

## *Biography of Joachim Bouvet SJ, China missionary*

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

Chinese: Bai Jin

### **Relevance for Stochastics:**

Joachim Bouvet made important contributions to the foundation of the mission of French Jesuits in China. He was teacher of the Kangxi emperor, mathematician, cartographer, legate of Kangxi to Europe. His special importance, however, lies in the creation of the system of Figurism in China.

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

(\*) 18 July 1656 in or near Le Mans, France

(†) 28 June 1730 in Peking (Beijing), China

### **Family Data:**

Joachim Bouvet descended from a French family of lower nobility, whose (male) members mostly worked in jurisprudence. His mother was Mademoiselle de la Briere.

Bouvet had two brothers, the older one was Mr. du Parc, “president des elus” in Le Mans, and the younger was Mr. de Bozé, counsellor of the president of Le Mans; he had also two sisters, the older one was Marie-Louise Bouvet de la Brière, nun at the “Filles de Notre Dame d’Alençon”, the other one was married to Mr. Marays, French treasurer in Alençon.

Bouvet entered the Society of Jesus on 9th of October 1673.

Bouvet’s ordination was in the beginning of 1685, the first Mass was on January 14, 1685.

Bouvet made his four solemn vows in Peking on February 2, 1692.

### **Education:**

Joachim Bouvet started his education, which was based on the Jesuits “Ratio Studiorum” at the Collège Henri IV de la Flèche. Bouvet especially liked physics and mathematics.

When Bouvet had finished his two-years noviciate, he studied rhetoric, philosophy, mathematics and physics. He continued his philosophical studies in la Flèche in 1676. Since 1680, he was professor in Quimper, where he taught the fine arts. When he became ill, he was sent to the Collège Saint-Marie in Bourges. There he felt his vocation to become a missionary. He then changed to the Collège Louis-le-Grand. Bouvet studied there his third year of theology.

### **Mission:**

Bouvet departed from Brest on 3 of March 1685 on the ship “Oyseau” (at first to Siam), with the group of the six “Mathématiciens du Roy”: Jean de Fontaney (1643-1710), the superior, [Jean-François Gerbillon](#) (1654-1707), [Claude de Visdelou](#) (1656-1737), Louis Le Comte (1655-1728) und Guy Tachard (1648-1712).

Arrival: 23 of July 1687 Ningbo, China, now five “Mathématiciens du Roy”.

Departure from China: 11 of October 1693 from Canton (Guangdong)

Arrival: March 1697 in France.

2nd departure to China: 7th of March 1698 from La Rochelle, France, on the ship “Amphitrite”.

Arrival in China: 4th of November 1698.

*Piao*: 28th of May 1707.

### **Professional Career:**

Bouvet’s “career” started with his legation to China. He was sent on March 3rd, 1685, as one of the (at the beginning) six “Mathématiciens du Roy”. This mission constituted the beginning of the French China mission of the Jesuits. The French Sun King Louis XIV wanted together with his Jesuit confessor François d’Aix de la Chaise (1624-1709) to start a counter mission to the Portuguese Jesuits’ mission, for in principle, China belonged to the Portuguese sphere of influence, to the Padroado, Portugal alone had the right and the duty to do mission in the Far East. The group included Jean de Fontaney (1643-1710) as chef of the group, Louis Le Comte (1655-1728), later famous for his *Nouveaux Mémoires sur l’état present de la Chine* (Paris 1696), Claude de Visdelou (1656-1737) and Jean-François Gerbillon.

Bouvet and the other four French Jesuits arrived in Ningbo in Southern China on 23rd of July 1687 avoiding to enter through the Portuguese enclave

