

Perny's Imprint: Knowledge of China and Printing Chinese, Between Guizhou (1861) and Paris (1869-1872)

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Abstract Paul Perny, a missionary in China and an antagonist of the Parisian academic sinologists, was also a botanist and author of linguistic works, which he often edited himself. Archives illustrate how he constructed his knowledge of China and how his specific skills operated in circuits of different scales, sometimes overlapping and permeable, sometimes instead mutually impermeable. His printing activities demonstrate that the dissemination of knowledge (in this case of the Chinese language) required technical and material support, which were all circulating on a global scale at that time. This paper therefore portrays printing presses as 'spaces of circulation', where information and materials converge, and people of different statuses interact.

Keywords Paul Perny. China. Guizhou. Paris. MEP. Sinology. Printing.

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1 Introduction

Paul Perny (1818-1907) was a French missionary to China who left a number of important linguistic works on the Chinese language.¹ Among these works are two dictionaries, one printed in China, the other in Paris. Production of multilingual dictionaries and lexicons of the Chinese language began around the year 1600 AD, initially between Southern China and the Philippines, and then continued thanks to the activities of missionaries. However, unlike in Japan, where the printing of missionary texts dates back to the beginnings of the presence of Europeans, dictionaries on Chinese-European languages continued to be transmitted only in manuscript form up until 1813 (Bussotti, Lachaud 2023). In this context, Perny is of note as one of the few Europeans to have first used xylography, for a bilingual work printed in China (1861); then around 1870, with the spread of new typographical printing techniques, he produced publications including Chinese texts in France. His work at these two moments (1861 and 1870) corresponded to two very different contexts. The first work in 1861 was born in the 'traditional' context of practical sinology rooted in missionary networks, where the discipline was an 'accessory' to conversion that developed in missionary lands. During this period, Perny must have been in contact with locals, although in the documents I consulted the help of native intermediaries for his linguistic works is not mentioned. Then, once he returned to France in 1869, he became one of the representatives of a 'practical sinology', that had not yet been reconciled with the 'cabinet tradition' (Fabre 2018). Thanks to his status with the Missions étrangères de Paris (MEP, Paris Foreign Missions), he was, on the one hand, an 'agent' of 'traditional sinology', carried out by the missionaries in the field, and, on the other hand, his prioritisation of the Chinese language and his use of the printed word – both stabilising and normative – rather than the manuscript tradition made him firmly of his era. His concerns also extended to the publication of his works, which were aimed at an audience other than missionaries, converts, and a few scholars, at a time when a community of scholars was forming around sinology – albeit

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1 It would be beyond the scope of this study to discuss such works, which are, however, included in the bibliography. Cf. e.g. *Vocabularium latino-sinicum* (1861), *Dictionnaire français-latin-chinois de la langue mandarine parlée* (1869a) and its *Appendice* (1872b), *Proverbes chinois* (1869b), *Dialogues chinois-latin* (1872) and *Grammaire de la langue chinoise orale et écrite* (1873; 1876).

in sometimes conflicting ways. In the following pages, I will discuss these issues based on my readings (in 2022-23) of Paul Perny's letters in the Archives of the Institut de recherche France-Asie (IRFA, The French-Asia Research Institute) of the MEP,² on documents I collected at the Imprimerie nationale (National Printing Office, henceforth IN) before 2017,³ as well as on my direct observation of his publications. The conclusion situates Perny's case within the places, spaces, and networks of circulation of both the abbot himself and his works, which overlap with those of the production and dissemination of sinological knowledge.

2 “When He's in a Bad Mood, He Has a Nasty Tongue and a Nasty Pen”

Paul Perny, ordained as a priest in 1843, entered the MEP in Paris in 1846 and left for China the following year. Initially based in the province of Guizhou 貴州 at Xingyi fu 興義府 (1848-62), he undertook a number of different roles, culminating in his appointment as interim superior of the provincial mission. He then settled in Guiyang 貴陽, and transferred the seminary ‘to the city gates’, i.e. to Lou-tsong-koan (Launay 2002, 1: 328).⁴

He has many of the qualities required for this task: prudence, tenacity, general views. He lacks a few others that are more necessary.⁵

Perny had many interests and abilities, but also a complex personality. He did not hesitate to write to his superiors in order to achieve his aims, sometimes with comments about colleagues that were

² Verónica Trujillo-Gonzalez and Xavier Lee of the University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, together with Richard Walter (ITEM) and Annie Salavert (MEP) are stated to be the authors of a forthcoming online publication of Perny's correspondence: EMAN platform, <https://eman-archives.org/EMAN/items/show/51>. However, so far, this electronic publication has not been completed or, if it has, it was not available to readers during my research at IRFA. Cf. also Lee, Trujillo-Gonzalez, Walter 2018.

³ At that time, I was visiting the IN in Flers-en-Escrebieux with my colleague Isabelle Landry-Deron, with whom I co-authored an article on Chinese movable type in European style (Bussotti, Landry-Deron 2020).

⁴ I am grateful to Eugenio Menegon for pointing out this reference. By cross-referencing other information, we are able to locate the district of Guanshanhu 觀山湖, now incorporated into the conurbation of the city of Guiyang. The problem of identifying place names exists for other mission sites (Li 2020, 274-9).

⁵ Cf. <https://www.irfa.paris/fr/notices/notices-biographiques/perny>, for a positive assessment of Perny's activities in the mission, despite the disadvantages of his temporary status (Launay 2002, 2: 529). Unless otherwise stated, translations of quotations are by the Author.

neither eulogistic nor peacemaking, in contrast to what one might expect from a man of the Clergy. Louis Simon Faurie (1824-1871), his successor as head of the mission in Guizhou, but also – at that time – an opponent and detractor of Perny, wrote of him that “all those who know him know that when he is in a bad mood, he has a nasty tongue, and a nasty pen”.⁶

2.1 Interest in Chinese Language and Culture

Perny's correspondence also reveals, very early on, educational projects as well as a remarkable interest in the Chinese language and culture. In 1853, he wrote that “a normal school would be an essential part of this new mission”.⁷ The following year, he pointed out the importance of developing Chinese language teaching for the Chinese: “It's their language... they need to learn [it] to a passable level”.⁸ A few years later, admittedly for religious reasons, he went even further in affirming the importance of Chinese culture:

our catechists must be well versed in religious controversy. Knowledge of the books of Confucius, the history of China, the history of idols, etc., etc., is just as necessary and just as indispensable for them.⁹

⁶ Faurie, Letter to M. Legrégeois (28 October 1861) from the IRFA-MEP archives (hereafter abridged as AMEP) Guizhou 6A08/05-2: Pastorale 546-2, 88. Faurie refused to take over as head of the mission when the Apostolic Vicar Albrand died in 1853 (Launay 2002, 1: 345-54). The simple and modest tone of Faurie's early correspondence, who at the beginning of the 1850s was “not yet sufficiently fluent in Chinese” (Perny, Letter to M. Albrand [24 June 1854] AMEP Guizhou 6A08/05-2: Pastorale 544, 380), contrasts with the combative, sometimes malicious tone of Perny. But over time, as Faurie's position evolved, his comments became more critical of Perny. In 1860, while Perny was in Europe, Faurie accepted the leadership of the mission and became Apostolic Vicar of Guizhou. For details on the biographies of the four missionaries mentioned here (Louis Faurie, Pierre-Louis Legrégeois [1801-1866], Étienne Raymond Albrand [1805-1853], François-Antoine Albrand [1804-1867]) and the others mentioned below, cf. the biographies on the website: <https://irfa.paris/missionnaire/>.

⁷ Perny, Letter to the Directors of the Seminary (15 November 1853) AMEP Guizhou 6A08/05-2: Pastorale 544, 321-2. Cf. Launay 2002, 1: 372.

⁸ Perny, Letter [to a confrere] (22 April 1854) AMEP Guizhou 6A08/05-2: Pastorale 544, 345-50. On the importance of learning Chinese, the teaching of which was limited to one afternoon a week, cf. Charbonnier 2015, 112.

