

Biography of Johannes Schreck SJ, China missionary and scholar

Name and Name Modifications:

Johann
Terrentius
Chinese: Deng Yuhan

Relevance for the China Mission:

Johannes Schreck, alias Terrentius, was already a famous scientist when he was still in Europe. In China, he continued the indirect mission via science, which had been started by [Matteo Ricci](#) (1552-1610) and played an eminent role as scientist in the method of accommodation.

Dates of Birth and Death:

(*) in 1576 in Bingen, County Sigmaringen in Suebia (diocese Konstanz, Holy Roman Empire of German Nation, today Germany)
(†) 11 May 1630 in Peking, China

Family Data:

Johannes Schreck's father had quite probably the first name Sebastian.

Schreck joined the Society of Jesus on 1 November 1611.

Schreck's ordination to priesthood was before 1618.

Schreck made his four solemn vows in China on 21 or 26 September 1626.

Education:

In 1590, Schreck started to study at the University Freiburg/Breisgau. At first, he studied at the Faculty of the Artists, where he obtained his Baccalaureate after four years, in 1594. In 1596, after two years more, he became Magister, quite probably in medicine. His education also comprehended languages (Latin, Greek, Chaldean), law and sciences.

In 1600, he was collaborator of the famous mathematician François Viète (1540-1603) in Paris. After Viète's death in 1603, he became disciple of [Galileo Galilei](#) (1564-1642) in Padua. Later, Schreck used the Latin form of his name, which was quite common for scholars then.

In 1611, after he had joined the Jesuits, Schreck started to study theology at the Collegio Romano.

Mission:

Departure for China was on 17 April 1618, together with [Nicolas Trigault](#) (1577-1628), [Giacomo Rho](#) (1592-1638) and [Johann Adam Schall von Bell](#) (1592-1666) in Portugal on the ship “S. Carlos”.

Arrival in Macau, China was on 22 July 1619.

Professional Career:

In 1610, Schreck arrived in Rome, where he lived until the end of the year 1611 together with his friend and colleague Johannes Faber (1574-1629) from Bamberg. Faber was papal physician, botanist and pharmacist. In Rome, Schreck had also contact with Federico Cesi (1585-1630), who came into conflict with the Holy Inquisition. Cesi founded the Accademia dei Lincei (Academy of the lynxes, which are considered to be sharp-eyed) in 1603. The goal of this academy was the independent scientific research. In 1611, Galilei became member of this academy, the next member was Schreck.

Schreck’s scientific task was the edition and the comment of the *Thesaurus Mexicanus*, an encyclopedia on plants, animals and minerals of Middle America. The material had been collected by Francisco Hernandez (ca. 1514-1587), but it was still crude. Schreck worked for the edition until autumn 1611, the book was only published in 1651. Shortly afterwards, he joined the Society of Jesus.

During his theological studies, the procurator of the China mission of the Jesuits, Nicolas Trigault, won him over for the China mission in 1614; Schreck then accompanied Trigault on his tour de propagande through the European courts (1616-1618), where they collected mathematical instruments, scientific books and money for the China mission.

After his arrival in China, Schreck had to stay for two years in Macau because of the local persecution of missionaries in China. Then he worked as a missionary in Hangchow, later in Peking (since 1623), where he became the European leader of the calendar reform. It had been started by the Chinese Christian scholar [Xu Guangqi](#) (1562-1633), and the calendar played a very important role for the rule of the Chinese emperor, who was considered to be the ruler of time and space. Without a correct calendar, it was nearly impossible to rule in the right way. But in the course of the centuries, the calendar had become full of mistakes and was no longer usable. During the

eclipse of the sun, the Jesuits could prove their superior astronomical knowledge. An Imperial Decree dated 1 of September 1629 then ordered the team under the guidance of Xu Guangqi to reform the calendar.

Together with [Niccolò Longobardo](#) (1557-1654), Giacomo Rho and Schall, Schreck started to make together with Chinese scholars translations of scientific European books into Chinese. At the beginning, Schreck felt overcharged by the calendar reform. Therefore he begged Galileo Galilei for help. When his teacher did not answer, he asked, indirectly via his brethren in Ingolstadt, Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) for advice. Kepler sent him detailed instructions and two volumes of his printed *Tabulae Rudolphinae*. But before he could finish his work, Schreck died with only 57 years; his successor at the calendar reform became Johann Adam Schall von Bell.