Macau, for the Portuguese would have stopped them. The five Jesuits were ordered to the imperial court, where two of the remained, namely Bouvet and Jean-François Gerbillon. After a quick introduction into the Manchu language, the two Frenchmen were appointed as teachers in European sciences for the Kangxi emperor (reg. 1662-1722) besides the team [Tomás Pereira](#) (1645-1708) and [Antoine Thomas](#) (1643-1709). These lectures were from the years 1689 till 1692. In 1693, Bouvet was sent back to Europe as legate of the emperor. He should bring new Jesuits to China and to found with them a kind of Academy like that the “Académie des Sciences”. After a long odyssey Bouvet arrived in France in 1697. He got to know there that the Vicar Apostolic of Fujian, [Charles Maigrot](#) MEP (1652-1730) wanted to make his Mandate dated March 19, 1693 valid for the whole of China. Therefore he sent his confrere Nicolas Charmot (1645-1714) to Rom, where Charmot submitted the Mandate with a petition and a covering letter to the Holy Office. When Bouvet got to know about this procedure, he started counter-attacks aiming at refuting two topics of Maigrot’s Mandate, namely Maigrot’s prohibition for the Chinese Christians to use the name *taiji* for the Christian God and to deal with the “superstitious” book *Yijing*. After his audience at Louis XIV in Versailles on 3 April 1697, who gave a considerable sum for the French China Mission, Bouvet returned to China from La Rochelle on the ship “Amphitrite” on 6 of March 1698 with the following Jesuits: Charles Dolze (1663-1701), Louis Pernon (1664-1720), Jean-Charles-Étienne de Broissia (1660-1704), [Joseph-Henri de Prémare](#) (1666-1736), Jean-Baptiste Régis (1663-1738), [Dominique Parrenin](#) (1665-1741), Philibert Geneix (1667-1699), the sculptor and lay brother Charles de Belleville (1657-1730) and the Italian painter Giovanni Gherardini (1654-1723?), who was a lay person.

After his return to China, Bouvet was teacher of the crown prince Yinreng. At the same time he started to deal with the *Yijing*, which became to a major point of Bouvet’s system of Figurism. Already in France, during his studies, Bouvet had learnt oriental languages, had studied the Jewish-Christian Cabbala, had the allegorical Figurist way to interpret the Bible and Neo-Platonismus. In China he tried to blend the old European ideas with the doctrine of the Chinese books.

Already during his stay in France, Bouvet had sent a letter to the German philosopher [Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz](#) (1646-1716), where he expressed his admiration for the edition of the *Novissima Sinica*. This meant the beginning of the correspondence between Bouvet and Leibniz. Bouvet’s letter dated November 4, 1701 became especially famous. Leibniz wrote that he should prove the practical use of his (probably 1679 found) binary arithmetics to

the Académie des Sciences in Paris so that his treatise should be printed. When he reported Bouvet (among many others of his correspondents) about it, Bouvet “found” the binary arithmetics in the Shao-Yong arrangement of the hexagrams of the *Yijing*, so that Leibniz could prove then that already emperor Fuxi ca. 3000 years BC had described the secrets of creation in the hexagrams, which proved the practicability of the systems.

An important point of Figurism is the theory about the descendance of mankind from Noa and his family, who became the ancestors of all men after the deluge. The descendants of Noa’s son Shem brought the primitive revelation to China given by God to Adam and Eve after the original sin. This revelation was contained in veiled form in the Canonical Books of China, especially in the *Yijing*, where it survived. Figurism thought that the old Chinese history was no real history, but the old Chinese emperors and heroes were only figures for the future Messiah or other names for the patriarchs of the Old Testament. There were many allusions and hints to the future salvation, the end of the world and Christian dogmata. The most important figure of the Chinese mythology was the emperor Fuxi, who in the Chinese tradition had ascended the throne in 2952 BC and who had written the eight trigrams of the *Yijing*. Fuxi was considered by the Figurists to be another name for the patriarch Henoch of the Old Testament and consequently, the *Yijing* was another name for the Book of Henoch, which was then still not found. But Bouvet was convinced that the Chinese were unable to read and understand their own books in the right way, i.e. Bouvet and the Figurists had to help them with the right “key”, the Figurist method, to understand them properly. In Figurism, also Daoist books, especially the *Daodejing*, and books from Song Confucianism were used.

Bouvet developed his system to help the Chinese to pass from their religious systems to Catholicism. Therefore he wanted to found an own “Apostolic Academy” in the way of Chinese and European academies. In this academy, a team of Chinese and European scholars should together do research in the Chinese books. He planned to have figurist dictionaries to unveil the hidden meaning of the Chinese books. These books also had the task to complete the holy scriptures of Christianity because Bouvet thought that in China, special traditions of the primitive revelation had survived. This was a dangerous enterprize.

To start his Apostolic academy, Bouvet wrote a long letter to different important persons on 15th of September 1704, who should help him with his plans, among others to Leibniz, to the director of the Royal Library, the Abbé Jean-Paul Bignon (1662-1743), to Pierre-Daniel Huet (1630-1721), bishop of

Avranches, who had in his *Demonstratio Evangelica* (Amsterdam 1697) presented similar theses as Bouvet, to P. Michel Le Tellier SJ (1643-1719), the confessor of Louis XIV, then one copy of the to pope Clement XI. and to the Jesuits general, whereas other confreres should read it. The letter survived in copies, but did not have the success Bouvet had wished. Therefore Bouvet realized his plans in a more modest way and without financial support from outside. Since 1707 he managed to collect around him several other Jesuits, mostly from France, whom he taught by means of letters and who considered him as their “master”.

