



summary

POPE FRANCIS

The Church in China and Verbiest Foundation mourning the loss of a great friend

p. 1

EDITORIAL

"We are continuing our dialogue with China and the Chinese communities worldwide!"

p. 2

PART 1 – Formation of church ministers for the local Chinese church: Serving local churches in China, Taiwan and Southeast Asia

Matthew Gong and Clara Lin

p. 3

PART 2 – The local Chinese church is celebrating its centenary 1926-2026: The Foundation will be celebrating with them

Paul Mariani and the redaction

p. 7

PART 3 – CICM (Scheut) has promoted the inculturation of faith in China and Taiwan

The redaction, Koen De Ridder and Benoît Vermander

p. 10

FROM THE ARCHIVE OF VERBIEST FOUNDATION: A bold historical initiative

by KUL Rector De Somer 40 years ago

Jerome Heyndrickx, Scheut (CICM)

p. 17

NEWLY LAUNCHED PUBLICATION IN CHINA: A study on the history of CICM (Scheut) in China and its Dutch-speaking sinologist Jozef Mullie

Simon Yongjun Zheng

p. 19

IN MEMORIAM

Dr. Paul Rule

Gianni Criveller

p. 20

CHINA TRIP 2025

"In the footsteps of the Scheut Fathers (CICM)"

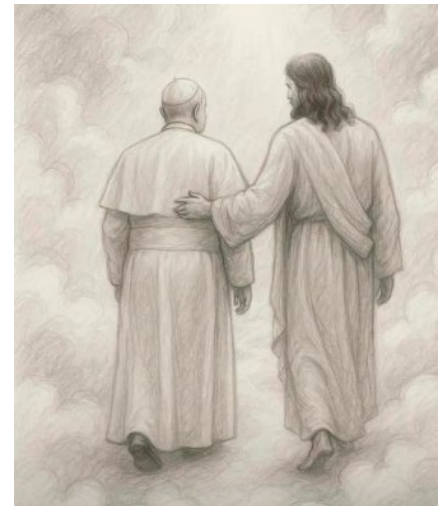
p. 20

PHOTO REPORT

p. 22

The Church in China and Verbiest Foundation mourning the loss of a great friend

Since 2015 every year, after their Ongoing Formation Session in Leuven, a group of priests from China went on pilgrimage to Rome where they were friendly welcomed by Pope Francis. In 2018 the Pope signed an agreement to engage in cooperation and exchange with China. Doing so the Pope completed a movement started by Pope Paul VI who in 1970 pleaded to the world for offering a seat for the PR China in the UNO. His successors Pope J-Paul II and Benedict XVI followed in his footsteps seeking dialogue. By signing the agreement Pope Francis reached the peak in the Sino-Vatican relation since the existence of the PR China. After the death of Pope Francis most commemorations ignore or underestimate the historical importance of this achievement. Together with all Christians in China, Verbiest Foundation mourns the death of a great friend of China.



"Two Friends heading Home after Easter" (Illustration from St Mary's Scholasticate - OMI Australia [Facebookpage]. Retrieved 24 April 2025.



Chinese priests meeting Pope Francis (Spring Session 2024). © Servizio Fotografico Vatican Media

Pope Francis

EDITORIAL

"We are continuing our dialogue with China and the Chinese communities worldwide!"

Exceptionally, at the invitation of the board, the editorial of this issue is provided by the Chinese colleagues of the Verbiest Foundation-Leuven (cfr. photo). Few readers know that we have been preparing and guiding the Verbiest Foundation's richly filled program of activities every day for years. We organize formation sessions for Chinese priests, religious and laity from China. We accompany Chinese bishops, priests, religious and laity, also civil officials from China who visit our country and also Rome. This year the Verbiest Foundation organizes a spring and summer session, a pilgrimage to Rome for the Chinese lay people from the Netherlands to celebrate the Jubilee Year. We will welcome a delegation from the Religious Affairs Department of Shanghai and catechists from the Diocese of Beijing. In the second half of September 2025, a delegation of Chinese bishops will visit the Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation. At the invitation of the Chinese Bishops, a delegation of Verbiest Foundation will visit China at the end of 2025. Together with friends from Belgium and the Netherlands, we also visit China and meet Chinese Christians in the former missions of CICM (Scheut). In cooperation with the KU Leuven, we are doing research on the rich past of the Scheut Fathers and their contributions in China in terms of development, education, health care, language study, etc. About all that, we have already published more than 60 volumes in English and Chinese in our own series. We also publish the Verbiest Koerier which appears in four languages: Dutch, French, English and Chinese. All this is sponsored by the Verbiest Foundation. In short, we are busy to keep that engine running daily but we enjoy doing it. We are also proud of our work and grateful for the appreciation and friendship that has been growing for years between us and friends in Belgium and the Netherlands.

Recently, however, our Foundation found itself in crisis quite unexpectedly. As colleagues of the Foundation, we stood by, silent, powerless, worried and deeply disturbed. Many of our readers also expressed their sympathy and support that they, along with us, were also very shocked.

Fortunately, our board was able to make a quick restart so that we could immediately continue our program undisturbed and without hesitation. Notwithstanding the crisis mentioned above, we are ensuring that the Foundation's activities continue as they have been for the past 40 years. Supported by our founder of the Verbiest Foundation, we continue this beautiful program together. **The Foundation lives on, its soul and program remain untouched!** We remain unchanged in our commitment to the future of the Verbiest Foundation's beautiful project and our dialogue with China and Chinese communities worldwide. We want to send this clear message to all readers of the *Courier Verbiest*, as well as to the organizations that were a driving force behind the Verbiest Foundation: the KU Leuven who positively affirmed and encouraged our activities, the Church of Belgium who, from 2006, supervised our activities, and especially CICM (Scheut), the congregation that founded the Foundation in 1983 and invited us to join Scheut



The Chinese colleagues of the Verbiest Foundation (from left to right): Simon Zheng, Theresa Hao, Lucia Wong, Matthew Gong, Gaby Yang, Clara Lin.

in continuing to honor today and in the future the old Priority Option for China of Founder Theophile Verbiest. We gladly describe the fruits of these efforts herewith in a report on the activities planned this year and already underway. We divide our activities into the following 3 parts:

Part 1: Formation of church ministers for the local Chinese church. Serving local churches in China, Taiwan and South-east Asia.

You will learn in this Courier how the Foundation continues today the work that the Scheut Fathers did in N. China by organizing -- co-organizing or simply assisting -- training sessions of church ministers.

- **Our program** offers classes, taught in Chinese, that contribute directly to the work of church ministers: Pastoral, Catechesis (on the Catechumenate), Social Teaching, Spirituality. Due to lack of teachers, these courses are rarely offered in seminaries in China.
- In this issue, **our teachers** -- coming from China, Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore -- give a brief introduction about the content of their course.
- **Formation of Church Ministers is today the main concern of Local Churches in East and West.** Ever since Verbiest Foundation was established by Scheut in 1982, it has cooperated with the Local Church in China to contribute in this field.

Part 2: The local Chinese church celebrates its centenary: 1926-2026. Verbiest Foundation joins the celebration.

It wasn't until 1926 that the first Chinese bishops were ordained. That was actually the birthdate of the *Local Chinese Church*, led by its own bishops. As early as 1946, Pius XII officially recognized the entire Chinese Church as an *autonomous Local Church*, with its own bishops, archbishops and a cardinal, counselor to the Pope. Yet even today, further growth toward a mature autonomous Local Church within today's People's Republic remains a very difficult challenge for the Church in China, especially its growth toward an even more inculturated Church within modern secularized society.

The celebration of this centenary is an ideal opportunity to highlight the importance, content and meaning of this *moment of growth of the Church in China*. Rather than organizing its own celebration of this centenary in Leuven, the Foundation prefers to participate in a proposal that is currently under discussion. The historical background suggests that it would be very meaningful to have an international celebration at the very dynamic Catholic community in Southeast Asia, Malaysia or Singapore. The Foundation wishes to cooperate in this.

Archbishop Celso Costantini, the first Apostolic Delegate of the Vatican in China, was the well-known promoter of the consecration of the first Chinese bishops in 1926. He was also the Founder of the Chinese religious Congregation of the *Discipuli Domini* (Disciples of the Lord). His congregation is very well known and active in Malaysia and Singapore. It is logical that in this celebration, our attention should be especially focused on this Congre-

gation and the role of its Founder, especially since 1926-2026 is also the centenary of the Congregation of the *Discipuli Domini*. The Foundation wishes to join - possibly as co-organizer - in a celebration being prepared in Southeast Asia. You will learn more about this important activity in the next *Courier Verbiest*.

Part 3: CICM (Scheut) has always promoted the inculturation of faith in China and Taiwan.

Over the centuries, inculturation of the Christian message in China has been a difficult task for missionaries. We find that CICM (Scheut) has made a remarkable contribution to this. In this *Courier* we give a brief overview:

- Scheut Fathers learned Chinese during 7 years of their formation. Through the lessons of P. Joseph Jennes on history of inculturation of catechesis in China.
- During the years 1920-1945, Fathers Leo Van Dijk and Mon Van Genechten took challenging, creative initiatives in terms of inculturation of Christian Chinese art.
- In Taipei, Scheut has further taken initiatives along these lines from the *Hua Ming Catechetical Center*, the Establishment of the *Taiwan Pastoral Center* and *Hua Ming Art Gallery*.

Dear reader, we feel encouraged by your interest and support. The rich information about our activities that you read in this *Courier* confirms that we are working together for a bright future of the Verbiest Foundation, strengthened by your prayers and your friendship, under the leadership of the Church in Belgium, KU Leuven and Scheut that founded and sponsored the Foundation for 23 years.