⁹ Perny, Letter to Albrand (19 February 1860) AMEP Guizhou 6A08/05-2: Pastorale 544, 906.

More directly, he wrote to a peer:

Do you read Confucius? Have you studied the 4 Choū [Sishu 四書, Four Books]? This is necessary to be [a] good Chinese. You're not bad already. [...] They say you speak the local language well. You have grasped the Chinese way of doing good. But if you haven't studied Confucius, your education isn't perfect.¹⁰

Moreover, in 1861, after learning of Perny's intention to leave Guizhou, Faurie commented:

He is currently working on the memoirs of his trip to France,¹¹ and it is always [the] same spirit. Ridiculing France, exalting China. Before his trip to France, he was anti-Chinese, but since his return he has gone to the opposite extreme, I don't know why.¹²

Perny's awareness of the 'Chinese cause' is announced in several letters, which include criticism of the aggressive policies of the English and Napoleon III, and a denunciation of the 1858 Treaty of Tianjin (allowing missionaries to settle freely in the territory of the Empire) and the Peking Convention: "Should we count on a religious peace won at the sharp edge of the sword and in the name of politics?"¹³ Apart from Perny's opinion about French policy in China, his attitude can also be explained by the fear of direct repercussions: violent actions were taking place in the provinces of the Empire, with missionary lands ravaged by a succession of rebellions¹⁴ and, particularly

¹⁰ Perny, Letter to Father Amat (10 August 1863) AMEP Guangdong 6A08/03-2: Pastorale 555, 639-47. Charles-Pierre-Anne-Jean Amat (1820-1863) died a month later.

¹¹ Two notebooks of a *Mémoire sur mon voyage d'Europe fragmentaire*, including a few pages of *Jeunesse de M. Perny par lui-même*, are in AMEP Perny file 0532-DG 231.

¹² Faurie, Letter to Albrand (15 May 1861) AMEP Guizhou 6A08/05-2: Pastorale 546-2, 885-9.

¹³ Perny, Letter to Thomine (24 February 1861) AMEP Guizhou 6A08/05-2: Pastorale 546-2, 831-85. He expressed a negative opinion of the French expedition also in another letter to Thomine-Desmazures (1 June 1860) AMEP Guizhou 6A08/05-2: Pastorale 544, 938. The Peking Convention of 1860 is the agreement of the unequal treaties that China was obliged to conclude, with Great Britain, France and Russia.

¹⁴ 'Miao rebellion' is a general expression that refers to a much more complex reality, with rebellions involving Miao, Han, and Hui people as protagonists. Often due to economic reasons (poverty of the local populations) and bad government, these movements were linked to religious practices (millenarianism) and encouraged by the Taiping rebellion, which exposed the fragility of the Empire, forcing authorities to move militias to the areas concerned, e.g. outside Guizhou province. In this context of instability and suspicion, anti-Christian violence became more frequent, particularly against French missionaries (Jenks 1994, 139).

in Guizhou, by anti-Christians persecution.¹⁵ Still in 1861, Faurie accused Perny of “preparing a work to prove the superiority of China over Europe: government, industry, trade”, an “absurd and dangerous” text, which he asked his Parisian colleagues to keep an eye on, so that the book would never be published.¹⁶ Indeed, this point on Chinese superiority would later take shape in Perny's works, in the opening pages of his *Projet d'une académie européenne au sein de la Chine* from 1874,¹⁷ and, even more so, in his last book, which he signed with his Chinese name and titled *La Chine supérieure à la France* (Tong 1905; Charbonnier 2015, 131).

2.2 Mission Projects and Activities

In addition to conversions, the creation of schools and a press, the establishment of rules for new clerics, etc., one of Perny's priorities was the creation of pharmacies, seen as places of action for ‘baptisers’, whose presence is confirmed in the archives.¹⁸ Meanwhile, he developed an interest in botany and, as early as 1854, he sent plants and silkworms to the Lyon Council.¹⁹ In 1855 Perny was made an honorary member of the Société d'acclimatation (Charbonnier 2015, 114; Launay 2002, 1: 454) and, writing in 1856, he mentions the Société

¹⁵ Launay 2002, 1: 354-63. Perny wrote about the martyrdom of Jean-Pierre Néel (1832-1862) in *La salle des martyres* (1874).

¹⁶ Faurie, Letter to Albrand (15 May 1861) AMEP Guizhou 6A08/05-2: Pastorale 546-2, 885-9.

¹⁷ The proposal to open an academy in Hankou “run by a few old missionaries well versed in the Chinese language, customs, and habits” could be seen as a solution to Perny's personal difficulties, but it was also coherent with his approach to Chinese culture.

¹⁸ *Journal de la Mission de Kouy-Tcheou, janvier 1857* AMEP Guizhou 6A08/05-2: Pastorale 544, 588-94. Four pharmacies were set up by E.R. Albrand: they may be regarded as sites of preaching, as much as the schools, and in fact the latter were less regularly run due to a lack of staff and money (Launay 2002, 1: 302-3, 306). The model was imported from Sichuan; in 1858, seven pharmacies existed in the form of a traditional shop, while Perny's plan to build a church-like pharmacy represented a novelty (Masson 2019, esp. 39).

¹⁹ Perny, Letter to Mr. Barran (10 October 1854) AMEP Guizhou 6A08/05-2: Pastorale 544, 417. For other shipments of plants in 1850 and 1853: AMEP Guizhou 6A08/05-2: Pastorale 546-1, 172 (15 July 1850) and 310 (29 January 1853). On his trip to Europe, Perny brought cocoons with him, but during the journey they hatched, while he lacked “oak leaves (*sic.*) to feed these insects, which were thus only born to die within 24 hours”: AMEP file Perny 0532-DG 231 *Mémoires sur mon voyage d'Europe* notebook 2, 38. On this subject, cf. a letter to Libois (20 November [?] 1862) about the shipment of 700-800 cocoons to Paris, via Hong Kong, AMEP Guizhou 6A08/05-2: Pastorale 546-4, 1137-8. Perny's contributions to silk and self-worming are mentioned in the bulletin of the Société impériale zoologique d'acclimatation and the Société nationale d'acclimatation de France, between 1855 and 1888 (Guo 2022, 215 fn. 27).

impériale de zoologie.²⁰ The following year, during his trip to Europe (autumn 1857-spring 1859), he visited Lyon and brought the Lyon Faculty of Sciences materials on plants and products from Guizhou²¹ as well as writing a brief description of the province and its products, mainly its plants and fruits (Perny 1859).

At that time, his relations with Stanislas Julien (1797-1873), an important member of Parisian institutional Sinology, seemed cordial, since the two had made a deal. In a letter addressed to the person chosen to act as an intermediary, Perny wrote:

Being in Paris, I met quite often with Mr. Stanislas Julien, the famous sinologist, curator of the Chinese library in the rue Richelieu. This library has religious books, which we do not have here, and it often has these Chinese books in two copies. It was difficult for me to have them copied in Paris. So Mr Julien made me this proposal: to send him from here the Chinese works he does not have in the Imperial Library and, for his part, he will give me the religious works that they have in duplicate.²²

Perny, who was 'hyperactive' in the 1850s, developed a project for a Mission Library: in 1854, he exposed his idea to François-Antoine Albrand (1804-1867), director of the seminary in Paris.²³ Two years later, the project was detailed as follows:

We have resolved [...] to create a Mission Library. All the books we have here will form the funds of this library, which will gradually be increased by the works of our new confreres and by the annual purchase of some good works in Europe. Knowledge quickly becomes 'rusty', especially as most of the young people who arrive at the mission do not have a strong scientific background. To maintain the necessary theological and ascetical knowledge among the missionaries of Kouý-tcheoû, I made this project [...] In the future, the new missionaries of Kouý-tcheoû will not bring with them certain basic works that we already have in sufficient numbers, such as the Bible [...] [but rather, they] will be informed from you about

²⁰ Perny, Letter to Albrand (15 July 1856) AMEP Guizhou 6A08/05-2: Pastorale 544, 514. These societies and the Musée du Jardin des plantes are also presented as privileged interlocutors in another letter, to Jules Ferry, in which Perny asks to be sent to the Miao people (Mai 1884: AMEP Dossier 0532).