Publications Johannes Schreck:

- Together with Johann Adam Schall von Bell, Xu Guangqi, Giacomo Rho et al.: *Chong chen li shu* (Calendar of the emperor Chongchen), 150 juan, later entitled: *Xiyang lifa xinshu* (1634).
- Together with Wang Zheng, Wang Weizhong: *Qi qi tu shuo*, 3 juan (1627).
- Together with Johann Adam Schall von Bell, Chen Yindeng, Wang Yinglin: *Ce tian yue shuo* (Compendium of the two spheres), 2 juan (1628).
- Together with Johann Adam Schall von Bell, Chen Zhengjian, Chen Yingdeng et al.: *Da ce* (Trigonometrie), 2 juan (ca. 1629).
- *Zheng qiu sheng du biao* (1629).
- Together with Chen Yujie, Zhang Caichen: *Huang chi zheng qiu* (ca. 1630).
- Together with Niccolò Longobardo, Chen Yujie, Zhang Caichen: *Huang chi dao ju du biao* (1630) (Zwei Werke Schrecks von Schall revidiert: *Zheng qiu sheng du biao* (About the right construction of the sphere) and *Huang chi dao ju du biao* (About the Zodiac, Ecliptic and Eclipses)).
- Together with Johann Adam Schall von Bell, Giacomo Rho et al.: *Ba xian biao* (1635).

- Together with Bi Gongchen: *Tai xi ren shen shuo gai* (European theories about the human body), 2 juan (1643), s.a. Nicolas Standaert, Ad Dudink, Nathalie Monnet (eds.), *Fa guo guo jia tu shu guan Ming Qing tian zhu jiao wen xian. Di shi er ce* (Chinese Christian Texts from the National Library of France = Textes chrétiens chinois de la bibliothèque nationale de France) (Taipei 2009), vol. 4, # 20.
- Together with Johann Adam Schall von Bell, Giacomo Rho et al.: *Xu shi si zhong* (1645).
- *Epistolium ex regno Sinarum ad mathematicos Europaeos missum, cum commentatiuncula Joan. Keppleri* (Sagani 1630).
- Using Francisco Hernandez: *Rerum medicarum Novae Hispaniae thesaurus, seu Plantarum, animalium, mineralium Mexicanorum historia* (Rom 1649, 1651, Roma 1992).
- *Nova plantarum, animalium et mineralium Mexicanorum Historia, ... in volumen digesta, à Jo. Terentio, Jo. Fabro, et Fabio Columna...*, 2 vols., (Rom 1651).
- Never finished was the *Plinius Indicus*.
- “Reisebriefe von P. Johannes Schreck”, in: Hartmut Walravens, *China illustrata. Das europäische Chinaverständnis im Spiegel des 16. bis 18. Jahrhunderts* (Weinheim 1987) pp. 23-25 (Brief vom 14. Mai 1619, 26. August 1621, 30. August 1621, 22. April 1622).

Johannes Schreck Bibliography:

- Joseph Dehergne, *Répertoire des Jésuites de Chine de 1582 à 1800* (Rome, Paris 1973) pp. 242f.
- Louis Pfister, *Notices biographiques et bibliographiques sur les Jésuites de l'ancienne Mission de Chine, 1552-1773* (Chang-hai 1932-34) pp. 153-158.
- 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).
- R. Streit, *Bibliotheca Missionum*, vol. V (Freiburg 1929) # 2139.
- Bernard H. Willeke, “Terrenz”, in: L. Carrington Goodrich, *Dictionary of Ming biography, 1368-1644*, vol. II (New York 1976) cols. 1282-1284.

- Johannes Beckmann, “Ein Schweizer Missionar am Kaiserhof von Peking: P. Joh. Terrenz S.J. (1576-1630)”, *Bethlehem* 39 (1934) pp. 171-173, 221-224.

