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Summary

Editorial

Dominik Declercq p. 1

2026: Activities of the Ferdinand Verbiest

Foundation Leuven

Matthew Gong p. 3

The Chinese Ferdinand Verbiest Cultural Exchange Association: The planned activities

for 2026

Clara Lin p. 5

Overview of Important VF Activities from 1982 to 2025

p. 8

How Toon Renson CICM (Scheut) died in jail in China

p. 12

History of the Xiwanzi Diocese

p. 15

Research into Jozef Mullie at the Verbiest Foundation: a new publication

p. 16

New VF Book Recommendation:

The Mission among the Mongols in Modern Times by Joseph Van Hecken (CICM)

Gaby Yang p. 18

Pilgrimage in the Footsteps of St. Paul

p. 21

In Memoriam

p. 22

Editorial

The Verbiest Foundation is able to introduce a touch of innovation, thanks to the solid legacy it has built up; or in other words, we hope that a slight shift in emphasis may keep the accomplishments of the last forty years safe for the future. While we trust we shall be able to reach new readers and supporters as well, by doing so, we assume a duty to make it clear in particular to them how the Foundation began and how it has developed. I owe everything that follows regarding the establishment and history of the Verbiest Foundation to Father Jeroom Heyndrickx, CICM, without whom the Foundation would not exist and who knows the Foundation better than anyone else.

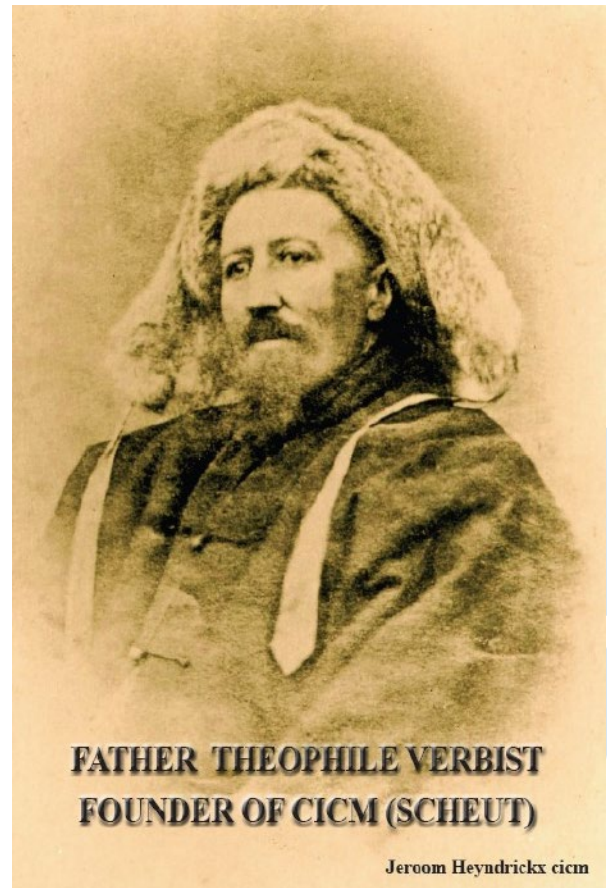
Ninety years of missionary endeavor by the Congregation of Scheut (CICM) in China came to an abrupt end when the People's Republic of China under the Chinese Communist Party expelled the 254 Scheutist Fathers, then in the country, in the year 1950. For a long time it proved impossible to restore any form of dialogue, in spite of the fact that the Chinese Constitution promised freedom of religion to five recognized faiths including the Catholic, and in spite of the existence of a Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association. As the name of the latter implies, China did not accept that an external authority i.e. the Vatican had a say in the organization of the Catholic population, in particular when it came to the appointment of Chinese bishops. When in 1958 the "Patriotic Association" effectively began consecrating its own bishops, a number of the faithful turned their backs on this State Catholicism and went "underground". The internal divisions between Chinese Catholics — but equally China's home-grown xenophobia during the Cultural Revolution (1966—1976) — paralyzed any attempt from outside to reestablish contact with China.

The death of Mao Zedong provided a new strongman, Deng Xiaoping, with an opportunity to launch a historical change of direction: his "Open-Door Policy" (1978) would raise China, economically and technologically, to become the world power that indeed it has become. The recognition that China had everything to gain from international cooperation appeared equally to give CICM an opening. This acquired material substance in 1983 when at the request of the 9th Chapter of the CICM General Meeting to respond positively to the "Open-Door Policy", the Verbiest Foundation Leuven was established. The objective was to promote dialogue with the Church in China — to foster unity of the Chinese communities of the faithful with the Universal Church — and to pursue cooperation with academic institutions in the People's Republic.

Editorial

It is hardly an overstatement that this first objective has come near to become reality, in part through the Foundation's efforts. The way leading up to it was strewn with dogged misunderstandings in China, but in Rome and in Scheut as well. With CICM, these even proved unsurmountable. All through the '90s underground Chinese Catholics would consider it a deadly sin to celebrate the Eucharist in a Patriotic Church. The Holy See was undecided. In 2003, the Verbiest Foundation organized a colloquy in Leuven in the presence of both sides, at which Belgian Cardinal Godfried Danneels called for unity. Pope John Paul II, in 2004, solicited advice from many quarters including Leuven for the redaction of a Pastoral Letter to the Chinese faithful, a letter that received final form under his successor Pope Benedict XVI. Promulgated on June 30, 2007, the Letter pleads for reconciliation and unity, and for dialogue within the Chinese Catholic Church and with the civil authorities. The normalization process, that was thus initiated in 2018, led to a "Provisional Agreement" between the Vatican under Pope Francis and China, by which bishops' appointments are mutually coordinated so that all Chinese bishops henceforth stand in unity with the pope in Rome. One may assume that Pope Leo XIV will continue to build upon this foundation.

The Verbiest Foundation continues to work on the interaction with the Catholic Church in China both by facilitating pastoral formation and by supporting advanced theological study programs for Chinese in Belgium and elsewhere, as well as by pursuing more general cultural exchanges with China and Chinese communities in Asia as well as here. Obviously, we are well aware of the far-reaching secularization of our world. Nonetheless in our "genetic uptake", so to speak, a fond place remains reserved for the old missionary area where CICM used to work in China. The letters, diaries, pictures, scientific contributions, newspaper articles and other archives in our library testify to this activity; what is more, many of the Chinese parishes created by Scheut fathers from the 1860s onwards do still exist. Experience learns that this archival material is precious for the present descendants of these early converts and that, like family memories, they are deeply meaningful. Taken together, these documents exhaustively describe the micro-history of dozens of villages and settlements in North China (and



Mongolia, and Xinjiang...) in the late Qing and Republican periods, recorded by Flemish men who lived in close connection with their environment. In this respect Leuven holds a treasure trove of hardly-explored research material for specialists of the subject. It harks back to the very roots of our Foundation, i.e. to the founding of CICM by Fr. Theophile Verbist 170 years ago, with his Option for China.

This information magazine is intended, as in the past, to keep you informed on a half yearly basis of our activities both as regards exchanges with China as in terms of research and publications. Moreover in this issue we remind you of the main past activities of the Foundation with the article "Main Activities of the Verbiest Foundation 1982—2025".

*Dominik Declercq,
Vice-Chairman of the Board of the Verbiest Foundation Leuven*

2026: Activities of the Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation Leuven

Fr. Matthew Gong

In 2024 and 2025, several major initiatives were successfully carried out. These included the restoration and further development of the Spring Session and Summer Session programs, as well as multi-level exchanges with the Church in China and related partners.

Looking ahead to 2026, the Foundation will continue along its established course, further promoting pastoral formation, ecclesial dialogue, research and publications, and cultural exchange as its core priorities. At the same time, in light of evolving religious policy conditions in China and changing practical circumstances, we must adapt prudently and respond with flexibility, while remaining faithful to our mission and objectives, to ensure the feasibility and sustainability of our initiatives.

In 2026, further adjustments to religious policy in China have been decided. This development has had a considerable impact on the formation programs of the Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation Leuven and on its exchanges and cooperation with the Church in China, making it necessary for us to suspend or adapt certain previously established plans.

Against this background, the formation and cultural exchange initiatives for 2026 will be planned and implemented, based on prudent assessment of the prevailing circumstances. The planned activities for 2026 are presented as follows.

