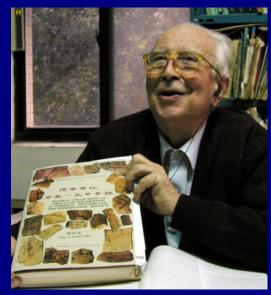
From Oracle Bones to DVD— Jean Lefeuvre (1922-2010): Jesuit, Lexicographer, Sinologist

The many fields of Chinese studies as developed in the world and in China proper have recently been the object of important gatherings. At these conferences, mention was made of the birth of Chinese studies during the lengthy revival of cultural encounter between China and the West since the time of the European Renaissance. This was done at the level of an always deeper exploration and search for mutual understanding thanks to the development of necessary tools, first of all the compilation of dictionaries and the publication of many



translations of classical texts. But as far as linguistic studies are concerned, it was not until the beginning of the twentieth century that a new field of research on the origins of the Chinese script was open. The discovery of oracle bones inscriptions as old as the Shang dynasty offered new data for the interpretation of the inscriptions on bronze. These studies developed as an important new field and yet an ancient source for seminal interpretation of Chinese cultural notions and concepts.

Among the few western scholars involved in these studies was Jean Lefeuvre (1922-1910), a Jesuit Catholic priest born in France who recently passed away in Taipei on 24 September 2010. For sixty years, besides other duties, he dedicated himself to the interpretation of oracular bones and bronze inscriptions and related topics. These pages would like to celebrate his memory.

Such a dedication had been the result of the twists of history.

Jean Lefeuvre was born on 5 July 1922 the first child of a fervent Catholic family living in a small village of 800 inhabitants in Western France.² Ancestral and more or less secret traditions (the pride of the region where Catholic faith blended harmoniously with local customs or medical practices) had been preciously kept as a treasure that formed his infancy's influential background. Aged 11, he started his secondary education at the Jesuit run school of Our Lady of the Holy Cross in the city of Le Mans where he graduated in 1940, aged 18, right at the beginning of the Second World War. In September that year, he joined the Society of Jesus (the Jesuit Catholic religious order) and began two years of novitiate in Laval followed by literary studies nearby Lyon, the French second largest city. But the authorities of the German army that in 1943 had invaded the whole of the country imposed on every young man of at least 20 years of age the so-called "Obligatory Labour Service". The purpose was to send into German factories many young French workers in order to supplement the dwindling German labour force decimated by the war. Sent to Germany as many other ones but faithful to his ancestry's traditional bravura, Jean Lefeuvre one day decided to sabotage his own work and for that was apprehended and would have been shot on the spot had he not in a forceful and clear German language protested against the poor working, eating and sleeping conditions of the place. Admired for his courage by the German officers, his anger saved his life.

After escaping from Germany towards the end of the war, Jean Lefeuvre resumed his Jesuit formation in philosophy, then in 1947 applied to be sent to China. Two young Jesuit friends and himself boarded a liner that sailed through the Panama Canal and reached Shanghai three months

¹ Two international conferences on Chinese Studies have been hosted by the People's University of China, Beijing, the first "World Conference on Sinology 2007", March 26-28 2007, and the "Second World Conference of Sinology", October 30th –November 1st 2009.

² All biographical details are taken from interviews gathered and edited by Thierry Meynard, s.j., and published under the title *Jean Lefeuvre*, *Jésuite et Sinologue*, Les Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 2007, 146 pp.

later. The first two years in China were passed in Beijing at the Jesuit run Chinese language school, and, beginning in 1948, Jean Lefeuvre studied also Chinese philosophy at the Beijing University. To achieve his Jesuit training, he went back to Shanghai to study Catholic theology (1949-1952) at the Bellarmine College, 徐家汇 Zikawei, where he was ordained a priest. But like all foreign missionaries, Jean Lefeuvre had to leave China in 1952, first to Hong Kong, then to the Philippines, where he completed his Jesuit formation. He was finally sent to Taiwan, Taizhong, where he lived from 1955 till 1970. Then began what was to be his lexicographer and sinological career.

All exiled missionaries were of course first employed in various apostolic tasks, and Jean Lefeuvre was no exception. His life at the Beijing University had already introduced him to Chinese youth needs, that is why he served for many years in a student centre and helped also in establishing a publishing house known by the name of Xu Guangqi, Guangqi Press.