- Johannes Beckmann, “Die Heimat des Chinamissionars P. Johannes Terrentius (Schreck) SJ”, *Neue Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft* 23 (1967) p. 143.
- Henri Bernard, “Galilée et les Jésuites des Missions d’Orient”, *Revue des questions scientifiques* CVII (1935) pp. 356-382.
- Henri Bernard, “L’encyclopédie astronomique du P. Schall.... La réforme du calendrier chinois sous l’influence de Clavius, de Galilée et de Kepler”, *Monumenta Serica* III (1938) pp. 35-77; 441-527.
- Liam Matthew Brockey, *Journey to the East. The Jesuit Mission to China, 1579-1724* (Cambridge, Mass., London 2007).
- Claudia von Collani, “Die Förderung der Jesuitenmission in China durch die bayerischen Herzöge und Kurfürsten”, in: Renate Eikelmann (ed.), *Die Wittelsbacher und das Reich der Mitte. 400 Jahre China und Bayern* (München 2009) pp. 92-104.
- Pasquale D’Elia, *Galileo in China. Relations Through the Roman College between Galileo and the Jesuit Scientist Missionaries (1610-1640)* (Cambridge, Mass. 1960).
- Giuseppe Gabrieli, “Giovanni Schreck, Linceo Gesuita e Missionario in Cina e le sue Lettere dall’Asia”, *Reale Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei: Rendiconti della classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche*, ser. VI, vol.XII (1936) pp. 242-256, 462-514.
- Giuseppe Gabrieli, “I Lincei e la Cina”, *Reale Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei: Rendiconti della classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche*, ser. VI, vol.XII (1936) p. 240.
- Giuseppe Gabrieli, “L’Encyclopédie astronomique du Père Schall”, *Monumenta Serica* III (1938) pp. 49-67, 240, 441.
- Giuseppe Gabrieli, “Note on the Introduction of Natural Sciences into the Chinese Empire”, *Yenching Journal of Social Studies* III (1941) pp. 220-241.
- Keizo Hashimoto, *Hsü Kuang-ch’i and Astronomical Reform. The Process of the Chinese Acceptance of Western Astronomy 1629-1635* (Osaka 1988).
- P. Huard, “La diffusion de l’anatomie européenne dans quelques secteurs de l’Asie”, *Archive internationale d’Histoire des Sciences* VI (1953) pp. 226-278.
- Isaia Iannaccone, “The Transition of Scientific Culture from Ricci to Aleni, Schreck, Rho and Schall von Bell: the Xiyang xinfa liushu”, in: Tiziana Lipiello and Roman Malek (eds.), “*Scholar from the West*”. *Giulio Aleni S.J. (1582-1649) and the Dialogue between Christianity and China* (Fondazione Civiltà Bresciana, Annali IX - Monumenta Serica Monograph Series XLII) (Nettetal 1997) pp. 573-592.
- Isaia Iannaccone, “The Geyuan baxian biao (Trigonometric Tables) and Some Remarks about the Scientific Collaboration between Schall von Bell, Rho, and Schreck”, in: Roman Malek (ed.), “*Western Learning*” and Chris-

tianity in China. The Contribution and Impact of Johann Adam Schall von Bell (1592-1666) (Monumenta Serica Monograph Series Vol. XXXV/1-2) (Sankt Augustin 1998) pp. 701-716.

- Isaia Iannaccone, *Johann Schreck Terrentius: le scienze rinascimentali e lo spirito dell'Accademia dei Lincei nell Cina dei Ming* (Napoli 1998).
- Fritz Jäger, “Das Buch von den wunderbaren Maschinen”, *Asia Major*, n.F. I,1 (1944) 78-96.
- Edward Kelly, *The Anti-Christian Persecution 1616-1617 in Nanking* (Columbia University, Ph.D. 1971).
- Edmond Lamalle, “La propagande du P. Nicolas Trigault en faveur des missions de Chine (1616)”, *Archivum Historicum Societatis Jesu* 9 (1940) pp. 49-120.
- Rainer-K. Langner, *Kopernikus in der verbotenen Stadt: wie der Jesuit Johannes Schreck das Wissen der Ketzer nach China brachte* (Frankfurt 2007).
- Georges Métaillé, “Des manuscrits en quête d’auteur. Du Plinius Indicus de Johan Schreck au Bencao Gangmu de Li Shizhen et au Bencao Pinhui Jingyao de Liu Wentai”, *Journal Asiatique* 286,1 (1998) pp. 211-233.
- Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, vol. III (Cambridge 1959) pp. 182, 444.
- Nathan Sivin, “Copernicus in China”, *Studia Copernicana* VI (1973) pp. 76-78.
- Hartmut Walravens, *China illustrata* (Weinheim 1987) pp. 22f.
- Hartmut Walravens, “The Qishi Tushuo Revisited”, in: Ku Wei-ying (ed.), *Missionary Approaches and Linguistics in Mainland China and Taiwan* (Leuven Chinese Studies X) (Leuven 2001) pp. 183-198.
- Erich Zetzel, *Johannes Schreck - Terrentius. Wissenschaftler und China-Missionar (1576-1630)* (Konstanz 2008).

- Ad Dudink, Nicolas Standaert, Chinese Christian Texts Database (CCT-Database), <http://www.arts.kuleuven.be/sinology/cct> (01 July 2009).

Author(s) of this contribution:

Claudia von Collani