Bouvet’s closest disciples were the three Jesuits Joseph-Henry de Prémare (1666-1736), [Jean-François Foucquet](#) (1665-1741), and Jean-Alexis de Gollet (1664-1741). All three of them wrote figurist treatises. Others, less important “Little Figurists” were: Emeric Langlois de Chavagnac (1670-1717), Louis Porquet (1671-1752), Julien-Placide Hervieu (1671-1746), Étienne-Joseph Le Couteulx (1667-1737), Joseph-Marie-Anne de Moyriac de Mailla (1669-1748), [François Noël](#) (1651-1729), François Noëlas (1669-1740), then [Ignaz Kögler](#) (1680-1746), Karl Slaviček (1668-1735) and as “last” Figurist [Pierre-Martial Cibot](#) (1727-1780).

But many of Bouvet’s brethren did not like the Figurist school. Some of the French Jesuits from another province started a campaign against the Figurists and tried to historical research on the *Yijing*, namely Fathers Patres Jean-Baptiste Régis (1663-1738), Joseph Marie Anne de Moyriac de Mailla (1669-1748) and Pierre Vincent de Tartre (1669-1724). Their paraphrase of the *Yijing* was published more than a hundred years later by Julius Mohl in publishing house Cotta in Stuttgart as: *I-king, antiquissimus Sinarum liber*, 2 vols. (Stuttgartiae, Tubingae 1834-1838). Besides that, adversaries of Bouvet under the guidance of the Jesuits’ visitor [Kilian Stumpf](#) (1655-1720) made an accusation of Bouvet at the Kangxi emperor that Bouvet denied Chinese history. The emperor then decided that Bouvet should continued his research, but alone without help from outside. Kangxi also said that Bouvet was the only European who had at least some idea about China, whereas the others did not understand anything.

Bouvet spent his last years, also after Kangxi’s death, at the court as the last of the former teachers of the emperor. None of his scriptures was published during his lifetimes, the scriptures of his Figurist disciples were also hidden in the Archives as crazy and unscientific and only were rediscovered in the 20th century.

### Important Publications:

Things Chinese:

- “Zhou yi yuan zhi tan” (about the *Yijing*).
- Manuscript: “Tianxue benyi”, in: Nicolas Standaert, Ad Dudink, Nathalie Monnet (eds.), *Faguo 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. 26, # 183.
- “Gujin jingtian jian tian xue ben yi”, in: Nicolas Standaert, Ad Dudink, Nathalie Monnet (eds.), *Faguo 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. 26, # 184, 185, 186.
- “Shi gen ben zhen zai ming jian” (ca. 1700-1720) (about Chinese names for God).
- “Zao wu zhu zhen lun”, 2 juan (ca. 1700-1725).
- “Gen ben zhen zai ming jian” (ca. 1700-1705).
- *Liu shi si gua tu* (ca. 1710) (6 pages, block print on bamboo paper).
- “Jing tian jian yin” (ca. 1710).
- “Tian zhu san yi lun” (ca. 1710).
- “Tian zun di bei tu” (ca. 1710).

European scriptures:

