



## A new identity for Rubens's 'Korean man' *Portrait of the Chinese merchant Yppong*

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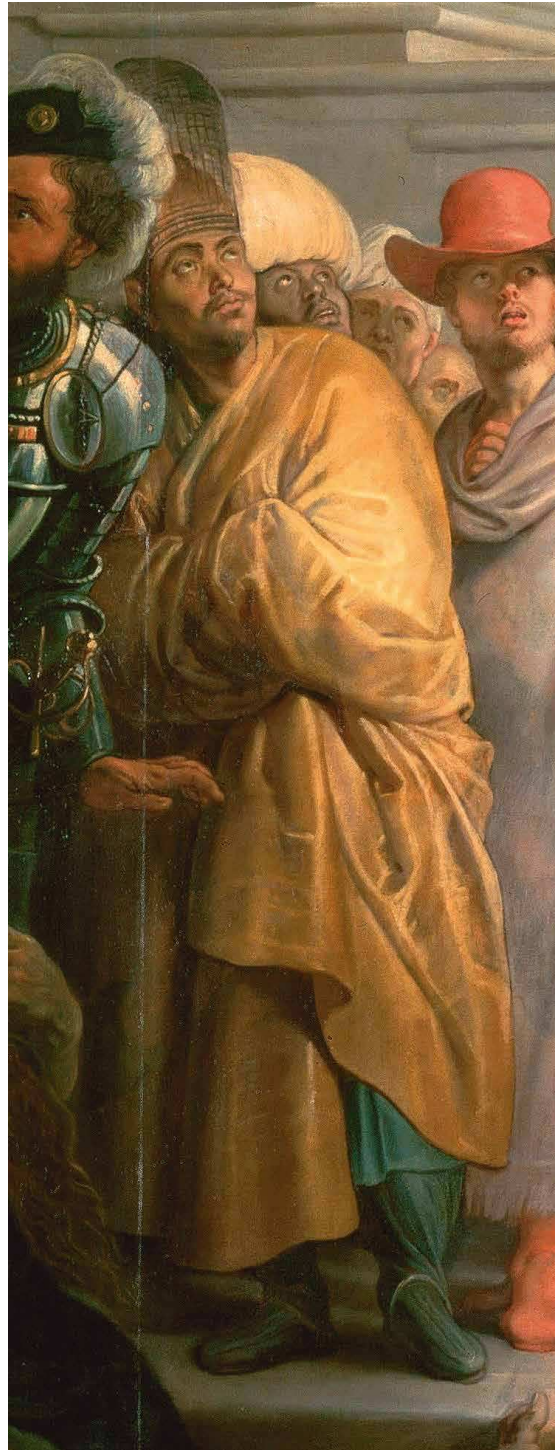
When Rubens painted his altarpiece *The miracles of St. Francis Xavier*, he included among the onlookers in the background a man in a yellow robe, turquoise trousers, and a curious conical hat (figs. 1, 2). The figure was probably based on an earlier drawing that is now known as *Man in Korean costume* (J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles) (fig. 3). The drawing has been related to Siamese ambassadors in London, pagan priests in Goa, and European missionaries in China, but the association with Korea has been most persistent since it was first put forward in 1934: the sitter may have been a freed Korean slave who traveled from Japan to Rome, where Rubens could have met and portrayed him.<sup>1</sup> The drawing's degree of detail suggests that at least the dress was done from observation. When the Getty Museum devoted an exhibition to the work in 2013, its experts concluded that the costume may have been authentically East Asian. They also called Rubens's rendition an 'imaginative' interpretation that 'defies categorization': he did not face a Korean man.<sup>2</sup>

The following will put forward another view, namely that Rubens's drawing was based on an earlier work by another artist. This was a portrait of an individual: a Chinese merchant who traveled on a ship of the Dutch East India Company – in fact the first Chinese to visit Europe whose identity is documented in such detail. The new conclusion is based on an entry in an *album amicorum* of the Dutchman Nicolaas de Vruse, dated 1595-1609 (figs. 4, 5).<sup>3</sup> One of this album's contributions, of 12 January 1601, is a colored drawing similar to Rubens's. The image is furnished with an inscription in Chinese and an explanation in Latin on the reverse. These texts identify the sitter as the Chinese merchant Yppong who traveled, via Java, to Middelburg where he arrived on 31 May 1600. Additional Dutch and Chinese sources document Yppong's successful career after his return to Southeast Asia, as a middleman for the Dutch East India Company.

The illustration in De Vruse's album represents Yppong full length with his peculiar hat, a transparent shape rounded on top (perhaps best described as resembling a birdcage). Rubens's larger image in black and red chalk renders the robe in much more detail but is cropped so that the figure's hat and legs are only partly visible.<sup>4</sup> As regards the faces, clearly recognizable features in both images are the cleft chin, wide cheekbones, protruding left ear, and the raised, round eyebrows. Even the hair, curling upwards at the right side of the face and slightly longer under the left ear, is almost identical. In both cases, however, the facial features are too generic to conclude that the artist was portraying an individual.

<sup>1</sup> Peter Paul Rubens, *The miracles of St. Francis Xavier*, 1617-1618, oil on canvas, 535 x 395 cm, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, acquired in 1776 from the Jesuit Church in Antwerp (© Google Art Project)





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Detail of fig. 1

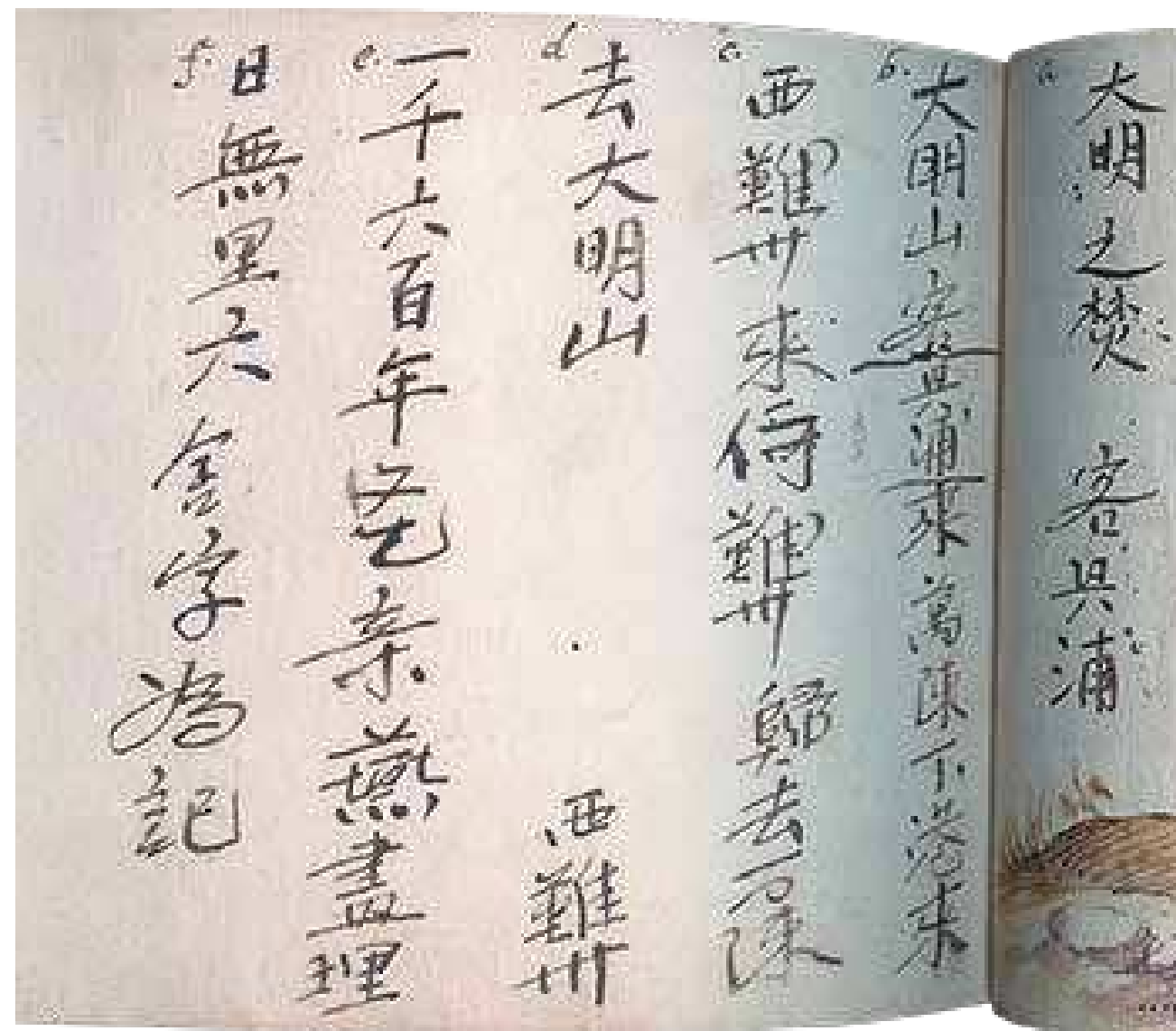


5  
Detail of fig. 4



3  
Peter Paul Rubens, *Portrait of the Chinese merchant Yppong*, c. 1617, black chalk with touches of red chalk in the face, 38.4 x 23.5 cm, Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum (Image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program)





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unknown draftsman, *The Chinese merchant Yppong*, dated 1601, drawing in colored ink on paper, octavo, 107 x 170 mm, from *Album amicorum* of Nicolaas de Vrse, 1595-1609, United States, private collection (photo © Antiquariaat Forum Rare Books, 't Goy-Houten)

Despite these obvious similarities, there are some marked differences in the body and clothing.<sup>5</sup> De Vrse's figure is long and sleek whereas Rubens depicted a broad-shouldered man; his dress, and the upper legs beneath it, is much shorter. Whereas the figure's overall posture with the ample sleeves and the broad, diagonal collar is similar, Rubens rendered the folds in the coat differently. While the amount of detail in Rubens's depiction of the upper garment suggests a careful study from observation, the same cannot be said of De Vrse's drawing, which seems to have been done more swiftly.

