Anna Di Toro and Luisa M. Paternicò

From Martini to Prémare: Early analytic Descriptions of Mandarin Chinese in Latin

Abstract: Some of the earliest works to describe Mandarin Chinese from the 17th century onward were written in Latin, which was the standard language of the learned people of the time in Europe. For this reason, Latin was immediately associated with the language spoken by the Mandarins: *guanhua* 官话, or Mandarin Chinese. Not only was Latin used as the metalanguage in these texts, but the grammatical categories of the Graeco-Latin tradition were borrowed as well in order to analyse, explain, teach, and learn a language that was actually very different from any of those spoken in Europe. This paper, after a brief introduction to the oldest Mandarin grammars written in Latin – namely the *Grammatica Linguae Sinensis* of Martino Martini (compiled around 1653–1656 and published in 1696), and the *Notitia Linguae Sinicae* of Joseph Henri de Prémare (compiled in 1720 and published in 1831) – will analyse how the description of Chinese evolved in the 70 years in between, how Chinese lexical and grammatical categories were rendered in Latin and how or how much the Latin categories were kept, stretched or adapted in order to define or explain linguistic phenomena that were not present in any of the native languages of the European missionary learners (Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, French, etc.) while using terminology that would be familiar to them.

Keywords: Mandarin grammar, Martino Martini, Joseph Henri de Prémare, China mission

Introduction

Some of the earliest works to describe Mandarin Chinese from the 17th century onward were written in Latin, which was the standard language of the learned people of the time in Europe.

For this reason, Latin was, already by the founder of the China mission, Alessandro Valignano (1539–1606), immediately associated with the language spoken by the

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Mandarins (the scholar officials who held the reins of power in China): *guanhua* 官话, or Mandarin Chinese.[1]

Not only was Latin used as the metalanguage in these texts, but the grammatical categories of the Graeco-Latin tradition were borrowed as well in order to analyse, explain, teach and learn a language that was actually very different from any of those spoken in Europe. This was due to the fact that the first Westerners engaging in the study of Chinese in China, namely Catholic missionaries coming mostly from Italy, Spain, Portugal and France, could not find systematic works describing it in the manner to which they were accustomed. As a matter of fact, although Chinese scholars already from the 2nd century B.C. had started compiling detailed lexicographical materials, the first descriptive grammar of Chinese composed by a Chinese person would be published only between 1898 and 1900. Its author was Ma Jianzhong 马建忠 (1845–1900), a scholar and official of the Qing dynasty, who had studied in a French school in Shanghai and then in France. His work *Mashi wentong* 马氏文通 (*General Rules of the Language by Mr. Ma*) marked the beginning of systematic studies on Chinese in Chinese.[2]

Before then, probably due to the peculiarity of Chinese morphology, Chinese intellectuals had never felt the need to compile descriptive grammars. This, however, does not mean that they had never carried on any observations on their language. The first traces of language studies can be found in the commentaries to the Classics, in the form of philological analyses of the texts. During the Han dynasty, the distinction between names and particles with no semantic content but only "grammatical" function first appeared. These particles were referred to in different ways in the following centuries, often as *yuzhu* 语助 ("language helpers") or *zhuzi* 助字 ("helping characters"). During the Yuan dynasty the traditional distinction between *shizi* 实字 ("full words") and *xuzi* 虚字 ("empty words") was made. The "full words" included nouns, verbs, and adjectives; the "empty words" included adverbs, prepositions, conjunctions, and particles. This distinction would stay in use for many years. Another classification of the time was that distinguishing *huozi* 活字 ("living words") and *sizi* 死字 ("dead words"): the former being those words that can change meaning and the latter being those that cannot.[3]

It is hard to determine if and how much the Jesuit missionaries to China in the 17th century were wise to these grammatical considerations. It is imaginable that they spent a certain period of time looking for language materials before realizing

1 Valignano (1584) 541–542: «[. . . la] lengua mandarín, que es entre los chinas como latín entre nosotros, y tienen necessidad de mucho y largo estudio para aprenderlas».

2 An accurate study on the *Mashi wentong* and the grammatical studies before and after it has been conducted by Gong (1987); see also Mair (1997) 5–26.

3 Paternicò (2013) 30–33.

that, even though good monolingual dictionaries were available, there were no grammatical works describing the Chinese language systematically or, at any rate, there was nothing like the grammar texts to which these European scholars were accustomed. Some early considerations on Chinese language, its peculiarities and difficulty are present in a few missionary writings of the late 16th and early 17th centuries,[4] but the first grammar of Mandarin Chinese ever written and printed was Martino Martini (1614–1661)'s *Grammatica Linguae Sinensis*. It was compiled around 1651–1653 and revised at least until 1656. The language described by Martini, in Latin with Chinese characters and transcriptions, is the Mandarin of the time (a Nanjing based *koine*). The work was printed and published as an appendix to the 1696 edition of Melchisédec Thévenot's collection of travel reports, *Relations de divers voyages curieux*.[5] In this work Martini does not seem aware of previous local linguistic studies, and describes Chinese using as a clear model Emmanuel Alvarez's (1526–1582) *De Institutione Grammatica libri tres*,[6] which was the textbook he had very likely used during his studies at the Jesuit College. As a matter of fact, with the introduction of the *Ratio studiorum* (*Study Plan*) between 1586 and 1591, great importance was attached to the study of Latin grammar in the Jesuit's education.[7] As will be described below, Martini, though making some adjustments, departs very little from the description of the parts of speech typical of Latin grammars.

The missionaries of the following centuries proved to be more aware of texts from the Chinese linguistic tradition and wrote about them in their works. This is the case of Joseph Henri de Prémare (1666–1736), who, in his *Notitia Linguae Sinicae* – published in 1831, more than a century after its composition around 1728 – wrote indeed of the differentiation made by the Chinese grammarians between *xuzi* and *shizi* and between *huozi* and *sizi*.[8] Prémare was aware of the fact that the Latinate model would be a hindrance to the correct understanding of Chinese and made an effort to emancipate Chinese from Latin categories. His work could be described as an initial negotiation between the Latin grammatical tradition and new concepts deriving from the Chinese one.

This paper, after a brief introduction on the oldest Mandarin grammars written in Latin, namely the *Grammatica Linguae Sinensis* of Martini and the *Notitia Linguae Sinicae* of Prémare, will analyse how the description of Chinese evolved in the 70 years in between, how Chinese lexical and grammatical categories were

4 Raini (2010) 12–21.

5 See: Masini/Paternicò/Antonucci (2013) 337–398; Paternicò (2013) 87–226.

6 Alvarez (1572).

7 Villoslada (1954) 96–98.

8 Prémare (1847) 27.

rendered in Latin and how or how much the Latin categories were kept, stretched or adapted in order to define or explain linguistic phenomena, which were not present in any of the native languages of the European missionary learners (Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, French, etc.), using a familiar terminology.

1 Martini's Grammar of Chinese: Structure and Content

Martino Martini was an Italian Jesuit missionary and is considered one of the fathers of Sinological studies. His main contribution was to make Chinese history, geography, and language known to the West thanks to the widespread circulation of his works.[9] Born in Trento in 1614, Martini joined the Society of Jesus in Rome, starting his novitiate when he was eighteen years old at the famous "Collegio Romano". In 1634, Martini addressed a letter to the Father General Muzio Vitelleschi (1563–1645) asking to be sent to the "Indies", and he obtained the permission in 1638. Due to several tribulations at sea, Martini reached Macau only in August 1642. From his annual relation of 1644 we learn that he entered China in 1643 and arrived by river in his final residence of Hangzhou. During the Manchu conquest of Southern China, he often had to move to different locations and had the opportunity to travel extensively with different tasks to accomplish. In 1651 he was sent to Rome as Procurator of the China mission in order to negotiate again with the Holy See the prohibition of the Chinese Rites, which had been decreed by Pope Innocent X in 1645 and which the Jesuits had not respected. During the long journey, he was able to complete the compilation of his many works to be printed and published in Europe: *De Bello Tartarico Historia* (Antwerp 1654)*, Novus Atlas Sinensis* (Amsterdam 1655)*, Sinicae Historiae Decas Prima* (Munich 1658) and *Grammatica linguae Sinensis* (Paris 1696), all of which would obtain great success on the Old Continent.[10]

A few manuscript copies of his grammar of Mandarin in Latin were found around the end of the 20th century by Giuliano Bertuccioli.[11] More manuscript copies and a printed and published version were found in the first decade of the 21st century by Luisa M. Paternicò, who also reconstructed the *iter* of its compilation, revision, augmentation, circulation, and printing from 1653 to 1696.[12] The most complete version of Martini's grammar is the manuscript currently pre-

9 Paternicò (2023) 4–5.
10 Paternicò (2013) 49–62.
11 Bertuccioli (1998) 349–481; Bertuccioli (2003) 629–640.
12 Paternicò (2013) 87–144.

served in the Diocesan Archive of Vigevano, which includes more explanations and annotations than other versions and which will be the object of attention in the next pages.