Formation Session

Spring session

The session will take place in May 2026. Thirty participants have registered. Most of them are Chinese catechists and laypeople from the Chinese diaspora. The program consists of learning sessions, exchange, and pilgrimage. The classes, which take place five days a week for five hours per day, cover the following themes: "Social Doctrine of the Church" and "Our Journey Together". In addition, there is a weekend program with VF visits to Cologne, the China Centre at Sankt Augustin, Bruges, Leuven, Brussels and the Netherlands.

We will continue to participate in and send instructors to pastoral formation programs held in Taiwan.



Cultural Exchange

1. Celebrating the Chinese Lunar Year of the Horse in Leuven

On 16 February 2026, more than thirty colleagues of the Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation Leuven, students from KU Leuven, and Belgian friends gathered at the Chinese College Leuven to celebrate the Chinese Lunar Year of the Horse.

The celebration was held in a warm and dignified atmosphere and included a ceremony honoring Heaven and the Ancestors, and a festive luncheon. Through these traditional rituals and moments of fellowship, participants experienced the richness of Chinese culture while further strengthening bonds of friendship and mutual understanding, reflecting the Foundation's longstanding commitment to promoting Sino-Belgian cultural exchange.



2. Upcoming Pilgrimage for Overseas Chinese Catholics: Following the Footsteps of St. Paul

In recent years, the Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation Leuven has actively promoted the faith formation and communal cohesion of overseas Chinese Catholics. In September 2023, the Foundation organized a pilgrimage to the Holy Land for Chinese Catholics from Belgium, the Netherlands, Taiwan, and the United States. In May 2025, it led another group of Chinese Catholics from Belgium and the Netherlands on a pilgrimage to Rome. Both pilgrimages proved highly fruitful, deepening participants' spiritual lives while strengthening connections and solidarity among overseas Chinese Catholic communities.

From 27 September to 10 October 2026, the Foundation will once again organize a pilgrimage for overseas Chinese Catholics to Turkey and Cyprus, "following the footsteps of the Apostle Paul" on a "Pauline Journey". This pilgrimage will offer participants an opportunity to revisit the spirit of the early Church at the intersection of history and faith. For more information, see "Pilgrimage in the Footsteps of St. Paul".

3. Participate in International Cultural Exchange Activities

The Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation Leuven will also send delegations to take part in various cultural and exchange events organized by different countries and organizations. These activities aim to strengthen international dialogue, promote mutual understanding, and foster collaboration across cultural and ecclesial communities:

- Sr. Gaby will participate in **The 30th Biennial Conference of the US-China Catholic Association** in Houston USA from 30 July to 3 August 2026.
- Five members, including Fr. Matthew, will participate in the **5th European Chinese Catholic Communities** gathering in Taizé, France, this September 2026.
- The Bishop Schraven Foundation in the Netherlands holds a memorial service each year on the second Sunday of October. VF will have representatives attending, and anyone who wishes may participate voluntarily.

The Chinese Ferdinand Verbiest Cultural Exchange Association: The planned activities for 2026

Clara Lin

The Chinese Ferdinand Verbiest Cultural Exchange Association, founded by Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation Leuven (Belgium) for many years has been firm in supporting both the development of the Church in China and pastoral development in Taiwan. Since 2017, it has been organizing courses, workshops, and seminars on Church history, catechism, spiritual reflection, and courses on Catholic Social Teaching themes.

The planned activities for 2026 include 10 Church history courses, a workshop on Spirituality of Dialogue, courses on faith growth, and academic seminars. Details are as follows:

I. 2026 Fan-Gu: Storytelling Conversational Course (In Person/Online): Important Figures and Stories in Catholic Church History

This year, Ferdinand Verbiest Cultural Exchange Association is launching the "Fan Gu Storytelling Conversational Course" for the second time. This time, it will focus on prominent figures and stories of the history of the Catholic Church. These Church history courses will take place every Tuesday afternoon, from 3:00 P.M to 4:30 P.M, over the months of March through May, for a total of ten sessions. The first session, on March 3rd, focused on the ways that the encounter between Chinese and Western cultures shaped the faith and prayer life of the Chinese Catholic Communities during the Catholic Church re-entry into China in the late Ming Dynasty. The other nine sessions will present the lives of relevant Catholic people, mostly saints, and their significance for the Church and society of their time: four Francis, three Teresas, two Ignatius, and two Anthonys, and some thematic classes like "mountains in the Bible", the evolution of the Eucharist, or the moving Holy See.

This course is headed by Father Francisco Carin (PhD in Philosophy and Religious Studies, Department of Philosophy, Beijing Normal University), former Major Superior of the East Asia Delegation of the Claretian Missionaries, and Professor Gu Weiyong (PhD in History, University of British Columbia, Canada), emeritus professor of history at National Taiwan University (NTU). They will explore the impact of these figures and events



33 participants attending in person and online for the Catholic history course



Professor Gu Weiyong (center-left) and Father Francisco Carin (center-right)

on the Church from different perspectives and through an interactive approach, offering rich and diverse content. The course introduces the story of the Catholic Church in a relaxed and interactive conversation style. Registration opened in February, and online classes are also available, giving people outside Taipei the opportunity to participate. After the March 3rd session, participants responded positively, and new students showed interest in subscribing to the first "Fan-Gu Storytelling Chat" video course for 2025.

I would take this opportunity to introduce, too, the ten video lectures from the first "Fan Gu's Storytelling and Chatting" course in 2025. The course had three thematic units presenting historical events of the Western Church, the Chinese Church, and the Taiwanese Church. In terms of content, Professor Gu Weiyong offered a Chinese perspective, while Father Francisco Carin provided a Western viewpoint; both the videos and images were

vivid and engaging. Professor Gu Weiying has delivered numerous “Historical Turning Points” courses at National Taiwan University. This course allows you to immerse yourself in the heart of his teaching; viewing these ten video lectures is akin to being present at a live NTU session. Father Carin, on the other hand, presents historically significant images and tables, offering valuable insights. These 2025 Ten Lectures have been recorded, finished post-production, and are now available for purchase. The complete slideshow presentation of the lecture is provided with the videos.

View the course content here:
<https://youtu.be/tSLrWMhSGd0>
 Subscription Information: <https://reurl.cc/6bbMVk>

II. The 8th Dialogue Devotional Workshop

Theme: Share the Gospel! – Catholic Evangelization and Charity Through the Lens of Pope Leo XIV’s First Apostolic Exhortation, “I Love You” (Dilexi te)

The Ferdinand Verbiest Cultural Exchange Association and Fu Jen St. Robert Bellarmine Faculty of Theology will jointly host the “8th Workshop on the Spirituality of Dialogue” on May 9, 2026 (Saturday) at St. Robert Bellarmine’s Great Hall. The workshop theme is: Share the Gospel! Exploring Evangelization and Charity Practices Today Through the Lens of Pope Leo XIV’s First Apostolic Exhortation, “I Love You” (Dilexi te). The organizers have invited six speakers and facilitators to support participant discussions.



The moderators and speakers of the 8th Workshop on the Spirituality of Dialogue

Pope Leo XIV’s first Apostolic Exhortation, “I Love You” (Dilexi te), emphasizes that evangelization is not just about teaching doctrine, but also about loving through concrete actions. The Pope pointed out that “love for the Lord and love for the poor are inseparable,” and that Christians encounter Christ directly when serving the poor, the sick, and the marginalized. This “encounter with the Lord” is the most authentic and convincing testimony of evangelization.

This workshop is open to the public and will host approximately 80 participants, including faculty and stu-



Opening Ceremony



Discussion and conclusion



dents from Fu Jen Catholic University and St. Robert Bellarmine Faculty, priests and nuns from Catholic religious orders, and parishioners from various parishes.

III. Religious Education Courses

The Chinese Ferdinand Verbiest Cultural Exchange Association intends to invite multiple lecturers to deliver six religious education courses at the association's facilities from September to October 2026. These sessions will be held weekly and are designed for non-Catholics interested in learning about the Catholic faith, as well as for Catholics seeking to deepen their understanding. The courses will be delivered using a blend of face-to-face sessions and online instruction.