²¹ Perny, Letter to the Directors of the Seminary (11 March 1857) AMEP Guizhou 6A08/05-2: Pastorale 544, 744.

²² Perny, Letter to the Director [Albrand?] (20 October 1862) AMEP dossier Perny 0532-DG 231.

²³ Perny, Letter to Albrand (20 February 1854) AMEP Guizhou 6A08/05-2: Pastorale 544, 344.

our catalogue and bring with them only excellent works that would not be found in the Kouý-tcheoü library.

As this passage shows, the collection was to be built up year by year, with books arriving in the luggage of new missionaries. In the same letter, however, Perny also talks about images:

In our Orations, when we display our beautiful images at feasts, the neophytes wonder what kind of saint it is [...] This arbitrary variety of images distracts and confuses them.

So, just as the Chinese produced images of divinities and represented them in a recognisable way, whatever their size and the colours used, Perny wanted to have some portraits typified for each saint. For this, he proposed a method similar to the one he devised for the library, i.e. to notify Paris of inappropriate images, so that he would no longer receive them and would only receive 'useful' ones.²⁴ Sometimes the requests for books were more specific, as in 1854²⁵ or in 1864, when he had left Guizhou for Sichuan.²⁶

2.3 The Return to France

Sichuan seems to have been a fallback option. On his return to Guizhou in January 1860 (Launay 2002, 1: 483), Perny was confronted by Faurie, who had taken over the mission and was unhappy with Perny's previous financial management. As a result, Perny quickly decided to leave Guizhou.²⁷ After an abortive attempt to be appointed to Guangxi,²⁸ he spent some time in Canton and then in Sichuan (1862-69). He returned to France in 1869, the year his dictionary

²⁴ Perny, Letter to Albrand (15 July 1856) AMEP Guizhou 6A08/05-2: Pastorale 544, 514-16.

²⁵ In February, Perny asked for "a Chinese dictionary (De Guignes) for the college", and French books for young teachers (by Gervé Gougnet?). A few months later, he asked for "[*Pratique de la*] *Perfection chrétienne* by R.P. [Alphonse] Rodriguez [of the Society of Jesus], *Jardin de la langue latine* [by Barthélemy Morand, 1836], manuals for winemakers and Oriental paintings, as well as *L'art de faire les vins de fruits*". Perny, Letters to Albrand, AMEP Guizhou 6A08/05-2: Pastorale 544, 329-32 (15 February 1854) and 411 (1 October 1854).

²⁶ E.g. fifty volumes from the 'Migne library' – presumably the texts of the Fathers of the Church, published by Abbé Jacques-Paul Migne (1800-1875) – to be sent to him in Sichuan via Hankou. Letter to Libois (2 February 1864). AMEP Sichuan 6A08/07-3: Sichuan oriental 530-2, 1619-21.

²⁷ Perny, Letter to Libois (14 April 1861) AMEP Guizhou 6A08/05-2: Pastorale 546-2, 701-2.

²⁸ Perny, Letter to Libois (10 August 1863) AMEP Guangdong 6A08/03-2: Pastorale 555-3, 639-47.

Dictionnaire français-latin-chinois was printed, and was imprisoned during the Commune (1870). He then published a memoir on this experience (1871): the contents of the first version, in which he revealed the inglorious conduct of the vicar-general of Paris, led to his expulsion from the MEP in 1872 and a canonical ban from the archdiocese of Paris.²⁹

As a person with some twenty years of practical field experience, Perny had a difficult relationship with the academic world of Parisian sinology: a militant for the 'practical mastery' of the Chinese language (Fabre 2018, 19), he came up against "the first 'Sinisants' who occupied institutional positions in Paris conferring sinological authority on them".³⁰ In France, away from his order, he tried to make a name for himself and was outraged that the positions at Langues O' were occupied by Julien, who did not speak Chinese, or – even worse – by his pupil Marie Jean Léon d'Hervey de Saint-Denys (1822-1892) (Fabre 2015, 254). He is said to have run for the Collège de France against the latter, i.e. Julien's successor, in 1874.³¹ He was certainly found guilty of having 'defamed' the elected candidate and his predecessor³² – an event that has been the subject of recent studies (Fabre 2018; Guo 2022). Beyond these facts, this confrontation testifies to the existence of tension between the Parisian 'academics' and 'sinophones' like Perny, during the period of formation of the sinological epistemic community – although the conflict faded away over the following decade, as the 'sinophones' reconciled with institutional

²⁹ According to Charbonnier (2015, 122-3), the text of *Deux mois de prison sous la Commune* was most heavily amended, meaning it is now difficult to find references for the case in question.

³⁰ Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat (1788-1832) and Julius Klaproth (1783-1835), trained in classical languages, as well as their 'heir' Julien and the unlucky Guillaume Pauthier (1801-1873), all displayed an 'analysis and syntax' approach to written language (Fabre 2018, 16, 18). The latter, ostracised by Julien, maintained good relations with Perny; we find his name in an undated list of recipients of geographical maps (1864?; Perny file 0532-DG 231). Pauthier, as a member of the Société Asiatique, also intervened on Perny's behalf when the clergyman was imprisoned during the Commune (Perny 1871, 64).

³¹ According to an account of an AIBL meeting (Charbonnier 2015, 124) and a letter from 16 February 1873 to the Director of the Collège de France (Fabre 2015, 258 fn. 202). However, Lina Guo (2022) follows the text written by Perny (see the following notes) and does not confirm this candidacy. Moreover, given that the Collège proceeded by cooptation, this possibility may well rather be the case.

³² Under the pseudonym of Leon Bertin, Perny published the pamphlet *Le Charlatanisme littéraire dévoilé* in 1874. Recognised as the author of the pamphlet, he was condemned by the Versailles magistrates' court (30 September 1874) first, followed by the Paris court in December 1874 and again on 29 January 1875 (Cordier 1894, 423). The pamphlet was partly dedicated to the Annamite and Abel des Michels (1833-1910). Next came the observations on sinologists, notably on Julien's immodesty and his tendency to regard sinology as his 'property', without really training disciples; then his pupil Saint-Denys is described as incompetent, having a Chinese pawn at home (François Li Chao-Pee, who could be spotted in the rue du Bac) to help with the work (Bertin 1874, 17).

sinologists by adopting some of their methods (Fabre 2015, 255-7). Regardless, Perny's candidacy was not taken into account in 1893 either (Cordier 1895, 121-2),³³ when Édouard Chavannes (1865-1918), the first academic to also carry out fieldwork, was elected. In his pamphlet against d'Hervey de Saint-Denys, we can read Perny's views on the Chinese language: that there is no 'learned' language, but a spoken language and a written language, and that the latter includes varieties of style (Bertin 1874, 14).³⁴ However, Perny did not support a didactic approach based entirely on practice and developed linguistic tools, such as dictionaries and grammar. In 1861, Faurie asserted that if the new arrivals to the mission wanted to learn Chinese, they should have left their studios and "put aside books, dictionaries, quills, and papers" in order to practice the oral language. In Guizhou, this would have taken the form of learning the local pronunciation, which was different from official Chinese – the need for which was, on the contrary, advocated in Perny's writings. Faurie's correspondence also mentions 'Latin interpreters', i.e. Chinese polyglots:³⁵ these 'mediators' are rarely mentioned and, when they are, remain anonymous in all the writings of Perny that I have been able to check. Despite his professed Sinophilia, local people are not always named in Perny's correspondence³⁶ and their help with linguistic work is never explicitly mentioned. This does not mean that local intermediaries did not exist, but rather, it shows a certain 'impermeability' between networks. Although Perny's missionary 'microcosm' was southern China, surrounded by the 'barbarians' who were the focus of his proselytising activities, in particular the 'Miaôtsè' (*Miaozu* 苗族?), Perny as both a teacher and an author had his 'roots' in France. He often wrote to the director of the Paris Seminary, sent botanical material to Paris and Lyon, and had books in French bought and sent to him.