Martini's work is, to our knowledge, the first grammar of Mandarin ever written, preceded only by a grammar of Hokkien, *Arte de la lengua chio chiu,* written in Manila around 1620–1621.[13] It is also the first Chinese grammar in Latin, considering that the latter was written in Spanish, probably by a Dominican missionary in the Philippines.

As already stated in the premises, the structure of Martini's *Grammatica Linguae Sinensis* remains quite attached to the model of Alvarez's grammar of Latin, with few discrepancies, as an analysis of the contents will easily reveal. The grammar of Alvarez is divided into three books. The *Liber Primus* is the most extensive and is subdivided into two parts. The first part deals with the declension of nouns, adjectives and pronouns followed by a long section on the conjugation of verbs in all their categories: actives, passives, irregulars, deponents, etc. A section entitled *Rudimenta: sive de octo partibus orationis* follows, analysing the traditional parts of speech.

The division of speech into eight parts was first introduced by the Greek grammarian Dionysius Thrax (2nd B.C.) in his *Τέχνη Γραμματική*. According to Dionysius Thrax, the eight parts of speech were: noun, verb, participle, article and relative pronoun, pronoun, preposition, adverb, and conjunction.[14] This division was inherited by the Latin grammatical tradition. As a matter of fact, it was adapted and used by Aelius Donatus (4th century A.D.) in his *Ars Grammatica minor* – a smaller edition of his *Ars Grammatica Maior* – which focused on *De Partibus Orationis,* namely: noun, pronoun, verb, adverb, participle, conjunction, preposition, interjection. Donatus' grammar was the main school text used to learn Latin in the Middle Ages, it set the model of language teaching and learning for centuries and, when books eventually came to be printed in the 15th century, it was among the first to be printed.[15]

The portion of Alvarez's grammar dedicated to the eight parts of speech is an emanation of this long tradition of Graeco-Latin grammatical studies. If we compare it with the contents of Martini's grammar, similarities and differences immediately appear, as Tab. 1 below shows:

The first major difference is that Martini felt the need to add an introductory section (Chapter I) on phonology, on syllables, their (limited) number, their pronunci-

13 Klöter (2010).
14 Kemp (1986); Di Benedetto (1958–1959).
15 Chase (1926).

Tab. 1: Index of contents of Alvarez's Latin grammar and Martini's Chinese grammar.

Alvarez, *De Institutione Grammatica*	**Martini, *Grammatica Linguae Sinensis***
– De Nomine	**Caput I: De vocibus Sinensibus**
– De Nominibus positivis, comparativis et superlativis	1. Vocum Sinensium numerus.
– De Pronomine	2. Harum vocum prima iuxta latinas explicatio
– De Verbo	3. De tonis seu diversa earumdem vocum apud Sinas pronunciatione.
– De Participio	4. Qualiter quinque hi toni pronunciarentur.
– De Praepositione	
– De Adverbio	**Caput II**
– De Interjectione	1. De Nominibus et eorum declinatione
– De Conjunctione	2. De Pronominibus.
	3. De Verborum coniugationibus.
	Caput III: De praepositionibus, adverbys, interiectionibus et coniunctionibus
	1. De Praepositionibus.
	2. De Adverbys.
	3. De Interjectionibus.
	4. De Coniunctione.
	5. De Numeris eorumque particulis quas numericas vocabo.
	6. De Nominubus positivis, comparativis et superlativis.
	7. De Pronominibus appendix.

ation (*latinas explicatio*) and, in particular, on tones. Only from Chapter II do the grammatical explanations concretely begin.

The section on nouns is split into two paragraphs in both works, according to the Latin tradition, which would distinguish nouns between *nomen substantivum* and *nomen adiectivum.* Martini, however, decided to place the paragraph on *De nominibus positivis, comparativis et superlativis,* which is a section on the adjectives and their degree, at the end of Chapter III. The sections on pronouns and verbs run parallel in both works, with the exception that pronouns also have a dedicated appendix at the end of Martini's work.

With the exception of the section on participles, which is not included in Martini's work, the rest of the contents run parallel from prepositions to conjunctions, which in Martini's grammar are in Chapter III, 1–4.

Alvarez's description of the parts of speech ends here, whereas Martini dedicates a long section to the numbers and their *particles*. Alvarez's grammar does have a section on numerals in the paragraph on the nouns, but of course has

nothing about *numerical particles*, which is what Martini calls classifiers. The Jesuit clearly understood the importance of this peculiar class of words that lacks a direct correlate in the European languages; thus, he dealt with it profusely and with an abundance of examples in this dedicated section.

Martini's grammar structure has so far enjoyed a legacy of four hundred years. Even nowadays, all grammars of Chinese, written either in Chinese or in any other foreign language, include, with little variation, the same distinction in parts of speech.

2 Martini's Grammar of Chinese: Metalanguage

Martino Martini's publication output was almost entirely in Latin. With the exception of a treatise on friendship, *Qiuyou pian* 求友篇,[16] and one on the immortality of the soul, *Zhenzhu lingxing lizheng* 真主灵性理证 (*Rational Proves of the existence of the real God and of the intellective soul*),[17] which had Chinese scholars and potential converts as target readers, Martini wrote his works on Chinese history, geography, and language in Latin, for the benefit of European learned men more generally and for his missionary confreres in particular. The choice of Latin was therefore strictly linked with his intended readership.

Martini's *Grammatica Linguae Sinensis* is no exception. It aimed at simplifying the acquisition of such a distant and different language, accommodating it to Latin's grammatical categories in order to make the matter more familiar and accessible for the European learner.

How did Martini render Chinese lexical and grammatical categories? To what extent were the Graeco-Latin categories or notions kept, stretched or adapted? An answer to these questions will be provided by taking as examples some key concepts:

- *voces*
- tones
- diacritic for aspiration
- noun declension and verb conjugation
- particles of various kinds
- other matters

16 Bertuccioli (1998) 173–348.

17 Bertuccioli (1998) 483–506.

As already stated, at the very beginning Martini felt the need to list the relatively few syllables of the Chinese language. However, he decided to do this from a phonological perspective. For this reason, the list is not referred to as *Syllables* but as *Voces* (meaning: "voices", "sounds"). This immediately reveals the didactic nature of this section: it aims not to simply count the syllables, showing how few they are, but to teach the real pronunciation of Chinese sounds by finding correspondences in European languages. To attain this, Martini used a phonetic transcription, adopting Latin letters and a set of diacritics to mark the aspiration and the tones.[18] He then explains the differences between certain sounds and whether they should follow the Italian or Spanish pronunciation. For example, after the list of syllables, he writes:

> *Ex his aliqua voces nulla indigent explicatione, omnino enim pronunciantur ut iacent, ac si latinæ essent syllabœ, quare illas solum explicabimus in quibus difficultas esse potest. Quæ per* ç *Hispanicum cum aricula scribuntur, eodem modo pronunciantur ut Hispani solent, cum aliqua differentia à* Z *Italorum:* c *vero ante* e *et* i*, non Italorum more, sed Hispanorum est pronunciandum, uti nimirum pleraq(ue) nationes primam syllabam nominum* cibi*, et* cetus*.* [. . .] *Illa quæ scribo per* g *ante* e *et* i *omnino Italorum more enunciantur, nimirum uti Itali primas syllabas, exempli gratia,* Genus*, et* gigas [. . .].[19]

As for the tones, Latin and other European languages did possess intonation, stress, and vowel quantity, but definitely not lexical tones. The word that we use nowadays comes from the Latin *tonus/toni,* which either referred to a musical sound or, in metrics, to the accent of a syllable. The early missionaries to China had mainly used the Latin words *accenti, soni, voces* and *pronunciationes* to refer to these suprasegmental events which distinguish otherwise homophonous syllables in Chinese.[20] They had also devised a system to describe the tones of Mandarin and a set of diacritics to mark them on the Romanised syllable.[21] Martini's grammar used the same Romanization, diacritics and explanations of his Jesuit

18 For a detailed explanation on Martini's Romanisation system and its evolution see Raini (2010) 130–141.

19 Translation: «Besides this, the sounds do not need any further explanation; as a matter of fact, they are pronounced as they are, as if they were Latin syllables, and hence we will explain only those that might present some confusion. Those starting with the Spanish *ç* written with the cedilla are pronounced in the Spanish way, with some difference from the Italian *Z*: actually the letter *c* before *e* and *i* should not be pronounced according to Italian usage but according to Spanish, just as most nations pronounce the first syllable of the nouns *cibi* and *cetus*. [. . .] Those that I write with *g* in front of *e* and *i* are to be pronounced according to the Italian usage, exactly like the first Italian syllables, for example, *Genus*, and *gigas* [. . .]».