On behalf of the board of VF

PART 1 – Formation of church ministers for the local Chinese church: Serving local churches in China, Taiwan and Southeast Asia

The Verbiest Foundation is again organizing formation sessions for Church ministers, in the service of the local Churches in China, Taiwan and Southeast Asia. The work that the Scheut Fathers (CICM) started then in N. China, will be continued by the Verbiest Foundation today. The program offers classes, in Chinese, that contribute directly to the work of church ministers: Pastoral, Catechesis, Social Doctrine, Spirituality, etc. Due to lack of teachers, these courses are rarely offered in seminaries in China. These sessions are taught in Chinese by teachers coming from China, Taiwan, Malaysia and Singapore. Our teachers are Fr. Matthew Gong (Social Doctrine), Sr. Gaby Yang (Catechumenate and Catechesis [book of A. Fossion SJ]), Fr. Francis Carin CFM (Church Administration [Successores Apostolorum]), Mr. Joseph Lim (Catechesis in today's society [book of A. Fossion SJ]), Fr. Terrence Huang CSSR (Pastoral), Prof. Ku Weiyong (Chinese Church history) and Prof. Chen Fangchung (History of CICM in China). Part 1 gives an overview of the content of the classes in Leuven and Taipei. Supplemented with pictures of the trips, excursions and visits in Leuven, Germany, the Netherlands, Rome, etc. as part of the cultural program.

LEUVEN - The Seventh Pastoral Ongoing Formation Session Spring 2025

*Matthew Gong,
Rector Chinese College Leuven*

Since 2015, the Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation (VF) has organized spring and summer sessions each year for priests, religious,

and lay Catholics in China. This ongoing formation program offers courses in pastoral ministry, Catholic catechesis, RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults), Catholic social ethics, homiletics, character growth, spirituality, Scripture, as well as pilgrimages and visits. These courses are highly practical for pastoral work. After the covid-epidemic ended, the VF immediately resumed these ongoing formation programs and successfully



The direction and Chinese colleagues of VF with all participants of the Spring Session on April 29, the 1st day of the one-month Formation Session, in Chinese, at the Chinese College Leuven.

held the sixth pastoral training session in April 2024, it received high praise. In addition to the spring session, a special summer session will be held in August 2025 for religious sisters.

Thanks to the efforts of the VF colleagues, overcoming various difficulties and challenges, the Foundation successfully organized the 7th Spring Pastoral Ongoing Formation Program from April 28 to May 30, 2025, at the Chinese College in Leuven (CCL). A total of 19 priests from 13 dioceses in China participated in this program. The curriculum included Catholic social ethics, catechetical instruction on communication, missiology, RCIA (Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults), and a one-week pilgrimage to Rome.

In the first week, a course was given about the *Social Doctrine of the Church* (cfr. photo). Through an overview of Catholic social ethics, its historical origin and development, fundamental principles, and key themes such as family, environment, and work, make participants understand the importance of Catholic social ethics in parish pastoral ministry and the connection between social work and evangelization.



Fr. Matthew gives a course about the Social Doctrine of the church.

In the second week, **Mr. Lin Junxiong** from Malaysia taught the course on *Catechesis in the field of Communication*. Mr. Lin holds a Bachelor's degree in Theology from the seminary of Fu Jen Catholic University Taipei, as well as a Master's in Pastoral Theology and a Master's in Applied Ethics from KU Leuven, Belgium. He is a collaborating lecturer of the VF. This course was based on the book *Catechesis in the Field of Communication* by Jesuit Fr. André Fossion, S.J. It helped participants explore and understand the content of the Catholic faith, as well as the methods, attitudes, and strategies for transmit-

ting it to others in today's society. Drawing on Church documents on catechesis and communication studies, the course also provided reflections and discussions on the transmission of the Gospel.

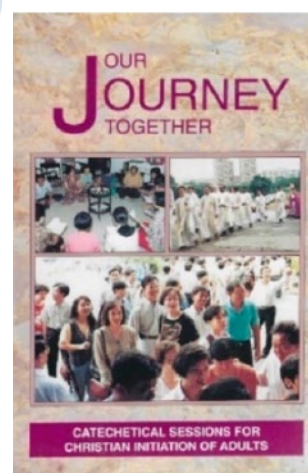
Toward the near future, Mr. Lin is also preparing a new course about the *Dialogue Between Faith and Secular Society*, inspired by Cardinal Jozef De Kesel's book. The course aims to explore the role and challenges of Christianity in a rapidly changing world. The interaction between faith and a secular culture has become increasingly significant.



In the third week, Redemptorist **Fr. Terence Wee** from Singapore was invited to teach *Missiology*. Fr. Terence holds a Master's degree in Religious Studies from St. Alphonsus Mission and Theological Institute and Ateneo de Davao University in the Philippines, as well as an Advanced Master's in Theology from KU Leuven. He also serves as a spiritual director for the Faith Formation Team of the Archdiocesan Commission for the Apostolate of Mandarin-speaking Catholics (ACAMS) in the Archdiocese of Singapore. This course explored Catholic missiology through the lenses of Church history, Scripture, theology, and social development. Participants were invited to analyze and reflect on what it means to share Christ with those who have never heard the Gospel, as well as how to continually evangelize among believers. Additionally, participants were encouraged to reflect on how to effectively carry out missionary work within their own social and faith contexts, how to formulate missionary strategies, and how to maintain a balanced and proactive approach in responding to the call to share the Gospel with the world.



In the fourth week, **Sr. Gaby Yang** from the VF led the participants in learning how to organize *Rite of Christian Initiation for Adults* (RCIA) programs. Using *Our Journey Together* as a model (cfr. photo), Sr. Yang introduced the RCIA process and explored how to journey with catechumens—gathering, seeking faith together, and sharing personal faith experiences. Through this approach, participants were encouraged to foster engagement and interaction, ultimately leading the community to integrate faith into daily life.





The last week of the spring session took participants on a one-week pilgrimage to Rome. As in previous years, they visited the four major basilicas of Rome and the historical sites of ancient Rome. During the pilgrimage, they visited the Propaganda Fide and other communities. Highlights of the trip included concelebrating Mass at St. Peter's Basilica with Archbishop Claudio Celli, as well as a pilgrimage to Assisi, the hometown of St. Francis. Usually, the pilgrimage culminates with the Pope's General Audience, when the priests even have the precious opportunity to meet the Holy Father in person.

During the spring session, weekends were dedicated to group visits and excursions, providing participants with an opportunity to learn about the Church history, culture, and activities of Belgium and its neighboring regions (cfr. photo report). These activities included: Visiting KU Leuven and Damian church, where the opening Mass was celebrated. A pilgrimage to Germany, where participants visited the SVD in St. Augustine, the Overseas Chinese Student Association, and the China Center, as well as the Cologne Cathedral. They were warmly received by Fr. Martin Wellington, the director of the China Center. A visit to Amsterdam, Netherlands. A tour of the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (CICM) Motherhouse in Brussels, where participants learned about the history of CICM's missionary work in China. A pilgrimage to Banneux and Liège, where they also engaged in fellowship with Chinese Christian communities in Belgium. On Ascension Day, participants visited Bruges to witness the renowned Holy Blood Procession. This grand procession, which dates back to the late 13th century, is one of the largest religious celebrations in Belgium, drawing countless visitors and pilgrims each year. For the Chinese parish priests, who rarely have the chance to travel to Europe, witnessing this magnificent procession firsthand will be a truly awe-inspiring experience.

On May 30, the five-week Spring session of 2025 concludes with a graduation ceremony, marking the successful completion of this enriching experience. The participants return to China, carrying with them abundant knowledge, blessings, and inspiration, ready to resume their pastoral ministry with renewed spirit and dedication. The successful completion of this program also signifies that, despite faced various challenges, the VF remains committed to its founder's mission of serving the Catholic Church in China. With this renewed spirit, the VF will continue to launch new initiatives and embrace an even brighter future.

TAIPEI – Fan Ku Chat “范古講古聊天” and the Seventh Workshop on Spirituality of Dialogue Spring 2025

Clara Lin,

Director of the Ferdinand Verbiest Cultural Exchange Association

Chatting with Fan & Ku

From March to May, Verbiest Association offered a very rare and interesting ten sessions' course, open to both physical and online attendance, so that people outside of Taipei were also given the opportunity to easily join and participate.



The course is called “Chatting with Fan & Ku” (范古講古聊天) and it is devised as an informal chat, to talk about the history of Christianity and the Catholic Church. There are two lecturers, one is Fr. Fan Kai-ling (Francesco Carin CMF) from Spain, who has a PhD in Religious Studies from Beijing Normal University and was the former Provincial Superior of the Claretian Missionaries in East-Asia (cfr. photo). Prof. Ku Weiying was a History Professor at Taiwan National University where he is still honorary teacher, and has dedicated many years to the research of Catholic history with many books published and a long teaching experience. These two speakers are very knowledgeable and have made every effort to prepare the course, sharing from their many years of research. In February, many priests, religious and laity signed up for the program in advance, and the participants commented that the 3-month program has been very fruitful!

The Seventh Workshop on Spirituality of Dialogue May 2025 in Taipei

Starting in 2021 and for five consecutive years, Chinese Ferdinand Verbiest Cultural Exchange Association and St. Robert Bellarmine School of Theology at Fu Jen Catholic University jointly organized a yearly Workshop on “Spirituality of Dialogue”. Last year 2024, the topic was “The Year of Prayer 2024 - Towards the Jubilee Year of Hope”. Each workshop attracted many participants, between 80 and 100. We would like to express our special thanks to the Integral Holistic Development Team of the Taiwan Religious Association of Men and Women for being the co-organizer and warmly inviting all religious communities, parishes and Catholics to join us in this great event.