IV. 2026 International Conference

Theme: Commemorating the Centenary of the Consecration of the First Six Chinese Bishops and the 80th Anniversary of the Establishment of the Chinese Catholic Hierarchy

On October 28, 1926, Pope Pius XI personally consecrated six Chinese bishops in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. The fact that, until then, Bishop Luo Wenzao's Vicar of Nanjing from 1685 to 1691 was the only Chinese national to have held the post since the arrival of the foreign missionaries in the 16th century, can help us to understand the magnitude of this historical event; it ended the monopoly that for more than two centuries the foreign missionaries held regarding the leadership of the Chinese Church. Subsequently, the Chinese Church as well as mission areas in Asia and Africa gradually transitioned to an indigenous leadership configura-

tion where local bishops governed and managed the dioceses and led the administration of the different local Churches. After this role shift, foreign missionaries continued to serve in those local churches as needed.

This International Conference, coorganized by the Chinese Regional Bishops' Conference, Fu Jen Catholic University's Academia Catholica and the Leuven Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation, is a unique occasion that aligns with the mission and vision of the Verbiest Association. The symposium is scheduled for October 16 and 17, 2026, at St. Paul Hall, 4th floor, Zhuozhang Building, Fu Jen Catholic University. For the Ferdinand Verbiest Association, it is an honor to join in the preparation of this international conference, a recognition of our long-term contribution to the positive development of the local Chinese Churches, a small milestone in our commitment to open bridges of dialogue and cooperation among the different local Churches. This conference celebrates and recognizes the significant contributions of local bishops in advancing each local Church within the Catholic Church. It also highlights the ongoing need for more thorough research and historical examination across various fields.

If you are interested to know more about the various activities of the Chinese Ferdinand Verbiest Cultural Exchange Association in 2026, you are most welcome to visit our website <http://www.verbiestfoundation.org>, or to contact us for at vf taipei@seed.net.tw.

Overview of Important VF Activities from 1982 to 2025

VF activities promoting exchange with the Church and with civil authorities in China:

1982: How CICM established Verbiest Foundation (VF) to promote exchange with China. In 1982, the CICM Chinese Province (Taiwan) submitted a preliminary proposal to set up Verbiest Foundation (VF). The Extended China Meeting organized in Rome by the CICM General Government (GG) in 1983, approved VF, then the CICM Superior General unexpectedly requested the Chinese Province to sponsor and direct it. The province accepted. From then on, the Provincial Government (PG) of the Chinese Province organized once a year a full day *China Meeting* to which all CICM confreres were invited to freely attend. They listened to the financial and activity reports of Verbiest Foundation (then also called “the China Program”) presented by Chinese lay faithful (Kuo Pin Sheng, Luo You Mei, a.o.) who ran the activities. The budget was presented and discussed separately during the PG-Meeting which decided on amending and approving the yearly budget.

1984: VF started regular visits to former CICM Missions in North China. VF visits to the Church in China had already started in 1982. As of 1984, Verbiest Foundation (VF) started visiting systematically the former CICM Missions in the whole of North China (from E to W, 4,000 km), thirty years after the CICM missionaries had been expelled. The welcome response of bishops, priests and faithful, from the official as well as from the unofficial Church communities, was impressive. Soon it was suggested to invite bishops to visit Belgium. But then, inviting underground bishops was not possible and inviting official (“patriotic”) bishops could not be allowed by the Holy See; even some Chinese faithful would also not approve. Yet, personal encounter was needed for promoting genuine dialogue. VF carefully took the risk.

1985: VF organized the 1st meeting outside China by official (“patriotic”) Chinese bishops with the Universal Church. With Pope John-Paul II remaining silent, VF organized the first visit outside China of three official “Patriotic Bishops” (not appointed by the Pope), officially allowed by China. The delegation was presided by Bishop Michael Fu of Beijing accompanied by Mr. Anthony Liu Bai Nian, secretary of the Patriotic Association. They were invited by Rector Piet De Somer of KU Leuven to



© VFphoto Archive – In November 1985, Bp. Michael Fu of Beijing and his delegation was welcomed at Brussels airport by Mgr. De Hovre and a delegation of KU Leuven for their 13-day visit to KU Leuven and the Church in Belgium, organized by Verbiest Foundation.

visit KU Leuven and the Church in Belgium for 13 days.

Cardinal Danneels received them for a friendly exchange and dialogue. Their meeting and joint prayer with CICM old China missionaries in Scheut was moving, even though several of the missionaries had only recently come out of a Chinese prison. Of the many meetings that took place during those 13 days, that encounter in Scheut, together with the meeting with the cardinal were undoubtedly the most impressive ones.

This visit of the bishops to Belgium surprised the Churches in East and West. It came so unexpectedly that many – especially in Taiwan and Hong Kong – could not approve of it.

That historical visit of 1985, however, appeared to be a breakthrough that was followed by more visits seeking understanding and dialogue. In 1987, Bishop Aloysius Jin of Shanghai visited KU Leuven where he gave a lecture in French at the Theology Faculty receiving a long applause. He did the same in Louvain-la-Neuve and in Liège Diocese. Queen Fabiola of Belgium received the bishop at the Royal Palace of Laken. Since then, several Chinese bishops visited Belgium. Each visit grew into a time of dialogue, encounter and sharing faith in dialogue.

- 1) In **1993**, Bishop Michael Fu of Beijing came to attend the graduation of 15 Spiritual Directors of Chinese Seminaries at the end of a Formation Session at KU Leuven. There he met and prayed with 92-year-old Cardinal Suenens and Archbishop Moreno, then Apostolic Nuncio in Belgium. The photo of this unique encounter – a “patriotic bishop” of China, a Cardinal of Belgium and a Nuncio of the Holy See together – was published in the media in Belgium as early as 1993. A pioneering role of VF.
- 2) In **1996**, one delegation of three bishops – Liu Yuan Ren, Guo Zheng Ji and Shi Hong Chen – were received by Her Majesty Queen Fabiola at the Royal Palace in Laken.
- 3) In **2002**, the Belgian Bishop Conference delegated Bishop Schreurs (Hasselt) and Bp. Vancottem (N. Brabant) to meet with Bishop Pius Jin Peixian of Shenyang (PRChina) and Archb. Joseph Tikang of Taipei (Taiwan) at Verbiest Foundation center in Leuven. They agreed to cooperate in exchange with the Church in China in the formation of ministers for the Local Church; the beginning of a program that ran for 25 years.
- 4) Also in **2002**, Bishop Jin Peixian and his delegation took part in the centuries-old Holy Blood Procession in Bruges where they were honored to carry the Holy Blood relic.
- 5) In **2005** and **2007**, two groups of bishops went on pilgrimage to Banneux, piously commemorating the first Banneux pilgrimage of a Chinese Bishop Fan Heng An of Inner Mongolia in 1934 shortly after the apparitions of Our Lady of Banneux had taken place.
- 6) In **2023**, three Chinese bishops took part in the September Procession in Tournai, each of them patiently walking the long tiring way wearing a heavy, embroidered cappa.
- 7) In **2025**, this remarkable history of the bishops’ visits to Belgium motivated VF to tell Bishop Guo Jin Cai and two other visiting Chinese bishops: *“Our Chinese College in Leuven has become a home in Belgium for the Chinese Church. You, your priests and faithful are always welcome here.”* This symbolizes the unique friendship relationship built by exchange between the two local Churches over a period of forty years.

1988: VF organized a visit of old CICM China missionaries with Belgian diocesan priests, religious and faithful to the former CICM Missions in N. China. From then on, VF organized yearly China visits for groups from Belgium, Taiwan and Singapore. This went on all through the 1990s until the time of Covid in 2020.

1990: CICM Superior General Michel Decraene visited China; the first China visit of a CICM General since the historical visit of Superior Joseph Vandeputte in 1948. In 1987, the 20th Chapter had formally reconfirmed in the CICM Constitutions the Priority Option for China. As



© VFphoto Archive – China trip in 1990: M. Decraene (center), the Superior General of the CICM, and the delegation of Verbiest Foundation, in front of the tombstone of Fr. Matteo Ricci, Beijing

a follow-up to this, VF organized and accompanied Superior General Michel Decraene with a CICM delegation of four, to visit the former CICM Missions in North China. In 2012, CICM Superior General Tim Atkin sent his Vicar General to join a CICM delegation to visit China. Superior General Charles Phukuta visited China three times, in 2017, in 2023 and 2024. These visits confirmed, renewed and strengthened the close family-like relationship of CICM with China.