³³ However, Perny's name does not appear among the 1893 candidates in the file on the Chairs of the Collège de France, Archives nationales: F/17/13556-F/17/13557. On the contrary, there is mention of Amieu (?), but not by Cordier.

³⁴ Different conceptions of the Chinese language persisted in nineteenth-century Paris: spoken and written, learned and vulgar, etc. (Fabre 2017).

³⁵ Faurie, Letter to Albrand (15 May 1861) AMEP Guizhou 6A08/05-2: Pastorale 546-2, 885-9. This paragraph does not refer to Perny.

³⁶ Perny wrote about his "former Catechist, Simon Hià Yü cheñ", tasked with delivering letters and retrieving a crate of books in a Letter to Libois (28 October 1861) AMEP Guizhou 6A08/05-2: Pastorale 546-2, 771.

3 Different 'Impressions'

As already mentioned above, Perny was the author of two lexicographic works, which we cannot describe here in detail. Let us just mention that the *Vocabularium latino-sinicum, ad usum studiosae juventutis sinicae*, auctore Paulo Perny. Anno post partum Virginis 1861 (Chinese Latin vocabulary, for young Chinese, by the author Paul Perny, in the year 1861 AD), was reprinted in 1888 (Cordier 1904-07, 1603-9). One copy of each edition is in the MEP library, and they are similar in format layout, i.e. with Chinese without pronunciation, which means that the dictionary was addressed to people who knew Chinese or who could decipher the Latin text and the translation. The second *Dictionnaire français-latin-chinois de la langue mandarine parlée* (1869a), presented as a work for general use, was instead an encyclopedic dictionary with a great variety of content, brought together in an appendix published in 1872 (1872b). The most important part of this appendix is on natural history: it lists thousands of entries associated with a double index without characters in which Chinese is transcribed according to Mandarin pronunciation (different to that used in the regions where Perny stayed).

One feature that the two publications have in common is that they were intended to be printed, even though in completely different forms, as the first was a traditional Chinese xylograph. In a short article on missionary printing in Guizhou, Cordier (1905) briefly mentioned the centres where Western printing was used for Chinese. These centres were Macao, with the presses of the East India Company, where from 1815 the volumes of Morrison's dictionary were printed; Shanghai, where many other presses were in operation in addition to the American Presbyterian Mission Press (Reed 2004; Drège 1978); and the missions of Shanghai, Beijing, Hejian 河間 (Hebei), etc.³⁷ In our case, in addition to the local dimension of the Guizhou mission and the 'national' Chinese dimension,³⁸ it is also important to consider the 'global' but also specifically local dimension of Paris. Indeed, the city of Paris had played an important role in the development of Western typography for the Chinese language since the eighteenth century (Bussotti, Landry-Deron 2020). Printing activities in general remained intense, with an increase in the number of private printing houses alongside the IN, using types produced locally – through punches done by the decomposition of characters, thanks

³⁷ Macao and Hong Kong, Shanghai, Ningbo, Xiamen, and Fuzhou are mentioned by Zhang and Han (2006, 444-7).

³⁸ For China, we should rather speak of the imperial scale of the territory of the Empire, but the field of Book History in Europe is accustomed to talking about 'national' scale; cf. Bussotti 2015 unpublished.

to the work of Pauthier and Marcellin Legrand (Legrand 1859; Bussotti, 2001) – or imported. After decades when the major concern was the unsuitability of type sizes (the types of Chinese characters produced in Europe were too big in size), the ‘market’ seemed to be highly mobile and in search of solutions to reduce prices and times.³⁹

3.1 Guizhou and Sino-European Impressions

In his brief article on this topic, Cordier (1905) only provided three titles: Perny's *Vocabularium*, an *Elementa Grammaticae Latinae* (1867) by Faurie and an *Alphabetum Lingua Latina typis missionis Kouiy-Tcheou* (1856); however, I have been unable to locate original copies of the last two titles. Nevertheless, there is evidence of other publications in missionaries' correspondence. In 1857 Perny printed the *Ki jen che pien* (*Ji ren shi pian* 畸人十篇, i.e. Ten dialogues on religious or moral subjects) by Matteo Ricci and the *Pa je me xiang* (*Ba ri mo xiang* 八日默想, i.e. Eight-Day Retreat, a book that was based on the teachings of Saint Ignatius),⁴⁰ for ‘virgins’, catechists and Christians.

After the printing of these two works, Perny remarked, our presses will immediately publish two more, which we owe to the pen of a confrere in Kouy-tcheou. [T]he first is a treatise on the Holy Angels [...] written in very simple language, and almost intelligible when read aloud. The second work is a treatise on the festivals of the year according to the order and division of the Chinese calendar, which could be used especially for Sunday reading [...] Finally, he envisioned the publication of ‘an apology of Christianity’ in the vein of Tertullian. (Launay 2002, 1: 453-4)

At this time, Faurie and Perny were not yet in conflict, as printing and publishing activities were still combined. Xylography was used to produce paper sheets with a printed base (often in red) – for example, mission registers –⁴¹ and alternated with elementary typography, which was used to publish the *Journal de la mission*.⁴² In 1858, a no-

³⁹ Fabre (2015, 80-3) gives an overview of the proliferation of these activities, despite some factual errors: for example, Perny did not donate his types to the IN as he claims, but rather quite the contrary.

⁴⁰ *Journal de la mission* of June 1857, AMEP Guizhou 6A08/05-2: Pastorale 544, 659-60 “Publications d'ouvrages nouveaux”.

⁴¹ Perny, *Registre de fidèles* (1857) AMEP Guizhou 6A08/05-2: Pastorale 544, 536-7.

⁴² *Journal* (September 1856-September 1857; the fascicule for February is missing) AMEP Guizhou 6A08/05-2: Pastorale 544, 548-715. On the printing of the journal at the mission, cf. Perny, Letter to Thomine-Desmazes (11 August 1857) AMEP Guizhou 6A08/05-2: Pastorale 544, 544.

tice on the needs of the Mission of Kouy-Tcheu was printed in France to raise funds: these funds were to be partly used to

help set up the religious printing works of the Mission. The Chinese print by woodblocks. The process is simple and inexpensive. An ordinary volume costs 80 to 100 francs to engrave. With woodblocks, an incalculable number of copies can be printed.⁴³

However, Faurie, who in 1856 was in charge of the press, wrote to Albrand:

During the first few years, we have tried to create a small 'xylographic typography' [wooden type?] for ourselves, and we are beginning to obtain fairly satisfactory results, when Providence, through the enterprise of Mgr de Sinite [Desflèches?], has provided us with a few kilos of movable type of which you have a sample at the head of this letter. However, as these typefaces are in very small quantities, and cannot be used to compose even 4 pages in 12-point font, this acquisition in no way alters the request for typefaces that we made to you in our previous letters.⁴⁴

Again, a few months later:

The printing type order will be completed when you receive this letter. Please accept my thanks in advance. The small quantity of movable type which arrived so unexpectedly is doing us a great service for the college and the mission. And those which you will send to us, if it has been possible to sort them as we wish, will be of even greater service to us [...] I shall send you by mail a copy of our complete works. We have done some marvellous indigenous typography. We will soon be competing with Firmin-Didot.⁴⁵

But things did not go so well. In October 1861, Albrand in Paris was sent a very miscellaneous list of items required for the mission: books and subscriptions to church periodicals, two clocks, writing paper, and 10 reams of paper, preferably in rolls (the equivalent of about 5000 sheets), vinegar essence, purple cloth for cassocks and, finally,

⁴³ Perny, *Notice sur les besoins généraux de la mission de Kouy-Tcheou (Chine)* (May 1858) AMEP Guizhou 6A08/05-2: Pastorale 549D, 21-4 (page 3: VI of the booklet).