In 2025, we will continue to co-organize with St. Robert Bellarmine School of Theology, the 7th Workshop on Spirituality of Dialogue which will be held in May in the Theology School's auditorium. The theme of the workshop is Pope Francis's Fourth Encyclical *Dilexit Nos*. We are honored to have **Fr. Otfried Chen** (陳科神父), Secretary General of the Regional Bishop Conference of Taiwan. He will

present an overview of the encyclical *Dilexit Nos* which focuses on the human and divine love of the Heart of Jesus Christ. **Fr. Thomas Cui** (崔寶臣神父), President of St. Robert Bellarmine School of Theology, will present a lecture on the Spirituality of the Sacred Heart in the Bible, followed by **Fr. Augustine Tsang** (曾慶導神父) of the Society of Jesus, who will present the Devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the Society of Jesus. **Fr. Francisco Carin**, CMF, will take a reflective look at the significance of Pope Francis's Fourth Encyclical, *Dilexit Nos*, in a world plagued by wars, socio-economic inequalities, out-of-control consumerism, and technological threats to mankind. **Sr. Ann Wang** (王佩臻修女) of the Society Devoted to the Sacred Heart (SDSH) will share the importance of this encyclical for catechetical ministry. Over the years, the sisters have directed the Taipei Archdiocesan Catechetical Center, doing extensive use of the Jesuit approach to provide a wide range of catechetical studies, spiritual seminars, parish retreats and communion activities.

In addition, the *Good Shepherd Social Welfare Foundation* has long been concerned with women's and children's issues, and is committed to serving abused women and children, unfortunate girls, abandoned children, children who witness domestic violence, unwed mothers, at-risk youth, and victims of human trafficking, and has been a pioneer in Taiwan's women's and children's protection work. **Sr. Lydia Wang** (王奕潔修女) of the Good Shepherd Sisters (RGS) will share her experience on how the Good Shepherd Foundation, together with its partners in

shared mission, serve those who are in distress and underprivileged to feel God's mercy and be witnesses of God's healing love through their service work, and while accompanying them in their social, psychological and spiritual recovery.

Taipei Verbiest Association for cultural Exchange:

Chinese Ferdinand Verbiest Cultural Exchange Association was founded by the Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation Leuven (Belgium). Throughout the years, it has committed to accompanying the development of the Chinese church and the promotion of Catholic pastoral activities in Taiwan. Since its establishment in 2017, it has successively organized courses, workshops and seminars on church history, catechesis, faith spirituality and social teaching.



PART 2 – The local Chinese church is celebrating its centenary 1926-2026: The Foundation will be celebrating with them

What exactly will be celebrated in 2026 and how will the Foundation celebrate?

In 1926, the first six Chinese bishops were ordained by Pius XI in Rome. A peak moment in the history of the Church in China. In 2026, we will celebrate the centenary of this event. We certainly need to know the historical background of this, because without it, it is difficult for us to understand the Church in China today. How historic was that event? Who were the major promoters of it? And how does the Verbiest Foundation want to celebrate this centenary? That is why we report here on the important role that Mgr. Celso Costantini and Vincent Lebbe played in close cooperation with Cardinal Van Rossum of the Propaganda Fide and with Pope Pius XI, who ordained the bishops in Rome. We also report on the Congregation of the Discipuli Domini (The Disciples of the Lord), founded by Mgr. Costantini as the first Chinese religious congregation, which is still active today in China, Taiwan and Southeast Asia.

The Verbiest Foundation hopes to celebrate this centenary together with the Discipuli Domini and with the Chinese communities in Southeast Asia. We will probably have more information about this in our next Verbiest Courier.

The first six Chinese Bishops of Modern Times: A Study in Indigenization¹

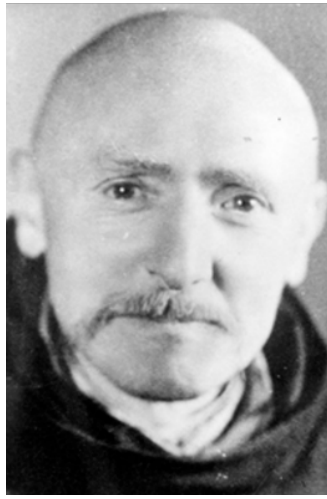
Paul Mariani

By the 1920s the Catholic Church in China found itself in a predicament. The Propaganda Fide focused on the great needs of the truly missionary territories. One of the most charismatic new churchmen on the scene was the Dutch Cardinal

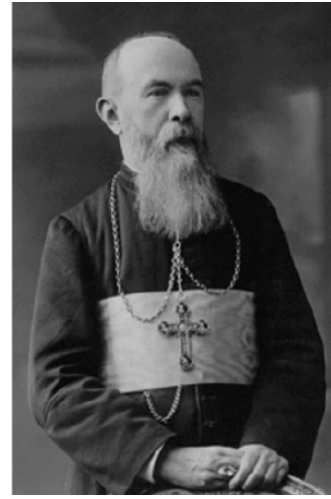
Willem van Rossum who was made prefect of Propaganda Fide in 1918. Proceeding cautiously but decisively, he proved crucial in the effort to ordain local Chinese bishops. However, some high-ranking prelates in the Vatican still needed to be convinced of the need for an indigenous hierarchy. One prophetic priest and missionary in China, Frederic Vincent Lebbe (1872 – 1940) who arrived in China just after the Boxer Rebel-



Cardinal Willem van Rossum.



Fr. Vincent Lebbe.



Jean-Baptiste-Marie Budes de Guebriant.

lion, would be of crucial importance. As early as 1908, Lebbe insisted that Church policy should be “China to the Chinese, the Chinese to Christ”, and in 1917 he began to argue for the consecration of Chinese bishops. As a French-speaking Belgian, Lebbe was in the unique position of having some distance from French colonialism, yet close enough to see its workings from the inside. At that time the number of Catholic dioceses was just under 100, which served a Chinese Catholic population of 2,4 million. Lebbe’s proposal was quite simple. Some of these dioceses were minuscule, with fewer than twenty priests to minister to several thousand Catholics. Would it be that difficult to move just one of these dioceses to the authority of a Chinese bishop? Or, barring that, could a diocese be detached from an existing one and given to a Chinese bishop?

At the end of World War I, the Holy See could turn its attention to the mission world and wanted, despite heavy protests from the French government, its own representative to ascertain the situation of its flock, clergy, and religious in China. The Holy See resorted to stealth diplomacy and took two important actions: dispatching an official representative on a fact-finding mission to China and publishing a papal letter on the missions.

In July 1919, the Holy See appointed Bishop Jean-Baptiste-Marie Budes de Guebriant, M.E.P. (1860 – 1935), to be its visitor to China. On November 30, 1919, Benedict XV promulgated *Maximum Illud*, a decisive turning point of the Church toward the non-European world: “For the local clergy is not to be trained merely to perform the humbler duties of the ministry, acting as the assistants of foreign priests. On the contrary, they must take up God’s work as equals, so that someday they will be able to enter upon the spiritual leadership of their people”. (MI 15)

Rome’s reform policies in strengthening the local clergy and building an indigenous hierarchy had idealistic, but also pragmatic motivations. World War I had hurt the mission cause, with many missionaries recalled to serve in the medical and chaplain corps of their respective nations. The war had devastated the youth of Europe as well as the ranks of future

missionaries. In addition, persecutions such as the Boxer Rebellion had proven the vulnerability of Christian missionaries in China. Therefore, supporting a strong native clergy was to ensure the future survival of the Church.

Benedict XV died on January 22, 1922, and was followed up by Pius XI. Lebbe and others waited to see if Pius XI would continue Benedict’s bold program outlined in *Maximum Illud* and were anxious to hear if he would use the information gathered by de Guebriant. He did. Six months after his election, Pius XI secretly chose Celso Costantini to be his delegate for an important mission in China. Costantini was made an archbishop prior to his departure so he would be the highest-ranking prelate in China when he arrived. Celso Costantini arrived in China with the delegated authority to choose the first Chinese bishops. To advance his program, Costantini decided to call a synod of the bishops in China in the Spring of 1924. The synod in Shanghai was the first nationwide council of the Catholic Church in China. The synod passed several important resolutions: It opened all church posts to local clergy without any reservations and gave Chinese clergy the same rights as missionaries. In terms of governance, the synod maintained that each local ordinary would need a council of three older and more prudent churchmen, one of whom was



Pope Pius XI.



Celso Costantini.

¹ Summarized version of the original article: *The First Six Chinese Bishops of Modern Times: A Study in Church Indigenization in The Catholic Historical Review*, Vol. 100, No. 3 (Summer, 2014), pp. 486-513 (28 pages) online accessible via <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43898674>. Summary by the redaction of Verbiest Koerier. Pictures all from VF publication archives.

to be Chinese. The synod also echoed the Holy See's request that missionaries should avoid as much as possible any contact with foreign diplomats and gave guidelines for such contacts when they were deemed necessary.

On February 28, 1926, Pius XI promulgated his own missionary encyclical: *Rerum Ecclesiae*, in which he made Benedict XV's desires his own. The pope gave his own letter a higher level of authority by making it an encyclical rather than an apostolic letter. *Rerum Ecclesiae* made it clear that the native clergy were not to be second-class citizens in their own Church. Rather, they were to be prepared to take the highest possible positions in their native churches.