1991: CICM started its second “Mission chez les Mongols” in Ulaanbaatar. In March 1991, diplomats from the Republic of Mongolia invited the Vatican to establish diplomatic relations. The Vatican agreed and invited CICM to send missionaries to Ulaanbaatar because records showed that early in 1921, CICM had already been invited for that purpose. Superior Michel Decraene immediately accepted. In agreement with the Vatican, he invited VF – c/o Jeroom Heyndrickx – to do the pastoral preparation to this 2nd CICM Mission among the Mongols by an exploration visit to Ulaanbaatar in October 1991. He met with vice-premier Minister Dorligjav and, separately, at the Academy of Social Sciences with Prof. Dr. Birra, chairman of the International Association of Mongolian Studies. Both, independently from each other, suggested that the new CICM mission engage in establishing an Antoine Mostaert Center in Ulaanbaatar. In 1992, when Fr. Wens Padilla was appointed as head of the CICM Mongol Mission, Superior General Decraene asked VF to contribute to the new Mission by initiating development projects and promoting Mongolian Research. VF organized this in cooperation with the Brothers of Charity starting in 1993, continuing until 2004.

1999: VF was voted as the “Pioneering missionary project of the CICM Sino-Mongol Province”. CICM decided to include the new CICM Mongol Mission in the Chinese Province which from then on was called Sino-Mongol Province. During the Provincial General Assembly in



© VFphoto Archive – In 2005, during his first China visit, Card. Godfried Danneels visited and lectured at the National Seminary in Beijing.



© VFphoto Archive – In 2024, Card. J. De Kesel and Bishop Li Shan of Beijing, both in unity with Rome, concelebrated at the North Cathedral in Beijing. The first time this happened since the PR China was established.

Hong Kong (in preparation to the CICM Chapter) all CICM confreres, after listening to the 2-hour long activity report of Verbiest Foundation, unanimously voted VF as *the pioneering missionary project* of the province. On that day VF reached its peak of recognition and approval in CICM.

2005 & 2008 & 2024: Three times VF organized visits for bishops of Belgium to China.

Belgian bishops were twice invited by the United Front and by Catholic Bishops of China.

1) In **2005**, Cardinal G. Danneels made an official visit to China staying at the official State Guest House. He was invited to meet Mr. Hui Liang Yu, Chinese vice-premier minister, at the official Zhu Nan Hai Government Building and had dinner with government and religious leaders of the United Front. He met with Ye Xiao Wen, Director of the official Religious Affairs Bureau and with delegates of Foreign Affairs. He met with the Conference of Chinese bishops. When the cardinal had to interrupt his visit unexpectedly to attend the funeral of the deceased Pope John Paul II, the government kindly invited him to complete the planned agenda of the visit at a later occasion.

2) **2008:** 2nd China visit of Card. Danneels, with the bishops of Liège, Tournai and Bruges. At the cardinal's proposal, Chinese authorities kindly permitted him and his delegation to make a Pastoral Visit to some former CICM Missions in N. China. They made an unforgettable visit to the Pinetree Mission (松树嘴子) in Rehe where they were welcomed with flowers, music, firecrackers and applause of 1,500 Christian farmers of that old country site mission. Then they proceeded to the Tiger Valley (老虎沟) nearby Chengde where a CICM Father, Joseph Segers (of St. Niklaas) had been killed by the Boxers. The bishops were deeply impressed by the level of Christian life of the faithful in these remote villages. Together with

the visit to Belgium by Bishop Fu Tieshan and his delegation in 1985, these two visits of Cardinal Danneels are registered in the history of Verbiest Foundation as two peak achievements in exchange and formation of friendship with official Chinese authorities and the Catholic Church.

3) **2024:** Visit of Cardinal Jozef De Kesel to Beijing and former CICM Missions in Hohhot and Jining (Wu-meng) dioceses in Inner Mongolia. This time also, the cardinal was invited by the United Front and by the Chinese Bishops. He met with the United Front commemorating the first visit to Belgium by Bishop Michael Fu and his delegation in 1985, meaning forty years of friendly exchange between the local Churches of China and Belgium. The cardinal also discussed exchange and dialogue with the bishops. He concelebrated the high Mass on Sunday at the North Cathedral in Beijing together with Bishop Li Shan. That was the first time since 1949, that a cardinal from the Holy See was invited by Chinese authorities to concelebrate in Beijing with the local bishop. A historical first.

VF programs to advance formation of Chinese students:

1983: Cultural exchange activities for Chinese students in Europe. In the early eighties, CICM confreres and ICM sisters accompanied groups of Chinese students – mostly non-Christians – in Summer Cultural Activity programs to France, Germany and Italy. Twice a group of VF non-Catholic Chinese students had a personal encounter with Pope John Paul II after the weekly general audience.

1985: Teaching theology in seminaries and preaching retreats in religious communities. In December 1985, Jeroom Heyndrickx of the VF was the first foreign missionary to be invited to teach on Vatican II in a Chinese



© VFphoto Archive – In December 1985, Fr. Jeroom Heyndrickx CICM taught a course on Vatican II at the Sheshan Seminary of Shanghai for 95 seminarians.



© VFphoto Archive – The first International Verbiest Conference on Philip Couplet in 1986, at the Great Beguinage in Leuven

seminary. Shanghai Bishop Aloysius Jin invited him to teach at Sheshan Seminary (then still in its old building). Official permissions were given to foreign teachers as of 1989. Since then, Jeroom Heyndrickx was allowed to teach Pastoral Theology at the National Seminary in Beijing, She Shan Shanghai, Beijing Diocesan and Shijiazhuang seminaries several times over a period of 25 years. Frans De Ridder CICM, went to preach retreats in religious convents, seminaries and dioceses.

1990: VF assisted in Formation Sessions organized by the dioceses in China. Starting as of 1990, Chinese lay faithful who had received an academic formation abroad were invited by dioceses in China to assist teaching in sessions for priests, religious sisters or faithful on Pastoral, Catechesis, Social Teaching, Spirituality.

1993: Formation of spiritual directors in seminaries. In 1993, VF, with the assistance of experts at the Holy See, organized in Leuven University (Belgium) a Formation Session for 15 spiritual directors from Chinese seminaries. H. Emin. Card. Suenens lectured to them on Vatican II. Bishop Michael Fu came from Beijing to attend the graduation ceremony where diplomas were handed out by university Rector Roger Dillemans.

2006 & 2007: Discussing the administration of dioceses in the Catholic Church with bishops from China, accompanied by Anthony Liu Bai-Nian of the Patriotic Association. Twice, VF-Leuven organized, with the agreement of the Holy See, a session for Chinese bishops (and bishop-elect candidates) to discuss the Church regulations on the administration of a Catholic diocese. As manual for the session was used the book "Successores Apostolorum" (Successors of the apostles) published by the Holy See, which for the occasion was translated in Chinese by VF.

VF activities of Academic Exchange with institutes in China

- * The first International Verbiest Conference on the history of the CICM in China and the history of the Church in China was held in 1986. Conferences have been held in Leuven and in Taipei; the 16th edition is scheduled for 2027, in Leuven.
- * Conferences provide an opportunity to publish "conference papers"; in addition, since 2007 the Verbiest Foundation has conducted independent research with its own researchers and in collaboration with scholars in China and the West, resulting in 74 books: 47 in the English-language VF series "Leuven Chinese Studies" and 22 in the Chinese VF series "Huairan Congshu" (怀仁丛书), plus five volumes published outside these series.
- * Since 1992, VF publishes its six-monthly Courier Verbiest which reports on all VF activities. Today it is published in four languages: English, Chinese, French, Dutch.

How Toon Renson CICM (Scheut) died in jail in China

The moving testimony of Remi Van Hyfte CICM, who was in the same small prison in Ding Bian (Northern Shaanxi) together with Fr. Toon Renson who died in that prison.

On September 10, 1951, Remi Van Hyfte (Watervliet) was accused of being an "imperialist" during a people's court at his mission in Dui Zi Liang. On Sept. 21, he was arrested and escorted, 50 km on foot, to the prison in Ding Bian. There he was locked in a dark cell, first alone, then with four or five. Remi strongly disagreed with his interrogators on that charge, and he told them so openly, which he was allowed to do. He asked for the reason why they were accusing him. Remi actually had a positive attitude. He showed understanding and looked for the reason why, after all, he had spent 20 years helping and caring for people in China in sickness and in all need, he was now condemned by China as an "imperialist".