20 It is interesting to note that in the *Arte de la lengua chio chiu* (1620), a grammar of Hokkien in Spanish, the word used is *tonadas*. See Klöter (2010) 156.

21 Raini (2010) *passim.*

predecessors, like Matteo Ricci, Nicholas Trigault, etc., but defined them as *toni.* Thanks to the grammar's wide circulation in both China and Europe, it established long-lasting norms of nomenclature not only for Martini's successors on mission in China, but also among European scholars up to today.

To mark aspiration, which is another peculiar trait of Chinese phonology that was not present in Latin, Martini recurred to the usage of the Greek spiritus asper mark.

Concerning the concepts of noun declension and verb conjugation, Martini, probably for practical reasons, did not opt to avoid them completely. The Jesuit instead preferred to keep them in the titles of paragraphs (*De nominibus et eorum declinatione, De Verborum coniugationibus*), but explained their lack in the text. Here, for example, is the incipit of Ch. II.1:

> *Cum omnis vox apud Sinas monosyllaba sit et indeclinabilis, nulla datur in nominibus declinationum varietas, sed nec in casibus ulla vocis mutatio, nec varia eorum genera. Nomina tamen substantiva et adiectiva sunt, et sæpe nomen à verbo non differt, eademq(ue) vox pro varia positione interloquendum, nomen substantivum, adiectivum et verbum esse potest.*[22]

In Ch. II.3 Martini clearly explains, and also shows with examples, the actual lack of verbal conjugation in Chinese:

> *Coniugationum varietatem verba Sinica non habent, sed nec ulla tempora quæ fiant ex vocis mutatione, sed solis additis particulis, vel ex ipso locutionis sensu tempora percipiuntur et explicant(ur) et solum habent proprie præsens, præteritum, et futurum: passiva, vero significatio addita particula* pí *exprimit(ur). Quando verbo nulla particula additur sed sola pronomina [. . .] tum præsens est tempus: pro præterito servit particula* leào *quæ proprie præteritum significat, remq(ue) iam perfectam. Pro futuro servit particula* ciām*, quæ futurum significat* [. . .].[23]

Interestingly, Martini also tries to show how the verb *amo* (*ngai* 愛, "to love") would appear if one were to conjugate it (see *infra*, § 4).

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22 Translation: «Since among the Chinese every voice is monosyllabic and indeclinable, there is no variation of declension in the nouns, and not even changes of voices in the cases, neither of gender. The nouns are both nouns and adjectives, and the noun is often not different from the verb, and using the same word in a different position, it can be a noun, adjective and verb». See Paternicò (2013) 176–177.

23 Translation: «Chinese verbs do not have a variety of conjugations, and not even tenses to render with voice changes, but only adding particles; in other words, the tenses are perceived by the meaning of the sentence, and they express and have only the present, the past and the future tense; the passive form is expressed adding the particle *pí*. When no particle is added to the verb, but only the pronouns [. . .], then the tense is present. For the past the particle *leào* is needed; it indicates the past and an action already completed. For the future the particle *ciām* is needed, which indicates the future». See Paternicò (2013) 179–180.

Another fascinating matter concerns the conceptualisation and use of the word *particles* in Martini's grammar. In the Latin grammatical tradition, the term *particle* could indicate uninflected function words in general, not content words.[24] In a narrower sense, it was used to refer to some negative particles like *non (n-)* or *haud* placed before a word to express negation. Also, some conjunctions or adverbs were referred to as *discourse particles.* For example: *ergo* ("therefore"), *nempe* ("indeed"), *autem* ("whereas"), etc.[25] The different vernaculars spoken in Europe adopted the term *particula* to refer to one or more peculiar class of function words in their language. Martini used *particula/particulae* every time he had to define a (mainly grammatical) morpheme for which he could not find a corresponding word class in Latin. In particular, he uses the word "particle" in the case of *verbal particles* and *numerical particles* but also for what we would define suffixes or adverbs. For example, in Ch. II.1 he writes about the particle *zi* 子, which is added to some nouns such as *fangzi* 房子 ("house"); the particle *men* 们, which is used to make the plural of nouns like *renmen* 人们 ("people"); the particle *de,* which is used to mark possession, as in *renmen de hao* 人们的好 ("the goodness of people").[26] As for *verbal particles*, Martini included in this category the aspect particle *le* 了, the future particle *jiang* 将, as well as the passive marker *bei* 被, and even a particle to express what the author sees as a resemblance of the subjunctive mood, *ji* 既, as in *ji wo zuo* 既我做 ("since I make").[27] In Ch. III.6 he calls *particles* words such as *geng* 更 ("more") before an adjective, or *duo* 多 ("a lot") after an adjective. As already stated, Martini defines *particulae numericae* as those noun classifiers that are measure words of Chinese.[28]

Finally, Martini at times appears to be looking for Chinese correlates for some familiar Latin concepts. For example, though clearly stating in Ch. II.1 that «*Casus etiam in nominibus nulli sunt*», later on, when dealing with particle *de* 的, he claims that it could be used to render the genitive case: «*sæpe genetivum facit, tam in singulari, quam in plurali nominibus postposita*». This is also the case in Ch. II.3, where Martini states that the particle *ji* 既 can render the *conjunctive mood*. In the same chapter, he explains that a circumlocution to render the optative is *ba bu de* 巴不得 ("if only").[29]

24 Kroon (2011) 1–2.
25 Kroon (2011) 8–17.
26 Paternicò (2013) 177–178.
27 Paternicò (2013) 179–182.
28 Paternicò (2013) 185–190.
29 Paternicò (2013) 176–182.

All in all, just as Donatus' *Ars minor* created the nomenclature for most European vernacular grammars,[30] Martini's grammatical terminology paved the way for the adoption of this kind of lexicon in China.[31]

3 Joseph Henri Marie de Prémare and his *Notitia Linguae Sinicae*

Joseph Henri Marie de Prémare, born in 1666 in Cherbourg, a seaport in Normandy, entered the Society of Jesus in 1683 and completed his studies at the Collège de la Flèche. Together with a group of French Jesuits from France, he arrived in China in 1698. According to Pfister (1833–1891), he had two main tasks: the conversion of Chinese commoners and the study of Chinese language and literature.[32] He adhered to the so-called "China Figurists", a group of Jesuits who found signs of Christian revelation in ancient Chinese texts, especially those that seemed more obscure to Europeans at the time, like the *Yijing* 易经 (*Book of Changes*).[33] He lived mostly in Jiangxi; in 1714 he was called to Beijing by Joachim Bouvet (1656–1730), but two years later Prémare left the capital in misery, probably in consequence of the bitter rows he had with Bouvet himself.[34] He had to leave Jiangxi for good in 1724, when Christian religion was proscribed by the Yongzheng emperor (r. 1723–1735), and was exiled first to Canton and later to Macau, where he died in 1736. Prémare was reported many times to the Propaganda in Rome, accused of having written texts supporting the Chinese Rites and Figurist ideas.[35]

He wrote many works in Chinese, Latin and French (most of which were never published), mostly concerning Christian faith, Figurist ideas, Chinese language and literature and translations of literary works.[36] He was the author of two short novels in Chinese, the *Meng mei tu ji* 夢美土記 (*A Dream about the Beautiful Land*, 1709), in literary language, and *Rujiao xin* 儒交信 (*A Confucian Be-*

30 Chase (1926) 24–25. More on Latin grammatical lexicon in Schad (2007).

31 For a later history of Chinese grammatical lexicon see Pellin (2009).

32 Pfister (1932).

33 The term "Figurists" was first used in a derogatory way by Nicolas Fréret (1688–1749, member of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres) in 1730 (see Lundbaek 1991, 109). In the opinion of Knud Lundbaek (1912–1995), his Figurist ideas influenced his approach to Chinese language (Lundbaek 1991, 101).