On March 30, 1926, van Rossum announced Pius XI's decision that the pope would consecrate the first Chinese bishops at St. Peter's in Rome. On September 10, the six traveled to Rome, accompanied by Costantini. The solemn Mass of Consecration on October 28 was attended by more than 40,000 people and lasted for four hours. Lebbe, de Guebriant, and Van Rossum were all present, as was a large group of Chinese students who had traveled from Paris, Louvain, and other places. After their consecration, the bishops continued their travels to France, Belgium, and Holland, where they were received enthusiastically at each destination. Among other sources, Lebbe's letters reveal pertinent details about the six bishops that shed light on their appointment:



The First Chinese Synod at the Cathedral in Xu-jia-hui, Shanghai from May 14 to June 12, 1924.



Consecration ceremony on October 28, 1926.

Zhao Huayi (1880 – 1927) had been born outside Beijing. His entire family was intensely Catholic. His father and other relatives were martyred during the Boxer Rebellion. He had worked for a long time in the missions before becoming a professor at the Beijing preparatory seminary and was Costantini's personal secretary. Zhao was forty-six when he was ordained bishop. Of the six, he was the only member of the diocesan clergy and took the Vicariate of Xuanhua.

Odoric Cheng Hede OFM (1873 – 1928) was born in Laohekou, Hubei Province. He had traveled to Italy at age ten. Eventually he became fluent in Italian, joined the Franciscans in Italy, and was ordained at age twenty-six. He returned to China in 1903, serving for four years as a missionary and then for many years as a seminary teacher and administrator. He was fifty-three when he was made bishop and was given the pastoral care of Puqi.

Aloysius Chen Guodi OFM (1875 – 1930) was born in Anyangcun, Shanxi Province. He also had a brother priest. He joined the Order of Friars Minor (Franciscans) and was ordained a priest at age twenty-seven. After the Boxer uprising, he was sent to investigate the religious situation in Shanxi. For nine years he served as secretary to two Italian bishops and taught Latin and apologetics at the Taiyuan seminary. He also was a member of the provincial board of education in Shanxi. He was fifty when he was made a bishop and was given the care of Fenyang.

Melchior Sun Dezhen CM (1869 – 1951) was born in Beijing. He was ordained a priest at twenty-seven and entered the Vincentian order two years later. For twelve years he was a professor of Latin at the minor seminary in Beijing, and for another twelve years he was a missionary in rural areas. He was fifty-six when he was made bishop. His diocese was Lixian (in present day Hebei province).

Simon Zhu Kaimin SJ (1868 – 1960) was from a prominent family in Shanghai, with a Catholic tradition of some 300 years. His relatives had extensive business interests throughout the region. That he was from a family of high social status counted heavily in his favor, as he would command respect from the Chinese civil authorities. Zhu entered the seminary at thirteen, joined the Society of Jesus at nineteen, and was ordained a priest at twenty-nine. He had served as a domestic missionary in various parts of China. He was made bishop just before his fifty-seventh birthday and was given the care of Haimen.

Joseph Hu Ruoshan CM (1881 – 1962) was born in Dinghai, Zhejiang Province. Orphaned at five, he was raised by Catholic missionaries. He became a Vincentian at twenty-five and a priest at twenty-eight. He did missionary work for six years and then taught philosophy and dogmatic theology at the theological seminary in Ningbo. He was a consulting theologian at the Shanghai synod. Ordained a bishop at forty-five, he received the care of Taizhou Diocese.

Not one of the six candidates was contested. They had been raised in devoted Catholic families and were well educated in their faith from an early age. They all spoke at least one Western language, often well enough to teach it. Five of them were priests from religious orders, which meant that their foreign superiors



From left to right: Mgr. Hu Ruoshan, Mgr. Zhu Kaimin, Mgr. Zhao Huaiyi, Secretary General of Propaganda Fide Francesco Marchetti-Selvaggiani, Cardinal van Rossum, Archbishop Costantini, Mgr. Chen Guodi, Mgr. Cheng Hede, and Mgr. Sun Dezhen.

could attest to their good training and solid seminary preparation. The six were posted widely throughout China, but none of them were given important sees such as Beijing or Nanjing. The most important positions continued to be held by foreigners and nine tenths of the bishops were still of alien birth and allegiance. However, the Church had taken a momentous step, one which might well lead to other and even greater ones. The naming of these six bishops began an inexorable process forward for the entire Catholic Church. In 1927, the first native bishop was appointed in Japan. In 1933, the first indigenous bishops were named for Vietnam and Sri Lanka. In 1939 in Rome, Pius XII consecrated twelve bishops from all the continents of the world, including the first sub-Saharan bishop (from Uganda) and the first bishop from Madagascar. In 1945 he named the first cardinals from mission lands. By 1951, there were forty Chinese bishops and 100 native bishops in missionary lands. At the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), indigenous bishops from all parts of the world were present. But it was China that set the pace, serving as a gift for the whole Church.

Cardinal Celso Costantini and the Congregatio Discipulorum Domini (CDD)

The redaction²

Celso Benigno Luigi Costantini was born on 3 April 1876 in Castions di Zoppola (Italy) as the second of ten children to Costante Costantini (a building contractor) and Maddalena Altan. He followed his father's trade as a mason and worked since 1887 in that trade before deciding to undergo ecclesial studies. He studied first from 1892 until 1897 at Portogruaro and then attended as a part-time student at the Academia di San Tommaso in Rome from 1897 until 1899. It was there that he obtained his doctorates in philosophical and theological studies in 1899. During World War I he served as a chaplain in the Italian Armed Forces since 12 December 1917.

China

He became the Titular Bishop of Hierapolis in 1921, and he received his episcopal consecration a month later. Pope Pius XI appointed Costantini as the first Apostolic Delegate to China on 12 August 1922 and also made him Titular Archbishop of Theodosiopolis in Arcadia the following month. Before his departure he met with Pius XI and with Cardinal Willem Marinus van Rossum. They advised Costantini to implement all dimensions of *Maximum Illud*, Pope Benedict XV's 1919 apostolic letter on the work of missionaries. Costantini arrived in Hong Kong on 8 November 1922.

To complete his mission of localizing the Chinese Catholic Church during his years in China, Costantini used the missionary thought contained not only in *Maximum Illud*, but also in the 1926 encyclical *Rerum Ecclesiae* of Pope Pius XI. According to Cardinal Costantini's way of thinking, the Chinese Church belonged to the Chinese people. But at the same time, it was also in communion with the Holy Father.



Card. Costantini (right) and Card. Angelo Roncalli (the later Pope John XXIII). © Associazione cardinalcostantini.it

² Info gathered from: Jean-Paul Wiest, *Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Christianity*; Francis Chong, *CDD* (transl. by Peter Barry, M.M.), *Cardinal Celso Costantini and the Chinese Catholic Church*, in *Tripod* 2022/02.

There is a Chinese proverb, which says: "Good tools are necessary to successfully carry out a job". Similarly, if you really want to establish a local Church, you must start with education. In other words, only if the local clergy receives a better formation, a substantial contribution will be made to the development of the local Church. Cardinal Costantini was a far-sighted person. At the first synod of the Chinese Catholic Church in 1924, which he organized, one decision taken was that in different areas of China 14 regional seminaries would be established. The purpose would be to offer higher quality of education in philosophy and theology to youth seeking to follow the path to priesthood. By 1936, 11 of these regional seminaries were already up and running, fully involved in the work of training clergy. He also encouraged the bishops and heads of missions to send suitable seminarians and young priests to Beijing's Furen University, Shanghai's Zhendan University, or any other university to study Chinese and the Humanities.

The Establishment of the Congregatio Discipulorum Domini

In his writings Cardinal Costantini often mentioned the missionary thinking of St. Paul, the Apostle. St. Paul used an abundance of knowledge and an apostolic spirit to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ and to set up the local Church. Costantini thought that St. Paul was successful in converting the Athenians because of his grasp and understanding of Greek culture. Therefore, he firmly believed that the localization of the Chinese Church should not just stop at the creation of the Chinese hierarchy but should involve initiating St. Paul's missionary methods. Of course, in preaching the Gospel, we should not make a distinction between rich and poor, nor between peoples of higher or lower levels of education. However, to influ-

ence and convert Chinese intellectuals and the whole Chinese race of people, the Church needs a clergy which is rich in the knowledge of Chinese culture and literature.

Observing this situation, Costantini set out to establish the *Congregatio Discipulorum Domini* (Disciples of the Lord), the first Chinese clerical religious institute. He hoped that this Congregation could evangelize through culture and thus be able to contribute to the conversion of the whole Chinese people. On December 12, 1926, he submitted a letter of application for the establishment of a congregation to *Propaganda Fide*. On January 4, 1927, Bishop van Rossum, CSSR as the head of *Propaganda Fide* stated to Celso that the application for the establishment of the congregation was approved. He visited Cha Er, not far from Xuan Hua, to buy a plot of land with the help of Bishop Zhao Huayi, Bishop of Xuanhua, and Father Zhang Bulai. On this land, the first monastery and motherhouse of the CDD was established, named Emmaus Monastery. In the field of candidate formation, Celso asked for help from the Redemptorist (CSSR) priests from the Spanish Province. On March 31, 1931, the Congregation of the Disciples of the Lord was recognized by the Holy See.

Celso Costantini gave a life motto to the disciples of God: "*Nil Contra Ecclesiam, Nil Sine Ecclesia, Omnia Pro Ecclesia*" - "Nothing Against the Church, Nothing Without the Church, Everything For the Church." From here it can be seen that Celso Costantini expected that all the apostolic work of the disciples of God should be centered on the Church. In fact, he emphasized that if the purpose of the congregation conflicts with the purpose of the Church, then the disciples of God must prioritize the purpose of the Church.