After months in jail, Remi thought he heard the voice of a Scheut Father coming from outside his dark cell. He looked through a crack in the door and recognized 60-year-old Toon Renson (Zaffelare), who was locked up in another cell. From then on, Remi heard Toon every day, shuffling past his cell with other prisoners during their daily walk to the toilet. That made a great deal of noise because of the clanking of the 5-kg iron foot cuffs that each prisoner wearily dragged along. Remi was also locked up with these cuffs day and night. He and Toon both endured two winters like this in the same prison, each confined with four or five fellow prisoners in a dark cell. Remi agreed with his cellmates that they would take turns sleeping in front of the door at night during the winter to block the chilly wind that blew in from under it. During the day, they picked lice off one another in the sunlight that occasionally filtered through a slit in the cell door. Meanwhile, each man told his life story. They weighed and reweighed their chances of release. Each time someone returned from a long interrogation, there was a lengthy discussion about it in the cell. "Which of us is worst off?" "Will any of us get the bullet?" they would ask one another.

Epidemics regularly broke out in the prison. In August of the second year (1952), Remi contracted dysentery. His cellmate then covered him with all his clothes while Remi lay shivering with fever. But for Toon Renson, things got worse. During the "toilet procession", while a guard was momentarily absent, Toon made a sign to Remi, saying, "It's bad; it won't last long." Toon later died in prison. Remi wrote the following moving account about it.



© VFphoto Archive – Father Remi Van Hyfte CICM arrived in Hong Kong after he was released from prison.

Toon Renson's illness worsened from mid-October. Regularly I heard him calling the guard for help, but no help came. The sentries grew tired of it. I also called out to the sentries and asked if I could go and help Toon, but they refused. Toon had dysentery and often had to go to the toilet. I looked through the crack in the door and saw from his dragging gait that he was getting weaker and weaker. On October 22, I heard him telling that young guard clearly that he was no longer doing well.

The next day, when we had just eaten in our cell, we suddenly heard shouting from Toon's cell: "Guard, the old man... he can't go anymore!" The guard came running, opened Toon's cell door, and then we heard shouting, "Meiqile – 没气了 (He has stopped breathing!)." Then there was a lot of running around. The guard stood at the door looking in and said, "Laorén shuì zhào le – 老人

睡着了 (*The old man is sleeping.*)” Everyone in our cell was listening intently to what was happening.... I said: “*He is dead.*” Shortly before, I had quietly given Toon absolution. Now I was praying the Psalm *De Profundis*. My cellmate, Mr. Zhang, a Buddhist ascetic, said, “*That’s right. Father Renson has reached his final goal.*” Perhaps to accommodate me as a Catholic, he added, “*He has gone to heaven. He is happy.*”

Toon’s fellow inmates were moved to another cell. For two days – Friday and Saturday – nothing happened. It wasn’t until Sunday that the body was taken away. On Monday morning, a guard came to ask me if my dysentery had recovered, which I confirmed. In the afternoon, a guard came to remove my foot cuffs. First, I had to stand still for a bit. Then he said: “*Now practice walking a little first, but be careful because you will fall.*” And he was right. After a year and a half of dragging along 5-kg iron shackles day and night, I could hardly walk without them. My feet felt unbelievably light. They lifted up by themselves. I kept tending to fall. After fifteen minutes of practice, we stepped outside, left the prison, and entered the street. Five policemen walked ahead of me. We went out through the city gate, about a kilometer away, and came to the Great Wall of China north of the city, a little further east. There, it was to be done. “*Sit down and rest a bit*”, the officers said, because I had not yet recovered from my illness.

A crowd of people was standing there. Schoolchildren wore their red Mao sashes. Among the people, I suddenly recognized Ma Fen Le, a Christian from Bei Ni Jing, where Toon had once been pastor, and also E.H. Han, the current pastor of Bei Ni Jing. Both turned to look at me cautiously. I gave a slight bow of my head to show that I understood. We were standing near the ancient Chinese wall, built by the Emperor, 250 years before Christ on the border with Mongolia. Stored in clay-earth, the wall at that site was goose-stepped and looked more like a high dike, but with steep walls. At the base of the wall, a small cave had been dug out, large enough for a coffin. Inside it, Toon’s coffin had been placed. In front of the cave were ashes from an extinguished wood fire. One of the two guards who were watching me, said to the other, “*That is where we kept watch over a fire last night.*” They had to guard the

grave – not against people, but against wolves and dogs. Then three men came with shovels to remove the coffin from the cave for burial.

The coffin was taken out, placed in our midst, and opened. It was a scraped-up coffin, a rough, rectangular container made of brutal willow planks. A coffin of the poor. The body was taken from the coffin and placed on the lid of the box. Father Renson wore the same clothes he had on when I spied him through the crack in our door: quilted pants and a quilted Chinese vest. On his feet he wore a pair of Chinese slippers, and on his head an alpine hat. I heard the children watching everything from the Wall say, “*Āiyā, lao de lihài le – 啊呀，老的厉害了 (Oh, how old he looks!)*.” That was probably because of his long gray beard, sunken eyes, and long eyebrows. And also perhaps because of the pained expression on his face.

Apparently, I was called for an autopsy, to testify that Toon had died of illness and not torture. The two from Bei Ni Jing were also called in for that reason. A workman opened Toon’s upper clothes. Thus, we could see Father Renson’s bare chest. He did not look skinny. When the judge asked me for my opinion, I did not hesitate to answer: “*I know how Father Renson died. He was sick for a long time first.*” Then a picture was taken of the whole group: the members of the tribunal and us, the witnesses with the sprawled corpse in front of us. A long-detailed report was made, listing the names of everyone present, the day and hour of Toon’s death, the clothes he was wearing, and so on.

When I returned to my cell, my companions saw that my foot cuffs were off. They looked at me with great curiosity. Unable to speak, I lay down and began to weep, sobbing loudly for a very long time. They said nothing, asked nothing; they just let me cry it out. That was still best. Then I told them everything.

The next day, I was called out again and taken to the court. A long-written text was read to me, as follows: “*The criminal and imperialist Sha Zhelin (Anthony Renson), Belgian, born in 1891, fell ill, etc.*” Then followed the whole story, with at the end: “*... we testify that the corpse of the criminal and imperialist Sha Zhelin bears no traces*



© VFphoto Archive – Father Toon Renson CICM (middle back row)

of mistreatment or acts of violence. We testify that he died of natural causes.”

As we stood waiting to sign the document, I asked if Father Renson had already been buried. When they answered “no”, I said: *“As a criminal, may I still ask you something... I would like to request that you bury Father Renson in Bei Ni Jing.”* I was worried that they would not want to bury him in Xiao Qiao Pan or Dong Tang, where he had been pastor for the longest time, but those places were too far away. I feared they might bury him somewhere unknown, and then one would never know what might happen to the grave. Therefore, I asked for Bei Ni Jing, as it was the closest.¹

Then we – E.H. Han, Ma Fen Le from Bei Ni Jing, and I – were led to a small courtyard where a photographer was ready. The long document lay on a table in the center of the courtyard. The chief justice sat down on the chair beside the table. As he signed, a photograph was taken. Next, in order, I drew, then E.H. Han, and then Ma Fen Le. Each time a photograph was taken.

That was the end. A young clerk, aged 13, was ordered to bring me to the guard. I tried to meet the gaze of E.H. Han or Ma Fen Le, but they dared not look and averted their eyes.

