Introduction from the Guest Editor

A recent communication by Jacques Gernet at the *Académie des Inscriptions & Belles-Lettres* in Paris focused on the figure of Antoine Gaubil (1689-1759), a Jesuit missionary who worked in Beijing from 1723 to 1759.¹ Gernet quotes Paul Demiéville, who in his preface to the edition of more than 300 letters by Gaubil considered him “the greatest European sinologist of the eighteenth century, the most intelligent among the French Jesuits who founded in China the first occidental school of erudite studies on China.”² Earlier Joseph Needham had conferred similar praise on Gaubil: “He had had a considerable astronomical training under Cassini and Maraldi at the Paris Observatory, and after his departure from France carried out what may truly be called titanic and indefatigable labours in acquiring an almost perfect knowledge of Chinese, collecting all possible texts bearing on astronomy and mathematics, and himself making astronomical observations. So perfect was his knowledge of Chinese and other Asian languages, that he was frequently called upon by the emperor to act as verbatim interpreter at State interviews.”³

The person of Gaubil serves as a nice entry point into the themes of circulation of knowledge and networks between China and Europe that are at the heart of this and the next issue of *East Asian Science, Technology and Medicine*. While in Beijing, Gaubil maintained an active relationship with many outstanding European scholars, such as Nicolas Fréret (1688-1749), secretary of the same *Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres* in Paris, where Gernet gave his talk. The last preserved letter of Gaubil’s exchanges with Fréret, which had lasted for nearly ten years, is dated Beijing, 2nd October 1741.⁴ The letter discusses the transmission of books from Paris to Beijing and from Beijing to Paris, and the practical problems concerned. It mentions the writings of other scholars who belonged to their network of scientific communication, such as Étienne Fourmont (1683-1735) in Paris and Joseph-Anne-Marie de Moyriac de Mailla (1669-1748) in Beijing. It

¹ Jacques Gernet, “À propos du Père Gaubil S.J., à Pékin de 1723 à 1759”, *Académie des Inscriptions & Belles-lettres, Comptes rendus des séances de l’année 2009*, fascicule 1 (janvier-mars), Paris: Boccard, 2009, pp. 9-19.

² Paul Demiéville, “Préface”, Antoine Gaubil, *Correspondance de Pékin, 1722-1759*, ed. Renée Simon, Genève: Droz, 1970, p. vii.

³ Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China: Volume 3: Mathematics and the Sciences of the Heavens and the Earth*, Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1959, p. 182.

⁴ Antoine Gaubil, *Correspondance de Pékin, 1722-1759*, Genève: Librairie Droz, 1970, pp. 533-537.

refers to books in Manchu as well as in Chinese, which treat topics in disciplines as diverse as history, chronology, and astronomy.⁵ Finally, Gaubil's scientific information is interwoven with an account of the recent deaths of Dominique Parrenin (1665-1741) and Francois-Xavier Dentrecolles (1664-1741), and information about the daily life of the mission and the missionaries: "If you want to know in particular what I do for religious practices as a missionary here, I will answer you that since the month of October of last year till the month of October of this year, I baptized 67 adults here, and I conferred baptism to 250 exposed or moribund children of infidels, I preached 35 times in our church and more than 30 times in the city in the chapels for women; I administrated the holy Viaticum and extreme unction to 34 sick, I distributed and had distributed books of religion and controversy, in total more than 150 books. That is more or less what I do each year, sometimes more, sometimes less."

This letter may well be paradigmatic of the articles in these two issues of *East Asian Science, Technology and Medicine*. One of the common key notions in these issues is "circulation". One can indeed think of history as one continuous process of circulation. The term refers in the first place to the physical traveling or displacement of persons. Together with them travel objects, texts (letters and books), images, artefacts, and this is the manner in which knowledge circulated. These objects and ideas usually emerge from "encounters" between actual persons, a second key notion of these issues, and often induce new encounters. These encounters frequently result in new texts that again start to travel. The link between circulation and encounter is "networks": they allow encounters and circulation from one place to another, from Paris to Beijing and from Beijing to St. Petersburg, say, even without the physical movement of the persons concerned. The purpose of this type of historical writing, then, is to catch a glimpse of these original encounters, to reconstruct the networks and to retrace the circulation.

There is also resemblance between the letter of Gaubil and the present issues regarding the interaction of various disciplines. Several topics included have wider implications than those they seem to embrace at first sight. Medicine concerns the physical body, but, in the case of the emperor, also the imperial body, and, as a consequence, its place in the organisation of the state. Chronology concerns time measurement, but is linked to astronomical observations in history books and to debates about the validity of statements in sacred books such as the Bible. An analysis of the history of the transmission of the screw leads to insights into the explanation of the theory and practice of technology.

⁵ Together with this letter Gaubil sent a second copy of the chronological writing (*Yu ding*) *Li dai ji shi nian biao* (御定)歷代紀事年表 (100 *juan*) published by order of the Kangxi emperor in 1715.

The authors of this and the next issue are all researchers of the Department of Sinology of the University of Leuven (Belgium). Despite the wide variety in topics they discuss, the authors share some characteristics in methodology: the importance paid to a textual approach, in line with historical-critical methods; the attempt to trace the history of the sources; the effort towards achieving a complementarity of Chinese, Manchu and European sources; the integration of visual sources; the endeavour of a holistic approach that pays attention to a context in which scientific, religious and ritual activities were closely interwoven.

The articles on “Networks and Circulation of Knowledge: Encounters between Jesuits, Manchus and Chinese in Late Imperial China” are spread over two subsequent numbers of *East Asian Science, Technology and Medicine*. The first issue includes two articles related to medicine: Noël Golvers traces the history of the circulation of medical and pharmaceutical books from Europe to China in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Beatriz Puente-Ballesteros explores the wide network of imperial power and privilege related to medical practice at the Kangxi court and the important role Jesuit medicine (i.e. Jesuit physicians and Jesuit drugs) played in it under the patronage of the Kangxi emperor. The same issue includes an article on the screw by Nicole Halsberghe, who investigates not only how the knowledge of the screw was transmitted from Europe to China, but also how it circulated between texts in China. The second issue contains two articles on chronology. Nicolas Standaert tries to identify the Chinese sources for the missionaries’ writings on Chinese history and chronology that were sent from China to Europe. Ad Dudink elucidates how biblical chronology was transmitted to China and how it was adopted by various scholars in their Chinese writings. The authors express their gratitude to the anonymous referees for their constructive criticisms as well as to the editors and the managerial staff of *East Asian Science, Technology and Medicine* for their generous help in preparing these two publications.

Nicolas Standaert