the publication of Confucius Sinarum philosophus, see Mungello, Curious Land, 287.

126 Sinensis imperii libri classici sex (Prague: Kamenicky, 1711). The manuscript is presently in Arras library. Noël was born in Hestrud in the Spanish Netherlands.


128 Louis XIV sent six Jesuits to Beijing as correspondents for the Académie Royale des Sciences (while the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres studied the Chinese language); the Royal Society proposed to include the Jesuits in China among their correspondents in 1687; the Imperial Academy of Sciences in Saint Petersburg maintained links with the French missionaries. See Standaert, Handbook, 892-3. In 1732, Naples saw the foundation of a specialized Collegio dei Cinesi.


130 Duyvendak, ‘China in de Nederlandse letterkunde’, 13. This was obviously related to the decline of the Dutch East-India Company, see Lach & Van Kley, Asia in the Making of Europe, Vol. III, 506. After 1678, the Dutch concentrated their direct trade on Java and relied for contacts with China on Chinese and Portuguese intermediaries, whereas European commercial interest in East Asia became increasingly focused on the large-scale production of certain products for export; see Wills, Pepper, Guns, and Parleys, 261-264.
Burke & R.P. Hsia (eds.), Cultural Translation in Early Modern Europe (Cambridge: Cam-
bridge University Press, 2007), 39-51: 51. According to Wills, Pepper, Guns, and Parleys,
264, by 1700 ‘[b]oth sides in the Sino-Western trade were reasonably content with their
profits, and the eighteenth century passed with little political contact between Europeans
and Chinese.’