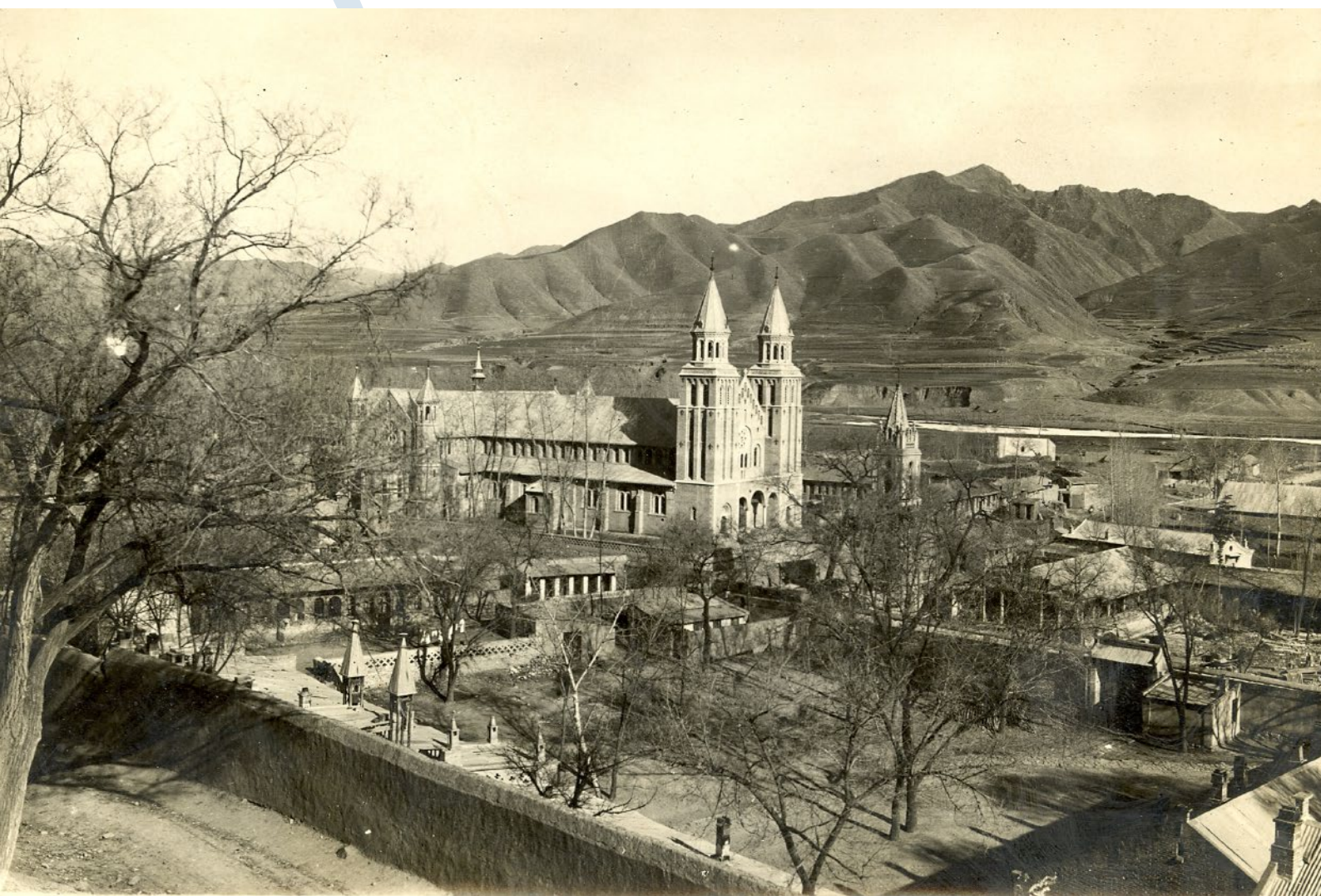
(According to the account of Father Remi Van Hyfte CICM, VF Archive, Leuven.)

¹ For years, CICM and Toon's family did not know where Toon was buried. Only fifty years later (in 2002), Father Jeroom Heyndrickx CICM discovered Father Renson's grave in Xiangyang, near Bei Ni Jing, and a photograph was taken.

History of the Xiwanzi Diocese

Xiwanzi, now Chongli County in the northern province of Hebei, on the edge of the Inner Mongolian steppe, was the cradle of the Scheut Congregation's China Mission. It is today a city with a population of 100,000 and a quite active Catholic community. The Verbiest Foundation has long harboured an ambition to publish a history of Xiwanzi that is bound to be welcomed both internationally as well as by the faithful in China as an essential contribution to the historiography of the Church in all of Northern China. This important project is based primarily on the archives of the Foundation (and of Kadoc, the KU Leuven documentation centre, where CICM archival materials have been transported

from Rome). Prof. Chen Zhixiong (Macau Polytechnic University) who leads the research will furthermore be able to build upon earlier publications by CICM archivist Valère Rondelez (1938) and Albert Raskin. The latter joined the Verbiest Foundation in 1987 and for the 3rd International Verbiest Conference of 1990 gathered recent research papers on Xiwanzi by young historians from Leuven and Liège universities as well as "house" researchers Sara Lievens and Stephan Aguirre y Otegui. The final product will therefore be a collective enterprise conducted over several generations and with oral testimony coming from Xiwanzi itself.



© VFphoto Archive – The Church in Xiwanzi

Research into Jozef Mullie at the Verbiest Foundation: a new publication



© VFphoto Archive – Mullie at his mission post in Rehe



© KADOC-KU LEUVEN – Mullie before his departure to China

Nearly every account of early Sino-Belgian contacts begins with Ferdinand Verbiest, the 17th-century Jesuit from Pittem, who, in China, rose to the position of imperial astronomer. Less prominent but of comparable scientific significance was the Belgian Mission of Scheut in Northern China in the 19th and 20th centuries. A number of missionaries taught themselves to become specialists of the regions where they were active, and his is the case, for example, with Jozef Mullie (1886–1976), a linguist and self-taught archaeologist. The Verbiest Foundation possesses a large number of documents from and about J. Mullie in its archives. Researcher Dr. Simon Yongjun Zheng, from the Verbiest Institute KU Leuven, will shortly publish the first part of a planned triptych on the life and work of Mullie: *Bringing China Home: The Life of Fr. Jozef Mullie — a Fleming, a Scheutist, and a Scholar of Sinology*.

The first part of this work traces Mullie's youth in Flanders, his early passion for linguistics, his entry into the Congregation of Scheut, and his 22-year career (1909–1930) as a missionary in the eastern part of present-day Inner Mongolia, which explains why he not only mastered Chinese but also acquired knowledge of Mongolian and Manchu. Back in Belgium, from 1930, he concentrated on teaching the Chinese literary language (*Wenyan* 文言), at first to his confrères at Scheut. In 1939, Mullie was appointed Professor of Chinese Language and Literature at the University of Utrecht, which remained his main activity during and after the German occupation, until he retired in 1956. His sympathy for the Flemish Movement is one reason why he wrote his two epoch-making works, *Het Chinees Taaleigen, Inleiding tot de gesproken Chinese taal (Noord-pekineesch dialect)*, and *De Grondbeginselen van de Chinese letterkundige taal*, both in three weighty volumes, in the Dutch

language. As could be expected, this rather limited Mullie's international fame. It is for this reason all the more welcome to see Simon now enabling a broader international readership to take cognizance of Jozef Mullie CICM, the missionary, the scholar, and also the bibliophile. For Mullie's library, now the core of the Chinese library of the KU Leuven, was carefully assembled by him from classical texts, historical and geographical compilations, rare editions and local material; in its time, it represented a significant infusion of traditional Chinese knowledge into the then still young academic discipline of sinology in Belgium. The analysis of the contents of Mullie's library by Simon thus sheds new light on cultural exchanges between China and Belgium in the first half of the last century.

The next two parts of Simon's trilogy will deal with Mullie's contributions to the study of Chinese linguistics (based on the two works cited above) as well as — this is potentially of great value — his significance for the image of China in Belgium. That is to say, in more than a hundred newspaper articles in the Belgian press of his time, Mullie provided his perspective on what was happening in China, informed as he was by a uniquely rich background of knowledge and experience of the country. One could wish that Western media today had more China correspondents of that calibre.



© VFphoto Archive – Mullie with Rehe General Tang Yuling and Swedish explorer Sven Hedin

New VF Book Recommendation:

The Mission among the Mongols in Modern Times by Joseph Van Hecken (CICM)

Chinese translation by Sr. Gaby Yang

Joseph Van Hecken CICM wrote “La Mission chez les Mongols aux temps modernes” and published it in Tianjin (China) in 1947. Unfortunately, the book was not widely spread because during a flood in Tianjin most of the books – kept in a basement of the CICM procure – were destroyed. It was a big loss to Mongolian Studies that this important report on the history of Mission among the Mongols, written by the most qualified missiologist and historian on CICM Mission in China and Inner Mongolia, remained so little known. The Research & Publication department of Verbiest Foundation-Leuven (VF) plans to remedy this by preparing three translations. It is the merit of Sr. Gaby Yang that a Chinese translation – which had been initiated by Fr. Zhao Yan Qing – is now ready for publication as the first of three translations planned by VF. Here below Sr. Gaby introduces her translation to the Chinese readers.