But in the community where he lived, some Jesuits worked as writers, translators or editors of books, and a decision was reached to resume a project initiated earlier in Shanghai by an Hungarian Jesuit, Eugene Zsamar, who died later in 1967. Zsamar had proposed to undertake "the most daring enterprise in Chinese lexicography attempted by foreigners during this century — an enterprise that started officially in Macao in 1949 and reached its fulfilment fifty two years later." The project was to gather a team capable of compiling an encyclopaedic polyglot Chinese dictionary in five languages: Hungarian, English, French, Spanish and Latin. Although Jesuits had compiled numberless dictionaries during their 400 year presence in China, there was a need for a systematic work on every aspect of Chinese language and culture. But when political events rendered difficult the immediate preparation for the work, Eugene Zsamar took refuge in Macao and some time later moved to Taizhong. Several teams of Jesuits were formed according to their mother tongues—Hungarians and French first, followed by Spaniards, Italians and some other English speaking members. This collective lexicographic enterprise was based on more than 200 Chinese dictionaries of various languages, including the most authoritative ones like the 國語辭典 Guoyu Cidian, the 辭海 Cihai and the 辭源 Ciyuan, already collected in China and carried to Taiwan.

Since Jean Lefeuvre as student at the Beijing University had done longer studies of the Chinese language, philosophy and history, he was entrusted in the French team with the translation of classical Chinese entries. A member of the English speaking group, Tomas Caroll (賀之緘 1909-1964) from the U.S., had also a deep interest in Chinese archeology, ancient Chinese astronomy, mathematics and music. He was in charge of studying and compiling the entries dealing with the ancient Chinese caracters. But unfortunately, on an archaeological research outing on 南平島 Lamma Island nearby Hong Kong, Tom Carroll died from sunstroke in 1964. His contribution had been deemed very important for the scholarly value of the whole enterprise, so it was necessary to find a successor: Jean Lefeuvre was selected to take over Tom Caroll's task as a runner do in a relay competition... He was then 42 years old.

It was a daunting task for some one who previously had no archaeological nor epigraphic training and who was, as his life style had proven, very influential among young college students of the time. Notwithstanding these educational and spiritual duties, Lefeuvre initiated himself in the "arcanum" of Scapulomancy and continued on the path already trodden by Tom Carroll. For the following three decades or so, he dedicated the greater part of his time to the compilation of the Chinese polyglot dictionary project to which he was to have three main contributions.

The first was to compile the entries related to the meanings of the characters as used in the Chinese ancient texts or Classics. The second was to investigate the collections, private or public, of oracle bones and bronze inscriptions already existing in various places in the world, and to select

³ From an archival note entitled "The Grand Ricci Story" - Cf. www.grandricci.org/resumengl.pdf

⁴ Ibid.

around 2000 ancient written forms present in these collections as relevant to the entries where ancient texts could be quoted.

The third contribution started when, under the direction of Yves Raguin (甘一鳳, 1912-1998) who succeeded Eugene Zsamar in 1956 as the head of the project, a strategic decision was taken. In order to show to the Jesuit authorities that the project was feasible and would have some encyclopaedic cultural content, the French team would prepare for early publication a shorter Chinese-French version of the dictionary. It would comprise around 6 000 characters and 50 000 or so entries. Yves Raguin and Jean Lefeuvre were together to be the main architects of the selection to be made out of the whole already gathered corpus of 180 000 entries, and their 16 000 or so characters, and of the lay-out of this shorter dictionary. Following five revisions that lasted three years, the single volume was finally published in 1976, more than twenty years after the start of the project and under the title *Dictionnaire Français de la Langue Chinoise* [French dictionary of the Chinese language, popularly known as the "Petit Ricci"]—see the sample page of the entry $illet tao^5$.

As an indication that Jean Lefeuvre had meanwhile advanced in his studies of oracular inscriptions on turtle carapaces or bovine shoulder blades (scapulas) is the fact that one year before the publication of the shorter dictionary he had published in 1975 a long article in which he presented 'a historical and bibliographical general survey of the discovery and the first studies' on these inscriptions. The survey is profusely documented and could be considered as a remote preface to three other volumes that would appear one by one during the following three decades.

In 1985, 《法國所藏甲骨錄》 *Collections or Oracular Inscriptions in France*, Collection Variétés Sinologiques New Series 70, Ricci Institute, Taipei-Paris-Hong Kong, 402 pp., comprising Part One: Catalogue (with reproductions and translations), Part Two: Commentary, plus Appendix, all in Chinese, French and English.