34 Lundbaek (1991) 114–116.

35 Pfister (1932) 521.

36 For a list, see Li (2012).

friending the Faith, 1729), in the vernacular, probably the first novels written in Chinese by a European, inaugurating the tradition of the 'missionary novel' in China.[37]

The first promoter of *Notitia Linguae Sinicae* (*A Knowledge of Chinese Language*) in Europe was Prémare himself. Knud Lundbaek has given an account of his epistolary exchanges with Étienne Fourmont (1683–1745), whom Prémare came to know when, in Canton, he was able to read academic journals from Europe.[38] Fourmont, a member of the Académie des Inscritions et Belles-lettres and a scholar of Hebrew and Arabic, had devoted himself to the study of Chinese and had published a dissertation on Chinese literature in the July 1722 edition of *Mémoires de Trevoux*, which Prémare could read in Canton.[39] In his dissertation, Fourmont spoke of his main task: to publish a Chinese dictionary in Europe. To this purpose, thanks to the generous support of the court of France, he had already engraved around 25,000 Chinese characters, an impressive undertaking in early-18th-century Europe.[40] From the letters sent by Prémare to Fourmont between 1725 and 1733, we know that in 1728 the Jesuit sent a manuscript copy of the *Notitia* to the French Academician, hoping that he could support and realize its publication:

> I am sending you a rather long work about understanding the Chinese language. I have written it in Latin to make it possible for all missionaries and all interested persons, of whatever nation they may be, to benefit from it. So, I have also worked for you, and this thought makes me love my labours. In particular, I hope that the second part of it will help you to come to appreciate the beauties of the Chinese style. [. . .] I trust that what I am asking you to do will not put you into trouble. You have the characters at hand, and I feel sure the publisher will sell more copies than needed to cover his expenses.[41]

Prémare's trust in Étienne Fourmont was doomed to be bitterly disappointed. The *académicien* himself was working on his two main works on Chinese language, the *Mediationes Sinicae* (which was to be published in 1737) and the *Linguae Sinarum Mandarinicae Hieroglyphicae Grammatica Duplex* (1742). Fourmont had in

37 The *Meng mei tu ji* is mentioned as an *opusculum* ("little book") by Prémare himself in the *Notitia* (Prémare 1831, 218), where he quotes a descriptive passage of the novel, written when his "pen" was still "young" (*calamo juvenili*). The attribution of the novel had nonetheless remained uncertain, until the study by Li Sher-Shiueh (Li 2011), who has demonstrated Prémare's authorship by comparing the *Meng mei tu ji* with other works by the French Jesuit. Recently, Li Sher-Shiueh has devoted a monograph to Prémare's Chinese novels and other works (Li 2022).

38 Lundbaek (1991).

39 On Fourmont, see Leung (2002).

40 See Bussotti/Landry-Deron (2020).

41 Letter of October 20th, 1728, translated in Lundbaek (1991) 37.

fact the ambition of being the first scholar to publish a Chinese grammar in Europe, and very probably was aware of the fact that Prémare's book was far superior to his own.[42]

The manuscript that Prémare sent to Fourmont has not been found so far, but at least two other original manuscripts reached Europe.[43] Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat (1788–1832) discovered one of them in the Royal Library in Paris and was the first to recognize the value of the book and the novelty of Prémare's approach, but also its limits:

> Quittant la rue battue des grammariens latins que tous ses devanciers [. . .] avaient pris pour modèles, l'auteur s'est créé une méthode toute nouvelle, ou plutôt il a cherché à rendre toute méthode superflue, en substituant aux règles les phrases mêmes d'après lesquelles on peut les recomposer.[44]

Abel-Rémusat played a crucial role in the diffusion of the *Notitia* by making manuscript copies (by himself and by his student Stanislas Julien, 1797–1873), thus promoting, in the end, its publication by the Collegium Anglo-Sinicum in Malacca in 1831.[45]

4 Prémare's *Notitia Linguae Sinicae* and Previous Chinese Grammars by Europeans

What was the «méthode toute nouvelle» of Prémare's book? Was the *Notitia* really so revolutionary? Prémare himself proudly stressed the originality of his approach in this well-known passage:

> *Absit ut ad nostras linguas sinicam revocare velim; nihil e contra cupio magis quam efficere ut missionarii mature assuescant suas ideas resolvere, easque a proprio uniuscujusque idiomate abstractas et nudas sinicis vestibus induant. Valeant itaque Despauterus et Alvarus, dum sinicas particulas in decem et octo distinctis articulis minutatim discutere et explicare conabor.*[46]

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42 The relationship between Prémare and Fourmont is thoroughly described in Lundbaek (1991); see also Abel-Rémusat (1829) 271–272. We should moreover remind the reader that the *Linguae Sinarum Mandarinicae Hieroglyphicae Grammatica Duplex* was in fact an edition of Varo's grammar, to which Fourmont added Chinese characters; see Abel-Rémusat (1829).

43 Kua (2020) 194–195.

44 Abel-Rémusat (1829) 270.

45 On the original manuscripts, handwritten and printed copies and the "journey" to Europe and back to China of the *Notitia*, see Kua (2020 and 2021). In the present article, I refer to the 1831 printed edition of the *Notitia*.

46 Translation: «Far be it from me the desire to reduce Chinese to our languages. On the contrary, my greatest desire is that the missionaries immediately grew accustomed to unfasten their

This passage introduces Chapter 2 (*Caput Secundum*) of the Second Part (*Pars Secunda*) of the book (for the detailed Contents of the *Notitia*, see Appendix). Interestingly, this passage is not the only feature that marks the importance of this section of the book. The Chapter is entitled *De Sinicae orationis particulis Tractatus* (*Treatise on the particles in the Chinese language*) and represents in fact a lengthy introduction to the Chinese particles. For the first time in a European grammar of Chinese, in Prémare particles are sorted by categories, some of which are new to Latin categories (for an analysis of this section, see *infra*, § 5).

Prémare was aware of the fact that he was doing something new, and laid claim to his new ideas. In order to describe a language that was, in Matteo Ricci's terms, «something completely different from Greek or German»,[47] it was necessary to emancipate oneself from the Latin grammatical tradition.

In order to appreciate the originality of the *Notitia*, we propose a Table (Tab. 2) in which we compare (limiting ourselves only to the titles of the chapters and summarizing the main subjects of each section) the contents of Prémare's book to the two main previous works on the Chinese language, by Martino Martini and by the Spanish Dominican Francisco Varo (1627–1687).

Luisa M. Paternicò introduced us to Martini's grammar above. As far as Varo's *Arte de la lengua Mandarina* is concerned, the book, completed in 1682 and published in Canton in 1703, «played a pivotal role in the development of Chinese grammatical studies».[48] As underlined by Sandra Breitenbach, the structure of the book and the Latinate model followed by Varo in describing Chinese influenced many subsequent scholars that compiled Chinese grammars. Although this approach represented a hindrance to the correct understanding of the peculiar structure of Chinese language, it was probably an unavoidable choice, being the Latin model familiar to them and to the students who had spent many years of their formation studying Greek and Latin.[49] Another feature of Varo's *Arte* was the practical aim of the book, compiled to teach the missionaries the *lingua franca* (in this case, Nanjing-based Mandarin), used in oral communication by officials and travelling merchants in Southern China, so that they would be able to preach the Gospel. Coherent with this practical aim, one of the most original features of Varo's grammar is the complete eschewal of the writ-

ideas, to abstract them from each of their native languages and to dress these naked ideas in a Chinese costume. Farewell, therefore, to Despauterus and Alvarus [our Latin grammars]! I shall thereby illustrate the Chinese particles, one by one, in eighteen subsections» (Prémare 1831, 153). I have modified some passages of Lundbaek's translation (Lundbaek 1991, 81).

47 «La lingua cina [. . .] è altra cosa che né la greca, né la todesca . . .» (Matteo Ricci, letter to Martino de' Fornari, 13 Febr. 1583, in Ricci 2001, 45–46).

48 See the Introduction by Sandra Breitenbach, in Varo (2000) xxi.

49 Breitenbach in Varo (2000) xxi.

ten language: not a single character appears in the book. If we think about the importance of script in Chinese culture, this approach is remarkably new.