De Vrse's image contains an inscription with the date (1601). Rubens's does not, so the chronology is not immediately clear. It is not possible that Rubens actually met Yppong in Zeeland or Antwerp, as the painter had left for Venice three weeks before the latter's arrival in Europe.<sup>6</sup> In order to establish the relationship between the two drawings, the following



will therefore delve into the background of De Vrse's album and examine the validity of the claims that it makes in Chinese and Latin. Other relevant checks concern the depicted dress, the archival records of the Dutch trading companies, and the iconography of Rubens's completed altarpiece.

#### Testimony to a social network. De Vrse's album amicorum

What kind of document is De Vrse's drawing? Early seventeenth-century *alba amicorum* contained dedications, poems, images, and similar contributions from one's scholarly and aristocratic contacts and testified to the range and quality of one's social network. They were particularly prized possessions among students. Some were accomplished, collective efforts in literature and art; a contributor might turn to a skilled draftsman, whom he

would pay for the work (often a heraldic image). This is the case for De Vrise's album.<sup>7</sup> Besides the portrait of Yppong, twelve images in De Vrise's book were commissioned from different artists; only one of these minor masters, Everard Hannegrave, is mentioned by name.<sup>8</sup> The other scenes relate to classical literature (Piramus and Thisbe, The judgment of Paris, Apollo and Daphne), Catholic worship (St. Sebastian), and the high nobility (a luxury mansion and the Bucintoro) (figs. 6, 7). In addition, seven leaves with illustrations of historical costume are included (appendix 1).

The album's owner, Nicolaas de Vrise, was born in the city of Goes in Zeeland in a well-to-do Catholic family with strong connections to the Spanish Netherlands. He may have become a lawyer in Middelburg.<sup>9</sup> Some of the 44 contributions in his album come from France, Germany, and Italy, but most are from the Low Countries, including the names of well-known patrician families. Although the Northern Provinces and Spain had been at war since 1568 (relations were only to relax with the Twelve Years' Truce of 1609), *alba amicorum* typically testify to the fluidity of the physical and religious boundaries between the Dutch Republic and the Spanish Netherlands.<sup>10</sup> As does De Vrise's. Goes is only 60 kilometers from Antwerp, and many Zeeland natives and immigrants remained culturally focused on the Catholic South rather than on Amsterdam. De Vrise's title page reveals his strong allegiance to the Vatican and Madrid: above the coats of arms of Zeeland and Middelburg is a fulsome crest of Pope Sixtus V (r. 1585-1590), flanked by those of Portugal (at right) and Spain (at left) (fig. 6). At the time, these two countries were joined in the Iberian Union (1584-1640) – a global empire spanning from Mexico to Macao, with Antwerp as its main emporium in Northern Europe.

De Vrise's connections to nobility in the Southern Netherlands suggest that he had been a student at the University of Leuven, that despite the Revolt remained the main center of education for the Catholic elite in the Low Countries. His Chinese image might then be connected to the university's first steps in 'Oriental' studies, for which it had recently appointed professors of Hebrew, Arabic, Aramaic, and Syriac.<sup>11</sup> In this context, an interesting figure among De Vrise's contacts is Jean-Baptiste Gramaye, *rhetor universitaris* at Leuven at the time he contributed to the album, whose interest in the East culminated in his book *Asia sive historia universalis asiaticarum gentium* (Asia or the universal history of the Asian peoples; Antwerp 1604). Although this concerned chiefly the Biblical Orient, Gramaye allegedly also studied Chinese.<sup>12</sup>

This book on Asia may have been a factor when Archduke Albrecht appointed Gramaye as court historiographer in 1606. Albrecht himself had until 1593 been viceroy of the Portuguese overseas possessions; his patronage of the Jesuits had turned Antwerp into the Low Countries' primary center connected to the worldwide Catholic mission. This meant that Antwerp continued to present itself as a city with global ambitions, even though the Dutch had blocked its access to the sea as of 1585.<sup>13</sup> Many Flemish merchants operated from the Zeeland harbors that functioned as Antwerp's de facto waterfront.<sup>14</sup> After a first attempt in 1595, various traders in the Dutch Republic had set eyes on sailing to East Asia, in effect taking over the naval routes established by the Portuguese. An Antwerp entrepreneur and a Middelburg mayor established Zeeland's two trading companies, which merged in 1602



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Title page from De Vrise's album, 1595-1609, inscribed 'Solem a mundo tollere videntur qui amicitiam a vita tollunt' and 'Amicitiae et memoriae sacrum', fol. 7r

with others from different regions to form the Dutch East India Company.<sup>15</sup> As will become clear below, De Vrise's album testifies that it was the very first fleet of the Middelburgse Compagnie, which left for Java in 1598, that would take Yppong to the Low Countries.

Other Dutch *alba amicorum* reflect these global connections as well. East Asian script is present in at least two other albums (figs. 8, 9). As early as 1595, a printed page from a Chinese gazetteer was included in the album of Bernardus Paludanus, based in the harbor city of Enkhuizen.<sup>16</sup> The album of the Harderwijk collector Ernst Brinck contained much more: two fragments from a Chinese dictionary, a quality mark of Chinese silk, an original Japanese calligraphy, and a printed Japanese text erroneously identified as Malay.<sup>17</sup> What makes De Vrise's text stand out is that it was not pasted into his album but written directly into it, allegedly by a Chinese visitor, and addresses the European reader. Yet it is not immediately clear whether its message should be taken at face value. For one, Yppong may have written the Chinese characters, but the rest of the entry must have been done by someone else, as the use of learned Latin and the quality of the writing points out. The image is presented as a self-portrait (which it obviously was not), with Yppong addressing the reader in first person: 'Holla! You, who sees me and doesn't understand what I am'. This expression seems to be intended as humorous: the reader sees the image, but only after turning the page will he be able to read an explanation.

To what extent should the entries in De Vrise's album be taken seriously? Some of them testify to the playfulness in early modern learned communication. At least one contributor used a pseudonym ('the Paduan Antenor'); another was an Englishwoman who had apparently written her contribution with her tongue.<sup>18</sup> Like her, Yppong was not one of De Vrise's student friends, but rather the most foreign among the many travelers and immigrants that peopled cities in the Netherlands, and Antwerp in particular, around 1600.

Although the Low Countries were an important node in an increasingly interconnected world, visits by East Asians were very rare. Yppong's calligra-



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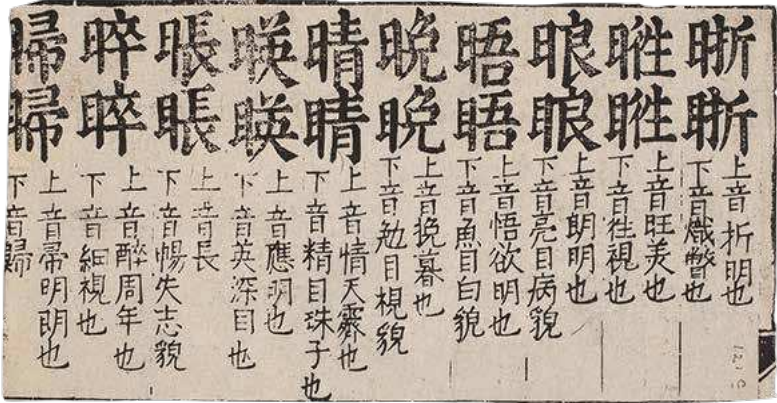
A mansion with a trekschuit, from De Vrise's album, fol. 77r



8

A truncated section from a Chinese rhyme dictionary, from Ernst Brinck's *Album amicorum* 2 (1612-1635), Royal Library The Hague, signature 135 K 4, fol. 121c

The small characters below explain the pronunciation of the two slightly different characters above. From *Hanlin chongkao ziyi yunlü daban ha pian xinjing* 翰林重攷字義韻律大板海篇心鏡 (c. 1596).



phy is, in fact, a unique document: probably the oldest surviving text written by a Chinese in Europe (followed only in 1654 by a text written in the Jesuit college at Leuven, by a Chinese assistant of the famous missionary Martino Martini).<sup>19</sup> How, and why, did Yppong honor Middelburg with his presence?

Yppong's travels from China to the Netherlands

The eye-catching Chinese calligraphy in De Vrise's album is divided into six evenly placed rows, in a seemingly clear and confident hand (see appendix 2). It reads:

[I am] Xing Pu [Yppong], a visitor from the Great Ming China.  
[I am] Xing Pu [Yppong], a visitor from the Great Ming, who came to the Lower Harbor Bantam, Zeeland, and then Holland, and [I now plan] to return to Bantam and the Great Ming.  
In Zeeland on Friday in January of the New [Year] of 1601, I leave these characters as my inscription.