PART 3 – CICM (Scheut) has promoted the inculturation of faith in China and Taiwan

The redaction

Verbiest Foundation honors that tradition in its publications but especially through active participation, whenever possible, to promote inculturation of faith in China even today.

Inculturation of the homage to the ancestors in the liturgy

Homage to the ancestors has been central to Chinese culture for centuries. As early as the 17^e century, the Jesuits managed to obtain permission from Rome, to adapt the Church's liturgy to it. The Pope gave his agreement but others in the Church were not ready. Offering incense, flowers and fruits to the ancestors was considered "superstition". After more than half a century of internal sharp disputes about it within the Church, Rome chose to ban it, thus restoring peace. This caused a historical misunderstanding between the emperor and the pope. Heavy negative consequences for the Church of China still reverberate until today. Vatican II made a historic positive breakthrough in this by not only allowing Mass in Chinese but

also strongly recommending the liturgy *Homage to the Ancestors*. This officially negated the criticism "superstition". But the bishops of China were not present at Vatican II. Cardinal Yu Bin and Bishop Luo Kouang of Taiwan were there, however, and they worked out a model of a Chinese liturgy *Homage to the Ancestors* officially celebrated in the churches of Taiwan from the 1970s until today. Scheut worked diligently in his parishes in Taiwan to promote this liturgy.

In China, to this day, that liturgy does not happen. Not because the bishops oppose it but because their Christians are not ready for it. No one blames them because, strangely enough, one can call this a consequence of their docility to Rome. For 300 years they remained faithful to the Pope's



prohibition of offering incense because some called it superstition and that was mortal sin. The perception of that prohibition for 300 years created a negative mentality toward that adaptation and to convert it into a positive acceptance and celebration along with it in a liturgy would be asking too much. Out of prudence, the bishops wisely choose to wait until the religious experience of Christians in China is ready for it.

Scheut and the Verbiest Foundation have been working hard since 1982

to promote openness to this crucial inculturation. Liturgical celebrations of Chinese Christians in Belgium or the Netherlands together with Christians from the West often become opportunities to organize a *Chinese Homage to the Ancestors* and thus to experience its profound meaning. To understand those celebrations a little better, here is some more explanation.

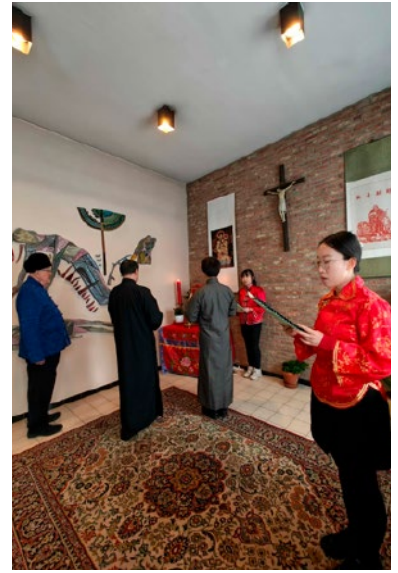
The liturgy proceeds solemnly, entirely in the traditional style of the ancient Chinese rites, before a special *altar of the ancestors*, with at its center the memorial panel for the ancestors, and next to it flowers, fruit, wine and incense, which will be offered. Its meaning is beautifully explained in Chinese on the colorful cloth covering the altar: *All the Lord's gifts reached us through our ancestors. We offer them as a tribute and that our ancestors may also now, permanently share in all that is good, beautiful and true.*

- Incense speaks of homage to God and of our prayer ascending to the Father.
- Flowers represent all that is true, beautiful and good on this earth.
- Fruit indicates the gifts we receive, and the good we do.

Next to the altar are two proverbs written on wooden panels with gold lettering on pitch black glossy background. The text was once personally written by Emperor Kangxi. It praises the goodness and justice of the eternal, all-powerful God and creator. Few countries or cultures possess such ancient sayings from their king or emperor. Chinese Christians are proud of it. Not surprisingly, even today those proverbs can be seen in numerous churches in the People's Republic of China.

Since 1982, the Foundation has organized this liturgy in dozens of places in Belgium and abroad: among others, in the homes of Scheut, Leuven, Schilde, Kessel-Lo, Vught. Also, in parish communities in Bruges, Turnhout, Beveren, Haasdonk, Liège, Jambes, Framont, etc., even in the Netherlands and Germany [Sankt Augustin SVD]. All the necessary liturgical Chinese paraphernalia and clothing were delivered to us by our colleague Louis Kuo Pinsheng from Taiwan. The Founda-

tion even managed twice to broadcast a complete Eucharist celebration on the National Television channel on Sunday. Once it was presided by Bishop Jia Yanwen, Archbishop of Taipei, a second time presided by Bishop Tikang when he was Archbishop of Taipei. The celebration was accompanied by the choir and Chinese orchestra of the CICM Kuang Jen Primary School of Taipei. Each time, the liturgy makes a deep impression on Christians from the West. It proceeds as follows:



1. First, a facilitator invites all present to stand up. In a clear voice he announces: The priest together with the co-assistants take their places.
2. Then the facilitator invites all to listen to the reading from the Book of Proverbs chapter 44, verses 1-15.
3. After reading, the message sounds: *Let us remember and praise our great ancestors. Homage to ancestors is a duty of all generations. To them we owe everything.*
4. Following this and in a clear voice, the facilitator then successively announces: *Offering of Incense, Offering of Flowers, Offering of Fruits, Offering of Wine.* The co-assistants offer the offerings one by one to the priest who solemnly offers to the sound of the gong and then bows together with the whole community. The solemnity with which all this proceeds impresses and inspires reflection. This mood reaches its climax when, at the end, at the signal of the gong, all bow together three times toward the altar.
5. Then the facilitator proclaims: *End of ceremony.*

This liturgy of homage gets to the heart of a Chinese faith experience. A precious treasure peculiar to Chinese culture that impresses every other culture. A successful inculturation of Chinese celebration of which the Chinese Church is proud. Gladly, the Verbiest Foundation actively participates in its promotion. Faithful from outside of China silently listen to it and feel enriched. Recommended as a model of interchurch exchange and enrichment.

History of inculturation in China: “400 Years of Catechetical Teaching in China” by Fr. Dr. Joseph Jennes CICM
Many years this was a manual for training CICM (Scheut) missionaries

In the years 1920-30, about 10-15 Scheut Fathers left for China every year, after they received a solid introduction to Chinese culture. Their preparation for the inculturation of the Christian message in China began when they entered Scheut at the age of 18. By the time they left for China, they had been learning the Chinese language intensively for 6-7 years. They were able to read the Chinese newspaper. And they were also taught about Chinese culture, history and geography. P. Dr. Jozef Jennes taught them in particular about the history of inculturation of faith in China.



Jozef Jennes CICM obtained his doctorate in Church History from the *Gregoriana* in Rome and became one of the principal teachers in the House of Scheut in Louvain. He taught them in the 1940s on “400 Years of Catechesis in China” with an account on Matteo Ricci’s attempts at inculturation and on the *Chinese Rites controversy* between the Jesuits and the other mission congregations in China. In 1942, Jennes published his Dutch book “400 Years of Catechesis in China,” the only book then in existence on that subject. Even 30 years

later, when Scheut established the *Taiwan Pastoral Center* in Taipei in 1970, it was discovered that this was the only book on that subject. It was then translated into English by Bert Van Lierde CICM and translated into Chinese by Tian Yong Zheng SJ. The Pastoral Center then published both translations together as a manual for classes at the *Pastoral Center*. (cfr. photo). Until today, this remains the only book on that important subject. Therefore, the Verbiest Foundation decided to republish both the English and Chinese updated editions. The well-known Sinologist Prof. Dr. Yang Fanhong has now edited the book with important enriching notes. Today it still fills a gap and is in fact an important manual for catechesis classes

in Chinese seminaries. Jozef Jennes CICM is best known in Scheut as the founder of the Mission in Japan, but even years before that he was one of Scheut’s most remarkable scholars.¹



The Christian message through Chinese catechetical prints: A curious and bold initiative by Leo Van Dijk CICM

In his book on the history of catechesis in China, J. Jennes points out the lack, until the 19e century, of adapted Chinese-style prints for visual catechetical instruction. Prints of Our Lady in Chinese style existed quite early. But it was not until the 19e century that initiatives were taken by the Jesuits in Shanghai to express the Christian message in Chinese style prints: first by Brother John Ferrer SJ, who himself had been trained in painting in Rome. In 1852 he founded a school in Shanghai for training Chinese artists in Christian art. That remarkable initiative was well on its way, but the center burned down and that was the end. Adolphe Vasseur SJ did remarkable work through his *Oeuvre des Images* with the cooperation of the orphanage in Shanghai who colored the prints². Until those years, the missionaries themselves brought masses of beautiful prints chosen from those most used for catechesis in Europe such as, for example, those of the *Catéchisme en Images* published by the *Maison de la Bonne Presse*. Schumacher’s German plates were also widely used and distributed until the 20^e century. The dominant mentality also of missionaries of that time was “China adapts to the West” rather than vice versa. Until the early 20^e century, there were only sporadic attempts to achieve representation of the Christian message with Chinese-style prints.

In that context, Leo Van Dijk³ CICM took a curious, bold initiative seeking inculturation in proclamation. In 1928, he published in book form his *Wenda Xiangjie* 《问答像解》 40 colored catechism plates, with appropriate explanatory text for the use of catechists in their classes. It was an attempt, through Chinese-style prints, to visually present to catechumens how, as Chinese, one experiences the gospel within the familiar environment of Chinese society. The prints suggest a quietly devout and dignified atmosphere. The choice of colors, composition and representation of each print is conform to Chinese aesthetics. The Biblical message visually presented in Chinese style.