⁴⁴ Faurie, Letter to Albrand (17 August 1856) AMEP Guizhou 6A08/05-2: Pastorale 544, 528-9.

⁴⁵ Faurie, Letter to Albrand (25 February 1857) AMEP Guizhou 6A08/05-2: Pastorale 544, 539.

a printing press. We have a good supply of new types, with which we would like to print our classics. We can't do it without a press, because the type would degrade too quickly, as happened to us once. As I know neither the price nor the weight of this item, I only ask on condition [...] that it is not too great an expense, [and] that it can be transported here.⁴⁶

We therefore conclude that attempts were made to use the types – probably those that arrived from Sichuan or those requested by Faurie in the letter quoted – but these attempts were unsuccessful and even damaged the types in question. It seems that no press arrived following this request, but further research would be necessary to confirm this point. This is perhaps why the *Vocabularium* was a xylographic imprint.

3.2 Perny's Sino-European Printed Works in France: Texts and Typefaces

The *Dictionnaire Français-Latin-Chinois* was published in 1869 by Didot, but as early as 1864 Perny had begun to work towards its publication, in the hope that this would be done at the highest level. In a letter to his director, he wrote:

You have no doubt become acquainted with the [honorable?] naval captain [?], Mr. De Maisonneuve. He is a friend of Fr. Libois. This excellent Captain is very devoted to the missi(ons). I turned to him to get the emp. Nap. III to print a French, Latin, and Chinese dictionary with characters, etc. You know that letters sometimes get lost. When you have the opportunity to see Mr. de Maisonneuve, would you ask him confidentially how the matter is progressing? He is seeing Mr. Drouyn de Lhuys; it is through him that we must go to the Emperor.⁴⁷

The *Dictionnaire* was not an imperial edition, despite its dedication to Napoleon III, and the project even changed publishers between the publication of the dictionary (1869) proper, and the volumes of the appendix (1872) and the grammar (1873-76)⁴⁸ – as, in the mean-

⁴⁶ Anonyme, Letter to Albrand (27 October 1861) AMEP Guizhou 6A08/05-2: Pastorate 546-2, 871.

⁴⁷ Perny, Letter to the director [Albrand?] (15 April 1864), file Perny 0532-DG 231. Édouard Drouyn de Lhuys (1805-1881) was a French diplomat and politician. Text also mentions Napoléon Libois (1805-1872).

⁴⁸ The first was published by Didot, the others by Maisonneuve et Cie, which was in the process of establishing itself as an Orientalist publishing house, with Ernest Leroux

time, the days of the Commune and Perny's removal from the MEP were taking place. Despite these changes, the graphics and composition of the frontispiece of the volumes maintained a formal unity. Moreover, the same graphic design was also used in other of Perny's publications, such as the *Vestiges des principaux dogmes chrétiens tirés des anciens livres chinois avec reproduction des textes chinois* (1878),⁴⁹ giving his productions a distinctive visual identity. This last project was probably carried out over many years, as correspondence reveals exchanges between China and France. The preparatory work for publishing the text was complex, involving copyists of Latin and Chinese:

Mgr Faurie wrote asking us to be so kind as to complete the copying of a manuscript by (M.) Prémare [Joseph-Henri Marie de Prémare, 1666-1736]. The illness I suffered in Paris did not give me time to finish it. I plan to annotate this manuscript, according to the Bull of Benedict XIV, on the subject of rites, and to publish it, if the occasion allows. You will easily find copyists for Latin, but [not for] Chinese! Mgr. D. told me that he had given you the necessary instructions on this subject. It goes without saying that we will pay the expenses. There were five or six Chinese in Paris in my time. I don't know if there are as many now. I would be very grateful if you could help us to complete this copy. You will at last be doing a valuable act for Chinese *belles lettres*. We are already making good use of your services. However, I promise not to abuse your kindness. Please send the copy to Libois so that I can receive it wherever I am.

This letter should be addressed to Albrand, dated 4 (October?) 1861; in another letter from the following year, still addressed to the 'director', Perny wrote: "I don't know if the manuscript you had kindly copied has arrived, I haven't seen anything yet".⁵⁰

The Preface by Bonnetty to Prémare's work, published in 1878 (Prémare 1878, I-XIV), as well as Perny's prefatory remarks to the dictionary (1869) and Pauthier's presentation of it in the *Journal Asiatique* (1871), provide information on its printing and the phases of preparation required. Although the need to synthesise forced me to

having just moved in 1871 and thus beginning his career. By this time, Didot had already lost its foundry (Jammes 1998, 61) and the Parisian publishing world was undergoing constant development and transformation (Barbier 2007, 247-8, 290-1).

⁴⁹ Besides this work, Perny collaborated with thinker and writer Augustin Bonnetty (1798-1879) on the *Annales de philosophie chrétienne* and founded the *Nouvelles annales* after his death; because of the latter publication, he ended up in conflict with the Bonnetty family (Charbonnier 2015, 125-31).

⁵⁰ Both letters are in Perny's file, AMEP Dossier 0532.

shorten my research on Perny's early stay in France and his second return from China (which turned out to be definitive), I have nevertheless found some interesting archives at the IN. The materials I found there offer additional insights into what is already more well-known information and enable us to understand the different stages in the production of Chinese types in Paris. Thus, we can grasp another facet of the character of Perny – both abbot and sinologist, naturalist and typographer.

First of all, it seems that, at least for the dictionary, publication costs were considerable, “far exceeding the meagre resources of a simple missionary” (Perny 1869a, 3). At the end of his preface, Perny thanks the Presidents and Members of the Central Councils for the Propagation of the Faith, for

their generous and benevolent assistance [...] Religion and science will be indebted to them for this service. We would also like to thank our printer, who has shown the greatest zeal in making this Dictionary a model of typographical elegance and accuracy. (8)

This trilingual edition was possible because, as Pauthier (1871, 354) explained, Perny

came to France to have his book printed, after having obtained from the American Presbyterian Mission Press in China⁵¹ a set of Chinese characters called diamond characters, which he had cast again in Paris, and which he composed himself, supplying them successively to the printer with his copy.⁵²

The explanation of the affair itself was more extensive in the Preface to the *Vestiges* (1878?):

The IN did have a collection of typefaces, wooden types that Mr. St A. Julien had sent for. Julien had brought them in. But they were shapeless. There were also those engraved by Mr. Legrand under the direction of Mr. Pauthier, [which were] more graceful, more exact; but they were incomplete and besides these two typefaces, [they] were larger than those of our ordinary printing typefaces.⁵³ So we needed a typeface that would work with the usual [Western]

⁵¹ Also mentioned by Trujillo-Gonzalez, Walter 2018.

⁵² “as I did myself to print the first issue of my *Dictionnaire étymologique chinois-anamite-latin-français*”, Pauthier concluded, explaining that the first issue of this dictionary, comprising the first ten radicals, was the only one published.

⁵³ The text includes a note referring to the *Annales de philosophie* which provided specimens of these characters in their t. XVI, 227 (fourth series) for those of Julien, and t. I, 126 (fifth series) for those of Pauthier.

characters. Moreover, the costs of this publication, made by the official printing house, exceeded our resources. Providence provided. The Anglican missionaries had had a very fine typeface engraved in China for the printing of their books. But it had to be brought to France. The IN, encumbered with its shapeless typefaces, had no intention of obtaining them. A simple missionary brought about this reform. With astonishing constancy, Abbé Perny, of the Congrégation des Missions-Étrangères, and a missionary in China for 25 years, came to Europe with the project of filling a gap in the Chinese missions, by providing the missionaries with the books they needed to carry out their apostolate completely and more easily. On his own initiative, with infinite trouble, and in spite of countless obstacles, he brought from China a set of matrices, and it was with the help of characters cast in France on these molds that he became not only the author, but also the material composer of the volumes we will quote below. (Préface 1878, IV-V)

Indeed, Perny had already written of his dictionary that

I had above all to resign myself to becoming, at my age, the typographer of the whole part of my work in Chinese and to devoting two whole years to this material task. (1869, 3)

From his account of the personal misadventures he experienced under the Commune, we are given to understand that the work was carried out at the press of Adolphe Lainé, 19 rue des Saints-Pères,⁵⁴ who was also the publisher of *Deux mois de prison* (1871). Here, the worker who helped with Chinese was named Michel: Perny forged such a close relationship with Michel that the latter tried to help the abbot when he was imprisoned during the Commune.⁵⁵ However, as in 1869 Perny also published his work on Chinese proverbs (Perny 1869b) with the same publishers and printers, we do not know

⁵⁴ In addition to the names Didot and Lainé, the cover of the dictionary mentions Adolphe Labitte, 4 rue de Lille, a descendant of a family of booksellers and auction catalogue experts (Fontaine 2014).