In 1997, 《德瑞荷比所藏一些甲骨錄》 Several Collections of Oracular Inscriptions in Germany, Switzerland, The Netherlands, Belgium, Collection Variétés Sinologiques New Series 77, Ricci Institute, Taipei-Paris-San Francisco, 509 pp., built on the same structure of Catalogue and Commentary, all in Chinese and English.

In 2008, 《甲骨文集書林》 *Collections of Oracular Bones Inscriptions*, Collection Variétés Sinologiques New Series 97, Taipei Ricci Institute, Taipei, Taiwan, 592 pp. — a volume which is the largest catalogue up to now of small or large 412 collections, chronologically ordered, and giving data on the authors, dates and contents of each.

By engaging himself in this systematic research, Jean Lefeuvre had a the same time prepared the tool that had helped him to insert in the complete French version of the dictionary project the selection he had made of 2 000 or so most ancient written forms of important and culturally meaningful Chinese characters. That final version was to be published in two stages:

In 1999, the 《利氏漢法大字典》 *Dictionnaire Ricci de caractères chinois* [Ricci dictionary of Chinese characters], Instituts Ricci (Paris-Taipei) et Desclée de Brouwer, Association Ricci — Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 2 volumes, 1164 pp., plus Index and supplements, 469 pp., comprising 13,390 entries of single characters.

In 2001, the 《利氏漢法辭典》 *Grand dictionnaire Ricci de la langue chinoise* [Great Ricci dictionary of the Chinese language, popularly known as the "*Grand Ricci*"], in 6 volumes and one of Indexes and Concordances, Institut Ricci de Paris and Institut Ricci de Taipei, Desclée de Brouwer. The dictionary includes all single characters and around 300,000 entries of vocabulary, expressions and locutions, a great number of them indexed into 200 or so fields of knowledge—see the sample page of the entry 道 *tao*.

⁵ When the project was initiated in Macau and organised in Taizhong in the early 1950s, the now official romanisation scheme 拼音 *pinyin* was not followed in Taiwan. Hence the dictionary had to follow the Wade-Giles system commonly used at that time overseas.

⁶ J. A. Lefeuvre, "Les inscriptions des Shang sur carapaces de tortue et sur os. Aperçu historique et bibliographique de la découverte et des premières études », in *T'oung Pao*, Volume 61, 1975, Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1975, pp. 1-82.

"Petit Ricci" - Sample Page

u. 2

11. 4

稻、蠹、蹈、道 4764-4767

[Dao]TAO-DAU-TAO [n4]

4764 115-10

(Bot.) Riz (la plante); riz non décortiqué; paddy.

tao⁴ t'ien² Rizière. — ts'ao³ Paille de riz. 稻田 稻草

- tzu⁰ Riz (la plante); riz non décortiqué; 稻子

4765 120-18 纛 TAO4 (TU2,5)

Etendard militaire.

4766 157-10 TAO

> 1 Marcher sur; fouler du pied. 2 Suivre (une voie). @ Exécuter; mettre en pratique. @ Frapper du pied; trépigner.

蹈覆轍 tao4 fu4 ch'e4 Retomber dans l'ornière où d'autres ont versé: retomber dans les mêmes errements.

蹈態 - hsi2 Imiter; plagier. 蹈義 - i4 Mourir pour une juste cause.

4767 162 - 9TAO4

> ① (N. 條) Route; voie; chemin. ② Voie à suivre; principe; règle; droite raison; règle des actions humaines; doctrine. 3 Moyen; méthode; procédé. (Philos. chin.) Le Tao; la Voie; la Réalité et le mouvement spontané de ce qui existe. (La Voie, qui ne peut être appréhendée par l'esprit discursif, est manifeste dans le devenir naturel et s'impose à l'homme en le rendant à lui-même). ⑤ Dire; parler de; exprimer. ⑤ :: n. 4756 導 Conduire; diriger; gouverner. ⑥ Sous les Han, district(縣 hsien) aux populations non-chinoises; sous les T'ang, province; au début de la République, division d'une province (comprenant plusieurs préfectures 所 fu). ③ (vx) Chef d'un tao ou d'un service spécial. (9 Num. (8) des ordres, édits, sujets de composition; b des services dans un repas, tournées; © des lignes, traits, rayons de lumière; d des rues, cours d'eau, digues. 10 N. f.

taot ch'ang² (Boud.) L'endroit où le Boud-道場 dha obtint l'éveil (bodhi); lieu où l'on enseigne le Bouddhisme; lieu réservé au culte et aux offrandes. @ (Tao.) Espace sacré où se déroulent les liturgies. 3 (Tao.) Rites pour la délivrance des âmes dans les enfers, pour obtenir les bénédictions d'en-haut, etc.

tao⁴ chia¹ Les Taoïstes, une des neuf écoles 道家 philosophiques.

