

## *Biography of Prospero Intorcetta SJ, China missionary*

### **Name and Name Modifications:**

Chinese: Yin Duoze

### **Dates of Birth and Death:**

(\*) 28 August 1625 in Piazza Ameriana, Kingdom of Sicily, today Italy

(†) 03 October 1692 in Hangzhou, China

### **Relevance for the China Mission:**

Intorcetta became well-known as one of the translators of the common Jesuit project of the translation of the Confucian Four Books, which finally led to the publication of the *Confucius Sinarum philosophus* (Paris 1687).

Intorcetta had several offices in the Society of Jesus: Procurator to Rome 1669-1674, Visitor 1676-1684, Vice-Provincial of China 1686-1689.

### **Family Data:**

Nothing is known about Intorcetta's family.

Intorcetta joined the Society of Jesus on 31 December 1642.

Ordination to priesthood in Messina in 1654.

Intorcetta made his four solemn vows in Macau on 16 February 1659.

### **Education:**

At first, Intorcetta attended the College in Catana, where his parents sent him to study law. Then, with sixteen years, he went to the Jesuits in Messina, because he wanted to become a missionary. But the superiors there at first did not want to receive him without the permission of his family, which he finally got. Intorcetta studied theology and also sciences at the Collegio Romano in Rome.

### **Mission:**

Departure to China: 4 April 1657, on the ship "Bom Jesus da Vidigueira".

Arrival in China in 1659 (together with Philippe Couplet).

Second departure to Rome: 21 January 1669.

Arrival in Rome: 1671.

Arrival in China: August 1664.

### **Professional Career:**

At first, Intorcetta worked in Jianzhang/Jiangxi. On June 28, 1665, he was brought to Peking together with Fr. Pietro Canevari (1596-1675), because of the “Calendar Case” with the following persecution of 1665 initiated by the Confucian Yang Guangxian. Intorcetta stood under house arrest together with most other China missionaries in the house of the Jesuits in Canton.

In October 1666, Intorcetta was elected procurator of the Jesuits to go to Rome, but he was blocked for more than one year in Canton. On 3rd of September 1668, he travelled to Macau. He started for Europa in January 1669, arrived in Rome in 1671 and was back in China in August 1674.

In China Intorcetta was Visitor of the Jesuits (1676-1684), Vice-Provincial of China (1686-1689). In 1678 and in 1691, he was in Hangzhou. The local persecution of Christians in Hangzhou and the complaints of the Court Jesuits at the emperor finally resulted in the Edict of Tolerance issued by Kangxi on 22nd of March 1692: Catholicism got the same rights as Daoism and Buddhism. On 2nd of August 1692, the Catholic Church of Hangzhou, which had been considered as the most beautiful of the whole of China. On January 10th, 1698, Intorcetta was again made Visitor but died before he could start his office.

Intorcetta was important because of collaboration in the translation project of parts of the *Sishu*, the “Four Classics”. Many Jesuits of the 17th century helped to make this translation. These translations should help new coming missionaries to get acquainted with the language and the way of thinking of the Chinese scholars. Later, they served also to create an image of China in Europe. The first publications were the “Sapientia Sinica” (Daxue) and the *Sinarum Scientia Politico-Moralis*. At the end of the 17th century, *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* appeared in 1687, edited by Philippe Couplet (1623-1692), where Intorcetta had also collaborated. This publication had great influence on the European enlightenment, as Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716) and Christian Wolff (1679-1754).