During the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), Chinese merchants and settlers had spread over regions bordering the South Chinese Sea. Bantam in eastern Java was the Southernmost point on the route of their junks. Bantam was also the main area where the Dutch interacted with the Chinese. It was envisaged as the base for the Dutch in the East Indies, chosen because – according to their main source of information, the travelogue by Jan Huygen van Linschoten – there were no Portuguese. Van Linschoten was wrong, but the local Chinese provided hospitality.

Most striking about the inscription is that Yppong was using Western dating rather than Chinese. A Chinese scholar would not have recognized the year 1601 but would have referred to the particular reign of the emperor, in this case the 28th year of the Wanli 萬曆 reign period, or the *gengzi* 庚子 year.<sup>20</sup> It seems that Yppong's Dutch hosts provided him with an outline for his inscription. The last two columns of his Chinese inscription are, in fact, only intelligible in the light of the Latin translation on the reverse: a phonetic rendition of the Latin words *ianuario dies veneris* (Friday in January), which were dictated to the foreign visitor (see appendix 2).<sup>21</sup>

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A cloth quality certificate, from Ernst Brinck's *Album amicorum* 2 (1612-1635), Royal Library The Hague, signature 135 K 4, fol. 121d 'No. 6 knitted, elongated, broadened cloth, [made of] thin brocade, even and pure, fine and smooth, the same on the inside and outside. We do not neglect our customer.'



The inscription furthermore reveals something about Yppong's social background. His literacy is evident from the handwriting that follows centuries-old conventions in Chinese calligraphy. Despite using a quill rather than a Chinese brush, he created pulsating lines and balanced, well-spaced characters. His writing compares well to, for example, the much less able hand of a Chinese schoolteacher from Macao responsible for a 1628 Dutch-Chinese dictionary.<sup>22</sup> Several erroneous characters and the inscription's basic vocabulary and grammar suggest, however, that Yppong did not belong to the class of the literati (see appendix 2). Apparently he was a well-educated yet semi-literate inhabitant of the 'Great Ming' empire who had become familiar with the Western dating system or, in any case, was trying to please his Dutch hosts. There seems to be no reason to doubt the inscription's authenticity.

The text in Latin on the reverse of the image, also attributed to Yppong, describes him as a merchant. The learned formulas, however, betray a local Dutch humanist's involvement:

Yppong is my name, China my fatherland, trade my profession, and to exercise it I came to Bantam and to the emporium of the Great Java, where two of your ships, named *Langebark* and *Zon*, had driven [you]. Because I saw and admired their admiral – not differently from how you see me [in my portrait] – I have, wanting to fully satisfy the desire to visit the regions from whence they had come (because the examination of singular things urges me on), paid a few pounds of pepper for a fee, and thus I have finally, after a very long sea journey (so that all too often I considered us as inhabitants not of the land, but of the sea and ships), [arrived] in the year [*left blank*] in Middelburg in Zeeland. Having toured this, as well as Holland, I now think again of Bantam, and thence China. It is allowed that I write these facts here in my fatherland's letters the day before the ides of January of the year 1601.

The statements on the two ships are so precise that it is possible to check their validity. The voyage of the fleet of the Middelburg Company commanded by admiral Gerard le Roy, consisting of the two vessels *Langebark* and *Zon*, is documented: they returned together from Bantam to Zeeland on 31 May 1600.<sup>23</sup> Apparently after staying six months in the Netherlands, Yppong decided that he wanted to return home. By that point, the *Langebark* and *Zon* had joined forces with the *Middelburg* and *Zeelandia* of the Veere Company to form the Zeeland Company, set to depart from Vlissingen for Java on 28 January 1601.

The archival record thus confirms the details of the text in De Vrise's album, and there seems to be no reason to doubt that a Chinese merchant traveled to Europe on a Dutch ship as early as the first decade of the seventeenth century. Already during the first Dutch expedition to Southeast Asia, led by Cornelis de Houtman in 1595-1597, an indigenous interpreter was taken aboard in Bantam, but he was not brought back to the Netherlands (the only foreigners this expedition brought home were two boys from Madagascar, aged 12 and 15).<sup>24</sup> In later years, the VOC came to depend

more heavily on Asian sailors, many of them Javanese, Chinese, and Japanese. An early example is the indigenous captain who was allowed to steer a VOC ship to Batavia in 1627.<sup>25</sup> The chances of encountering an East Asian in the Dutch Republic were actually greater during the century's first decades than afterwards, when owing to extensive intermingling the VOC forbade European sailors to bring Asian wives, children, or slaves with them to the Netherlands.<sup>26</sup> In fact, no one seems to have followed the example of Yppong, who journeyed to the Netherlands on a VOC ship simply out of curiosity. And why did admiral Le Roy agree on taking him on board – perhaps to impress his patron, the mayor of Middelburg, with such a literate foreigner? This is a question our research has been unable to answer.

### Yppong's costume

The Latin text on the reverse of the drawing betrays the exotic interests of Nicolaas de Vrise's contacts. It discusses the nature of the Chinese script (as similar to Hebrew, in writing from right to left) and pays particular attention to costume. Yppong is presented as stating that

our dress is made wholly of linen (which China surely has in great quantities). Our shoes are of pure silk; we tie our long hairs, combed carefully, into a knot on top, we cover them with a silken hair-net and then we put on the very high and round hat, furnished with horsehair in a net-like manner.

This description seems to match the drawing, raising the question of whether the artist tried to represent Yppong's actual clothing.

To start, the gray outer robe reaches across his knees and covers another, light green robe and turquoise trousers; the black shoes are lined in similar turquoise. The robe is similar to a *daopao* 道袍, originally a Daoist robe that in Ming times was casual dress worn by all levels of society. For example, in a group portrait of 1652, six famous early seventeenth-century scholars all wear the *daopao* with its broad collar tucked under the right armpit, its characteristic long and wide sleeves, and no belt (fig. 10).<sup>27</sup> By contrast, the traditional dress for the Ming literati class would have been the *shenyi* 深衣, which is very similar in design but distinguished by the belt and two long sashes in front, as well as the dark borders lining the robe's lapels, sleeves, and sometimes the bottom. This was the ritual robe worn by scholars, codified by the Confucian classic, the *Book of rites* (*li ji* 禮記).<sup>28</sup>

The usual headdress of the *shenyi* robe was the square flat-top hat (*si-fang pingding jin* 四方平定), as worn in the painting shown by the scholar in the top right corner (fig. 10). Another model favored among Ming literati was the so-called Dongpo hat (*dongpo jin* 東坡巾), which has an additional upright brim split in front. The Jesuit missionaries who identified with the literati, Matteo Ricci and Nicolas Trigault, donned this high flat-top model (fig. 11). The Dongpo hat furthermore features in a Chinese encyclopedia that, through a copy in a Spanish manuscript, became a visual source for Olfert Dapper's 1670 book on China (fig. 12). Dapper also portrayed hats traditionally worn by Chinese officials, with the characteristic round 'ears'

protruding on both sides (that actually imitate the two ends of a cloth tied at the back of the head): this model was worn by a Chinese man in Batavia portrayed by Andries Beeckman around 1658 (fig. 13).

These traditional hats are all different from Yppong's elongated, conical, 'birdcage' model. The 'silken hair-net' underneath this hat, tying his hair in a cone, is a traditional Chinese wrapped head cloth, or *futou* 幘頭. Curiously, our research has not yielded other portraits of figures with this particular type of 'very high and round hat, furnished with horsehair in a net-like manner', nor is this type of hat recorded in the many reference works on Chinese traditional dress.<sup>29</sup>

Yet the absence of evidence is not evidence of absence. Since the beginning of the Ming period, merchants had been categorized, with servants and prostitutes, at the bottom rung of the societal ladder. Dress was codified in Chinese tradition according to this hierarchical division, and merchants' dress may have been deemed an unattractive pictorial subject.<sup>30</sup> There are, fortunately, relevant textual sources. A Chinese novel of 1620 describes a merchant in a '*daopao* robe of Huzhou damask' who wore 'a Suzhou-style Hundred Pillar Horse Mane Hat':<sup>31</sup> these 'pillars' may refer to a construction of horizontal ribs similar to the cage-like hat in De Vrise's drawing. The so-called horse mane hat or *zongmao* 騮帽 was 'a type of hat made of horse's mane, palm fiber, or rattan, in the shape of a bell, and very popular in the Yuan and Ming periods'.<sup>32</sup> Chinese bells have a straight, tubular shape (they are not flared at the bottom), which conforms with the elongated model depicted in De Vrise's album.

According to a personal note (*biji* 筆記) of another late-Ming author, the *zongmao* hat represented a new fashion that emerged in the mid-sixteenth century in the Suzhou area, first as an expensive accessory worn by affluent men and young examination candidates but later available for everyone in cheaper imitations made of palm fiber and rattan.<sup>33</sup> In the late Ming period, the Suzhou area was the empire's economic center. The merchant families' wealth combined with the Ming court's waning powers of oversight resulted in something of a fashion extravaganza with the *zongmao* hat making its way to seafaring merchants in Southeast Asia. Whereas the first Ming emperor had forbidden commoners (and merchants, ranked below commoners) to wear shoes (rather than straw sandals), in the late Ming new types of footwear originated. The merchants' colorful costumes, headgear, and shoes expressed their new wealth and freedom.<sup>34</sup> The portrait of Yppong with his *zongmao* hat, light green underdress, turquoise trousers, and shoes is a rare visual testimony of this social development in the Ming empire.