Tab. 2: Summary of contents of the Chinese grammars by Martini, Varo and Prémare.[50]

Martini (compiled in 1656 ca.)	Varo (compiled in 1682)	Prémare (compiled in 1728 ca.)
Ch. 1. The Chinese sounds: list of the sounds and their Latin pronunciation; the tones. Ch. 2. Names and their declension; pronouns; verbs and their conjugation. Ch. 3. Prepositions, adverbs, Interjections and Conjunctions; Numerals and 'numericals'; positive, comparative and superlative nouns; pronouns appendix.	Prologue Ch.1. A Few Monitions. Some features of the spoken language; diastratic variations; importance of a correct pronunciation and a correct syntax; Ch. 2. On the Tones of this Language; Ch. 3. On the Declension of the Noun and Pronoun; Ch. 4. On the Substantive, Adjectival, Comparative and Superlative Nominals; Ch. 5. On the Abstract Verbal Nouns, Diminutives, Frequentatives, Occupations, and Genders; Ch. 6. On the Pronoun; Ch. 7. On the Interjection, Conjunction, Negation, Interrogative, and Conditional; Ch. 8. On the Verb and its Conjugations; Ch. 9. On the Passive Verb and Passive Constructions; Ch. 10. On the Prepositions and Adverbs; Ch. 11. On the Way of Forming Sentences;	Introduction: Ch. 1. Chinese literary tradition and on the one should follow in studying it; Chinese dictionaries; Ch. 2. Characters. Sounds and tones; the Chinese initial, intermediate and final sounds; Appendix: the Chinese sounds; Part 1. On 'Vernacular Language and Familiar Style': Ch. 1. Grammar and syntax of vernacular (brief explanation of *xuzi* 虛字, *shizi* 實字, *huozi* 活字 and *sizi* 死字); nouns and adjectives; pronouns; verbs; adverbs; prepositions; syntax; Ch. 2. On the peculiar genius of the Chinese language; on the use of certain characters (as得, 把, 打, 一, 來, 去, 道, 見, etc.); on the use of several particles divided in categories; On the 'figures': repetition, antithesis, interrogation, etc; list of proverbs. Part 2. On the 'Language of Noble Literary Works': Ch. 1. Grammar and syntax; on the variability of the parts of speech in Chinese;

50 For Martini, I follow the English translation by Luisa M. Paternicò (2013); for Varo, I refer, with slight modifications, to the translation by W. South Coblin and Joseph A. Levi, in Varo (2000), and for Prémare to Knud Lundbaek (1991) and to the translation by James G. Bridgman (1847), with some modifications.

Tab. 2 (continued)

Martini (compiled in 1656 ca.)	Varo (compiled in 1682)	Prémare (compiled in 1728 ca.)
	Ch. 12. On the Numbers and Numerals; Ch. 13. On Peculiar Particles; Ch. 14. On the Courteous Words of the Mandarin Language; Ch. 15. On How to Name the Mandarins, their Relatives, and Other People; and How to Refer to Oneself Orally and in Writing; Ch. 16. On Courteous Words *inter loquendam* and Courtesies when Visiting and Inviting; [*Confessionarium* by Basilio da Gemona, added in the printed ed. of 1703]	Ch. 2. Treatise on the particles of Chinese language; on various particles; on particles denoting time; intensive, interrogative and final particles; Various literary styles, with examples drawn from the Classics and other ancient texts. Ch. 3. On 'various styles in Chinese and the best way of writing it', with literary examples from texts of the classical tradition; Ch. 4. On the 'figures': antithesis, repetition, climax, metaphor, etc.

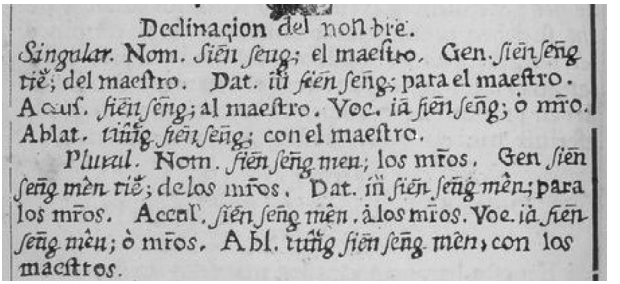
The first impression one gets in comparing the three grammars is the growing length and complexity of the texts. While Martini's grammar is about 12 pages (*recto* and *verso*) long,[51] Varo's printed text, excluding the *Confessionarium*, counts 99 pages and Prémare's book 260 pages.

By comparing the structure of Martini and Varo, we observe a similar approach. Both books offer a first section about the phonological system of Chinese and then organize Chinese grammar following the traditional Graeco-Latin division into parts of speech. However, while Martini does not offer systematic examples of noun declension (see *supra*, § 2), Varo chooses to display them (see Fig. 1).

As far as verbs are concerned, both Martini and Varo propose a table of verbal conjugation (see in Figs. 2 and 3).

These choices lead us to reflect on the fact that the same Latinate approach to Chinese had different possible gradations: while Martini takes some little liberties, Varo seems closer to the handbooks to which the students of classical languages were accustomed. When he deviates from the models, he alerts the reader, as he does in the first lines of Ch. 7, where we can read:

51 We refer to the manuscript reproduced in Luisa M. Paternicò (2013) 146–167.



Declinacion del nom bre.
Singular. Nom. ſiẽn ſeng; el maeſtro. Gen. ſiẽn ſẽg tiẽ; del maeſtro. Dat. iũ ſiẽn ſeng; para el maeſtro. Accuſ. ſiẽn ſẽg; al maeſtro. Voc. iã ſiẽn ſẽg; ò mrõs. Ablat. tũg ſiẽn ſẽg; con el maeſtro.
Plural. Nom. ſiẽn ſẽg men; los mrõs. Gen ſiẽn ſẽg mẽn tiẽ; delos mrõs. Dat. iñ ſiẽn ſẽg mẽn; para los mrõs. Accuſ. ſiẽn ſẽg mẽn. àlos mrõs. Voc. iã ſiẽn ſẽg mẽu; ò mrõs. Abl. tũg ſiẽn ſẽg mẽn; con los maeſtros.

Fig. 1: Varo, *Arte de la lengua Mandarina*: Noun declension.[52]

> Even though we are dealing with the parts of speech according to the order I have drawn from the grammar of Nebrixa, this is not the proper place for the interjection and conjunction, since these two are the last ones in [that] order. However, it seems to me that to put these two parts first [. . .] will be less troublesome . . . .[53]

Varo has also some important innovations: the first chapter, entitled *De algunas advertençias* (*A Few Monitions*), introduces the reader to some features of the spoken language, warning the student of the importance of a correct pronunciation and sentence structure in order to be intelligible when speaking Chinese. The chapter contains also some interesting reflections on diastratic varieties, and on what variety the missionaries should learn:

> There are three modes of speaking this language. The first is high and elegant [. . .] and it is spoken in the way that it is written. This first mode can only be used with educated men [. . .]. And it is certain that, if the minister could learn this way of speaking, that would be a very good thing, for on hearing him the educated Chinese would look upon the Priest as a learned man. However, this way of talking is in practice extremely difficult for us [. . .]. The second mode is a medium which is understood by the great majority [. . .]. It is very necessary for us to learn this way of speaking, in preparation for when we are preaching the word of God to the Christian as well as to the Gentiles, since, by not tiring them with coarse speech, they will listen to it with pleasure [. . .]. The third mode is coarse and vulgar and is used to preach to women and peasants [. . .]; it is the one which is learned with the least difficulty.[54]

The most striking differences between Varo and Martini appear in the last part of the book. Here we can find separate sections on syntax (Ch. 11: ‘On the Way of

52 Varo (1703) 20 (copy preserved in University of Iowa Main Library, digitized by Google, urly.it/3z_8v).
53 Varo (2000) 99. Varo refers to Antonio de Nebrija (1444–1522), author of *La Gramática de la Lengua Castellana;* on Nebrija’s influence on Varo, see Breitenbach, in Varo (2000) xxxv–xxxvii.
54 Varo (2000) 19.

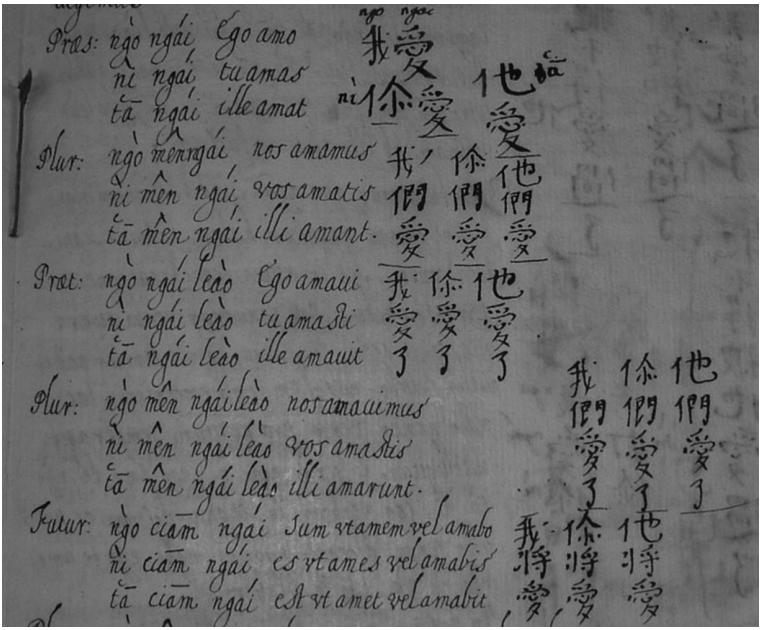


Fig. 2: Martini, *Grammatica Linguae Sinensis*, Conjugation of *amo*.[55]