道教 (Relig.) Le Taoïsme. - chiaot 道歉 - ch'ien4 Présenter ses excuses.

ching1 1 Livres canoniques taoïstes. 2 道經 Prières récitées par les prêtres taoïstes pour les défunts.

ch'ing2 O Chants des prêtres taoïstes. @ 道情 Chant à but moralisateur.

 chü⁶ (N. 件) Accessoires (de théâtre, etc.). 消乏

- fa² Remercier (qn) de sa peine. - het Présenter ses félicitations, ses com-道賀 pliments.

- hsi3 Id. 消支

擔道

- hsieh⁴ Présenter ses remerciements.
- hsüeh² ① "L'étude du Tao", école philoso-道學 phique aussi appelée 理學 li hsüeh, qui prétend donner l'interprétation orthodoxe de la pensée des anciens sages; elle fleurit sous les Sung. 2 L'étude du Tao; la doctrine taoïste.

道學先生 - hsüeh2 hsien1 sheng0 Intellectuel vieux jeu; lettré aux idées arriérées.

 i* Morale; moralité; sens du devoir. - jen³ 1 Homme vertueux, raisonnable. 2 道人 Taoïste. @ Immortel; Génie.

- ku1 Nonne taoïste. 消姑

— kuan⁴ (N. 座) Monastère ou temple taoïste. — kuang¹ **1** L'éclat de la vertu. ❷ Tao-消潮 道光 kuang, nom de règne (1821-1851) de l'empereur Hsüan Tsung des Ch'ing.

Les efforts soutenus nécessaires pour 道力 - 1i4 atteindre le Tao ou cultiver la vertu.

- 118 Principe admis; doctrine; norme; raison; bon sens. Raison d'être; motif; raison. Moyen; combinaison; dispositions.

道林紙 - lin² chih³ (transcr. phon. Dowling paper) Papier de première qualité, sans bois (sans pâte mécanique).

消流

道路

- liu² Adeptes du Taoïsme; les taoïstes.
- lu⁴ Route; voie; chemin.
- lu⁴ i³ mu⁴ Sur la route (n'exprimer son 道路以目 mécontentement que) par des regards: ne pas oser exprimer ouvertement son mécontentement contre l'oppresseur.

消貌

mao⁴ Air digne, respectable.
men² **1** La porte d'accès à la Voie parfaite. 道門 2 Le Taoisme.

- mou2 L'avis des passants: avis divers et 道謀 inconciliables.

noo³ Présenter ses condoléances. 道惱

道袍 (N. 件) Robe de prêtre taoïste.

- p'o' Expliquer (oralement). 道破

- pu⁴ shih² i² On ne ramasse pas les objets perdus sur la route: honnêteté de moeurs.

shan1 Le Mont des Immortels: le séjour 道山 des morts.

- shih4 O Prētre taoïste. O Devin; astro-消士 logue. S Homme vertueux.

— t'ai² (vx) Chef d'un tao (circonscription

道臺 ou service administratif, sous les Ch'ing et au début de la République).

道德 – te² Moralité; bonnes moeurs; vertu. Moral. - te² ching¹ Le Livre de la Voie et de la 道德經 Vertu, attribué à Lao tzu, rassemblant en 81 chapitres les principaux thèmes de la tradition

« Grand Ricci » – Sample Page

道(道) TAO - [DAO]

10535 TAO-27

rad. 162-9

道 **TAO**4,3 道

USAGES ANCIENS

rec. phon. : śjôg (*śjôg) / śjəu-

【金Br.】

西周: 184 (428) Route. 2. [443] Ds 行道 hsing tao to Voies de passage. 3. [180] Ds 省道 sheng3 tao4 Inspecter les voies de communication. 4. [347] Inclus ds un nom de personne.