Plate 1 of *Wenda Xiangjie*.

1 Jozef Jennes also made a study of the “Rites Controversy” and passed those notes on to one of his students, Frans Bontinck CICM in whom he saw a possible important scholar for the future. He encouraged him to develop those notes further. Frans Bontinck did just that and in the 1950s wrote a historical doctoral thesis on the “Rites Controversy” at the Gregorian University in Rome. This was published and is still today considered the standard work on the Rites Controversy that should not be missing from any scholar’s library.
 2 A copy of the book is kept in the archive of the Verbiest Foundation, “The History of Salvation”: Old and New Testament, the story in traditional literary language, beautifully illustrated with colorful but Western prints. Those and also other prints from that and later times, some already more “inculturated,” are because of their content or style no longer suitable for catechetical teaching today but they are precious documents that bear witness in our time to the way in which for centuries the message was proclaimed in China and to the evolution that took place there over the years seeking more appropriate ways of proclamation. A remarkable example of this is also “Catechesis on Heaven” by Raymond De Jaeger SAM. A limited publication to make some of these -- as Documents from the rich catechetical archive of the Church in China -- available would be useful.
 3 Leo Van Dijk CICM (1878-1951) was ordained priest in 1902 and left for China that year. Was pastor in Gansu (Lanzhou), then in Ningxia and Suiyuan. Died in Schilde in 1951. His catechetical records were published in Ningxia.



Plate 28 of Wenda Xiangjie.

In 1935, Van Dijk published 40 prints on the life of Christ 《救主行实图解》 with explanatory text on each print. Beyond that, he also published a complete series of large colored plates in Chinese style to be used for catechetical instruction. Van Dijk's initiative was bold and new. People had to get used to it. Until then, the message had been proclaimed and presented through Western art. That practice lasted more than 200 years. It was already

Upon his arrival in China, the Provincial Superior at Xiwanzi – the later Bishop Leo De Smedt (1881 – 1951) – inspired by the need for cultural adaptation as propagated by the delegate of the Vatican, Msgr. Celso Costantini (1876 – 1958), gave Mon Van Genechten the task to master the techniques of Chinese traditional arts and crafts and to make the Gospel acceptable among the Chinese population. In the period 1937 – 1938 he made a series of mural paintings in churches at Liuhaio (Inner Mongolia) and Datong (Shanxi). Afterwards he was assigned as professor in the arts at the Catholic University of Beijing, where he continued to practice Chinese painting under the guidance of the famous scholar-artist Pu Xinyu (1896 – 1963). From 1939 until 1942 Van Genechten organized, under his Chinese name Fang Xisheng, a series of exhibitions and became more and more recognized by Chinese critics as well as by the Western press. During most of the war years Mon Van Genechten worked on the monumental painting *Suffering China*.

an accepted tradition where the gospel message was necessarily *Western* in the mindset of believers and non-believers alike. To change that mentality and accept that the Gospel message is for all cultures, all races and languages, that required effort and adaptation. Leo Van Dijk's prints were a first daring challenge on that field. For Christians, they succeeded quickly. Van Dijk's plates were distributed widely in the Church of China during the 1930-40s. Leo Van Dijk, a missionary in the parish pastoral, first in Gansu then in Ningxia, may be regarded as a pioneer in that field. He was talented and was the daring pioneer who creatively pushed open the gate to inculturation and succeeded in doing so. During the 1928 Leuven Missiological Week, Louis Schram CICM reported on that bold initiative of his confrère Van Dijk.



The monumental painting "Suffering China".

Fr. Mon Van Genechten CICM: From a Flemish artist to a Chinese artist in China⁴

Leo Van Dijk CICM was followed by Mon Van Genechten CICM, a native Flemish artist. He left for China as a Scheut Father and also as a formed artist. His CICM superiors and also the Apostolic Delegate Celso Costantini appealed to him when he arrived in China, to further develop his talents. He himself was also daring and creative allowing himself to be further formed by Chinese artists. He went to live for months in a temple in the West Mountains outside Beijing. He copied the ancient wall paintings in order to master the spirit of Chinese painting. He became the only Western artist in Beijing in the 1940s to exhibit his Chinese works together with Chinese artists. Sinologists Koen De Ridder and Benoît Vermander SJ described how they appreciated Mon Van Genechten's contribution.



Fr. Mon Van Genechten.

Benoît Vermander

I have looked again and again at the artwork of Mon Van Genechten, each time with renewed interest and admiration. However, my admiration does not come primarily from his authentic mastery of the Chinese painting techniques. There is something deeper in the sense of fellowship and affinity I feel when I look at his paintings, wood engravings or photographs. The impression they give me can be summarized in a single sentence: Mon Van Genechten became a true Chinese painter because he was a true Flemish painter.

His first works, when he was still in Flanders, testify to the sense of humanity, compassion and popular wit that is so typical of his artistic tradition. He learnt the Chinese painting techniques the hard way, and this apprenticeship caused a certain stiffness or conventionality in the works he produced during this period. The mission he had, to produce "religious paintings", reinforced this tendency. At the same time, the discipline of Chinese painting greatly softened and enriched his sense of line and landscape, and his drawings were gradually filled with the spirit, with the cosmic animation, which Chinese painting aims at expressing. But the most striking feature of

⁴ Data collected and edited from Leuven Chinese Studies XI. Mon Van Genechten, born in Geel (Belgium) 1903, died in Geel 1974. Went to China in 1930, was active in pastoral work in parishes of the diocese of Xiwanzi until 1938. Promoted the inculturation of Chinese Christian art in Beijing until 1947. Returned to Belgium in 1947 and continued to promote Chinese Christian art there and in Rome at the 1950 Rome Exhibition, retired to Geel in 1971.



"In de Stille Kempen", one of Van Genechten's early works.

Mon Van Genechten's artistic evolution was his coming back to the popular, compassionate vein that characterized his first works, without losing what he had learnt during his Chinese apprenticeship.

Mon Van Genechten was able to sense the diversity of Chinese artistic tradition, especially of Buddhist and popular art, and to learn from it. Because of this, a few Chinese artists might still have reservations about this art, fearing that it goes astray and does not truly deserve to be called "Chinese". These reservations come from too narrow an understanding of the essence of Chinese art. The best of the artistic evolution of the last fifty years or so in China has been to retrieve its social, technical, religious and regional diversity. The Mongolian years of Mon Van Genechten have certainly contributed to open him to this diversity. And discovering the variety of Chinese art led him to greater artistic freedom. Ultimately, the question is not to determine whether Van Genechten's art is Chinese or Western, but whether or not his painting is strong and meaningful.

His paintings express the soul, the suffering and the dignity of the common people. In this sense, they are more "religious" than most conventional "religious" paintings. Taken together, Van Genechten's portraits paint the Way of the Cross traveled by the whole humankind and, in a special way, by the suffering Chinese nation. Social and political circumstances were giving another dimension to Van Genechten's art. The Christian art he was creating was not in-culturated "from above" anymore, it was a genuine creative process, rooted in historical experience. Did the great Flemish artists of the past not attain universality in the same way?

Mon Van Genechten liked to emphasize the wrinkles on a person's face. These wrinkles seem to be a sign of history that manifests itself throughout an individual's destiny. Looking at the wrinkles on the face of old Chinese or Flemish women one can sense the harshness of the road traveled by them and their ancestors, one can sense also a mute solidarity between the poor and the weak of the world. And such solidarity goes beyond time and space.

A painting can condense a variety of experiences: aesthetic, spiritual, political, and others. The artwork of Mon Van Genechten has to be looked at within the tormented context of China and the Chinese Church of that time. They emphasize suffering,

and this might be one of the main reasons for their relevance today. It is sometimes said that Chinese art does not express suffering, that it always aims to represent peace and harmony. In fact, this is true for literati art, not for popular art, and even within the sphere of "noble" art, there are various indirect ways (the disposition of the lines of clothing, landscape metaphors...) for expressing human suffering. Mon Van Genechten expresses the *Passion* of humankind in the bold way that he learnt from his own artistic tradition. He was going to be followed by contemporary Chinese artists. Ink and wash painting is able to deal in its own way with poverty, ugliness and anguish. There were already resources in the Chinese artistic traditions enabling it to develop along this line, but the shock of the encounter with Western art led to a reappraisal of these resources. Today, what is at stake is not the preservation of cultural or artistic inheritances as if they were of immutable essence, but rather the creation of new, creative artistic syntheses.

The lesson to be drawn from the encounters between Chinese and Western art that have occurred during this century is clear enough: first be yourself, learn from the artistic spirit that has pervaded your culture and you will be able to fully enter another culture and another artistic world. Entering another culture will not leave you intact, you will have to undergo radical and sometimes painful transformations. At the same time, the dialogue between what you have learnt in depth and what you are experiencing anew will help you to go deeper within your inner Self. It will help you to bring to light unprecedented forms of art. Mon Van Genechten has created an art that is truly his own and that testifies to the struggles of his generation. This is why his work and his life remain so meaningful for us today.

Chinese and/or Western style?

Inculturation of the Christian faith in China remained, even beyond and after Leo Van Dijk and Mon Van Genechten, a much discussed topic. Some Scheut Fathers also contributed to it. Well-known is the *John the Baptist*, Chinese style painted by Maurits Van Overwalle. Similarly, Jan-Baptist Steenackers built the famous church of Xiaoqiaopan in Chinese palace style. When Bishop Leo De Smedt planned to build a cathedral in Xiwanzi, he first had a design drawn entirely in Chinese style. But his Christians disagreed and replied to him, "*We want a church, not a temple*". The most famous Scheut Father architect Alfons De Moerloose who built most of the churches and monasteries in N. China did not follow Celso Costantini either. He thought the style of a Christian church should be gothic.