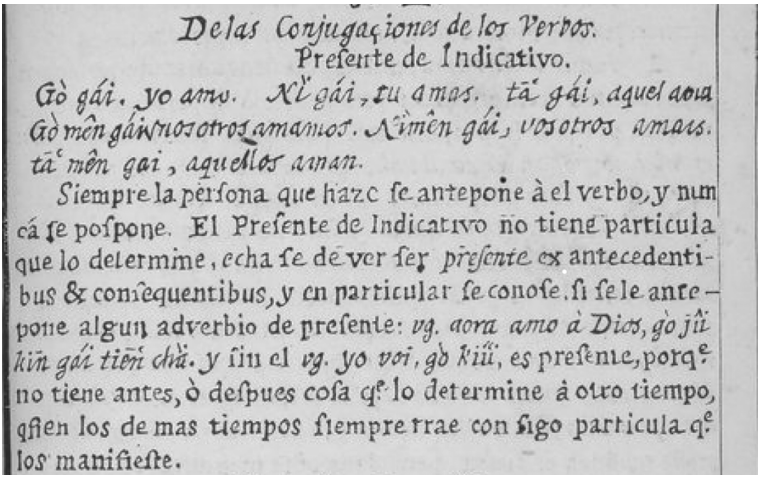
Forming Sentences'), on particles (Ch. 13: 'On Peculiar Particles')[56] and on pragmatics (Ch. 15: 'On How to Name the Mandarins, their Relatives . . .', and 16: 'On Courteous Words *inter loquendam*') and even on social etiquette (second part of Ch. 16: 'On Courtesies when Visiting and Inviting'). From Varo on, the sections on etiquette and pragmatics would be introduced in most of the Chinese grammars written by Europeans. Interestingly enough, some versions of Prémare's grammar (but not the one printed in 1831) contain a section on Chinese courtesy.[57]

When we compare the first two grammars with Prémare's work, the first impression is a sudden rise in complexity and length. The book, 260 pages long in the Latin printed edition, is divided into three sections: a lengthy Introduction, Part One ('On Vernacular Language and Familiar Style') and Part Two ('On the Language of Noble Literary Works'). A general discussion of the structure can be

55 M. Martini, *Grammatica Linguae Sinensis*, copy preserved in Diocesan Historical Archive of Vigevano, Fondo Caramuel, env. 41, fasc. 31; reproduced in Paternicò (2013) 157. I express my gratitude to Luisa M. Paternicò for providing the image.

56 We shall discuss the section devoted to the 'Various particles' in the next paragraph.

57 See Kua (2020) 164–165.



Delas Conjugaçiones de los Verbos.
Preſente de Indicativo.
Gò gái. yo amo. Nǐ gái, tu amas. tā gái, aquel ama
Gò mên gái nosotros amamos. Nǐmên gái, vosotros amais.
tā mên gai, aquellos aman.
Siempre la perſona que hazc ſe antepone à el verbo, y num
cá ſe poſpone. El Preſente de Indicativo no tiene particula
que lo determine, echa ſe de ver ſer *preſente ex* antecedenti-
bus & conſequentibus, y en particular ſe conoſe, ſi ſe le ante-
pone algun adverbio de preſente: *vg.* *aora amo à Dios, gò jîn*
kiñ gái tièn chù. y ſin el *vg.* *yo voi, gò kiù*, es preſente, porq.e
no tiene antes, ò deſpues coſa q.e lo determine à otro tiempo,
qſien los de mas tiempos ſiempre trae con ſigo particula q.e
los manifieſte.

Fig. 3: Varo, *Arte de la lengua Mandarina*, Conjugation of *amar*.[58]

found in the book by Knud Lundbaek and especially in the monograph wholly devoted to the *Notitia* by Li Zhen.[59] Here I shall just pinpoint some features that distinguish Prémare's grammar from the previous ones.

The Introduction (pages 3–14, plus an Index of Chinese sounds) includes a chapter on the Chinese literary tradition and a chapter on phonology. While previous grammars also inserted an initial chapter on the sounds of Chinese, the section on Chinese literature, and on the order that the student should follow in reading the suggested books, is very original. Not only is the subject new in a grammar book, but also the selection of texts and their order have many remarkable peculiarities.[60] Prémare divides the texts into nine groups (*gradi*), starting from the «ancient monuments called the 經»,[61] followed by the Four Books of the Confucian tradition and (in the third class) the main Daoist texts (*Dao De jing* 道德經 and *Zhuangzi* 莊子) together with the *Li* 禮 (*Rites*).[62] There follow other groups, sorted according to hierarchical criteria and choices that seem quite personal. Li Zhen has underlined the absence of Tang and Song classical poetry and Knud Lundbaek has defined the presence of the Daoist books in the

58 Varo (1703) 51.

59 See Lundbaek (1991) and Li (2014).

60 For a thorough analysis of this section, see Lundbaek (1991) 65–68.

61 *Yijing* 易經 (*Classic of Changes*), *Shijing* 詩經 (*Classic of Odes*), *Shujing* 書經 (*Classic of Documents*).

62 Prémare (1831) 3. For an analytical list, see Li (2014) 140.

third group and of the ancient dictionary *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 by Xu Shen 許慎 (58–148 ca.) in the fifth as oddities in the missionary context.[63] Prémare gave high consideration to these last texts, which, together with the *Yijing*, the Figurists considered central to their approach to the Chinese past.[64]

The other remarkable novelty in the structure of the *Notitia* is its division into two Parts, devoted respectively to the vernacular and to literary language. The awareness of different varieties of Chinese was already consolidated in missionary circles, as we have seen with Varo. However, as far as we know, Prémare was the first to structure his grammar based on a clear division of the two varieties of Chinese.[65] As he writes in a note introducing Part One:

> *Prima pars missionaris adjuvabit: 1º ut Sinae eos loquentes facilius intelligent. 2º ut Sinas vicissim melius ipsimet audiant. 3º ut libros humili stylo compositos cum gustu legant, et sic magis expedite loquantur [. . .].*
>
> *Secunda pars eisdem missionariis plurimum proderit. 1º ut veterum librorum sensum recto capiant. 2º ut libros in aliud idioma sine errore vertant. 3º ut sinice non ineleganter scribant, si velint.*[66]

The aim of the book is clearly to give the students a solid instruction in the spoken language (defined as *lingua mandarina*) in Part One and in the written language in Part Two. Allusions to "pleasure" in studying and to the beauty of Chinese are repeated in many passages of the book. On the same page we read about the *amaenitates* ("beauties") possessed by both the classical and the vernacular language and to which the missionaries should develop a sensibility.

Chapter 1 of Part One enunciates briefly some traditional Chinese categories: *xuzi* 虛字, *shizi* 實字, *huozi* 活字, and *sizi* 死字 (see *supra*, Introduction, and *infra*, § 5). Prémare, however, does not develop this section and immediately resorts

63 See Li (2014) 139 and Lundbaek (1991) 66–67.

64 See Lundbaek (1991) 33–34 and Li (2014).

65 Some of the authors of later European grammars of Chinese were inspired by Prémare; for example, Abel-Rémusat (1822) and Nikita Bičurin, who, in a section of his *Kitajskaja grammatika* (1835), made a line-by-line comparison of the different varieties of Chinese while explicating the grammatical rules.

66 Translation: «Part One shall help the Missionaries: 1st, to be better understood when they speak with the Chinese; 2nd, to understand better when the Chinese speak to them; 3rd, to be able to read with pleasure the books in a simple style and thus to speak more fluently [. . .]. Part Two shall give the Missionaries manifold assistance: 1st, to understand correctly the meaning of the ancient books; 2nd, to translate the books correctly in other languages; 3rd, if they wish to write in Chinese, to write with a certain elegance» (Prémare 1831, 38).

again to the "reassuring heads"[67] of the Latin parts of speech (nouns and adjectives, pronouns, verbs, adverbs, prepositions, etc.), to which the French Jesuit devotes only 8 pages, where he explains their peculiarities.[68] Nouns, adjectives and verbs have no gender, no number, no declension or conjugation, but number, cases or tenses are rendered by the use of *particulae.* The following Chapter 2 (pp. 49–120) introduces the reader to the *Peculiar genius of the Chinese language* (*De Proprio Linguæ Sinicæ Genio*), introduced by the following lines:

> *Linguae hujus ubertas, amaenitas ac vis, ex frequenti certarum litterarum usu, ex variis particulis, denique ex figuris, mirum in modum elucet.*[69]

This chapter contains a section devoted to *The Use of Certain Characters* (*De Usu Aliquot Litterarum*), presenting characters which, in different contexts, may have peculiar meaning or functions, as *de* 得 ("to obtain"), often used to form some complements, or *ba* 把 ("to take", "to seize with the hand"), often used to introduce the pre-verbal object of a sentence. The following section presents various kinds of Chinese particles (*particulae*), divided into five categories (see *infra*, § 5). There follow many pages devoted to particles that do not correspond to the categories analysed, organized without an apparent order. In my opinion, in this chapter we can tangibly sense Prémare's struggles in describing the peculiarity (*genius*) of Chinese: after having resorted to traditional Greek and Latin categories, he immediately tries a new path, but seems to advance without a compass: «il a cherché à rendre toute méthode superflue», as Abel-Rémusat said (see *supra*, § 3).

