

Preface

If Rudolph Stolper, an antiquarian bookseller from Bath, UK, had not come to my office in the Leiden Library in the course of the summer of 1991 this catalogue would probably never have existed. He had with him a large suitcase, which he barely could handle, as he was, physically speaking, a bit of a tiny man, and his age seemed quite advanced, already then. After the usual exchange of polite remarks (I was meeting him for the first time) he opened the suitcase which proved to be full of Chinese manuscripts, which he said he had acquired in Northern Thailand. The purpose of his visit was evident: he wanted to sell these manuscripts to the Leiden Library.

China had not been entirely outside the scope of my acquisition policies, but it was certainly not the prime target of the Library. I rather tried to focus on the Middle East and South-East Asia, which are the places from which manuscripts had traditionally come to Leiden, for several centuries and in great quantities. In that field the Library was really strong. China, however, had not altogether been out of my thoughts, if only because I was eager to acquire Islamic manuscripts from there, the Leiden Islamic collections being almost entirely devoid of that type of material. I expressed my doubts to Mr. Stolper on his proposition, and I explained to him that another reason why I hesitated to comply with his request was the fact that Leiden University has a Sinological Institute where his materials would be far better placed than in the Central Library of the University. But he did not seem to care, possibly because he saw that he had aroused my interest, which was true. The contents of that suitcase had started to intrigue me, and this did not escape my astute guest. In order to get rid of him I told him that I would think it over and that I would let him know in due course. In the meantime the suitcase should stay with me. Not much happened then, and to be honest, after a while I almost forgot about it, pressed as I was by other, more urgent matters. From time to time Mr. Stolper reminded me of his deposit and enquired after the progress of my decision making. He did not in any way hasten me, but he was adamant that I make a decision, and rightly so. After a while I decided to purchase the entire collection, plus a number of additional manuscripts which Mr. Stolper had sent me later on. I was so lucky that Dr. Barend ter Haar generously dedicated part of his research budget to the acquisition of the collection.

I continued asking around about the contents of the manuscripts, but did not receive much concrete information. This seemed to change when Mrs. Yuan Bingling arrived in Leiden in order to write her PhD thesis. When she visited the Library in search of *kongsi* documents, I saw in her a suitable candidate and I proposed that she would make a description of the

content of these manuscripts. She herself suggested including the older Chinese materials which had been for many years, often for several centuries, in the Library, and about which hardly anything was known. I made technical descriptions in English, and summaries of earlier descriptions, to which she added her notes in Chinese. The original plan was to make a bilingual description in English and Chinese. Soon, Ms. Yuan Bingling asked the sinologist Mr. Koos Kuiper to cooperate in the compilation, which he accepted. However, he found a bilingual description not necessary, but the inclusion of Chinese characters indispensable.

A year or two later, Ms. Yuan Bingling gradually withdrew from the project as her time and energy were increasingly needed for the preparation of her thesis (which she successfully defended in 1998). In the end she returned to China in order to take up an academic position.

In the meantime Koos Kuiper kept on working, and actually took over the whole project from Ms. Yuan Bingling. He made one discovery after the other on the older Chinese manuscript collections. The most interesting discovery he made was the fact that many Chinese manuscript materials were kept, not in the Oriental department of the Leiden library as one would expect, but in the department of Western manuscripts of the Library. They form part of collections of scholarly notes of 19th-century Dutch sinologists. In the end these notes and related materials have all been identified and their descriptions now form a considerable part of this catalogue. The description of these materials shed further light on the history of Dutch sinology.

Other Chinese manuscript materials acquired since the mid-1990's are included in the present catalogue. They constitute a modest addition.

To come back to Mr. Rudolph Stolper of Bath: Unknowingly he stood at the beginning of a considerable increase in the Chinese manuscript collection of the Central Library of Leiden, and thereby at the starting point of a chain of events, which, more than a decade later, led to the coming into being of this first catalogue of Chinese manuscripts in the Central Library of Leiden University. Between that starting point and the completion of the catalogue many people have in some way or another helped making it, both in and outside the Leiden Library. Their efforts are appreciated and without them the completion would have taken more time than the decade it has now taken.

Jan Just Witkam
Interpres Legati Warneriani

Leiden, 28 December 2004

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