Is Yppong's costume the same as the one depicted by Rubens? The authors of the Getty catalogue, searching for Korean elements, concluded that Rubens's drawing of the costume 'notably lacks notations and salient details (...) the drawing does not provide enough evidence to be able to definitively establish the figure's identity'; they emphasized only that it is 'highly improbable' that the figure's wide collar belonged to a traditional Korean garment.<sup>35</sup> This collar is, in fact, typical for a Chinese *daopao*.<sup>36</sup> Obviously, a Korean connection cannot be ruled out as dress all over East and Southeast Asia was greatly influenced by Chinese fashion. The horsehair



10  
Xiang Shengmo 項聖謨 & Zhang Qi 張琦,  
*Venerable friends* 尚友圖, 1652, hanging  
scroll, ink and color on silk, 38.1 x 25.5 cm,  
Shanghai, Shanghai Museum



hats, for instance, became as popular in Korea as among all levels of society, ‘whether noble or base’; a late sixteenth-century official deplored that social differentiations too were therefore obscured.<sup>37</sup>

Later developments. Yppong arrives in China, his fleet returns

What happened upon Yppong’s return to Asia? The four ships of Zeeland’s Asian trading company took seven months to arrive in Aceh on 23 August 1601. After three months the fleet set sail again. On 29 November, the *Zeelandia* and *Langebark* headed back to Europe, but the *Middelburg* and *Zon* continued their Asian journey to Siam via Pattani (present-day Thailand).<sup>38</sup> As Leonard Blussé has argued, Yppong’s movements from here can be fol-

lowed in Dutch and Chinese sources related to the VOC.<sup>39</sup> There is little doubt that the ‘Inpo’ in Blussé’s 1977 article is our Yppong, as the character Pu 浦, denoting his first name, is identical. De Vrise’s drawing provides additional information about his identity, including the family name 興, pronounced as ‘xing’ in Mandarin but slightly different in the dialects of South China: ‘hing’ (Hokkien) or ‘hin’ (Hakka). Blussé also notes that this Chinese merchant had converted to Protestantism during his visit to the Netherlands.<sup>40</sup> This fits well with our earlier remark that Yppong dated his portrait in the Western fashion, which may have been a confirmation of his new identity.

On 26 May 1602, the ‘Zeeland vessels, that brought with them the Chinese that had been in Holland’ the year before, arrived in Pattani.<sup>41</sup> The journey from Bantam via Borneo and Ambon had taken so long because they ‘were sailing against the monsoons’.<sup>42</sup> Yppong’s further adventures, as an essential middleman between the Dutch and the Chinese, the real ‘brains behind the scheme’ who ‘safely directed the operations from the Dutch ships’, are outlined by Blussé.<sup>43</sup> He argues that the same Chinese merchant from Pattani, ‘well acquainted with the Dutch’, returns in a chapter on the ‘redhaired barbarians’ in a Chinese account of these years (printed in 1617).<sup>44</sup> The merchant appears as a consultant for Admiral Van Warwijck, advising on how to bribe a eunuch in Minnan for imperial approval to engage in trade. Eventually Yppong rendered many services to the VOC, such as supplying food during their siege of Malacca in 1606. Yet as Pattani’s importance as a trading post in the South Chinese Sea declined, he wrote to the VOC directors in the Netherlands of a career switch: ‘I am fitting out my junk, in which I risk all my belongings, and plan to go with my whole family to Ambon, or Banda in company with your lordships’ yacht, in order to provision the fortress there’.<sup>45</sup> He left Pattani on 8 October 1612 and traveled to the Moluccas, as a journal by a Dutchman in English service confirms. There he married a woman who had been baptized as a Christian in Ambon, and he fathered a son. When Yppong died in 1614, he left behind an impressive inheritance of more than 6,000 reals.<sup>46</sup>

For our story, it is furthermore interesting to follow the two ships of the Zeeland fleet that did not travel from Aceh to Pattani but returned home, taking along another East Asian. On their way back, in March 1602, the *Zeelandia* and *Langebark* arrived at the island of St. Helena, where they took to battle and captured the Portuguese ship *St. Iago*, carrying ‘a large amount of porcelain and other Chinese goods’. One of its passengers was a Florentine trader, Francesco Carletti, who had bought five Korean slaves in Nagasaki and was now traveling with three servants, ‘one of the Japanese nation, a Korean, and the other a Mozambique Negro’, as outlined in Carletti’s *Ragionamenti del mio viaggio intorno al mondo* (Florence 1701).<sup>47</sup> When the Dutch took Carletti as a hostage, the Korean tricked the Dutch into bringing him on board as well. They arrived in Middelburg on 6 July 1602 – one and a half years after Yppong’s departure.<sup>48</sup>

Incidentally, in the first decade of the seventeenth century, various Asian travelers found in Middelburg their port of arrival in Europe. The *Zeelandia* and *Langebark* were also carrying a group of envoys from the Sultan of Aceh to Prince Maurits, whose presence did not go unnoticed. Soon after their arrival the main, elderly envoy died and was buried with great



11  
Peter Paul Rubens, *Portrait of Nicolas Trigault*, 1617, black chalk, touches of red chalk, blue-green pastel, pen and brown ink, traces of heightening with white chalk; 44.6 x 24.8cm, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; purchase, Carl Selden Trust, several members of The Chairman’s Council, Gail and Parker Gilbert, and Lila Acheson Wallace Gifts (© The Metropolitan Museum of Art; image source: Art Resource, NY, EX.2013.1.4)



pomp in the Pieterskerk in Middelburg. The rest of the embassy remained in the Dutch Republic for another 15 months, their expenses paid by the VOC.<sup>49</sup> A similar ambition brought two ambassadors of the King of Siam to Middelburg in 1608: they also rendered homage to the prince before sailing back on the first VOC ship from Amsterdam.<sup>50</sup> It is remarkable that very few written testimonies, and no images, of these foreigners survive. In any case it was not the human factor that made an impact on the Dutch. When the Chinese porcelain cargo of the *Zeelandia*, captured from the Portuguese, was auctioned in Middelburg it made a fortune: this was no less than the beginning of the Dutch porcelain trade that would take tens of millions of pieces to the Netherlands in the next two centuries. Another famous consequence was the origin of international law, when Hugo Grotius started to write *De iure praedae* (On the law of prize and booty).

For our story, it is particularly important to note that Carletti's slave was precisely the Korean, known as 'Antonio Corea', whom earlier scholars have associated with Rubens's drawing. Carletti's *Ragionamenti* mentions that around or shortly after 1600 a Korean slave was freed in Rome. This may have been his own slave, who then became a model for Rubens during his Roman sojourn.<sup>51</sup> Which brings us back to Rubens's drawing.

### Yppong, Peter Paul Rubens, and Francis Xavier

In the year Yppong wrote his calligraphy, Matteo Ricci became the first European to gain access to the Forbidden City in Beijing, catalyzing a rich exchange of knowledge from East Asia to Europe and vice versa. In Antwerp, the Jesuits were about to celebrate this exchange. Ricci was following in the footsteps of Francis Xavier, who had baptized thousands in the Moluccas and Japan but died in 1552, on his way to open up China to the True Faith. In their lobby for Xavier's canonization, the Antwerp fathers ordered for their house church a large altarpiece of *The miracles of St. Francis Xavier*, which had to express the global reach of the Jesuit proselytization. Antwerp was, after all, as much a frontier zone of the Catholic mission (with the heathens lurking at the other side of the River Scheldt) as was Nagasaki or Macao.

The assignment went to Rubens who, in a first sketch, positioned the missionary performing his medical miracles on an elevation with a group of witnesses at his feet, including a generic 'Oriental', a man in a turban (fig. 14).<sup>52</sup> For the finished work of 1617-1618, this was apparently not deemed a convincing reference to East Asia (figs. 1, 2). The figure whom Rubens depicted instead of the turbaned man is clearly similar to Yppong: the same conical, transparent hat providing a view of the cloth covering his hair; round, curly-haired eyebrows; and turquoise trousers and shoes.

De Vrise's *album amicorum* may have circulated in the Southern Netherlands, where artists may have caught an interest in its many costume drawings. Perhaps Rubens saw the image of Chinese costume and, deeming it lacking in lifelike detail for incorporation in a major devotional work, decided to reconstruct the figure's original posture with a manikin, perhaps using an authentic East Asian piece of clothing. This might explain the greater amount of detail in Rubens's drawing in regard to the overcoat, while being less specific in regard to the hat, boots, and even the face. It was



12

*Chinese hats*, 1670, engraving, from Olfert Dapper, *Gedenkwaardig bedryf der Nederlandsche Oost-Indische Maetschappye, op de kuste en in het Keizerrijk van Taising of Sina*, Amsterdam 1670, following p. 460, Special Collections, University of Amsterdam

surely not impossible that the Antwerp Jesuits owned this type of dress, as they sometimes incorporated Asian cloth in their liturgical garments; when Francis Xavier was canonized in 1622, the novices at the Antwerp college even processioned in 'Chinese' garb.<sup>53</sup> The dress that Rubens depicted may or may not have been similar to Yppong's original dress (it may even have been Korean rather than Chinese).<sup>54</sup>

For the altarpiece, then, Rubens may have changed the posture of Yppong's 'self portrait' into a more dynamic one, the head turned over the left shoulder, looking upward at the missionary's countenance. Rubens seems to have followed De Vrise's example so carefully that he departed from the colors in his *modello*, rendering the trousers and shoes their striking turquoise. It may have been compositional reasons, however, that made the artist turn Yppong's original gray-brown overcoat into a brighter, yellow-brown one.