⁵⁵ "A worker at the press [?] of Mr. Ad. Lainé, 19, rue des Saints-Pères, had learned of my arrest. Without wasting a minute, this generous worker planned to secure my release. He visited all the offices of the prefecture and pleaded on my behalf but was refused permission to see me. He wrote to Raoul Rigault, the delegate for general security. His touchingly simple letter tells me what he is doing and his hope that I will soon be released. I would like to give you the name of this generous worker. Mr. Michel did most of my sinological work. I shall remain sincerely grateful to him. Mr. Michel is, moreover, a serious and honest man. Mr. Lainé himself made the most active efforts to Madame Jules Andrieux, whose husband was a member of the Commune, and who had great obligations to him, but to no avail". (Perny 1871, 28-9)

whether Michel worked on this last small book, on the large dictionary, or both.⁵⁶ Moreover, at that time, Perny was already preparing the large characters that would be used for *Le livre des Cent familles* included in the 1872 appendix, so in the Preface to the Dictionary (1869, 7-8), he stated that “we have chosen and engraved, for these names, a particular form of Chinese characters”. About ten years later, for the *Vestiges*, it was instead a question of “engraving, at our own expense, the ancient characters so numerous in this work” (Bonnetty’s preface in Prémare 1878, V).

3.3 Documents at the IN

The IN has many unclassified archives of its Oriental typefaces. Among them, a quite recent report on IN Chinese characters (1913?) lists four complete series of IN characters, sizes 10, 16, 24, and 40:

of the four series, the most widely used is the 10-point series.⁵⁷
Its engraving is excellent and produces very sharp impressions.⁵⁸

That this last series of types was linked to the typefaces introduced to Europe by Perny cannot be excluded.

In other documents, we read that in 1903, Perny had an intermediary write to the IN proposing the purchase of around 8000 well-catalogued matrices: this figure gives quite a precise idea of the number of different typefaces that were considered sufficient for publication. The reason for this proposal was explained as follows:

Around 1876-1877 Father Perny [...], at the express request [of the IN], allowed a font [of the typefaces] that he had needed for printing his works. I even believe that the IN took advantage of this opportunity to have matrices made from those with which it had been entrusted. In any case, since that time, no one has ever asked Father Perny for any Chinese characters.⁵⁹

Thinking that, in the long run, he had been injured by this operation, Perny hoped for ‘compensation’ for the losses he suffered because of

⁵⁶ In the brief preface to *Zhonghuo suyu* 中國俗語 *Proverbs chinois*, the author explained that “it was by conversing with the Chinese that we collected most of the Proverbs in this booklet; we extracted the others from the work 增廣俗語 (*Zeng guang suyu* ?)”.

⁵⁷ These typefaces were reproduced in an IN catalogue, *Catalogue des signes chinois: corps 10* (1889).

⁵⁸ Note for the office of the Under-Secretary of State for Finance (1913?), unclassified archives of the IN, collection of oriental types.

⁵⁹ Letter to the Director of the IN, undeciphered signature, 27 January 1903.

the low number of requests for use (and rental) of his typefaces from French users, who could instead have turned to IN. Hence, the IN should purchase the original typefaces to compensate. But the IN's response was negative: they explained that between 1873 and 1883 they had been authorised to cast typefaces from matrices at Perny's request. Perny had supplied 7725 matrices for this purpose and the matrices with the cast typefaces were returned to him: the typefaces, 9.5-point size, did not correspond to the IN standard.

According to this response, there should have been a document⁶⁰ explaining that the IN had obtained permission to take impressions of the 7725 signs to produce electrolytic matrices, which were completed in 1883: as these matrices were still in good condition for use, the IN could not accept Perny's proposal.

IN sources from 1890 stated that in exchange for Perny's provision of 7712 matrices (dated 3 March 1873), he received 1200 kg of cast iron (fused type); and that Perny's typefaces (the "diamond typefaces" mentioned by Pauthier) were the same ones reproduced in the *Price List and Specimen Book of Types, Comprising Chinese, Japanese, Manchu, English, and Music* (Shanghai, 1872) of the APMP, American Presbyterian Mission Press (Meihua shuguan 美華書館; cf. Barnett 1971; Drège 1992). The APMP was the press where William Gamble, who applied electrotypes to print Chinese texts, worked, and where he established that a set of 8000 characters was sufficient for a newspaper, while less was needed for religious publications, around 6000 in a standard font (McIntosh 1895, 21-3). Finally, in 1879, the equivalence of typefaces was verified on 'Chinese groups' sent from Shanghai by Camille Imbault-Huart (1857-1897).⁶¹

Some information in the IN archives is contradictory: contrary to what the preceding document attests, elsewhere we read that

M. l'abbé de Perny did not give any matrices; it was with the help of lead types, coming from the cast iron made for the account of [-] Abbé Perny, that IN took electroplated impressions. See the 1878 specimen. A catalogue of these signs was published in 1889 in 8°.⁶²

In addition to the complete specimen of these typefaces, the IN also holds an annotated version of the specimen, with information on

⁶⁰ Still among these documents, we find a small note saying that this file has not been found.

⁶¹ "Liste des types étrangers de l'Imprimerie nationale" (1890, 8); the IN archives contain the proofs of this publication, and specimens of typefaces sent by Imbault-Huart to use for the *Journal Asiatique*.

⁶² This could be the *Catalogue des signes chinois: corps 10* (1889). Handwritten note on the folder containing a dossier entitled "Chinois Corps 10 (Chinese Size 10)", unclassified archives of IN on oriental typefaces.

the storage of the types – which were divided into groups according to their graphic components, and with each typeface being assigned a number. However, these documents require verification for the actual presence of these typefaces at the IN, made from those of Paul Perny, and clarification on the related technical issues.⁶³ But it would be especially interesting to understand how they were actually used for contemporary and later works printed by the IN, or by publishers who borrowed the IN types, and to confirm whether or not Perny's purchase of the APMP types had any concrete effects on the discipline of sinology, given the importance of printing in the dissemination of knowledge. Last but not least, as Zhang Xiumin 张秀民 and Han Qi 韩琦 (2006, 444-52) explained in their history of printing in China, the French decomposed typefaces of Pauthier and Legrand provided models for the types used by the APMP between 1844 and 1860. As such, a few years later, the story came full circle with the characters being reintroduced to Europe from China by Perny and his contemporaries.

4 Epilogue

Paul Perny died in 1907, and the following year several books from his library were sold during the auction of the collection of Gustave Delondre, a specialist in Oriental languages and former attaché to the Consulate and librarian of the Société d'Ethnographie (*Bibliothèque* 1908). Some features of the sale catalogue seemed to emanate directly from Perny's personal trajectory, as they reflect someone who had been away from China for forty years, who was of modest means and with a small personal library, where he kept a few copies of his own works and a set of Christian books in Chinese, including an incomplete dictionary by Gonçalves.⁶⁴ The list of Chinese books is more surprising. We reproduce it below, respecting the contents and description of the works, but having updated the transcription of titles and names, with the addition of Chinese:

207. *Da Qing lǜli tongzuan jiquan* 大清律例統纂集全 (Complete and Assembled Compendium of the Code of the Great Qing, 1824).