Chinese artists promoted their own Chinese religious art at the Hua Ming Art Gallery "华明艺廊" in Taipei

Today, fifty years after Scheut left China, dozens of new churches were built. Outside of the well-known National Seminary in Beijing, only a few more Chinese-style churches were built. This confirms that inculturation of the message is not solely -- perhaps not primarily -- determined by the style of catechetical prints, images or building style of churches. Many other, arguably even more important factors contribute to it. And anyway, as far as art is concerned, it is ultimately only China's own artists who have the charisma to express the Chi-



"Hail Mary" oil painting by Chen Mei-chun.



CICM Provincial Fr. Wim Bollen delivered a speech.

nese Christian's own faith in words, images or buildings. That may have been the intuition of Albert Geusens CICM when, as director of *Hua Ming Center*, he organized a first important Expo in 1963. That was not the beginning of the later *Hua Ming Art Gallery* but the expo did draw attention to the question: "Instead of a bookshop, wouldn't Scheut rather establish a Center for Promotion of Christian Art?"

In 1970, Scheut had already established the *Taiwan Pastoral Center* to form church ministers and promote Vatican II Pastoral renewal with emphasis also on inculturation of faith in China. Chinese artists can play a crucial role there. Average

people experience facts and view things only superficially. Artists see what is good, beautiful and true in everything and express it in sculpture, in music or in a painting. And in China you need Chinese artists for that. No one can replace them in that. Scheut decided to turn the former *bookshop* into a *Hua Ming Art Gallery* (华明艺廊), where Chinese artists exhibit their works of art, inspiring the faithful of Taiwan to live out their faith. Archbishop Tikang and the then *Kuang Jen Foundation* (光仁基金会) fully appreciated this thinking of Scheut. Thanks to their cooperation and support, *Hua Ming Art Gallery* (华明艺廊) was established.

Important key figures such as Ye Wei Min, Jiang Xin and Guo Bin Sheng animated this initiative for eight years encouraged by Bishop Tikang and Kuan Jen Foundation. Chinese artists exhibited their artworks at the *Hua Ming Art Gallery*. After a week-long exhibition in *Hua Ming*, the expo traveled to other



"Jesus Our Lord" Chinese Painting by Shu Hui-she.



"I am the way, the truth, & the life" Chinese painting by Ou Hao-nian.



"Our Lady" woodcut by Zhu Ming.



Mr. Ye Wei Min.



Mr. Jiang Xin.



Mr. Guo Bin Sheng.

dioceses in Taiwan. On site, the local bishop opened the expo each time. Priests, religious, believers and non-believers came to admire the works and grew in experiencing their own faith differently. A remarkable initiative, which was the continuation in Taiwan of what CICM (Scheut) had promoted fifty years earlier with Leo Van Dijk and Mon Van Genechten. The expo in Taiwan was a step forward. The organization of each expo was in the hands of Chinese organizers. Chinese artists were speaking and showing their message. The results were remarkable. Each expo marked a visible, palpable growth of the local Church in Taiwan. Someday this initiative may be re-activated.



Archbp. Luo Guang.



Fr. Zhang Chun Shen SJ (standing) delivered a speech.



Bp. Kupfer MM cutting the ribbon in Taichung.



Bp. Jia, Yao Zhaoming and Xi Murong discuss the art of localization.



Bp. Wang Yurong delivered a speech.



"Chinese Religious Art" published between 1980-1988 about the Hua Ming Art Gallery.

FROM THE ARCHIVE OF VERBIEST FOUNDATION: A bold historical initiative by KUL Rector De Somer 40 years ago

Jerom Heyndrickx, Scheut (CICM)

In 1985, 3 illicit (not recognized by Rome) Chinese official bishops visited KU Leuven and the Church in Belgium at the invitation of Rector De Somer. The visit lasted 13 days and was organized by the Verbiest Foundation. The bishops were officially welcomed to KU Leuven by Rector Roger Dillemans (after the death of Rector De Somer shortly before). Cardinal Danneels invited them to lunch followed by a long conversation. CICM (Scheut) which sponsored the entire visit welcomed these bishops from Communist China. Old missionaries exiled from China in 1950 had a conversation and joint prayer with them. The visit was historic and daring. It was the first time Communist China officially allowed a delegation of Catholic bishops to travel to the West. Rome could not give permission. Pope John Paul II silently let it happen.... It did mark the beginning of more than forty years of China-dialogue of the Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation.

Following are excerpts from Rector Dillemans's welcome address to the Chinese bishops at the KU Leuven Rectorate and from the speech at the farewell dinner in Leuven, in the presence of representatives of the Embassy of PRC in Belgium and representatives of the dioceses and institutes in Belgium visited by the bishops.

Your Excellencies,
Esteemed representatives of the Chinese Embassy,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my honor and great pleasure to welcome the Chinese Friendship Delegation to our university. The importance and full historical significance of this visit may be realized by many of us only after many years.

It is the first time in the history of the People's Republic of China that Catholic bishops from China are visiting Europe. That they chose to come to Belgium for that first visit is an extraordinary honor for us. Belgium is proud of its relations with China. By deciding to come to Belgium and more specifically to Leuven, our friends from China have made a meaningful decision. I would like to explain this further.

Our university's Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation is conducting research on the history of Belgium-China relations. From this we learn that throughout its history Belgium has highly valued friendship and cooperation with China. As early as 1832, the second year after independence, Belgium opened a plan for economic cooperation with China. Our country contributed to the modernization of China through the construction of the Beijing-Hankou railroad and the establishment of the first steelworks ever in China more specifically in Hanyang where Bishop Antonius Tu, coincidentally one of our guests today is bishop. Our research confirms that during that period Belgium developed, after America, the most intensive program of cooperation with China both in terms of technology and culture. Belgium confirmed its friendship with China when King Albert decided in 1926 to be the first of all Western countries to return its concession in Tianjin to China, its rightful owner. This gesture served as an example to other countries, and we are proud of it.

Excellencies, today we are at the beginning of a new phase in this Belgium-China relationship. It is abundantly clear to us that your friendship visit can be the beginning of a new period of intensive exchange between your country and our country, between the Church of China and our Church, possibly also between our university and the Catholic Major Seminaries in your country.



Your decision to come to Leuven also makes much sense, because from here some famous missionaries left for China. After his stay in China, the Italian Jesuit Martino Martini gave a lecture to the young Jesuits here at our university in 1654 to arouse interest and admiration for China and Chinese culture. After that lecture, three famous Jesuits left from Leuven to China: Philippe Couplet of Malines, François de Rougemont of Maastricht and Albert Dorville of Brussels. Shortly after them, Ferdinand Verbiest of Pittem also left from here.

Allow me to add that my great uncle, the Scheut father (CICM) Bishop Alphons Bermyn, was Bishop of Ordos (Inner Mongolia) and I feel so honored to greet here the Archbishop of Inner Mongolia Bishop Wang Xueming who, by the way, still wears Bishop Bermyn's ring (cfr. photo).

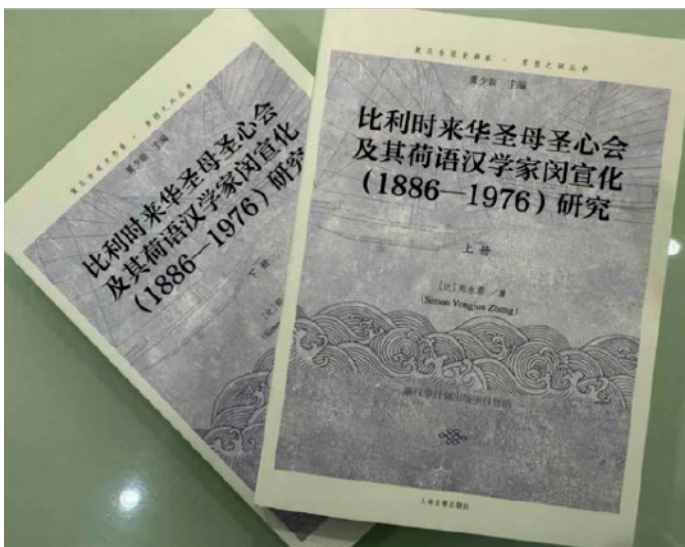
We are honored that you have accepted our invitation for this visit. This university, one of the oldest in Europe, has traditionally contributed to the formation of theology and philosophy professors in local Churches worldwide. Many Chinese *scholars* were also formed here. We are happy and willing to continue this tradition. Reopening the Chinese seminaries is a big task for you, we are aware of that. We therefore hope that your contacts with our professors in our faculties of Theology and Philosophy will be useful to you and help us to better understand your needs. May this lead to a fruitful exchange between our university and your seminaries. May it be a contribution to the process of modernization in your country for which we have the greatest admiration.



NEWLY LAUNCHED PUBLICATION IN CHINA: A study on the history of CICM (Scheut) in China and its Dutch-speaking sinologist Jozef Mullie

Simon Yongjun Zheng,
Researcher at the Verbiest Institute KU Leuven

The Belgian missionaries, in particular the Flemish, have been mentioned in Chinese sources in a number of ways. Their handwritten materials, such as the writings of van Rubroek, Verbiest,... provide us with a wealth of information about China from their perspective. Especially, the CICM missionaries, captured my attention and piqued my interest, so much so that their works and stories became the focus of my PhD research.



Price two volumes: € 30 (postage not included)
ISBN: 9787573213747
602 pages - Simplified Chinese.