13

Andries Beeckman, *A man wearing a Chinese official's hat in Batavia*, 1658-1664, watercolor on paper, 36.5 x 24 cm, Album du Paulmy, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, EST-389, nr. 16



There is an additional indication that Rubens not only saw De Vrise's image but also read the text on the reverse that identified the foreign visitor as coming from Bantam. As Barbara Uppenkamp notes elsewhere in this volume, the painter consulted an illustrated travel account to depict the demise of pagan idolatry in the face of Jesuit piety. Rubens's image of a bearded, snake-headed idol breaking apart also occurs in the travelogues of Willem Lodewijcksz (1598) and Johann Theodor de Bry (1599). These authors connect it to the image worship of the Chinese community in Bantam. This is where Yppong met the Dutch. The reference seems significant

since Bantam is no essential feature in Francis Xavier's own biography (he was active only on nearby islands such as Ambon and Ternate).<sup>55</sup>

What explains such exertion in terms of costume and iconography on Rubens's part? The painting was intended as visual argumentation in the process of sanctification of Francis Xavier, who was beatified in 1619 (and canonized in 1622). It is a compound of miracles that reportedly took place on different locations throughout Asia where he healed and resurrected natives. The miracles themselves are rendered in a surprisingly non-specific manner: the main figure who is being saved from imminent death, his grave being dug in the foreground, is not recognizably Asian (with a blonde woman at his side), nor are the mother with her drowned child (at left) and the blind man (at right, with outstretched arms) who await healing. Therefore most of the Asian local color needs to come from the group of onlookers in the background that includes, besides Yppong and a turbaned black man, a figure in a red hat that was derived from De Bry's representation of Chinese dress.<sup>56</sup> The presence of these 'authentic' witnesses was obviously essential for the argument that the medical miracles had actually happened. This explains why Rubens was prepared to search for precise visual information: rather than mere pictorial accuracy, it was the missionary's beatification that was at stake. What may have made the presence of Chinese onlookers all the more important was the hagiography of Xavier, reported to have died alone on the island of Shangchuan 上川, waiting for a Cantonese merchant to smuggle him onto the mainland where millions of Chinese souls were awaiting salvation.<sup>57</sup>

As noted above, it is not possible that Rubens actually met Yppong, as the painter had left for Venice three weeks before the latter's arrival in the Netherlands. But he may have heard about the Chinese merchant's visit via the same network of contacts to which Nicolaas de Vrise's album testifies, connecting Middelburg to Antwerp and Leuven. One plausible link is De Vrise's aforementioned friend Jean-Baptiste Gramaye. He had been appointed to the archduke's service three years before Rubens received the same honor (1609). Relations between the court historian and the court painter are not documented. Yet owing to his book *Asia sive historia universalis asiaticarum gentium*, Gramaye may have been consulted for the preparations of Francis Xavier's beatification, including the altarpiece; in that case, he may have called the Jesuits' attention to De Vrise's Chinese visitor. He may even have told them that this particular Chinese man had converted to Christianity (albeit of the Protestant kind). Obviously, routes of communication between Middelburg and Antwerp may also have run differently, but nothing seems to stand in the way of the thesis that Rubens made his drawing on the basis of De Vrise's image of 1601.<sup>58</sup>

A final question needs to be addressed: what if the image in De Vrise's album is not what it purports to be – a portrait? What if Rubens's drawing predated De Vrise's (and one relinquishes the dating of 1617)? Perhaps the artist who was commissioned to honor Yppong's visit to Middelburg took an earlier image as his example. Rubens's drawing may have been made soon after the completion of his education in 1598, when he entered the Guild of St. Luke as an independent master and shortly before he left for Italy. He may have drawn an East Asian figure as part of his projected *Cos-*





*tume book* that, although now generally dated to after his Italian journey, he may have started as early as 1591-1600.<sup>59</sup> The absence of archival evidence for an East Asian visitor to Antwerp before 1600 is not evidence of absence, and the possibility that Rubens portrayed this visitor in a drawing, which was later copied for De Vrise's album, cannot be entirely ruled out. Most scholars, however, date the *Costume book* after 1609, and the variety of arguments listed above – the fuller depiction of the hat and legs in De Vrise's drawing, the use of color that matches the rendition in the altarpiece, and Rubens's iconographic reference to Bantam – all support the thesis that the painter imitated Yppong's effigy. What is in any case completely implausible in the light of De Vrise's album is that Rubens made his drawing in Italy after a Korean model.

Yet 'Antonio Corea' should not be written out of this story completely. As noted above, little more than a year after Yppong's departure from Zeeland, this Korean slave arrived in Middelburg with the very same fleet. Together the two East Asians may have filled a space in the Netherlandish imagination. By 1617, when Rubens had to depict one of the potential converts of Francis Xavier, the memories about these foreigners may have been conflated. Obviously, any differentiation between Chinese and Korean dress would have been lost on both Rubens and the public of his altarpiece.

### Conclusion

The portrait of Yppong in De Vrise's *album amicorum* is a unique document for many reasons. It is the first surviving portrait of a Chinese individual visiting Europe, whose biography is supported by other sources; it is accompanied by the first Chinese calligraphy produced on European soil; it is one of the few visual documents of a Chinese merchant's dress of the late Ming period; and it contributes to our understanding of Rubens's manner of creating images of foreigners for the Jesuits, in particular the East Asian in his *Miracles of St. Francis Xavier*. Rubens's preparatory drawing for this painting should be renamed 'Portrait of the Chinese merchant Yppong'.

This discovery may have wider consequences for our understanding of the European imagination of Asia. As historians, we may be too quick to presuppose a dynamic of 'Orientalist' projections and 'inventions of the exotic' in early modern representations of foreigners. To the Getty Museum, Rubens's depiction of an East Asian was foremost a work of fantasy: 'alluringly exotic and foreign, a wonder to behold but defying categorization'.<sup>60</sup> Yet as Nicolas Standaert has observed, such an argument merely added another layer of construction or 'mythology' to the interpretation of Rubens's drawing – why not leave open the question of whether the artist could have seen a real man?<sup>61</sup> As our new identification suggests, the abundance of written documents for the early seventeenth century – from the VOC and elsewhere – should rather inspire a detailed search for additional information: it is possible that Chinese sources will reveal more about Yppong's East Asian adventures.

14

Peter Paul Rubens, *Modello of The miracles of St. Francis Xavier altarpiece*, c. 1617, oil on canvas, 125 x 93 x 11 cm, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Gemäldegalerie, inv. no. EX.2013.1.1.



Appendices

Appendix 1. De Vrise's *album amicorum*

Manuscript on paper and vellum, the Low Countries, France and Germany, 1595-1609, including approximately 31 blazoned coats of arms, 20 miniatures, 1 drawing, 1 engraving and 10 other inscriptions, altogether 114 leaves (37 blanks), oblong 8vo (107 x 170 mm), early foliation, contemporary Dutch mottled calf, gilt (rubbed), shelfmarks ‘2201’ and ‘g’ on spine.

*Provenance:* Nicolaas de Vrise; in the possession of J. Douw, lawyer in Middelburg in the 18th century; in the possession of C.A. van Sypestyn in the 18th century, sold at Sotheby’s, 20 June 1825, no. 510, as part of a collection of 43 *alba amicorum*, 5 guineas to Thorpe; Sir Thomas Phillipps (1792-1872), his library stamp on fol. ii and the shelfmark ‘2201’ on the spine (among a group of manuscripts acquired by him in 1838/1839 from Taylor); British Library, Loan 36/8; sold at Christie’s London, 7 June 2006, no. 38; sold by Antiquariaat Forum Rare Books, ’t Goy-Houten, to a private collector, United States.

The miniatures include: f.7 Armorial title page with the arms of Middelburg (inscriptions: ‘Solem a mundo tollere videntur qui amicitiam a vita tollunt’ and ‘Amicitiae et memoriae sacrum’); f.14v Pyramus and Thisbe; ff.20v, 24v, 30v, 35v, f.49v Leaves from a French costume book; f.26 The judgment of Paris; f.41v A couple in a chariot driven by Venus and Cupid and drawn by pairs of swans and doves; f.51 Martyrdom of St. Sebastian [?]; f.58 Apollo and Daphne; ff.63, 65, 70 A further series of costume-book illustrations; f.77 A barge being drawn past a villa, a road in between; f.80 A richly-dressed lady in an architectural frame, Cupid lurking below; f.82 The Bucintoro; f.83v Portrait of a young man (backed onto leaf); f.85 Perseus and Andromeda; f.87v A nun carrying a bishop’s crook; f.95 Portrait of Yppong, a Chinese merchant. On f.55v is a drawing in pen and ink of three buildings around a lake, a group arguing over a dead bird in the foreground.