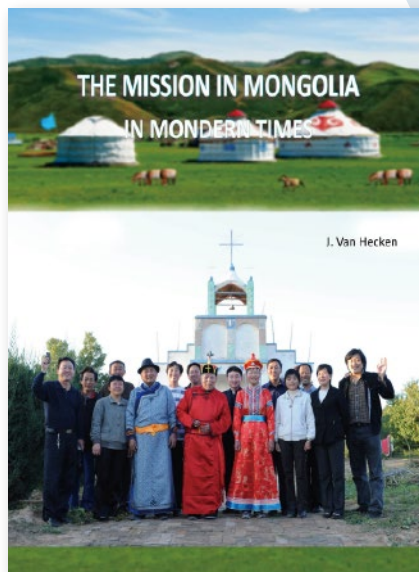
Some years ago, VF considered that a book on the Mongols, written by an expert like Van Hecken deserved to be translated first into the Mongolian language and be published in Cyrillic as well as in Mongolian script for perusal by the Mongolian readers. For that purpose, VF invited a Mongol expert who accepted the task but regrettably did not complete it. However, that project is still on the present agenda of VF. A Mongolian translation is planned to be published soon.

Much earlier, Verbiest Foundation Leuven (VF) had invited (the now late) Sr. Christiane Vandebogaert ICM to translate the book in English. She finished the translation and Joseph Lim, VF researcher, enriched it by adding the Chinese names of persons and places. The English translation is on the VF list for publication in 2027.

Making this important work of J. Van Hecken CICM available to a wider international readers public, remains for VF the accomplishment of an important item of its Mongolian Study Program. VF considers this as part of the continuation of the CICM Option for China determined by Founder Theophile Verbiest.

Apart from scattered records of early Jesuit and Lazarist missionaries preaching in Mongolia, there has been no historical work that systematically examines the missionary activities of the Scheut Fathers and Protestant missions among the Mongolian nomadic population. The Chinese translation of Fr. J. Van Hecken’s “La Mission chez les Mongols aux temps modernes” presents this.

Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation-Leuven publishes this book including rich and comprehensive detail of early missionary



efforts in Mongolia, covering the Jesuits, the Lazarists, and especially the missionaries of the Scheut Fathers. The book consists of ten chapters and is illustrated with numerous rare historical photographs, vividly depicting the missionaries’ experiences among the Mongolian people, their sufferings and joy, successes and failures, as well as their sacrifices and gains in the process of preaching the Gospel.

The activities of Jesuit missionaries in China and Mongolia present a pattern characterized more by contact than by conversion.

Matteo Ricci entered Beijing in 1601 and established a mission expanding into provinces such as Zhili, Shandong, Shanxi, Shaanxi, Gansu, and Henan, and further extended to tributary regions including Korea, Manchuria, Mongolia, and Dzungaria. Although the Jesuits frequently accompanied the Qing court into Mongolia, engaged with princes and nobles, and participated in surveying and mapping expeditions, evangelization among the Mongolian people did not happen. This was due to multiple constraints, including the political environment, the nomadic way of life, the influence of Lamaism (Tibetan Buddhism), and a shortage of personnel. The efforts of figures such as Ferdinand Verbiest, Jean-François Gerbillon and Dominique Parrenin reflect a strategic adjustment that used science as a bridge; nevertheless, missionary activity largely remained at the level of observation and indirect contact.

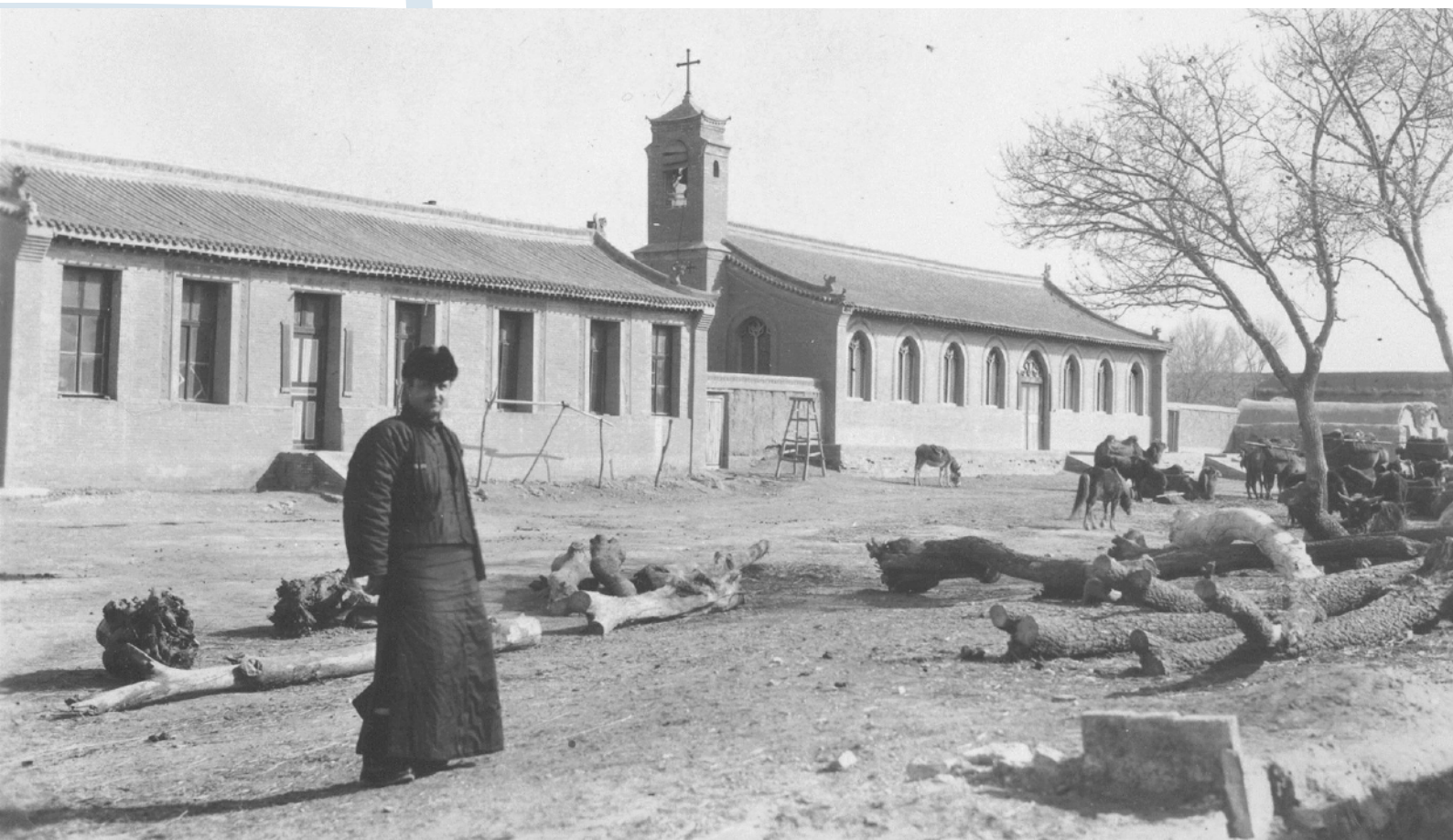
Then the Lazarists took over and initiated early missionary efforts in Mongolia. Confronted with vast territories, shortage of personnel and restrictions imposed by the Qing prohibition of Christianity, their efforts towards evangelization were also frustrated. Fr. N.J. Raux proposed a missionary strategy centered on settlements and local formation and aiming to establish Christian villages and formation of indigenous clergy; however,

this plan failed due to political resistance and social opposition.

Mgr. Mouly and Joseph Gabet then shifted their focus to the lama community, promoting conversion through education, language study, and personal relationships. The book of J. Van Hecken presents individual cases of Mongolian lamas – such as “Paul” and “Peter Feng” – to illustrate the complexity of interreligious dialogue and the cost of religious conversion. Yet, the number of converts remained very limited.

The Qing ban, the structure of nomadic society, and the deep-rooted influence of Tibetan Buddhism made it difficult to institutionalize missionary work. Nevertheless, the Lazarists made the first attempts to translate Catholic teachings into Mongolian, compiling prayer books and catechisms, and documenting Mongolian society – thus laying an initial cultural foundation for subsequent missionary efforts.

