
PRESENTING THE COLLECTIONS

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MANCHU COLLECTIONS IN PARIS

The historians, bibliographers, sinologists, and manchurists already know that a great number of Chinese materials, among which were many in the Manchu language, was brought to Europe mainly in the eighteenth—nineteenth centuries. The Manchu part of the principal European collections has already been described in different catalogues [1]. The French collections were mentioned in the article of Prof. Kanda Nobus [2], followed later by a Manchu catalogue of the Bibliothèque Nationale [3] and a title-list of the Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises [4].

The Manchu collection of the Bibliothèque Nationale (a successor of Bibliothèque du Roi) was formed gradually starting from the end of the seventeenth century, and its detailed history is well presented by Mme Marie-Rose Séguy in the preface to the “Catalogue du fonds mandchou”. The catalogue, compiled by Jeanne-Marie Puyraimond under the guidance of Prof. Walter Simon, was published in 1979. It includes 294 entries which provide a description of 82 manuscripts. According to the number and repertory of the blockprints and manuscripts, this Manchu collection is comparable only with that at the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, and of the British Library in London [5]. It was a general opinion that almost all Manchu books in France were concentrated in the Bibliothèque du Roi as a central library. In 1970 the British Prof. W. Simon initiated a revision of the old catalogue, as well as compilation and publication of the new one.

The second biggest Oriental library in Paris belongs to the Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises, and the title-list of its Manchu collection was published by H. Walravens in 1976. These were the two collections known to the scholars, and during the last 20 years nobody has raised the question if other depositories in Paris may contain the books in Manchu. Having an honour to receive the six-month Diderot grant of Maison des Sciences de l'Homme in 1995—1996, the author of the present article had an opportunity to work on different Oriental collections of Paris, and the preliminary results of this research are presented in this article.

The history of the Manchu collections, as well as the history of the Manchu studies in France, like in other European countries, is closely connected with the interest to China. That is why we shall trace the origin of the principal Manchu collections (mainly of the Bibliothèque Nationale

as the biggest and most important one) in connection to the famous French sinologists who made a great contribution to the Manchu studies as well.

The history of Oriental studies in France is traditionally started in 1685 when the first French Jesuit missionaries stepped on board of the ship “l'Oyseau” bound to China. They reached Peking only in 1688. It was a group of six Jesuits known as “Mathématiciens du Roi” — specialists in mathematics, astronomy, natural history, geography, cartography and philology — who were sent by the French king Louis XIV to China for collecting the Chinese materials and introducing the European science to China [6]. Among the members of the first French Jesuit missions were Father Joachim Bouvet (1656—1730) and Father Jean-François Gerbillon (1654—1707) who were joined by Joseph-François-Marie-Anne de Moyriac de Mailla (1669—1748), as well as by Dominique Parrennin (1665—1741) [7]. They quickly acquired a good command of the Chinese and Manchu languages and were the first to acquaint France with the culture of the Manchu court in China.

The first forty-nine volumes of Chinese blockprints were brought to Paris by J. Bouvet as a gift of the Chinese emperor Kangxi to Louis XIV in 1693 and were registered in the Royal Library on May 27 and June 2, 1697 [8]. These books started the Royal collection of the books, manuscripts, drawings, and maps from China. At the beginning of the eighteenth century the Oriental collection numbered about 2,000 volumes mainly consisting of diplomatic gifts to the French court, items from the collection of the abbot Jean-Paul Bignon (1662—1743), who was the director of the library since 1719, books from the Congrégation des Missions Étrangères, books from Father Jean-François Foucquet (1663—1740) and from the Compagnie des Indes. The first catalogue of the Royal library “Catalogus codicum manuscriptorum Bibliothecae regiae” was printed in 1739. The earliest research on the Manchu language in Europe was printed in France in 1696. It was “Elementa Linguae Tartaricae” by the Jesuit Father F. Verbiest published in “Relations de divers voyages curieux” [9].

During the eighteenth century the books were sent from the French mission mainly by Father Jean-Joseph Amiot (1718—1793), who had lived in China for 42 years, and like many of the missionaries died in Peking [10]. He