List of contributors

Nicolaas de Vrise (1613), fol. 8r  
Joannes Ridderius, J.U.D. (1591), fol. 10r  
Tobias v. Werve (1589), fol. 12r  
Screvelius de Driel, fol. 13v

H. Gramaye, fol. 17r  
Nicolaes de Mathenesse de Wybisma, fol. 19r  
Reinault de Brederode (1590), fol. 22r  
G. d’Eversdyck (1591), fol. 23r  
Bernardus a Renesse a Moermont (1589), fol. 28r  
Adam de Huls (1589), fol. 29r  
M.R., fol. 30v  
B. du Boucquer (1592), fol. 32r  
Hermannus de Mausyenbroucq (1591), fol. 32v  
J.G. de Mausyenbroucq (1591), fol. 32r  
Theodorus a Meuthen (1589), fol. 34r  
Machel Klockher, fol. 37r  
Joannes van der Stegen (18 January 1592), fol. 39r (inscribed ‘Perfer et obdura’)  
Petrus Venius (1591), fol. 40r  
Jacobus Rijck (1593), fol. 44r  
Johannes Otteriasghus, fol. 44v  
Emanuel Cassell (1591), fol. 46r  
Philippus Tegnagell, fol. 48r  
Patavus Antenor (1592), fol. 54r  
Joannes de Blyenburch (1592), fol. 56r  
Frederico de Herlin de Lilla (1592), fol. 59v  
Carolus du Pire (1591), fol. 60r  
Nicolaus Halsius, fol. 60v  
Dutrapelau, fol. 65r  
Johannus Gerardus ab Enschringen (1591), fol. 66r  
G. Bronchorst (1591), fol. 67r  
Hugues Ocols, fol. 68r  
O.H. Loeynck, fol. 73r  
Jacobus Spuen (1591), fol. 78r  
Bernhard Junge (1595), fol. 83r  
Everard Hannegrave (1591), fol. 85  
Chrestien Faulconaer, fol. 86v  
Cornelius Cor., fol. 89r  
Joanna de Penin, fol. 91r  
Yppong (12 January 1601), fol. 95rv  
Joannes Borgius (1591), fol. 97v  
Marie de Bougoingne (1594), fol. 98r  
Sara Crabbe, fol. 100r  
Melchior Daelhemius, fol. 100r  
Elizabeth Bertholomeeus, 1595, fol. 101r  
F. Cornelius Curtius, fol. 101v  
Jo. Giovanni Melkorn (1591), fol. 103r

Appendix 2. Transcription, translation, and explanation of the Chinese text (fig. 15)<sup>63</sup>

Between square brackets are alternative readings of some of Yppong’s characters:

(a) 大明之焚客興浦 (b) 大明山客，興浦，來萬陳下港、來 (c) 西難州、來何難州、歸去萬陳、(d) 去大明山。西難州，(e) 一千六百年又乙[有一]，亲[新]燕畫理，(f) 日無里六，舍字為記。

[I am] Xing Pu, a visitor from the Great Ming China. [I am] Xing Pu, a visitor from the Great Ming, who came to the Lower Harbor Bantam, Zeeland, and then Holland, and [I now plan] to return to Bantam and the Great Ming.

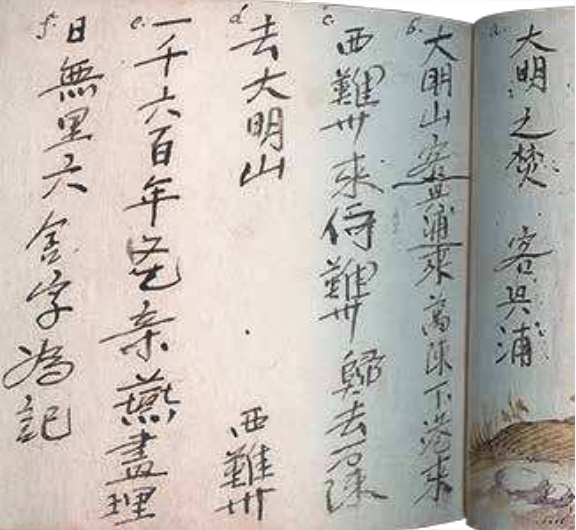
In Zeeland on Friday in January of the New [Year] of 1601, I leave these characters as my inscription.

Explanation

The inscription is written in simple classical Chinese and seems to contain a few Dutch or Latin words transcribed phonetically in Hokkien, the dialect of Fujian, or perhaps in the dialect of the Hakka minority in South China. Many lines and words follow the Latin text, of which the Chinese inscription seems to be a summary. As in all probability the Chinese author would have been unable to read Latin, communication may have been mediated by an interpreter speaking Portuguese, a *lingua franca* throughout the South Chinese Sea. Here follows a discussion of the inscription line by line following the original annotation (a-f):

In line (a), *zhi fen* 之焚 means literally ‘the burning of [the Great Ming]’ and is nonsensical in this context. Written slightly differently, for example as *zhilin* 之林, it could be pronounced in Hokkien as ‘tsina’, and in Hakka as ‘jilan’ or ‘jinan’, which in both cases is close to the name of China in Malay: Tjina (Cina). The two characters are also written at a certain distance from the preceding *da ming* 大明 (Great Ming), indicating these are parallel names. Yppong probably added these characters to translate phonetically the name used by the Malay and his Dutch hosts for his mother country.

The combination of characters that follows in the first line is similarly problematic. The first character, *ke* 客, means literally ‘guest’ or ‘visitor’, which makes sense in the context of a purported visit to Zeeland



15  
Detail of fig. 4

and Holland. A second, less plausible reading is Hakka (*kejia* 客家), as the author places the designation twice in front of his name, the usual location in Chinese to put titles and place names deemed essential for one’s identity. The repetition of the combination of *ke* followed by the name, suggests that the author found it important to mention even though none of his Dutch hosts could read Chinese. The possible use of the Hakka dialect in the transliterations may also point to a Hakka origin, but this is speculative.

The next two characters denote the author’s name. According to Chinese convention, his family name is followed by his personal name. The latter character is *pu* 浦 and the author is therefore named Pu. The first character denoting his family name is more difficult to decipher. It appears in a slightly clearer version in line (b), where it is recognizable as the abbreviated version of Xing 興, a traditional surname.<sup>64</sup> The author’s full name in Mandarin Chinese is therefore probably Xing Pu. In the Latin text he is called Yppong, which seems to be the transcription of his name as pronounced in his own dialect: in Hokkien, *xing* 興 is pronounced as ‘heng’ or ‘hin’, and in Hakka it is pronounced as ‘hin’ or ‘him’. In the VOC documents found by Leonard Blussé, Yppong is called Empo, Impo, or Inpo.<sup>65</sup>

Line (b) begins with *damingshan* 大明山. The addition of the character *shan* 山, ‘mountain’, is curious. The author may have alluded to the common practice



among overseas Chinese to refer to China as *tangshan* 唐山, in which Tang refers to the Tang dynasty (618-907): *damingshan* may, correspondingly, refer to the Ming dynasty.<sup>66</sup> Lower Harbor, or *xiagang* 下港, is the Chinese name of Bantam, for which Yppong also gives the Chinese name, *wanchen* 萬陳 or *bantan* in Hokkien.

The last two lines, (e) and (f), have the most problematic phrases. It seems that three erroneous characters occur in line (e): *you yi* 又乙 should read 有一, meaning ‘plus one’; and *qin* 亲 misses a radical and should read *xin* 新, meaning ‘new’, probably in reference to the New Year mentioned in the Latin text.<sup>67</sup>

The following string of characters in lines (e) and (f) is unintelligible without the Latin translation: *yan-huali* 燕畫理 (Hokkien: ‘yenhoali’; Hakka: ‘yanfali’) refers to ‘januario’ or January (‘januari’ in Dutch); and *ri wuliliu* 日無里六 (lit. ‘on the day wuliliu’; Hokkien: ‘bolidak’; Hokkien ‘lak’ is pronounced very similarly to ‘dak’; it is therefore transcribed as such) refers to ‘dies veneris’ or Friday (‘vrijdag’ in Dutch) in the Latin text.

The last four characters, *she zi wei ji* 舍字為記, are easier to grasp, and *she* 舍 should be written as *she* 捨, meaning ‘to leave behind’. The placement of these four characters slightly to the left disconnects them from the previous sentence, signaling the beginning of a new, independent phrase in the Chinese text.

The Latin translation (see below, appendix 3) adds an interesting commentary to the Chinese inscription, revealing the linguistic curiosity of the author’s Dutch hosts. It mentions that ‘dies veneris’ is pronounced as ‘bodilare’, which must refer to the Hokkien pronunciation of *wuliliu* 無里六; and that ‘quod scripsi’ is pronounced as ‘sagi’, which is probably a transcription of 舍字, pronounced as ‘siatsu’ in Hokkien and ‘sashe’ in Hakka.<sup>68</sup>

Appendix 3. Transcription and translation of the Latin text<sup>69</sup>

From Pieter de la Ruë, *Mengeling van aantekeningen over zaaken en gevallen van verscheiden aardt*, 1720-1742, University of Amsterdam, Special Collections, Ms XIV G 1-5, vol. 3, par. 9, fols. 23-26.

*Nicolaas de Vrise een Goesenaar [teste d. Secret. D. Keetlaer: schoon er op den tytel het wapen van Middelburg stond.], en zoo ’t my toescheen, Roomschezind. Hy had het begonnen 1591. De naamen der volgende personen meest allen met hunne Wapens daarby, heurlyk met koleur in miniature, waarin:*

(...)  
*Yppong Chinees. Als deeze staat uitgetekend in miniatuer met zyn gewoonlyk gewaad en tegen over hem zes kolommen Chineesch Schrift [’t welk dus vertaald in’t Latyn, daar by stond:]. By zyne afbeeling staat onderaan:* Heus tu, qui me vides nec quid sim capis *en vervolgens agter het beeld, op de linkerzyde:* Nomen Yppong est, patria Sina, professio mercatura cuius exercendae ergo Bantam, Javae Majoris Emporium veneram cum & ibi duae naves vestrates *Longa barca & Sol* titulis, aspulerant, quarum Navarchos cum viderem & admirarer, [n]o[n] secus quam Tu me, Regiones, unde advenerant, invisendi desiderio (q[uo]d singulorum indagatio curiosa excitarat) satisfacere o[mn]i[n]i cupiens, aliquot piperis pondo, pro naulo, iis appendi et sic longissima (ita ut [n]o[n] terrae, sed maris naviumque incolas e[ss]e affirmarem saepius) tandem navigatione Middelburgum Zelandiae an[n]o [aspuli].