### Publications Prospero Intorcetta:

- (Probably): “Yesu huili” (between 1630 and 1692) (Rules of the Society of Jesus).
- Together with Ignatio a Costa SJ: *Sapientia Sinica* (Kien Cham 1662) (bilingual Chinese-Latin) (translation of the Daxue), facsimile in: Paolo Beonio-Brocchieri (ed.), *Confucio e il Cristianesimo*, 2 vols. (Torino 1972-1973).
- *Chum Yùm. Sinarum Scientia Politico-Moralis* (1667) (Chinese-Latin edition), and: Adam Franz (ed.), *Analecta Monumentorum omnii aevi Vindobonensia*, ed. Kollar (Vindobonae 1761), French: *La Science des Chinois, Ou Le Livre de Cvm-Fv-Çv* (Paris 1672) (translation of the Zhong Yong), Facsimile in: Paolo Beonio-Brocchieri (ed.), *Confucio e il Cristianesimo*, 2 vols. (Torino 1972-1973).
- “Compendiosa narratione de statu missionis Chinensis; prodigiis, quae in ultima persecutione contigerunt...”, in: Johann Adam Schall von Bell et al., *Historica narratio de initio et progressu missionis Societatis Jesu apud Chinenses...* (Regensburg 1665), with other title: *Historica relatio de ortu et progressu fidei orthodoxae in Regno Chinesis per missionarios Societatis Jesu: ab anno 1581. usque ad annum 1669* (Regensburg 1673).
- Together with Christian Herdtrich, François Rougemont und Philippe Couplet: *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus...*, trad. Prospero Intorcetta, Philippe Couplet (Paris 1687), English (abbreviated version): *The morals of Confucius, a Chinese philosopher: who flourished about five hundred years before the coming of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ* (London 1691; online Ann Arbor, Mich. 1999).
- *R.P. Prosperi Intorcetta Societatis Jesu Missionarii Sinensis Testimonium de cultu Sinensi: Datum anno 1668* (Lugdunum 1700).
- Noël Golvers (ed.), “Littera, Romae, 2 Junii 1672” (Latin-English), in: “An unobserved letter of Prospero Intorcetta, S.J. to Godefredus Henschens, S.J. and the Printing of the Jesuit translations of the Confucian Classics (Rome-Antwerp, 2 June 1672)”, in: Dirk Sacré, Jan Papy (eds.), *Syntagmata. Essays on Neo-Latin literature in honour of Monique Mund-Dopchie and Gilbert Tournoy* (Leuven 2009) pp. 688-692.

### Scientific Honors:

Fondazione Prospero Intorcetta, Piazza Armerina, Sizilien.

### Prospero Intorcetta Bibliography:

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- em Dizionario biografico degli Italiani, vol. 62 (2004) pp. 526-529 (Elisabetta Corsi Ambrosetti).
- Louis Pfister, *Notices biographiques et bibliographiques sur les Jésuites de l'ancienne mission de Chine (1552-1773)* (Chang-hai 1932-34).
- Robert Streit, *Bibliotheca Missionum*, vol. V (Freiburg 1929).
  
- Henri Bernard, “Les adaptations chinoises des ouvrages européens”, *Monumenta Serica* X (1945) pp. 1-57; pp. 309-388; XIX (1960) pp. 349-383.
- Charles R. Boxer, “Some Sino-European Xylographic Works, 1662-1718”, *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 29 (1947) 199-215.
- Paolo Beonio-Brocchieri, “Prospero Intorcetta”, in: *Scienziati siciliani gesuiti in Cina nel secolo XVII. Atti del convegno a cura di Alcide Luini. Palermo, Piazza Armerina, Caltagirone, Mineo* (Roma, Milano, Torino 1985) pp. 171-182.
- Liam Matthew Brockey, *Journey to the East. The Jesuit Mission to China, 1579-1724* (Cambridge, Mass., London 2007).
- Carmelo Capizzi, “Per una biografia scientifica di Prospero Intorcetta”, in *Scienziati siciliani gesuiti in Cina nel secolo XVII. Atti del convegno a cura di Alcide Luini. Palermo, Piazza Armerina, Caltagirone, Mineo* (Roma, Milano, Torino 1985) pp. 197-217.
- Carmelo Capizzi, “La decorazione pittorica di una Chiesa in Cina nella seconda metà del seicento. Una lettera inedita del P. P. Intorcetta S.J.”, *Studi e ricerche sull'Oriente Cristiano* 12 (1989) 3-21.
- Henri Cordier, *L'imprimerie sino-européenne en Chine* (Paris 1901).
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- Knud Lundbæk, “The First European Translations of Chinese Historical and Philosophical Works”, in: Thomas H.C. Lee (ed.), *China and Europe. Images and Influences in Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries* (Hongkong 1991) pp. 29-43.

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- David E. Mungello, *The Forgotten Christians of Hangzhou* (Honolulu 1994).
- Abel Rémusat, *Nouveaux mélanges asiatiques*, vol. 2 (Paris 1829).
- Andrew C. Ross, *A Vision Betrayed. The Jesuits in Japan and China, 1542-1742* (Edinburgh 1994).
- Andrew C. Ross, “Alessandro Valignano: The Jesuits and Culture in the Far East”, in: John O’Malley (ed.), *The Jesuits. Cultures, Sciences and the Arts 1540-1773* (Toronto, Buffalo, London 1999) pp. 336-351.
- Nicolas Standaert (ed.), *Handbook of Christianity in China. Volume One: 635-1800*. (Handbook of Oriental Studies, section 4: China 15/1. Handbuch der Orientalistik, Abt. 4: China 15) (Leiden, Boston, Köln 2001).
  
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