東周: 880 後 882 2

1. [880] :: n. 10514 導 tao³ Diriger. 2. [882] Ds 亡道 wang² tao⁴ Ne pas avoir [de conformité avec] la voie

【籍 Textes Anciens】

[a] TAO4

- 《書 Shu》 1. Voie de communication; route. Suivre le chemin de. 2. Principe; loi naturelle. Ds 天道 t'ien1 tao4 Voie du Ciel : loi tracée et suivie par le Ciel lui-même. Ds 王道 wang² tao⁴ Voie royale: conduite suivie par le souverain. 3. Se conduire comme il convient; suivre la voie
- 《詩 Shih》 1. Cheminer; aller. Ds 行道 hsing2 tao4 Voyager. 2. Dire; raconter; exposer. Ds 不可道 pu4 k'e3 tao4 Impossible à dire.
- 《遺 I Chou》:: n. 9835 首 shou³ Tête.
- 《論 Lun》 1. Conformité à l'ordre naturel; conscience morale individuelle. Ds 無道 wu² tao4 Qui a quitté la Voie: en proie au désordre; menacé d'anéantissement. 2. Façon de penser et de se conduire; compréhension personnelle; doctrine.
- 《左 Tso》 1. Ordre social; bonne organisation d'un État. 2. Voie, méthode à suivre ds le gouvernement d'un État : sens du devoir, moralité. 3. Nom d'un État, situé ds le 河 南 He-nan (Henan) act.
- 《易 I》 Mouvement insaisissable de la vie; principe universel inaccessible à la connaissance servie par la dialectique 陰陽 yin¹ yang² (繋辭 Hsi Tz'u).
- 《周 Chou》 Habileté; adresse; art.
- 《荀 Hsün》 Suivre (une ligne de conduite); décider; exécuter; appliquer.
- 《禮 Li》 1. Classe; catégorie; sorte. 2. Manière; façon de faire. 3. Sacrifier aux divinités des routes et chemins. 4. Remplir les devoirs attachés à une situation, une fonction; faire office de $(p.\ ex.: ds\ 父道\ \mathbf{fu}^4\ \mathbf{tao}^4\ \mathrm{Remplir}$ les devoirs d'un père; $ds\ \ominus$ 趙 $\mathbf{mu}^3\ \mathbf{tao}^4$ Faire office de mè-
- 《管 Kuan》Ds 六道 liu4 tao4 Les six passages: les six orifices corporels (les yeux, les oreilles, le nez, la bouche ou yeux, nez, oreilles et bouche comptant pr quatre plus les deux orifices inférieurs).
- 《君 Chün》 Méthode; procédé; moyen.
- 《爾 Erh》 Droit; honnête; probe.
- 《史 Shih Chi》 1. Passer par; prendre la route (qui passe par). 2. Cours d'eau; lit, chenal d'une rivière. 3. Direction; orientation (comme dans les 32 directions de la rose des vents ou les quatre points cardinaux). 4. Ds 道家 tao⁴ jia¹ Taoïsme: l'une des six branches principales de la tradition philosophico-politique. 5. Circonscription administrative (peuplée d'une population à majorité non 漢 Han).
- 《漢 Han》 Voie de l'immortalité; art des Immortels.

《書 Shu》 Curer, draguer (un cours d'eau); dégager le lit d'une rivière.

- 《論 Lun》Diriger; gouverner.
- 《左 Tso》Conduire; mener.
- 《莊 Chuang》 1. Raisonner; sermoner. 2. Flatter; flagorner.
- 《管 Kuan》(Venir) de; (provenir) de.

【説文 Shuo Wen】

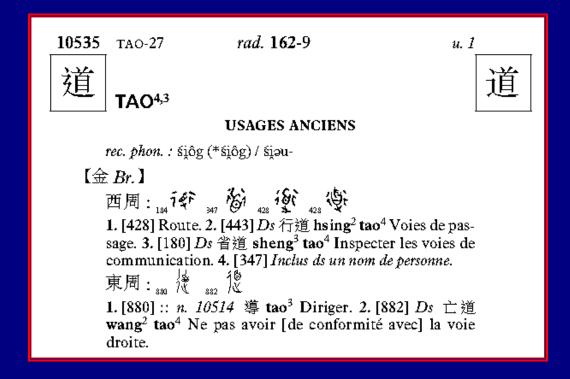
Voie, chemin sur lequel on marche; cheminement; démarche; d'où la Voie; le Principe.