Quam ut et Hollandiam perlustratus Bantam rursus, illinc Sinam cogito. Haec Patriis litteris an[no] 1601 pridie id[us] Januarii licet hic adscripserim. Paucis enim me tibi explicare volui & quidem ad literam. Percipis, scio, inprimis itaq[ue] te monitum velim, nos [n]o[n] Hebraeor[um] instar, a dextra ad laevem nec Latinor[um] ad dextram a laeva, sed, a superiori paginae parte ad inferiorem, scripturam extendere, ita tamen ut prima lectionis regula a dextra incipi debeat, ut litteris a.b.c. demonstratum vides. [*Zie d’andere bladzyde.*]

Ad vestitum venio, qui totus ex bysso (quo Sina vel maxime abundat) est. Calcei holoserici, crines oblongos accurate comptos & in vertice collectos illaqueamus, reticuloque Setaceo obducimus et pileum praecelsum et rotundum setis equinis

reticulatum praetextum imponimus. Caepisti? Vale. Sed ad revisum, quem spero, tu votis adjuva.

- g. *Bodilare eor[um] lingua est dies veneris Sagi est q[uo]d scripsi*
- f. *di veneris haec scripsi*
- e. *1601 novi anni in Januario*
- d. *Tum Sinam Zelandiae*
- c. *Zeelandiam, Hollandiam tum per Zeelandiam cogito Bantam.*
- b. *Ex Sinae provincia Yppong Bantam venit illinc*
- a. *Sina Yppong*

*NB Men moet, dit leezende, beginnen met L[etter] a*

*Translation:*

*Nicolaas de Vrise from Goes [note: according to the Secretary D. Keetlaer: although the title page contained the arms of Middelburg] and, as it seemed to me, a Roman Catholic. He began it in 1591. The names of the following persons most of them with their coats of arms, properly done in colored miniature, including:* [*Follows a list of the contributors to the Album*] (...) *Yppong the Chinese. As he has been drawn in miniature with his usual dress and opposite six columns of Chinese writing [note: the Latin translation of which was added]. Below his image is written:* ‘Hey you, who sees me but doesn’t understand what I am’ *and furthermore on the reverse of the image, at left:* ‘Read this and you will understand. Yppong is my name, China my fatherland, trade my profession, and to exercise it I came to Bantam and to the emporium of the Great Java, where two of your ships, named *Langebark* and *Zon*, had driven [you]. Because I saw and admired their admiral – not differently from how you see me – I have, wanting to fully satisfy the desire to visit the regions from whence they had come (because the examination of singular things urges me on), paid a few pounds of pepper for a fee, and thus I have finally after a very long sea journey (so that all too often I considered us as inhabitants not of the land, but of the sea and ships) [arrived] in the year [*left blank*] in Middelburg in Zeeland. Having toured this, as well as Holland, I now think again of Bantam, and thence China. It is allowed that I write these facts here in my fatherland’s letters the day before the ides of January of the year 1601. For I wanted to explain myself to you in a few words, in a literal fashion. I know, you

understand that all of us move our writing not unlike the Hebrews from right to left, and not like the Latins from right to left; but from the upper part of the page to the lower part, yet in such a manner that the first line of the text has to begin on the right, like you see demonstrated with the letters a, b and c. [*note: see the reverse page.*]

Now I come to my clothing, which is made wholly of linen<sup>70</sup> (which China surely has in great quantities). Our shoes are of pure silk; we tie our long hairs, combed carefully, into a knot on top, we cover them with a silken hair-net and then we put on the very high and round hat, furnished with horsehair in a net-like manner. Have you understood? Greetings. But with your promises you have to contribute to [the possibility] of meeting again, which I hope.

- g. In their language, *Bodilare* is Friday: *Sagi* is I have written this
- f. on Friday I have written this
- e. In January of the new year of 1601
- d. Then to China. In Zeeland
- c. to Zeeland and Holland, then I consider [going] via Zeeland to Bantam.
- b. Yppong came from the province of China to Bantam and from thence
- a. China Yppong

*One has to read this beginning with the letter a.*



## Notes

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- 1 Stuart Wortley 1934 first claimed that the figure was Korean.
- 2 Cat. Los Angeles 2013, 37, 20.
- 3 The image has been published earlier in Van Oudheusden 2008, 169; Brusse & Mijnhard 2012, 232; Kuipers 2014, 9; and Blussé 2016. The album is listed in Heesakkers & Thomassen 1986, 107, but has otherwise not been studied.
- 4 Cat. Los Angeles 2013, 27, presumes that the hat worn by Rubens's figure was square-shaped, which De Vrise's drawing seems to disprove.
- 5 Rubens's image also shows a ship in the background.
- 6 The *Langebark* and *Zon* arrived in Zeeland on 31 May 1600. Rubens had left for Venice on 9 May.
- 7 We have sought to locate and contact the owner of the album, a private collector in the United States, via the seller Forum Rare Books in 't Goy-Houten, The Netherlands. The seller has assured us that the owner does not want to show the book nor make their name known. Our reconstruction of the contents is based on five different sources: 1) seven good color photographs made available to us by Forum Rare Books, plus one photo printed in Van Oudheusden 2008, 168; 2) the description by auctioneer Christie's, London, 7 June 2006, no. 38; 3) Post 1993; 4) the list of contributors in the catalogue of auctioneer Sotheby's, 30 May 1825, Cat. London 1825, no. 510, 120; and 5) the detailed description and transcription of the album's Latin text in De la Ruë 1720-1742, vol. 3, par. 9, fol. 25. Pieter de la Ruë's manuscript concerns personal notes and thoughts on a variety of topics, containing almost 1,400 entries written between c. 1720 and 1742. It is accurate: for instance, his list of names in De Vrise's album matches those in the catalogues of Sotheby's and Christie's. Taken together, these five sources provide data on the contributors, images, and text in De Vrise's album, which, despite being incomplete, allowed us to arrive at plausible hypotheses.

- 8 Hannegrave, who made the miniature of Perseus and Andromeda, is not listed in the RKD database of Netherlandish artists.
- 9 De la Ruë 1720-1742, vol. 3, par. 9, fol. 25, writes that De Vrise's origins lay in Goes. 'Nicolaes de Vri[e]se', a lawyer in Middelburg, is mentioned four times in the period 1599-1602 in the archive of the Van Dorp family; National Archives of the Netherlands, Van Dorp Collection, 1414-1986, access no. 1.10.25, inv. no. 254, 542, 1265, and 1280.
- 10 Cat. Antwerp 2013.
- 11 Van de Walle & Servais 2001, 24.
- 12 De la Ruë, who inspected De Vrise's entire album carefully, identifies 'H. Gramaye' as Jean-Baptiste Gramaye (1579-1635) from Arnhem, court historiographer to the archduke and author of Gramaye 1604. According to Van de Walle & Servais 2001, 37, Gramaye published Our Lord's Prayer in Chinese, while in some editions of his *Asia* a map of Tartary (Central Asia, Siberia, China) by Petrus Kaerius was added.
- 13 Göttler 2013, Stols 2002.
- 14 Stols 2002, 7.
- 15 The Middelburgse Compagnie first merged with the Veerse Compagnie into the Verenigde Zeeuwse Compagnie in 1601.
- 16 Bernardus Paludanus, Album amicorum (1595), Royal Library The Hague, signature 133 M 63, 23 June 1595, fol. 410v–h. Because of the bad quality of the woodblock print, we have been unable to identify the Chinese text. Christoph Spindlerus added in Latin, 'scripsi Christophorus Spindlerus [...] d. 23 Junij Anno 95 iam ia[nuarii] vii regnii China navigaturus [sum]', suggesting that he was on his way to depart with the Eastbound fleet of Cornelis de Houtman of 1597.
- 17 Ernst Brinck, Album amicorum 2 (1612-1635), Royal Library, The Hague, signature 135 K 4, fol. 81r and fols. 121a-d.
- 18 Post 1993, 419.
- 19 Now Ms Inv. 3510, Royal Library Albert I, Brussels. Dominicus's short Christian prayer written in 28 Chinese characters was, according to N. Golvers, 'in all probability the oldest specimen of a Chinese text produced on European soil'; Golvers 1994, 342.
- 20 January 1601 equals the 12th month of the lunar year in the Chinese annual count, which is 1600, and therefore the 28th year of the Wanli reign period (not the 29th).
- 21 The Latin text specifies that this was 12 January 1601, which was indeed a Friday according to the Gregorian calendar.