⁶³ Might the typefaces have moved from a 9.5-point size, unsuited to IN standards, to a 10-point size through the production of matrices via galvanoplasty?

⁶⁴ The items included works by Perny, including linguistic works (lots 198-206); a number of Christian works in Chinese (lots 222-224), as well as “a large collection of handwritten Christian works in Chinese, around twenty volumes, with a Chinese dictionary (incomplete) by Gonçalves, in sheets”; and several volumes relating to the Christian religion (*Bibliothèque* 1908, 27).

208. *Bencao gangmu* 本草綱目 (Chinese Herbarium). By Li Shizhen 李時珍, Ming dynasty.
209. *Qinding shoushi tongkao* 欽定授時通考 (Complete Treatise on Agricultural Arts and Sciences, Imperial Edition of 1742). Written by imperial order. With numerous figures.
210. *Qiqi tushuo* 奇器圖說 (Illustrated Description of the Curious Machines of the West). One volume in-4, illustrated with numerous figures. Interesting work on arts and crafts.
211. *Shan hai jing guangzhu* 山海經廣注 (Classic of Mountains and Seas). With commentaries. 4 *ben*, in-4, curious figures. Poor condition.
212. An abridged edition of the same work. 2 *ben*, in-12, one with figures.
213. *Voyage d'un Chinois en Occident, à travers toute l'Europe*. 1 *ben*.
214. *Qinding [xingming] wannian shu* 欽定星命萬年書 (Chronological Book Used to Establish the Annual Calendar). 3 *ben*, in-8.
215. *Lidai di wang nianbiao* 歷代帝王年表 (Chronological Abridgment of the Kings and Emperors of China). By Qi Zhaonan 齊召南 (1703-1768). 4 *ben*, in-8. Worm pitting. This work begins with Fuxi 伏羲 and ends in 1644. It is a convenient manual to consult.
216. *Kangxi zidian* 康熙字典 (The Kangxi Dictionary). 30 *ben*, in-8.
217. *Wufang yuanyin* 五方元音 (Tonic Dictionary of the Chinese Language). 2 parts in 1 *ben*, in-8.
218. *Zihui* 字彙 (Chinese Dictionary). 13 *ben*, in-12.
219. *Other dictionary*. 3 *ben*, in-12 in poor condition.
220. *Zheng yin cuo yao* 正音撮要 (Manual for the Study of the Mandarin Language, 1850). For the use of the Chinese, including vocabularies, collections of sentences, dialogues, pronunciation tables, etc. 4 *ben*, in-12.
221. *[Ts'eu hou fa tch'eng]*. Model letters from members of the Hanlin Academy (翰林院). 1817 edition, 8 *ben*, in-12.⁶⁵

Some of these books were of evident utility for Perny, such as the Chinese dictionaries and the Chronology, which was probably used for his appendix to the dictionary (1872), as well as the Code, on which Perny had a translation project mentioned in his letters. As for others, their presence can be explained by considering them as a reflection of the practices of someone who had spent time in China calculating calendars and practicing calligraphy. But we should also note a *Voyage d'un Chinois en Occident* – perhaps the *Chengcha Biji* 乘槎

⁶⁵ *Bibliothèque* 1908, 25-6. The term *ben* 本 is probably the equivalent of *ce* 册 and it indicates the number of fascicles. The last title in brackets is the original transcription in the French text, as it has not been identified.

筆記 (Notes taken on a boat) of Binchun 斌椿 (1803-?), cf. Day 2018 – and two copies of the illustrated *Shan hai jing* 山海經 (Classic of Mountains and Seas) which, with its myths and unlikely creatures, featured everything a missionary had to dread the most. The technical and scientific books are numerous, which is logical for someone who was active in these learned circles and who compiled the natural history section found in the appendix to the dictionary (1872). But sometimes the gaps are equally eloquent: there were no ‘classical’ Chinese titles in his collection. Did he not bring them back from China? Could he have sold them earlier? Could they have been kept or sold in some other way? On the one hand, this lack is quite astonishing for someone who once wrote to his colleague: “Do you read Confucius? Have you studied the 4 Choū [Sishu 四書, Four Books]?” On the other, however, it is less so if we keep in mind the ‘European’ networks to which Perny was already addressing himself in his letters analysed above.

5 Concluding Remarks

Through some of his attitudes, including that of always putting himself forward as the protagonist of all adventures (i.e. in the creation of schools, the library, the mission’s printing works, the compilation and printing of the multilingual dictionaries, his imprisonment under the commune, his confrontations with some of his colleagues and with the most influential of his fellow sinologists), Perny appears to be the main ‘actor’ in his own story and therefore – as far as the themes touched on in this contribution are concerned – he was regarded as the author of the dictionaries, the tireless supplier of plants and silkworms to Europeans in search of information and technical solutions, and the paladin of practical sinology against the untouchable academic barons. However, historians now recognise the complexity of the logic of knowledge production (Romano, 2014, § 18), which forces us to question the works he left behind in such terms as well. The linguistic books bear Perny’s name, but it is likely that local people played a role in them, particularly in the case of the first compilation, the *Vocabolarium*, which was produced entirely in Guizhou. Furthermore, this *Vocabolarium* was printed by the Zhongjiazhi 仲家子 native tribe who, according to the missionaries themselves, knew no Chinese. These ‘barbarians’ acted as intermediaries between the missionaries and China. Moreover, in 1884, Perny sent a memorial to Jules Ferry (1832-1893), then President of the Council, because he wanted to launch an inquiry into the Miaôtsè (Miao), whose ‘tribes’ resided between Tonkin and China as well as in the provinces of Yunnan, Guangxi, Guizhou, and Sichuan. About them, he wrote: “I already possess numerous documents collected on the spot during my

thirty-year stay in China".⁶⁶ There is no reason to believe that local people – whether Han Chinese or not – were never involved in the long and tedious process carried out by Perny or his colleagues of compiling dictionaries, copying them in preparation for engraving wood-blocks, and then printing and binding the books, despite the reigning silence about them. Nevertheless, this practice was also shared by other compilers of dictionaries who preceded Perny, as sometimes the characters used, traced by hands far too skilful to be European, betray the existence of these nameless collaborators. At the same time, however, it must be said that missionaries did not always sign copies of the dictionaries they transcribed or compiled themselves, although sometimes their identity and authority as authors could be established, while the indigenous go-betweens, despite their importance (Shaffer et al. 2009), remained condemned to anonymity.

Perny operated in multiple circuits, which intersected without necessarily communicating. Firstly, as we have said, there was a continuous exchange with Paris and France (an exchange that, we feel, is amplified by the fact that written correspondence has survived, while oral exchanges have not): he was in contact with the director of the seminar, but also with learned societies in Paris and Lyon. This exchange at a 'global' scale, in a colonial world, was echoed in Perny's correspondence through his (very) critical reflections on the actions of France, and to a lesser extent England, in China, during the dramatic years of the sack of the Summer Palace and the unequal treaties. Obviously, Perny was also active in the mission and church circuit, a subject we have not discussed here. But his trip to Europe included a stop in Rome, where he claimed to be the translator of a papal bull, and so on. At the same time, exchanges between missionaries were taking place at the regional level (province to province), but also inter-regionally, between the countries of East Asia: for instance, in Annam, i.e. in the mission in Vietnam, where he sold some copies of his *Vocabularium*.⁶⁷ Finally, on a smaller scale, there were ongoing exchanges on the spot, between missionaries – as in the case of Perny's conflicts with Father Faurie – but also between missionaries and locals, even if we have not mentioned this point in this contribution. Indeed, Perny interacted with converts, Mandarins, and the Chinese authorities, with whom he constantly had to seek mediation, but also with rebels, etc.

An important element of his biography to be considered from his time in Guizhou, and which also involved his participation in multiple

⁶⁶ AMEP file Perny 0532-DG 231. For this mission, which did not take place, he asked for 6000 francs.

