vein, the normative Confucian framework into which the Xu family writings were embedded is not reflected upon in the text. It is true that “awareness that the biography was written with a purpose does not mean that the whole story is a fiction” (12). However, embedding the sources into their discursive contexts would have helped to develop a greater awareness towards certain textual tropes such as Confucian generosity (18) or Christian prayerfulness (64) and thus towards the insecurities that remain in the interpretation of the available sources on Candida Xu. Even so, Gail King’s biography of Candida Xu is a valuable addition to the scholarship on early modern Chinese Christian women and to the study of the Xu family. It not only recounts the life of an exemplary Chinese Christian woman, but also provides many details on a prominent Chinese Christian family.

Nadine Amsler

Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin, Berlin, Germany

nadine.amsler@wiko-berlin.de

DOI:10.1163/22141332-08040011-08

Eric Verbiest

God of de Keizer?: Pater Ferdinand Verbiest in China. Gompel & Scavina: Antwerp, 2020. Pp. 290. Pb, €34.00.

Eric Verbiest’s *God of de Keizer?* is an enticing narrative of the Jesuit China missions from the 1630s until the late 1680s that focuses on Ferdinand Verbiest’s accomplishments in order to analyze the Jesuit approach Verbiest came to embody: was it possible to convert the emperor (and the rest of China) by offering and illustrating the usefulness of Western scientific, mathematical, and astronomical knowledge? *God of de Keizer?* is organized in ten mostly chronological chapters, which are further subdivided into two- to six-page-long fragments, formatted as Jesuit letters or Chinese and Manchu daily reports. This set-up makes for an engaging and fast-moving read, whereby the reader is drawn into a constantly evolving first-person chronicle.

The story starts with shipwrecks and pirate attacks, diseases, and altercations with the Dutch East India Company. While this part may not yet dig deep into the Jesuit type of accommodation they established in China—in particular the dilemma of serving God or the emperor—Eric Verbiest reminds the readers of the dramatic parameters of Jesuits’ global lives. That is not to say that there was any less drama more regionally, during the dynastic transition from Ming to Qing—the setting of chapter two. This comes out most viscerally

in the description of the gory details of the Ming emperor's final hours as he slays his own concubine and princesses before committing suicide (36–37), for example, or references to the Yangzhou massacre (48) or the difficulties both Jesuits and Chinese faced in serving Sichuan's Yellow Tiger, Zhang Xianzhong. With a narrative that closely follows the primary sources available, Verbiest presents a captivating account.

As the author sets the scene in these opening chapters, Ferdinand Verbiest is not prominently represented until halfway through chapter three (page 77 to be precise is when he is first mentioned after an absence of nearly fifty pages). This does not mean that the central issue—in what way should Jesuits balance their service to God and emperor—is not furthered in the meantime: the way Verbiest's predecessor, Adam Schall von Bell, deals with the dilemma is described in detail to explicitly set it against (and in line with) Verbiest's approach later on in the book. The dynastic transition, while being a stage for dramatic reversals and incomprehensible cruelty on the one hand, does also serve to illustrate the possible lack of Jesuit agency in the matter of which emperor or ruler they had to serve. Once the Chinese and Manchu elites were aware Jesuits could cast cannon or perform other administrative functions, all of them—Zhang Xianzhong, the southern Ming, and the new Manchu rulers—forced them to act in those capacities. This lack of agency is part of the argument itself, as the protagonists continually contemplate the pros and cons of engaging the Chinese elite in the accommodating way the Jesuits did. Multiple times Eric Verbiest lets the main characters confront and discuss to what extent the Confucian rites for ancestors were civil or religious in nature (33). While at first the reader may think this was an issue that set the Jesuits as a group against other missionaries such as the Dominicans and Franciscans, it becomes clear that the issue of accommodating the Confucian elite caused stark divisions and heated arguments among Jesuits as well (56–57).

Towards the second half of the book, the conflict about whether serving the Qing government in various capacities was truly the best way to bring about mass conversion in China takes the center stage. According to the author (expressed via the Jesuit Francisco Furtado), there is no worse strife than the one with “people of the same color” (58). In this context, Eric Verbiest does not skirt around controversy within the Jesuit society, including Nicolas Trigault's suicide (44), heated fights between Jesuits who are staunch supporters of the Portuguese king's patronage and those who are supposedly less supportive, and the distrust that existed between different Jesuits when it comes to offering support to the Muscovy envoy in exchange for favors (193–208), for example.

Even though the spotlight centers squarely on Ferdinand Verbiest, Verbiest himself does not become the main first-person narrator; this may be because

Eric Verbiest recognizes that the Flemish missionary has been identified as a “more distant figure, a faint shadow” (as Golvers describes Verbiest on page 289). Eric Verbiest thus seeks to add to Ferdinand Verbiest’s academic image, which is studied more easily thanks to the numerous academic works he left behind, a more in-depth analysis of the missionary’s personality, as he was perceived by both European and Asian contemporaries. He succeeds in doing this. Verbiest’s character and skills are consistently portrayed in a very positive light; Schall has nothing but positive words (77), Chinese scholars such as Liu Yunde seek his friendship (84), even enemies (Muslim astronomers) are impressed by Verbiest’s performance (92). Sometimes, Verbiest’s engineering skills allow him to single handedly concoct unusual solutions (156). Verbiest thus comes off as a man with many skills, diplomacy, and deep emotions, for example when the author emphasizes how much pain Verbiest experiences due to the distrust of his fellow fathers (183). By the end, the reader has a much more personal sketch of a supposedly “distant figure,” even though some questions remain and are most likely unanswerable: did Verbiest really believe that his wholehearted dedication to the Kangxi emperor would eventually result in the ruler’s conversion? Was it possible for Verbiest to be the pivot of the Jesuit dilemma of serving both God and emperor and at the same time be one of the last missionaries to unite missionaries of all nationalist backgrounds working together in China? Is it possible for a personality to embody all these contradictions and still be considered loving and unifying by everyone around you?

Frederik Vermote

Social, Behavioral and Global Studies Department, California State
University, Monterey Bay, CA, USA

fvermote@csumb.edu

DOI:10.1163/22141332-08040011-09

Giulia Falato

Alfonso Vagnone’s Tongyou jiaoyu (On the Education of Children, c.1632): The Earliest Encounter between Chinese and European Pedagogy. Studies in the History of Christianity in East Asia, 3. Leiden: Brill, 2020. Pp. x + 298. Hb, €99,00.

In the history of the cultural exchanges between China and the West, “the spread of Chinese Learning to the West” and “the spread of Western Learning to the East” are the two components. What Dr. Giulia Falato discusses in her book belongs to this period of history. By investigating the prolific Italian Jesuit Alfonso Vagnone’s (1566–1640) *Tongyou jiaoyu* (童幼教育) Falato discusses in what way Western knowledge in the field of pedagogy, specifically Western