- 22 Kuiper 2005, 116, 118.
- 23 Bruyn *et al.* 1979, 2. Incidentally, on the two ships only 55 men had survived the voyage.
- 24 Van Rossum 2014, 97.
- 25 Van Rossum 2014, 98. Van Rossum does not mention any Koreans. From the 1630s, when the Dutch tried to keep and hold Taiwan, they depended heavily on Chinese sailors.
- 26 As of 1639 it was even forbidden for all company servicemen who had married Asian or half-Asian women to return to the Netherlands; Van Rossum 2014, 80.
- 27 The six figures depicted are (clockwise) Lu Dezhi 魯得之 (1585-c. 1660), Dong Qichang 董其昌 (1555-1636), Chen Jiru 陳繼儒 (1558-1639), Xiang Shengmou 項聖謀 (1579-1658), Monk Qiutan 秋潭 (1558-1630), and Li Rihua 李日華 (1565-1635). Painted in 1652, it was done in retrospective by Xiang Shengmou who added himself into the painting top right. See Brook 2012.
- 28 On the *shenyi* robe and its development, see Yuan Jianping 2000 and Qiu Chunlin 2007. The garment is based on the same traditional robe worn by Chinese men of all classes for two millennia, which is basically the *daopao* robe, the casual robe still worn by Daoist priests today.
- 29 We have thus far been unable to find any other image of the *zongmao* hat. It is not included in the Ming encyclopedia *Sancai tuihui* 三才圖會 (1609) and mentioned nor illustrated in the comprehensive Zhou Cibao 1996 or other similar reference works such as Chen Maotong 2005. Zhou Xun and Gao Chunming 1996, p. 103, lists the *zongjin* 駝巾 (same as *zongmao* 駝冒), but fails to provide an illustration or references. Chinese websites on Chinese costumes do not mention or show the *zongmao*, and the massive digital database on Chinese texts, the *Zhongguo jiben guji ku* 中國基本古籍庫 gives no hits for *zongmao*, and only one hit for *zongjin*. The illustrations in the 1625 publication by Adriano de las Cortes contain depictions of a similar high, round hat 'popular among the people' (Girard 2001, f.146v) which, however, seems to have been made of black felt instead of horse mane wires and it has a particular knob on top. The relationship to this hat, its name, and the possible origins of the Portuguese work in, for example, Chinese contemporaneous *leishu* still awaits further investigation. The authors want to thank Nicolas Standaert for his helpful suggestions.

- 30 On the codification of dress in the Ming period, see Lin Liyue 1999 and Zhang Jia 2014.
- 31 'On his head he was wearing a Suzhou-style Hundred Pillar Horse Mane Hat, and his body donned a fish belly–white *daopao*-robe of Huzhou damask 頭上帶一頂蘇樣的百柱駝帽，身上穿一件魚肚白的湖紗道袍.' From Feng Menglong 馮夢龍 (17th century), *Illustrious words to instruct the world* (Yushi Mingyan 喻世明言, 1620), chap. 1, 'Jiang Xingge chonghui Zhenzhushan 蒋兴哥重会珍珠衫', quoted in Xiong Lan and Li Baoqun 2009, 12.
- 32 '一種用馬鬃或棕、藤編成的帽子，樣子如鐘狀，元明之際很流行'; Luo Zhufeng 1986-1993, vol. 12, 858.
- 33 Fan Lian 1978, 2.1 a-b.
- 34 See Lin Liyue 1999, esp. 122-124, 132-136. For more on Ming merchants, see Chen Dakang 1996.
- 35 Cat. Los Angeles 2013, 4.
- 36 Cat. Los Angeles 2013, 30, explores the idea that the voluminous overcoat with long sleeves was a Korean *cheollik*, suggesting that the figure wears a short-sleeved outer coat over an inner coat with long sleeves, since 'just above the [left] elbow, the folded-under material forms a circle around the arm'. This circle, however, can also be interpreted as one of the pleats in a single piece of garment. In *The miracles of St. Francis Xavier* (fig. 1) Rubens represented the overcoat as a single piece of garment.
- 37 Thus the scholar-official Cho Hön reported in 1574 to the Korean king Sŏnjo, quoted in Palais 2015, 638.
- 38 Pieter Walichszoon to his brother Jacob, 4 August 1602, National Archives of the Netherlands, no. KA 113, in: De Jonge 1964, no. 14, 480.
- 39 Blussé 1977.
- 40 'As Empou has been in Holland and has been christened there and moreover has become a member of the Dutch Reformed church, we take him for a Dutchman and not for a Pattani'. Willem Boecholt, Pattani, to the Portuguese governor of Malacca, 1 December 1611, National Archives of the Netherlands, no. KA 966; quoted in Blussé 1977, 303.
- 41 'Petani, alwaer wy (...) met grooter vrientschappe ontfangen werden ende ons lading gecreeghen hebben, meer noch 3 Seeuse scheepen, die den Chines mee brochten, die in Hollandt geweest hadde, die den 26 Mayo anno 1602 hier arriveerden oock met Godts hulpe haer lading gecregen'; Pieter Walichszoon to

- his brother Jacob, 4 August 1602 (no. KA 113), in: De Jonge 1964, no. 14, 480.
- 42 '[A]lzooy zylieder [i.e., the ships *Mid-delburg* and *Zon*] de Mousones teghen hadden', Jacob Boreel and Jacob de Waert to the Dutch States General, 7 July 1603, in: De Jonge 1964, no. 7, 491-494, esp. 492. These two ships only returned to Zeeland in May 1603; idem, 493.
- 43 Blussé 1977, 296.
- 44 Zhang Xie 1617, chap. 6, 'Hongmaofan 紅毛番'. Quoted in Blussé 1977, 297, 308.
- 45 Letter of 'Empo' to the VOC directors, 15 October 1612, National Archives of the Netherlands, no. KA 967, quoted in Blussé 1977, 304.
- 46 The woman later married an Englishman, which resulted in an Anglo-Dutch fight over the inheritance, overseen by Jan Pietersz. Coen, who mentions 'eenen Engelsman na subornatie getrouet de weduwe van eenen Impon, Chinees, welck in Amboina gedoopt en onder U.E. jurisdictie es staende (...) Voorsz. Inpon heeft een kint naergelaten ende 't selve een derde van zijn goederen [na]ge-maect, wesende 219 2/3 realen'; J.P. Coen to the VOC directors, 22 October 1615, in: Colenbrander 1919, vol. 1, no. 7, 131.
- 47 Carletti & Weinstock 1964, 228.
- 48 Roelofsen 1970; Bruyn *et al.* 1979, 6. The fleet (now consisting of three ships) stopped at the Brazilian island of Fernando de Noronha in April.
- 49 Unger 1948, xlv-xlvi; Wap 1862; Hondius 2005.
- 50 Zoomers & Zuidervaart 2008.
- 51 Other archival sources suggest that another Korean was present in Zeeland slightly later: a Dutch merchant in Japan, Jacques Specx, had as his servant 'een Coreer, die voor een bootsgesel met de Japansche vaert ende voor desen met eenich Hollants schip in Zeeland gheweest'. Cornelis van Nenenrode to J.P. Coen, 17 February 1628, in: Coolhaas 1919, vol. 7, part 2, 1226-1227 (and cf. 1257); according to Chi & Walraven 2003, 40-41, this man may have been Rubens's model.
- 52 According to Cat. Los Angeles 2013, 56, these men are pagan priests convinced by Xavier's arguments.
- 53 Cat. Los Angeles 2013, 51.
- 54 The main argument in Cat. Los Angeles 2013 for identifying the overcoat in Rubens's drawing as Korean is the fullness of the skirt below the waist. This feature is not present in De Vrise's drawing nor in Rubens's altarpiece, neither of which can be attributed recognizably Korean features.

- 55 By the 1590s there were 50,000 Catholic converts in the area, mostly on Ambon; see Ricklefs 1993, 25.
- 56 Cat. Los Angeles 2013, 60 (referring to the second volume of Johann Theodor de Bry, *India Orientalis*, 1599). See also the image by Johann Silbmacher, fig. 14 in Christine Goettler's chapter in the present volume.
- 57 Another association would have been Japan, where Francis Xavier's effort had resulted in tens of thousands of converts. In fact some Koreans were among the Jesuit converts in Japan, but European audiences were unaware of this fact.
- 58 It is also possible that both images were based on a single, lost original.
- 59 Rubens's *Costume book* is in the British Museum, inv. no. 1841.12.11.8. Belkin 1982 places the bulk of the drawings in 1609-1612, revising older statements that Rubens started the *Costume book* as early as 1591. For the controversy around the date, see Held 1982.
- 60 Los Angeles 2013, 20.
- 61 Standaert 2014.
- 62 We owe a debt of gratitude to Leonard Blussé, Koos Kuiper, and Ad Dudink for their invaluable help with the translation.
- 63 We are indebted to professors Li Song and He Jin of Peking University for their help in deciphering this character.
- 64 Blussé 1977 and Blussé 2016 suggest that the surname is written as En 恩. We decide on another interpretation as the heart-readical (*xin* 心) is clearly absent in the characters of the surname written in De Vrise's album.
- 65 Luo Zhufeng 1986-1993, Luo Zhufeng 1986-1993, vol. 3, 366.
- 66 Blussé 2016, 73, proposes to read *qin* 亲 as 辛. In that case, the character could stand for the Chinese year-cycle *xinchou* 辛丑 corresponding to 1601. Because the Latin text also has 'New Year', we prefer the translation with 'new' *xin* 新.
- 67 The Cantonese 'seji' comes even more close.
- 68 We are grateful to Dirk van Miert and Ilse Slot for their help with the transcription and translation from the Latin; any errors are our own.
- 69 The term *byssus* was used in antiquity for a variety of fabrics: linen, cotton, and silk. See Smith, Wayte & Marindin 1890, entry 'byssus'.



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