Following 1865, the activities of the Scheut Fathers in the Chahar region exemplified a transition from “taking over the mission territory” to “actively pioneering”. When the congregation took over the Mongolian Vicariate, they inherited several thousand believers and



© VFphoto Archive – Father J. Van Hecken CICM in Boro-Balgasu, Inner Mongolia

multiple scattered stations. However, the vast territory, shortage of personnel, and the fact that the faithful were almost entirely Han Chinese meant that evangelization directly targeting the Mongols had yet to begin. Father Theophile Verbist was the first to propose a new direction: learning the Mongolian language, cultivating a native clergy, and engaging in direct missionary work among the Mongols. However, his untimely death temporarily hindered the implementation of this vision. His successors, such as Father Remi Verlinden and Father Alfons De Vos, continued these efforts. Through language study, interactions with lamas, and the acceptance of refugees, they established Mongolian catechumenate communities – Yaozigou being a notable example – marking a shift from “indirect contact” to “direct evangelization.”

Yet, the Yaozigou community eventually disintegrated due to violent conflicts. Meanwhile, the mission stations in Chahar were expelled by local authorities. Compounded by structural obstacles – such as Mongolia not being recognized as a legitimate missionary territory and the deep influence of Lamaism – the missionary endeavor faced repeated setbacks. In response, the missionaries gradually adjusted their strategies: they began establishing Mongolian villages, intensified language training, set up transportation hubs such as Boro-Balgasu, and expanded their outreach to Ordos, Qinghai, and beyond. These adaptations opened new possibilities for subsequent developments.

Chapter Four of the book focuses on the pioneering phase around 1874: the Fathers Remi Verlinden and Alfons De Vos ventured from Boro-Balgasu deep into the grasslands, advancing evangelization under harsh conditions. By engaging with Mongol princes such as those in Jungar and Otog, translating doctrinal texts, and building interpersonal networks, they gradually obtained political permission and protection.

Chapter Five turns to the early practices following the formal establishment of the mission territory. The missionaries successively founded multiple mission stations in Ordos and Alashan – including Baga-Ejin, Subahai, Fuma Fu, Shajintaohai, and Nalingao – in an effort to comprehensively advance evangelization among the Mongols.

Chapter Six focuses on the perseverance of the Boro-Balgasu mission station between 1880 and 1900 amid persistent persecution from Mongol officials and extreme material scarcity. Missionaries such as Father Alfons Bermyn and Father Jérôme Van Aertselaer gradually strengthened the Mongolian Christian community by appointing catechists, establishing schools, and nurturing the faith.

Chapter Seven describes the revival of the mission territory from ruins following the Boxer Uprising and its subsequent ascent to its zenith. After the miraculous relief of the Xiaoqiaopan siege, the Qing court, compelled by circumstances, prompted various Mongol banners to reconcile with the Church and provide compensation. By 1925, both the power of the mission territory and the lives of the faithful reached their peak. Notable progress was also made in Mongolian education, academic research and interactions with the Roman Curia, marking this period as the golden age of the Mongolian mission.

Chapter Eight recounts the tortuous journey of the mission territory from its peak to its eventual ordeal. Yet the faith of the believers did not collapse; they continued to gather secretly in the ruins to pray. This chapter concludes with an overview of the fruitful achievements of missionaries in the fields of Mongolian linguistics and folklore between 1926 and 1948, especially the monumental series of works by Father Antoine Mostaert on the Ordos dialect and the Monguor people – an indelible spiritual legacy from those turbulent years.

Chapter Nine focuses on the significant contributions of Mongolian lay believers, nuns, religious brothers, and clergy, regarding them as the “crown” of the missionary enterprise. Beginning with Catherine Bayinji, Mongolian nuns laid a solid foundation for the faith to take root in families through education, orphan care, and medical nursing. The eventual emergence of the first Mongolian priests – including Ma Yuanmu and Ma Zhongmu – marked the maturation of the local Church.

Chapter Ten systematically traces the course of Protestant missionary work in Mongolia from the early nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century.

Overall, this book presents a clear structure and rich material, systematically tracing the complete arc of Catholicism in Mongolia – from the initial contact of the Jesuits, to the difficult pioneering of the Lazarists, to the rooting of the Scheut Fathers in Ordos.

Sr. Gaby Yang

Pilgrimage in the Footsteps of St. Paul

“Walking the Path of St. Paul, Seeking the Light of Faith.”

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations.” — Matthew 28:19

“Come over to Macedonia and help us.” — Acts 16:9

“Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel!” — 1st the Corinthians 9:16

“I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” — Philippians 4:13



The **Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation (Leuven, Belgium)** warmly invites Christians and all those interested in the history of the early Church to join a **pilgrimage following the missionary journeys of St. Paul the Apostle**.

From **September 26 to October 11, 2026**, this pilgrimage will travel through **Turkey and Northern Cyprus**¹, visiting places closely connected with the life and missionary work of Paul the Apostle.

Walking through these biblical lands, participants will be invited to rediscover the courage and faith of the early Christian communities and to renew their own missionary calling.

The participation fee is **€2,750 per person in a double room**. A single room is available at an additional cost. The fee includes: registration fee, accommodation in selected hotels, local transportation during the pilgrimage, daily meals according to the itinerary, guided visits with a Chinese-speaking guide and organized program activities. The fee does not include: international flights to and from Turkey, flights between Turkey and Cyprus (These will be arranged collectively and paid separately according to the final price.), travel insurance, Visa fees (if required), personal expenses. A **deposit of € 500 per person** is required to confirm your participation.

If you are interested in this pilgrimage, **please contact:**

Belgium and International Participants

Contact Person: **Gong Zhixi**

Email: matthewgonzx@outlook.com

Phone / WhatsApp: +32 485 726 878

Telephone: +32 16 222 841

Address: Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation, Vlamingen-
straat 1, 3000 Leuven, Belgium

Taiwan

Contact Person: **Lin Yijun**

Email: clara150301@gmail.com or vtaipei@seed.net.tw

Phone: +886 2 2314 9631

Address: Room 828, No. 2, Section 1, Zhongshan North
Road, Zhongzheng District, Taipei 10041, Taiwan

The registration² will close on June 30, 2026!

Please note that **places are limited**, and registration may close earlier once the group is full.

¹ Istanbul (Constantinople); Alexandria Troas and Assos; Pergamon, Thyatira, Sardis, Smyrna; Ephesus and the House of the Virgin Mary; Laodicea and Philadelphia; Hierapolis and Colossae; Perga, Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium; Lystra and Derbe; Tarsus (birthplace of St. Paul); Antioch (Antakya), where the disciples were first called Christians; Cappadocia; Northern Cyprus: Nicosia, Kyrenia, Famagusta and surrounding monasteries

² To register, please provide the following information: Full name, Gender, Date of birth, Nationality, Passport number, Passport expiry date, Contact information, Room preference: single room or double room

IN MEMORIAM



On 13 April, a memorial Mass was held for the mother of Fatemeh, at the Chinese College in Leuven. (From left to right: Fr. Matthew, Fatemeh's brother, Fr. Jerom, Fatemeh, Sr. Gaby, Sr. Tian)

The loss of a mother leaves a void that words can scarcely express. For Fatemeh, this sorrow has recently become a painful reality. Fatemeh's mother was Iranian and grew up in a Muslim family. After Fatemeh converted to Catholicism, her mother also began to show interest in the Christian faith. Unfortunately, she passed away unexpectedly from a heart attack. In a spirit of solidarity and compassion, a memorial mass was held at the Chinese College to honor her mother's memory and to surround Fatemeh and her family with warmth and prayerful support.

What follows is a heartfelt personal tribute from Fatemeh to her mother:

"In loving memory of my dear mother, whose kindness, strength, and love will forever live in our hearts. She will always be deeply missed and never forgotten."

Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation

Mission Statement

Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation (VF) is legally established in Leuven. 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 中华) 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, 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

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 Verbiest 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.
- 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 in Belgium and China. This should be based on equality and mutual appreciation.
- The Foundation sponsors the activities 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.

What can you do?

The Verbiest Foundation receives annual support from donors. It is thanks to this financial support that we are able to continue our selfless commitment to the above goals. Would you like to support our work? You can do so in the following ways:

- **Donate via bank transfer**
You can choose to make a one-time transfer or set up a monthly direct debit.
Financial support can be sent to:
- **Donation through a legacy**
If you are considering including the Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation in your will, please feel free to contact us at any time via email, phone, or mail for more information. We will always treat your inquiries with the utmost respect and complete discretion.

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(KBC Bank NV, Mgr Ladeuzeplein 19, 3000 Leuven, België)

Note: Donations to the F. Verbiest Foundation are not tax-deductible. We do not issue tax receipts for these donations.



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