The Chinese Imprint

Printing and publishing Chinese religion and philosophy in the Dutch Republic 1595-1700

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This dissertation discusses how Chinese religion and philosophy were represented in printwork created in the Dutch Republic between 1595 and 1700. Focusing on a variety of printed media, this study sheds new light on the representation of an often contentious subject matter to readers, and the publishing strategies of the producers. To this end, form, content, and material-technical aspects of various text types in Dutch and French are analysed to gain insights into the ways in which an early modern public of readers - who were very much divided on religious, political, economic, and linguistic fronts - could take note of Chinese religion and philosophy. Furthermore, this analysis reveals the ways this knowledge was embedded into seventeenth-century Dutch perceptions of themselves and the foreign world.

Interpretations and understandings of Chinese religion and philosophy were the result of processes of textual transmission in which producers played a fundamental role. This study thereby assesses the importance of authors, translators, printers, publishers, editors, illustrators, and booksellers in shaping the cultural consumption of China. As such, this dissertation proves that there was no singular image of Chinese religion and philosophy, but rather a varied array of notions on the subject. Perceptions differed according to type and aim of publication, in addition to a variety of motives and considerations related to the cultural, political, religious, and economic background of the producers.
THE CHINESE IMPRINT
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Printing and Publishing Chinese Religion and Philosophy in the Dutch Republic
1595–1700

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements 9
Previously Published Materials 13

Introduction: The Commodification of Confucius in the Dutch Republic 15
Research Aims 20
Historiography 23

Early Modern Intercultural Contacts between China and Europe 23
Printing and Publishing in the Dutch Republic 27
The Dutch Republic and the Middle Kingdom 32
The History of the History of the Book 341
Methodology 36
Transtextuality 36
Religion and Philosophy 39
Definition of Terms 43
Outline 45

Chapter 1: Representations of China’s Religion and Philosophy in Dutch-made Books, 1595-1687 51
Introduction: The First Global Era 51
Publishing Books on China 53
Outline 54

Early Contacts between China and the Dutch Republic 58
The Mercantile Approach 58
Early Dutch Travelogues on China: Cornelis Claesz 59
Illustrating the Foreign Idol: the Devil in Calicut 65
Jesuits and Calvinists on Chinese Religion and Philosophy 79
The Missionary Perspective 79
The Society of Jesus in the Middle Kingdom 79
Jesuit Publications on Chinese Religion and Philosophy 84
Calvinist Considerations of China 100
The Further Reformation: Gijssbrecht Voetius and Johannes Hoornbeeck 104
Chapter 2: The Vernacular and Latin Translations of Confucius:
Confucius *Sinarum philosophus* (1687) and Pieter van Hoorn’s *Eenige voornaam eigenschappen van de ware deugdt* (1675) 165

Introduction: *Translating Confucius* 165

 Accommodating Chinese Religion and Philosophy 166

 Outline 168

 Athanasius Kircher 172

 China’s Prisca theologia 172

 The Amsterdam Publication of *China Illustrata* 175

 Kircher’s Chinese-Egyptian Hermeticism 178

 The First Latin Translations of Confucius 182

 Learning Chinese from Confucius 182

 From Manuscript to Print 184

 The 1675 Dutch Edition of Confucius 187

 Confucius as a Guide to Virtue: Pieter van Hoorn 187

 Batavia: a Chinese Town under Dutch Rule 193

 Johan van Hoorn’s Enduring Contact with the Middle Kingdom 194

 The 1687 Jesuit Edition of Confucius in Latin 201

 Confucius *Sinarum philosophus*: Bibliology and Paratext 201

 Arguing for Accommodation 205

 Translating Confucius *Sinarum philosophus* 206

 Simon Foucher 207

 Jean de Labrune 213

 François Noël 218

 Conclusion 220
Chapter 3: Confucius in Dutch-made Learned Journals during the Last Quarter of the Seventeenth Century 223

Introduction: 'Confucius Can be Found in Amsterdam' 223
The Dissemination of China 224

Outline 225

The Learned Journal in the European World of Print 228
The Emergence of the Erudite Periodical 228

Learned Journals of the Dutch Republic 234

French Huguenots and the Publication of Learned Journals 236
The Erudite Press and China before 1687 238