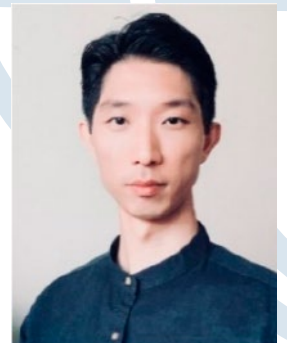
CICM was established in the 19th century, consisted primarily of Belgian and Dutch missionaries conducting missionary work in China. As early as 1865, the first 4 Scheut Fathers arrived in this Far East land, and over the next 90 years, nearly 700 people followed in their footsteps, leaving a lasting impression across many regions of Northern China. Among their many accomplishments were the establishment of schools, the organization of charitable activities, and, most notable, the conduct of extensive academic research. The missionaries gradually took it upon themselves to introduce Chinese culture, people, language, society, and customs to Europe, thus

leading to the creation of Belgium's first professional sinologists. Fr. Jozef Mullie, cicm was one of those notable Belgian sinologists. His research on the Chinese language, in particular Northern dialects and Classical Chinese, has continued to be of academic interest and influence.

The results of my four-year PhD research have now been published in China as a monograph in the academic series of Fudan University, "Fudan Global History—Between the East and West". This book is divided into two volumes, the first volume describes the CICM's early history, thereby giving the reader an understanding of their hardships during their formative years in Belgium, and their struggles upon arrival in China. The second volume describes Mullie's life as a Chinese missionary and his research in Sinology, specifically Chinese linguistics. At the end of the book, I briefly introduce Mullie's two life-long monographs, which are intended to provide readers with a better overview and understanding of Mullie's important but nearly forgotten contributions to the academic field of Dutch-speaking Sinology. It is no doubt, in my personal opinion, that the Chinese linguistic works left behind by Mullie can provide Dutch-speaking individuals of today with a fresh perspective and inspiration to examine both spoken and classical Chinese in terms of articulation, grammar, writing instruction, and usage.

About the author:

Simon Yongjun Zheng 郑永君, received his PhD in History from Fudan University in 2021. This study was sponsored by the Ferdinand Verbiest Foundation. He is currently an academic researcher at the Verbiest Institute KU Leuven. Simon's research focuses on the history of Christianity in China, Dutch-speaking Missionary Sinology, and Sino-Belgian encounters.



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IN MEMORIAM Dr. Paul Rule



VF PhotoArchive - Paul, during our 1995 international conference on *The History of the Relations Between the Low Countries and China in the Qing Era (1644-1911)*.

On 20 November, 2024, Dr. Paul Rule passed away. Paul Rule was a welcome guest at our conferences, and presented remarkable research results, mainly on the history of the Jesuits in China, which we gladly published in our proceedings. Hereunder we take up a memorial, written by Fr. G. Criveller on the website of St. Joseph University, Macao, to commemorate him:

“Paul Anthony Rule (1934-2024): Scholar on the Jesuit Mission to China”

*Gianni Criveller,
Director of the PIME Center in Milan*

I first met Paul Rule in 1994 in Brescia (Italy), during a groundbreaking symposium on Giulio Aleni, the first Jesuit missionary to China to be involved in the Chinese Rites Controversy. I remember Rule's fervent argumentation in favor of Aleni's stance in the fateful controversy. Since then, I cannot really count how many times we met in numerous symposiums on China mission, held in Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Macau and Europe. For my own dissertation on Aleni, Rule's *K'ung-Tzu or Confucius* (1986) was a preliminary must. Rule published dozens of other well-researched studies on China Mission in Late Ming and Early Qing.

Australian born and educated Paul Rule taught Chinese Religions and History at La Trobe University in Melbourne until 2002, but continued to collaborate with many international

academic Institutions, particularly with the Ricci Institutes of San Francisco and Macau. He received education in the Society of Jesus, and was a Jesuit priest from 1955 to 1964.

The contribution of Paul Rule to scholarship on Jesuit China Mission is monumental and essential for any one working in the field. The last and most impressive legacy of Rule is exactly on the Rites Controversy: together with Claudia Von Collani, he produced the English translation, commentary and annotation of the *Acta Pekinensia*. They are the records of the legation of Maillard de Tournon to China in 1705-1710 compiled in Latin by Jesuit Kilian Stumpf. The impressive work with its huge amount of previously unedited information, counts three volumes, published in 2015, 2019 and 2024, for a total of about 2500 pages. Indeed, Paul Rule worked until his last day.

CHINA TRIP 2025

“In the footsteps of the Scheut Fathers (CICM)”

China Commercial International Travel Service Co., Ltd. is organizing a pilgrimage to China with the cooperation of the Verbiest Foundation. The trip will take place in October 2025. Hereunder you can find the itinerary.

15-day pilgrimage to China October 10 – October 24, 2025

Brussels - Beijing - Chengde - Chaoyang - Fuxin - Shenyang - Xi'an - Zhangjiakou - Beijing - Brussels

The journey begins in **Beijing**. There will be a visit to the tombs of Ricci, Schall, Verbiest, the former Imperial Palace, Tiananmen Square, the Temple of Heaven, the Beijing National Stadium, the North Cathedral (where we will attend Mass), the old Verbiest Observatory, the Great Wall of China, etc.

We will travel by bus to **Chengde** (Rehe), halfway between Chaoyang and Beijing, which is another 230 km. Here we will visit a beautiful summer palace built by the Manchu emperors. The emperors resided here from May to October. A visit to Laohugou (Tiger Valley) is also planned, a small Catholic village, where Theofiel Verbist, founder of CICM, died of typhus in 1868. He was buried there along with other Scheut Fathers. His body was later transferred to Scheut-Brussels. As we do elsewhere, we will contact the local Christian community to show our solidarity. We will also visit the Tibetan Bodala Palace in Chengde.

The visit to the city of **Chaoyang** is entirely in the context of the history of the Scheut Fathers in China: a visit to the former main post and later seat of the diocese, Songshuzuizi. Even today, the Verbiest Foundation supports various initiatives of the Catholic community in this region. It is a nice introduction to the North Chinese countryside and its inhabitants.

The journey continues to western Liaoning, an area where the Scheut Fathers worked from 1865 to around 1950, as in neighboring Jehol. In **Fuxin**, we will visit the church community. We will travel to **Shenyang**, the capital of the southern province of Manchuria, by high-speed train. A visit to the imperial palace, built in 1635, reveals the nomadic past of the Qing emperors.

We will travel further to **Xi'an**, where we will visit Xi'an Cathedral, the city walls of Xi'an, the museum of the Qin Shi Huang terra-cotta army, etc. We will also watch a Chinese classical



de Grote Muur nearby Teling being like under Han Kieu pas
VF PhotoArchive - Scheut Fathers on the Great Wall of China.

dance performance from the Tang dynasty. We plan to visit **Zhangjiakou** and Xiwanzi, the Catholic village nearby, where the founder of CICM began his missions in China.

Since the Foundation does not have a travel license, the trip will be organized by a recognized travel agency (China Commercial International Travel Service). The trip will be accompanied by an English-speaking tour guide. Accommodation will be in standard three- or four-star hotels and the meals will be adapted to Western travelers. The price of the trip (full board, excursions, transportation by airplane, train, bus and entrance fees included) is approximately 2220 EUR per person for a twin room. For a single room, the price is 2910 EUR per person. The prices do NOT include the return flight tickets Brussels-Beijing – Beijing-Brussels. These must be purchased on your own initiative.

If you are interested in this trip, please contact matthewgonzx@outlook.com (Fr. Matthew Gong).

Registration closes on June 30, 2025!

PHOTO REPORT



On March 15, the faithful from the North church, West Church, and East Church of the Beijing Diocese embarked on a pilgrimage for the Jubilee Year. Led by Father Zhang Xiaozhuo and Sister Wang, over 100 believers were divided into groups of about ten people each. They started their walking pilgrimage from the West church, proceeded to the North church, and finally reached the East church, covering a total distance of 7.8 kilometers.



On April 30 a pilgrim group of 35 faithful from China came to Verbiest Foundation in Leuven and celebrated the Eucharist at St. Damian Church.



On March 15, 120 Catholics from Ningbo Diocese, Yuyao parish went on a pilgrimage to Our Lady of Sheshan (Shanghai).



Bishop Feng Xinmao of Hengshui diocese ordained three priests April 29, 2025.



Spring session 2025



Visiting the China Center of SVD in Sankt Augustin, Germany.



With the parish priest of the chapel of Our Lady at Zoete Waters, after the procession on May 1.



On pilgrimage in Banneux, May 18.



Eucharistic celebration with Archbishop Celli in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome.

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

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

What is the Ferdinand 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 Belgium and China. This should be based on equality and mutual appreciation.
- The Foundation sponsors the activities of the Institute Verbiest KU Leuven (Naamsestraat 63, bus 4018, 3000 Leuven), those of the Chinese College in Leuven (Vlamingenstraat 1) and those of the Institute Verbiest in Taipei. Through these institutes, the Foundation wants to develop research on the history of the Church in China as well as developing there pastoral collaboration with the Church.
- To help the Church in China most effectively, it is better to invest in the training of ministers of the Church. For this purpose, the Foundation offers scholarships for the formation of priests, of nuns and lay people. Note that a formation, insured in China, is preferred. The foundation also aimed at higher institutes in China. Likewise, there are priests, nuns and lay people who are invited to receive special training abroad. After their studies, it is advisable that they return to China to serve their own Church. Colleagues from the Foundation are in touch with bishops and religious communities in China. They make sure that the support is used good and correctly.
- In addition, the Foundation also responds positively to requests for help for (small) development projects in the dioceses of North-West China: Gansu, Qinghai, Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, etc.

Financial support can be sent to:

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IBAN: **BE76 7350 1834 3795**

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