Chapter 2 of Part One is concluded by the section devoted to 'Figures', divided into repetition, antithesis, and interrogation. Here the discussion is enriched by a series of considerations dealing with aesthetics, but also with the Chinese way of thinking:

> *Toto hoc paragrapho vox illa antithesis valde late sumitur; interdum est vera antithesis, interdum est mera correspondentia seu correlatio; nescio quo alio nomine possim appellare hanc figuram, quae tam saepe occurrit, cum in sermone, tum in libris, ut ex mille modis loquendi, quos in hoc opuscolo legere est, vix duas tresve reperiri putem, in quibus non sit oppositio aliqua, vel in sententia vel saltem in verbis. Hoc scilicet linguae Sinicae proprium est. Sensus*

67 Lundbaek (1991) 75.

68 See also Li (2014) 151–162.

69 Prémare (1831) 49; transl. in Lundbaek (1991) 77: «The richness, beauty and force of this language are shown admirably in the frequent use of certain characters, in its various particles and in its numerous figures of speech».

> *quidem una et altera littera posset absolvi, sed ad oppositionem vel repetitionem recurrere necesse est, ne cadat oratio et ore hiante spiritus per vim abrumpatur [. . .]*[70]

The structure of Part Two ('On the Language of Noble Literary Works') is similar to the one of Part One. It is, however, important to stress the fact that Prémare underlines that he is introducing a special section, by giving the title of *Tractatus* to Chapter 2 (pp. 153–180), the section devoted to particles. In the introductory note to this 'Treatise', he remarks that he shall not adopt the categories usually adopted by (Latin) grammarians. In the following pages, he first illustrates various particles of the literary language and then proposes a classification in four categories (see *infra*, § 5).

Chapter 3, 'On Figures', is much longer and more detailed than its corresponding chapter in Part One. The incipit of the chapter reads: «*Quod stellae coelo et pratis flores, hoc orationis sunt figurae*», and then:

> *Non me fugit quod his articulis non comprehenduntur omnes figurae, quas nostri rhetores explicant [. . .]. Despauterus longe inferiorem esse me facile patiar.*[71]

Here Prémare claims the richness and dignity of the Chinese rhetorical tradition, offering a trenchant picture of Chinese aesthetics, connected with philosophical concepts. Returning to 'antithesis', he writes:

> *Haec tamen figura sinice non astringitur ejusmodi contrariorum antithesi: oppositio de qua praesertim hic agitur, non semper inimica est quin magis correspondentiam et necessitudinem mutuam saepius indicat [. . .]. Itaque sinae litteras cum litteris, cum accentibus accentus, phrases cum phrasibus ita maritant, ut in hoc solo puncto tota fere elegantia sinicae orationis posita esse videatur. Istud autem, ut caetera omnia, ex symbolicis figuris libri* y-king *desumpserunt.*[72]

---

70 Prémare (1831) 128; transl. by Lundbaek (1991) 79, with some modifications: «In the whole paragraph the term antithesis is taken in a very broad sense. While at times it is a real antithesis, at times it is a mere correspondence or correlation; I do not know how could I name otherwise this figure that occurs so often, both in speech or in books. I doubt that there are more than two or three instances among the thousands of sentences contained in this small work of mine that do not contain some kind of opposition, either in concept or at least in words. This is certainly a peculiarity of the Chinese language. It is possible to state a proposition with a few simple words, but one must work with oppositions and repetitions, to avoid that the speech turned downward and that the speaker remained breathless».

71 Prémare (1831) 204; transl. by Lundbaek (1991) 91, with slight modifications: «I know that these subsections do not list all the figures that our masters of rhetoric illustrate [. . .]. If somebody should say to me that I am far below Despauterus, I shall take it easy».

72 Prémare (1831) 204; transl. by Bridgman (1847) 246, with slight modifications: «This figure in Chinese, however, is not limited to an antithetical exhibition of things that are diametrically op-

The French Jesuit refers here obviously to *yin* 陰 and *yang* 陽, the ever-interacting and interdependent dynamic principles of light and darkness, activity and rest, heat and cold, masculine and feminine, etc., that produce the movement of all things and harmony in human relations, society and also in art.

As far as Chinese sources of the *Notitia* are concerned, as we have seen, the 'Introduction' on Chinese books of the *Notitia* offers a remarkably rich list. To this list we should add the numerous literary works (Yuan dramas, novels and novellas of Ming and Qing period, etc.) that are used as sources of the numerous examples in Part One.[73] Li Zhen identifies an important source also in Chen Kui 陳騤 (1128–1203), whose *Guwen gouxuan* 古學鉤玄 (*Deep Meaning of Ancient Learning*) is quoted by Prémare in the conclusion of his book.[74] Li Zhen has conducted a thorough comparative study of the model phrases in Chen Kui and Prémare, demonstrating that Chen Kui was the main source of the examples contained in the section devoted to rhetoric in Part Two of the *Notitia.* In her opinion, Chen Kui's works have also influenced the structure of this section.

5 From Martini to Prémare: Some Concluding Remarks

As we have seen in discussing the structure of the *Notitia* and comparing it with the grammars by Martini and Varo, Prémare's book presents many innovative features. Here we shall deal only with some examples drawn from his grammatical metalanguage, comparing it with the terms chosen by Martini and Varo (Tab. 3).

As we have seen above, Prémare's *Notitia* introduces some Chinese grammatical terminology, as for example the terms *xuzi* and *shizi*, which are described as follows:

posed to each other. The contrast here treated is not always one of contraries; it is indeed in many cases used rather to exhibit some mutual necessity and correspondence [. . .]. So great indeed is the care with which the Chinese match character with character, tone with tone, and phrase with phrase, that almost all the matter of elegance in Chinese composition would seem to rest upon this one point. But this, as everything else, they have taken from the symbolic figures of the Yijing».

73 Li (2014) 138–141.

74 Li (2014) 276–278. The *Guwen gouxuan* 古學鉤玄 was a book containing models of elegant phrases and a rich anthology of classical prose. It included the *Wenze* 文則 (*Rules for Written [composition]*), also by Chen Kui.

Tab. 3: Examples of grammatical metalanguage in Martini, Varo and Prémare.

Martini	Varo	Prémare
voces [sounds]	*voz*	*voces*
tonus/toni [tono]	*tonada/tonadas*	*accentus/accenti*
particula	*particula*	*particula/littera*
particulae numericae	*numerales*	*notae in enumerationibus*
–	–	*litterae vacuae* (虛字)
–	–	*litterae plenae seu solidae* (實字)
–	–	*litterae vivae* (活字)
–	–	*litterae mortuae* (死字)

> *Sinica oratio, sive ore prolata, sive in libris contenta, suis partibus componitur. Quaelibet sententia seu phrasis, ut integra sit, requirit verbum, sine quo nullus subesset sensus, et nomen [. . .]; accedunt adverbia, praepositiones, particulae [. . .], quae ad oratoris claritatem et ornatum, magis quam ad ejus essentiam pertinent. Grammatici Sinae litteris quibus oratio componitur dividunt in*字虛 hiū tsée*, litteras vacuas, et*字實 chĕ tsée*, plenas seu solidas. Vacuas appellant quaecumque orationi non sunt essentiales. Nulla enim littera proprie vacua est, sed in se semper aliquid significat. Adeoque cum litterae supponunt pro meris particulis et dicuntur vacuae, id fit per* 借假 kià tsié*, seu metaphoram, hoc est a proprio sensu ad alienum transferuntur.*[75]

Prémare then explains that *shizi* are divided into *huozi* 活字 (“*litterae vivae*”) and *sizi* 死字 (“*litterae mortuae*”), adding concisely that *litterae vivae* indicate verbs and *litterae mortuae* indicate nouns.