Pierre Bayle’s Nouvelles de la République des Lettres 239

Discussing and Reviewing Confucius Sinarum philosophus 245

The Antiquity of China 253

Martino Martini and the Universal Flood 254

Isaac Vossius Versus Georg Hornius 257

Critiquing Confucius 263

The Jesuits and the Jansenists: Antoine Arnauld 263

The Mediating Role of the Editor 264

Conclusion 267

Chapter 4: China and the Chinese Rites Controversy in Dutch Newspapers at the Turn of the Eighteenth Century 271

Introduction: Shifting Representations of China and Confucius 271

Dynamic China 273

Outline 274

Publishing News in the Dutch Republic 276

'The Dutch Miracle' of News Publication 276

Dutch Newspapers in French 279

Compiling News in Mercuren 280

News from China 281

Is News from China even News? 281

Newspapers as Vehicles for Discussing and Debating China 283

Reports on China in Dutch-made Newspapers 284

Reporting on the Economic Interests of the Dutch 284
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Advertising China</td>
<td>286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Middle Kingdom in French-language Newspapers</td>
<td>290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Kangxi Emperor and Louis XIV</td>
<td>290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diverging Reports in French and Dutch</td>
<td>293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Chinese Rites Controversy in the Public Eye</td>
<td>297</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louis le Comte's Nouveaux mémoires sur l'état présent de la Chine</td>
<td>299</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A War of Pamphlets</td>
<td>304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Chinese Rites Controversy in News Digests</td>
<td>307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>311</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epilogue: The Waning of Dutch Demand for China?</td>
<td>315</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusions</td>
<td>316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Aims</td>
<td>316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Considerations Related to the Production of Print</td>
<td>318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mercantile, Missionary, and Cultural Entrepreneurial Perspectives on China</td>
<td>320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expanding and Rethinking the Corpus of European Sources on China</td>
<td>325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dutch Printwork for the Republic of Letters</td>
<td>326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transtextuality as Theoretical and Methodological Framework</td>
<td>328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samenvatting</td>
<td>343</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Sources</td>
<td>353</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature</td>
<td>363</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Unlike our seventeenth century Dutch forebears, we went to China by plane. While they were confined to the drudgery of life at sea for months at a time, we arrived safe and sound from Amsterdam in Shanghai in less than 11 hours. In 2016, our team of the NWO-project ‘The Chinese Impact: Images and Ideas of China in the Dutch Golden Age’ visited China to take part in the international seminar on the ‘Entangled Cultural Histories of the Low Countries and China’, generously hosted by Shaoxin Dong of the Institute for Advanced Humanistic Studies of Fudan University. During the day, we were treated to stimulating presentations and discussion, and in the evening we ate, drank, and made merry. I will never forget playing pool in a smoke-filled hole in the wall, where the bartender adhered to the Chinese custom of serving beer warm. While it made our drinks less refreshing, it certainly added to the already very Chinese ambiance. It was a wonderful first – yet certainly not last – visit to China, which was made all the more special by the truly intercultural meeting of minds I was fortunate enough to be part of.

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Previously Published Materials

A first version of some parts of this study have been published earlier. Selections of Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 appeared in ‘Confucius at “De Batavische Mercurius”’: Governor General of the Dutch East Indies Pieter van Hoorn and the first vernacular translation of the Chinese Confucius’ was published in D. Cappa, et al., Cultural encounters. Cross-disciplinary studies from the late Middle Ages to the Enlightenment, Berlin, Vernon Press, 2018, pp. 109-124.

“It is said that…”: The Chinese Rites Controversy in Dutch newspapers and periodicals in the seventeenth century’ appeared in Jaarboek voor Nederlandse boekgeschiedenis, vol. 23, 2016, pp. 172-191, and ‘Constructing Confucius in the Low Countries’, De zeventiende eeuw, vol. 32, no. 2, 2016, pp. 137-164, which was co-authored by Thijs Weststeijn. Weststeijn was primarily responsible for section I ‘The First Latin Translations’, while I focussed mainly on section II ‘The 1675 Dutch Edition’. Section III ‘The 1687 Latin Edition’, as well as the Introduction, and Conclusion and Aftermath were written jointly.