[a] TAO4

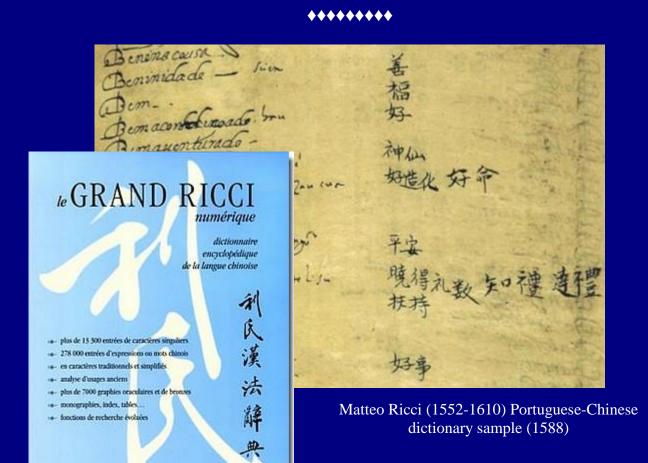
1. a. Voie; route; chemin. b. Tracer un chemin; conduire, mettre en communication. c. Lit; cours. d. (Hydraul.) Conduit. e. (Ling. - Phonét.) Canal. f. (Inform.) Piste magnétique (sur disque). g. (Anat.) Tractus; voie. 2. a. Voie à suivre (en morale, en politique); règle (morale); voie morale; principe (métaphysique). b. Suivre (une doctrine); être adepte de. Mouvement (religieux); Secte. 3. (Philos. chin. – Tao.) a. Le Tao: la Voie, vérité ultime ou réalité ultime. La Voie qui ne peut être appréhendée par l'esprit discursif, mais est manifestée ds le devenir naturel des Dix mille êtres. Réalité suprême qui transcende les modalités sensibles et non sensibles de l'être, mais que l'on connaît par l'expérience qu'en donne la pratique de la vertu (德 te²). Totalement ineffable, mais aussi immanent, le Tao se manifeste sous le double aspect de la présence (有 yu³) et de l'absence (無 wu²). b. Taoïsme. Taoïste. 4. Manière de procéder; art; méthode. 5. a. Art de mettre en communication le Ciel et la Terre, les puissances sacrées et les hommes. Réaliser une œuvre (magique ou technique). b. Pouvoir du devin, du magicien, du roi. 6. a. Mettre en ordre; gouverner. Gouvernement. b. Pouvoir civilisateur royal; principe d'ordre qui peut se manifester ds les différents domaines du réel. 7. a. Renseigner par la parole (pr montrer à un autre la voie à suivre). **b.** Dire; enseigner; parler; expliquer. Parole qui enseigne; doctrine; discours; idéal de conduite. c. Exprimer (p. ex.: des remerciements, des excuses). d. Communiquer. 8. Spécif. de diverses choses : a. Pièce écrite; édit; ordre. b. Plat (ds un repas); tournée (à boire). c. Rayon (de soleil); p. ex.: ds 一道光 i² tao4 kuang¹ Un rayon de lumière. d. Objet de forme linéaire : mur; digue; tranchée; crête de montagne; vague; etc. e. Fois. 9. a. Connaître; s'apercevoir de; deviner; voir. **b.** (Bouddh.) **i.** La voie; le chemin (qui mène à l'éveil, bodhi 菩提 p'u² t'i²). ii. Ds 六道 liu⁴ tao⁴ les six voies de renaissance ou destinées possibles au moment de la mort. 10. (Adm. hist.) a. District frontalier (dyn. 漢 Han). b. Province (dyn. 唐 T'ang). c. Région spéciale administrée par un censeur en mission (dyn. 宋 Sung – dyn. 明 Ming). **d.** Région; subdivision d'une province (dyn. 清 Ch'ing). e. Division du censorat chargée d'une province (dyn. 明 Ming – dyn. 清 Ch'ing). 11. Sacrifice aux esprits des chemins. 12. Depuis; à partir de. 13. Partic. ou suff. euphon. 14. :: n. 10514 導 tao3 Guider; conduire; diriger. 15. Équiv. à n. 9752 是 shih⁴ Être. 16. :: n. 10509 倒 [a] tao³ En revanche. Inverse. 17. :: n. 10512 到 tao4 (pr. et fig.) Arriver à; jusqu'à. 18. :: n. 10573 得 [a] te² Obtenir; pouvoir. 19. :: n. 9835 首 shou³ Tête. 20. (Géogr. hist.) Tao: a. État situé au 河南 He-nan (Henan) act. (époque 春秋 Ch'un Ch'iu). b. Préfect. située au 河南 He-nan (Henan) act. (dyn. 隋 Sui). c. Préfect. située au 湖南 Hu-nan (Hunan) act. (dyn. 唐 T'ang). 21. N. f.