⁶⁷ Perny, Letter to Libois (2 February 1864) AMEP, Sichuan 6A08/07-3: Sichuan oriental 530-2, 1619-24.

and asymmetrical circuits, is that he was a botanist. As well as linguistic skills, knowledge of certain areas of the natural sciences seemed to be the rule for missionaries, who were invited to collect materials useful for natural history – but also for land use – in those places where they went on mission, particularly in China, as many studies have already documented.⁶⁸ In addition, French missionaries lived for long periods *in situ* and formed networks in territories that were often remote and rural: these were ideal spaces for plant collection, which was rich and repeated over time, without the need for long journeys (Fan 2004, 73, 80, 131). I will not dwell on this subject, as I have no specialist training in the field, but let us at least read what Perny wrote much later, in his letter to Jules Ferry, to justify his request for a mission to the Miao people:

The results of this scientific mission would be greatly appreciated by the learned societies of France and, I dare say, would do the greatest honour, Minister, to the cabinet of which you are the president. But apart from this main objective, my mission would provide services to the Learned Societies of our country which deserve to be taken into account and to weigh in the balance of considerations to be put forward in favour of the so-called Miaôtsè mission. The Société d'Acclimatation would receive valuable shipments of plants and flowers. Our medicine would be enriched by the knowledge of a host of medicinal plants unknown here. I won't forget the Museum of the Jardin des Plantes, which already has several million plants sent by me. (MEP Perny file 0532-DG 231)

Perny therefore proposed to return to China to take up a position and act as a mediator between holders of local botanical knowledge (he also stated in his appendix to the dictionary that some plants were named according to their customary name in Chinese) and the Parisian institutions and learned societies, as the Société d'Acclimatation and the Museum of the Jardin des Plantes. These institutions all played a role comparable to that of the 'library', 'collection', or 'laboratory' theorised by Latour (1996) and Callon, Raw and Rip (1984).

But Perny also used his skills and offered services that would "weigh in the balance of considerations" for the politician. Perny went from gathering samples to botanical classification, offering useful knowledge for a colonial power because of the practical repercussions that plants from China could have on medicine, for example. His plans for a mission to the Miao people failed, but it was as a scientist, and not as a man of letters or the church, that Perny attempted

⁶⁸ Cf. Fournier 1932; Dumoulin-Genest 1994; Zheng, Zheng 2005; Li 2020 and the article in this dossier.

to negotiate with politicians (Callon, Raw, Rip 1984, 14 and ff.). Let us recall yet another aspect correlated with the collection of plants and the possibility that the activity claimed by Perny was in fact collective and carried out by or with local people: we mentioned the networks of pharmacies and pharmacist-baptisers who mastered the rudiments of Christian religion but also, above all, traditional pharmaceutical principles. For once, there were identifiable go-betweens of local knowledge destined for European recovery, who were named by Perny as in the writings by other missionaries (Masson 2019). Finally, we should quote another sentence from the letter to Jules Ferry:

So far, no sinologist has been able to translate Chinese medical and natural history books because the synonymy of the plants has not yet been established. I shall take the greatest care to establish this synonymy, which is so important for science. (MEP Perny file 0532-DG 231)

A dozen years earlier, in the appendix to his *Dictionnaire* (1869-72), he explained the need to establish this 'synonymy'. What we consider here is not so much whether Perny actually did a good job of the work he claimed was necessary (first of all associating local plant names with those in standard Chinese, and then translating them into French and Latin, with the latter language being used because of its universality). Instead, we emphasise his awareness of the need to do this, and the production of a double index (one in Latin and one in the transcription of official Chinese) for his naturalist lexicon in the appendix of 1872. This was his way of creating tools for consulting, but also for interfering with and questioning the material produced (Callon, Raw, Rip 1984, 224), as well as making it available to as many readers as possible. It was also a realisation of the power of a global scientific language, by a churchman, who was already accustomed to spreading the universal word of his god.

But our botanist abbot was also a sinologist: it is his output as such that we have studied here. This activity took place at a time when an epistemic community was being created in Paris, initially asymmetrical and extremely polemical – all of which has recently attracted the attention of researchers.⁶⁹ As early as the turn of the eighteenth century, there were numerous conflicts between sinologists, crystallising around the issue of printing a Chinese-French-Latin dictionary, which was eventually published in 1813 by the Imperial Printing Office (i.e. the IN; Bussotti 2015; Bussotti, Landry-Deron 2020). This was a highly political project: not only its printing was decided by Napoleon, but the presence of sources to compile the dictionary in

⁶⁹ Cf. Guo 2022; Fabre 2015; 2017; 2018.

Paris, as well as the Oriental characters that were used in the same years to produce other Orientalist imprints, was largely due to Napoleon's campaigns in Italy (Bussotti 2015). Many scholars would have liked to be entrusted with the task of printing the dictionary, which was the first of its kind; and the chosen one, De Guignes Jr (Chrétien-Louis-Joseph de Guignes, 1759-1845), could only suffer from the criticism of all the other contestants, which persisted as Perny also made a critical reference to the dictionary.⁷⁰ One year after the publication of the dictionary, Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat was elected to the Collège de France. Polemics continued on other subjects among his disciples, for example between Stanislas Julien (1799-1873), who was to succeed him at the Collège, and Guillaume Pauthier (1801-1873), notably because of the former's intervention against the publication of the latter's translation of the *Dao de jing* 道德經 (Classic of the Way and the Virtue) (Pauthier 1842; Julien 1842). As we have explained, Perny was close to Pauthier, even though during his Chinese years he had tried, with Julien, to set up an exchange of books between China and those in duplicate at the Bibliothèque nationale, where Julien was assistant curator from 1854. However, in addition to the Collège, the Académie, and the Bibliothèque, Julien also substituted for his pupil Antoine-Pierre-Louis Bazin (1799-1862) at the École nationale de langues orientales (Drège n.d.). This latter responsibility proved to be too much, especially as Julien's oral knowledge of the language was insufficient to match the prerogatives of teaching at this École, and Perny was the defender of practical knowledge. When Julien gave way to Hervey de Saint-Denys, Perny took up the torch of controversy again, before the conflicts subsided towards the end of the century (although the Parisian sinological network has remained strongly asymmetrical, at least until recent times). Excluded from the mission and academic spaces, Perny was also interested in the printing of his works: in the previous pages, I explained how, in the nineteenth century, techniques, tools, and depositories of Western metal typography, eventually applied to Chinese, circulated from one part of the globe to another, and returned to Europe from China partially modified (Markovits, Poucheпадass, Subrahmanyam 2003, 2-3). These printing practices, which for Chinese characters were initially concentrated on dictionaries or a few classical texts (Bussotti, Landry-Deron 2020), started to spread and, in Paris, they went beyond the confines of the IN and also became operative through the activities of private publishers and printers. We know little about them, and even less about the workers who processed Oriental languages in these small enterprises. Indeed, the name of Mr. Michel, a worker

⁷⁰ Perny, Letter to Libois (6 June 1848) AMEP Guizhou 6A08/05-2: Pastorale 546-1, 97-8.

who helped Perny with Chinese at Lainé Press for at least two publications, transpired from Perny's writings not because of his work, skills, and knowledge, but because he took an interest in the destiny of the clergyman when Perny was arrested during the Commune. What's more, in the digital age, we have lost touch with the tangible nature that was a book on paper and with everything that went into creating this medium. It was through this process that knowledge became matter, that texts (including those in Chinese) were fixed and shaped, and that (sinological) knowledge was thereby transmitted. In this context, printing presses played a role in the constitution, fixation, and transmission of information that is not entirely dissimilar to that of collections and libraries (Latour 1996), while their complex structure and operation, which brought together tasks of multiple nature, is reminiscent of those of scientific laboratories (Callon, Raw, Rip 1984).

Acronyms

AMEP, Archives des Missions étrangères de Paris (Archives of the Paris Foreign Missions)

IN, Imprimerie nationale (National Printing Office)

IRFA, Institut de recherche France-Asie (The French-Asia Research Institute)

MEP, Missions étrangères de Paris (Paris Foreign Missions)

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