75 Prémare (1831) 39: «The Chinese language, whether spoken or written, is composed of certain parts. Each sentence or phrase, to be entire, requires a verb, without which it has no meaning, and a noun [. . .]; there are also adverbs, prepositions and particles [. . .], which are used rather for splendour and embellishment of the style, than because they are absolutely essential to sense. The Chinese grammarians divide the characters that constitute the speech into two classes, called虛字*hiū tsée*, empty characters, and 實字 *chĕ tsée*, full or solid characters. Those that are not essential in composition are called empty, though no character can strictly be called so since it necessarily has some signification. Therefore, when characters are used as mere particles, and are called *hiū tsée*, it must be understood to be by 假借 *kià tsié*, or metaphor, i.e. they are changed from their natural to an alien sense». N.B. this version follows Abel-Rémusat in writing from right to left the Chinese characters in disyllabic words. The passage follows James G. Bridgman’s translation, with slight modifications; see Prémare (1847) 27. For further reflections on the complexity of the categories of *xuci* and *shizi*, which are not to be considered as absolute and rigid categories, see Li (2014) 165.

In relation to the aesthetic function of *particulae*, described by Prémare, we may quote here Chen Kui, who in his *Wenze* 文則 (*Rules for Written [composition]*) wrote: «文無助詞不順» (translation: "without auxiliary words, the written language has no smoothness").[76]

As far as we know, this is the first appearance of these categories in a European grammar of Chinese. Although Prémare's description of the de-lexicalization process of the function words (*xuzi*), in which he follows the Chinese tradition, is precise and shall be influential in European linguistics, he does not develop his analysis of these categories.[77]

On Particles

Both Martini (see *supra*, § 2) and Varo introduce the concept (and the term) of *particulae* (*particulas* in Varo) when presenting certain features of Chinese, such as the expression of verbal tenses or of number and declension for nouns. Varo, however, uses the term more extensively. *Particulas* in Varo designate also the elements that he calls "diminutives" (for ex., *xie* 些, "some", "a small amount", or *shao*少, "a little", terms that can function as nouns, verbs or adverbs, Ch. 5. II), the "frequentatives" (for ex., *chang* 常, "often", an adverb, Ch. 5. III), negative adverbs (like *bu* 不, "no", Ch. 7. II), or interjections (Ch. 7. I). As we have seen, Varo devotes to "particles" an entire chapter (Ch. 13: *De diversas particulas*, 'On peculiar particles'), but the 11 *particulas* introduced here represent peculiar uses of some terms, as for example the use of *yi* 一 ("one"), used between two reduplicated verbs, and *de* 得 ("to obtain") when used to form some complements.[78] Some of the *particulas* analysed by Varo in this section correspond those analysed by Prémare in the section *De Usu Aliquot Litterarum* in Part One, Chapter 2. As we have already commented above (§ 4), the French Jesuit does not call these characters *particulae*.

As far as the taxonomy of particles is concerned, in the pages devoted to *particulae* both in Part One (vernacular language) and in Part Two (literary language), Prémare proposes some categories but does not seem to be aware of the Chinese traditional categorization of empty words (*xuzi*), although, as he has seen, he knew the *Wenze* 文則 (*Rules for Written [composition]*), whereas Chen

76 Quoted in Casacchia/Gianninoto (2012) 216.

77 See Li (2014) 151.

78 For this reason, I adopt the translation "peculiar" for *diversas*.

Kui discusses the "function words" (*zhuci* 助詞).[79] Beginning in the 12th century, "studies of particles" (*xuci de yanjiu* 虛詞的研究), developed constantly in China, and later produced a classification of *xuzi* into 7 categories: initial particles (*qi yu ci* 起語辭), connective (*jie yu ci* 接語辭), explicative (*zhuan yu ci* 轉語辭), complementary (*chen yu ci* 襯語辭), collective (*shu yu ci* 束語辭), exclamative (*tan yu ci* 歎語辭), and final (*xie yu ci* 歇語辭).[80]

In the introductory note to this 'Treatise' on particles (Part Two, Chapter 2), Prémare remarks that he shall not follow Latin grammarians, who divide the particles in copulatives, disjunctives, augmentatives, diminutives, etc. The new categories proposed by Prémare are:

– Part One (on vernacular language), Chapter 2: negative particles, augmentative, diminutive, initials, and finals;[81]
– Part Two (on literary language), Chapter 2: particles denoting time, intensive particles, interrogative, and final.[82]

Observing these categories, it seems that, like Martini, Prémare also used *particula/particulae* to define morphemes for which he could not find a corresponding word class. We may find some correspondences with the Latin particle categories, like augmentative,[83] negative and interrogative.[84] Other categories, like initials and finals, are more suitable to describe peculiar features of Chinese.

As in Martini and Varo, also in Prémare the category of particles seems elusive.[85] Most of the particles described by the French Jesuit are not classified into

79 In a letter addressed to Fourmont dated August 30, 1731, Joseph de Prémare writes that in China he could not find books dealing with grammar and syntax: «It was by accident that I found a few remarks about terms for certain groups of words» (Lundbaek 1991, 56). Although the repertoires of particles cannot be considered grammar books, they were however used to learn the correct use of the written language. On the Chinese traditional categorization of particles, and on the repertoires devoted to *xuzi*, see Casacchia/Gianninoto (2012); Pellin (2009) and Di Toro (2019). Chen Guohua gives to one of these repertoires, the *Bianzi jue* 辨字訣 (*A Refined Method for a Categorization of the Words*, 1694), by Wang Mingchang王鳴昌, the status of a complete grammar treatise; see Chen (2015).

80 See for ex. *Bianzi jue* 辨字訣, by Wang Mingchang王鳴昌.

81 *De particulis negativis; de particulis augmentativis; de particulis diminutivis; de particulis initialibus; de particulis finalibus* (Prémare 1831, 77–89).

82 *De particulis quae tempus designant; de particulis quae augent sensum; de particulis quae interrogant; de particulis finalibus* (Prémare 1831, 181–186).

83 See for ex. Littleton (1735): entry *Atque*.

84 See examples in Rosén (2009).

85 On the subject, see Breitenbach's Introduction in Varo (2000) xlii–xliii.

his categories, and the logic underlying their order is unclear:[86] at this point the work of systematising Chinese grammar is still in an embryonic stage.

On Classifiers

Unlike Martini and Varo, who devote a separate section to classifiers in the chapters devoted to numerals, Prémare does not distinguish a category for "classifiers": in his *Notitia* the classifiers are briefly illustrated under the section on nouns and are called *notae in enumerationibus* (for ex., *san wei laoye* 三位老爺, "*tres viri*"; *yi kou zhu* 一口豬, "*unus porcus*"). We can also find some classifiers (like *ge* 個) presented under the category of the pronoun; Li Zhen has explained that in fact some characters that in contemporary Chinese are classifiers had different functions in the past, and often acted as pronouns. Prémare, however, offers examples in which *ge* 個 is indeed used as a classifier.[87] We may conclude that the category of classifiers is not yet mature in Prémare's analysis.

In conclusion, we may observe that while Martini was the first scholar to introduce Mandarin Chinese to Europeans and to lay the foundation of the terminology of Chinese grammar in Latin, Prémare was the first to try to emancipate Chinese from the Latinate model. As we have seen, he is to be credited with providing the impulse to follow new paths, urging the Graeco-Latin model to face new challenges. As remarked by Bernard Colombat, this occurs when Latin begins to "die" as a spoken language:

> Or c'est précisement à cette époque où le latine commence à «mourir» que sa grammaire va être utilisée pour décrire la plupart des langues du monde, non seulement les langues européennes, mais aussi beaucoup d'idiomes exotiques [. . .]. La grammaire latine, instrument vieux de plurieres siècles, va donc servir de modèle pour «grammatiser», c'est-à-dire «outiller» par ces instruments que sont les grammaires et les dictionnaires les langues alors parlées dans le monde, et ce pendant longtemps.[88]

However, Prémare's main contribution to the didactics of Chinese may be his effort to offer to the student a method both rigorous and agreeable by showing the 'beauties and the force' of the language. As Prémare wrote in dismay in one of his last letters to Fourmont in October 1733, after having read the works that the *académicien* sent him in Canton:

86 See Li (2014) 174.
87 Li (2014) 155.
88 Colombat (1999) 10.

> You and I have aimed at very different goals. I have done what I could to make the study of Chinese easy and agreeable. You seem to have aimed at discouraging people and making them afraid. If I were in Paris with my *Notitia*, I should need only three or four years to make people speak Chinese, read Chinese books, and write popular as well as classical Chinese.[89]

Appendix

Joseph de Prémare (1666–1736), *Notitia linguæ sinicæ* (Malacca, 1831)

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Pars Prima. De Lingua Vulgari et Familiari Stylo

89 Transl. in Lundbaek (1991) 60.

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Articulus Primus. De Usu Aliquot Litterarum
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Par. Secundus. De 把
Par. Tertius. De 打, 一, 來, 去, 道, 見, etc.
Articulus Secundus. De Particulis in Sermone Adhiberi Soliti
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Articulus Secundus. De Repetitione
Articulus Tertius. De Gradatione
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