1. Curer, draguer (un cours d'eau). 2. :: n. 10514 導 tao³ Guider; conduire; diriger.

"Grand Ricci" — Ancient Written Forms Sample



Such a huge lexicographic compilation would not have been achieved without the collaboration of many sinologists specialists of various fields of knowledge and related aspects of Chinese history and culture. But the contributions of Jean Lefeuvre gave to the *Grand Ricci* a feature that does not exist in any other western dictionary of the Chinese language.



電子版

Association Ricci

In a latest development, the editors of the large dictionary, helped by the outstanding expertise of a highly qualified team of informaticians sinologists, have also offered Jean Lefeuvre's research on the Chinese oracle bones and bronze inscriptions to the lovers of the Chinese language and of its script in the form of the digital edition of the *Grand Ricci* (seven volumes, around 9,000 pages) on one single DVD!⁷

That edition was officially launched in 2010 in Shanghai on May 11, exactly four hundred years after the death of Matteo Ricci in Beijing. As a sinologist, Jean Lefeuvre occupies an important place among not a few Jesuit scholars who had lived in China. Their attempts at deciphering the Chinese script and language had started very soon after their arrival on their land of adoption. Matteo Ricci (利玛竇, 1552-1610) himself had compiled two short "vocabularies", Portuguese-Chinese (1588) and Chinese-Portuguese (1598), for which he later devised with the help of Lazzaro Catttaneo (郭居静, 1560-1640) the first transcription scheme in roman letters with diacritical marks indicating the five tones. That scheme was improved by Nicolas Trigault (金尼各, 1577-1628) in his larger dictionary curiously named 《西儒耳目資》 Xi Ru Er Mu Zi [an aid for the ears and eyes of western scholars], Hangzhou, 1626. Several other dictionaries and grammars of the Chinese language have appeared in the following centuries, in particular the works of Léon Wieger (戴蓫良, 1856-1933) on the Chinese characters and of François-Séraphin Couvreur (顧賽芬, 1835-1919) who published the *Dictionnaire Classique de la Langue Chinoise* [Classical dictionary of the Chinese language], a one man work remarkable "first by the number of entries, about 21,400 single characters, including some corrupted graphies (perhaps the greatest number of single characters entries contained in any Chinese dictionary published in the West); secondly, the entries explain the meanings of each character by quoting the Chinese Classics and texts of various origins [...]." 8

Jean Lefeuvre takes his place in the ranks of these explorers who have gone beyond the boundaries of their cultures and crossed over unmapped territories. But there, they have had access into a new world, a new way of perceiving the world and human life. Let Jean Lefeuvre himself explain his discovery:

"As far as I am concerned, ever since I have begun thirty years ago to study the oracular inscriptions, I have a very affective relation with the Chinese characters. Because I am familiar with the ancient written forms, I can still better feel the soul of a character. This same experience, most of the Chinese people have it with the most current characters." […] "In fact, the script not only register the thought, but conversely the script informs the thought. Chinese people for more than three thousand years have used ideograms. […] The Chinese way of thinking and the Chinese characters maintain between themselves a very intimate link. For a Chinese, any concept of the thought is linked to such and such a character. By figuring out even mentally the drawn character, it is a whole symbolic world that opens up which the alphabetic transcription would not be able to express in the same way. For instance, the central concept of the Way in Daoism is written 道. Every Chinese people reads in this character a path and a head, expressing the idea of principle." ⁹

When the *Grand Ricci* was published in 2001, not a few media reported the news with praise for the achievement. One of the articles in its title said briefly about Jean Lefeuvre: "A Defining Dedication". ¹⁰ Obviously, it was more than that!

Yves Camus Macau Ricci Institute

⁷ *Le Grand Ricci Numérique*, April 2010, ISBN 978-2-204-09239-5. — www.grandricci.org/ouvrages.html Contact: contact@grandricci.org

⁸ Cf. Yves Camus, *Jesuits' Journeys in Chinese Studies*, Macau Ricci Institute 2007, p. 4, 16-17, accessible at www.riccimac.org/eng/features/index.htm

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