- Janette C. Gatty (ed.), *Voyage de Siam du pere Bouvet* (Leiden 1962).
- “Route que tint le P. Bouvet depuis Peking jusqu’à Canton, Lorsqu’il fut envoyé par l’empereur Cang-hi en l’année 1693”, in: Jean-Baptiste Du Halde (ed.), *Description géographique ... de la Chine* vol. I (Paris 1735) pp. 113-125, also in: Prévost (ed.), *Histoire générale des voyages* (Paris 1749) pp. 251-260, English: *New General Collection of Voyages*, vol. III (1746) pp. 540-546, German: *Allgemeine Historie der Reisen*, vol. V (1749) pp. 469-478.
- “Description d’un repas solennel fait à Canton, où l’on voit ce que les chinoises observent en pareille circonstance”, in: Du Halde, vol. II, pp. 134-138.
- Claudia von Collani (ed.), *Journal des voyages* (Variétés Sinologiques New Series 95) (Taipei 2005).
- *Portrait historique de l’empereur de la Chine présenté au roi* (Paris 1697), other title: *Histoire de l’empereur de Chine présentée au Roi par le P. Bouvet* (La Haye 1699), English: *The History of Cang-Hy the Present Emperour of China Presented to the Most Christian King* (London 1699), also as part of: *The present condition of the Muscovite Empire, Till the Yeare 1699, in two letters...* (London 1699), Latin part of Leibnizen’ 2nd edition of the *Novissima Sinica: Icon regia monarchiae Sinarum nunc regnantis* (s.l. 1699), Dutch: *’T Leven en Bedrijs Van den tegenwoordigen Keiser van China, van t’ begin sihner 36 jaarige Regeering, tot den Jaare 1698. Benevens een Historische Beschrijvinge van ’t selve Rijk, Behelsende de Persoon des Keisers, sijn Regeering, en Gedrag...* (Utrecht 1699), German: *Joachim Bouvet, Abbildung der vortrefflichen Qualitäten des ietzt=regierenden Sinesischen Regenten Cham-Hy, Aus dem Französischen in das Hochdeutsche übersetzt*, bound together with: Louis Le Comte, *Das heutige Sina* (Franckfurt, Leipzig 1700), Italian: *Istoria de l’imperator de la Cina* (Padova 1710).
- *L’Estat present de la Chine en figures dedié à Monseigneur le Duc de Bourgogne* (Paris 1697).
- “Lettre, Paris-Fontainebleau, 30. aout 1697 - 15. octobre 1697”, in: Claudia von Collani, “Ein Brief des Chinamissionars P. Joachim Bouvet S.J. zum Mandat des Apostolischen Vikars von Fu-kien, Charles

Maigrot MEP”, *Neue Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft* 43 (1987) pp. 188-211. (ASJP, Vivier, pièce 52).

- “Epistola, 1.a Decembris 1697”, an das Hl. Officium, in: *De Ritibus Sinensium....* (Leodii 1700) pp. 156f (ARSJ, JS 166, ff. 259r-260).

The correspondence between Bouvet and Leibniz was edited by Rita Widmaier. The correspondence ends with four letters written by Leibniz to Bouvet, whereas Bouvet’s letter dated September 15, 1704 to the Abbé Jean-Paul Bignon and Leibniz quite probably never reached Leibniz; it seems that the Jesuits stopped it because of the controversy about the Chinese Rites or because they did not like to have such an Apostolic Academy.

- Rita Widmaier (ed.), *Leibniz korrespondiert mit China. Der Briefwechsel mit den Jesuitenmissionaren (1689-1714)* (Frankfurt 1990), with:
  - “Joachim Bouvet S.J. an Leibniz, Fontainebleau, 18. Oktober 1697”;
  - “Leibniz an Joachim Bouvet S.J., Hannover, 2. (12.) Dezember 1697”;
  - “Leibniz an Joachim Bouvet S.J., [Hannover, Mitte] Januar 1698”;
  - “Leibniz an Joachim Bouvet, Hannover, 30, Januar 1698”;
  - “Joachim Bouvet S.J. an Leibniz, La Rochelle, 28. Februar 1698”;
  - “Joachim Bouvet S.J. an Leibniz, Peking, 19. September 1699”;
  - “Joachim Bouvet S.J. an Charles Le Gobien S.J. für Leibniz, Peking, 8. November 1700”;
  - “Leibniz an Joachim Bouvet S.J., Braunschweig, 15. Februar 1701”;
  - “Joachim Bouvet S.J. an Leibniz, Peking, 4. November 1701” (Leibniz-Archiv, LBr 105, Bl. 21r-27r, mit Tafel der Hexagramme; Kopie B.Nat., Ms. fr. 17240, ff. 75r-80r, mit Darstellung der Shao Yong-Ordnung der 64 Hexagramme des *Yijing*);
  - “Joachim Bouvet an Leibniz, Peking, 8. November 1702”;
  - “Leibniz an Joachim Bouvet, [Berlin, 18. Mai 1703]”;
  - “Leibniz an Joachim Bouvet S.J., Hannover, 28. Juli 1704”;
  - “Leibniz an Joachim Bouvet S.J., Hannover, 18. August 1705”;
  - “Leibniz an Joachim Bouvet S.J., [Hannover, Juni (?) 1706]”;
  - “Leibniz an Joachim Bouvet S.J., [Hannover, 13. Dezember 1707]”.Neue Ausgabe mit Übersetzung ins Deutsche: Rita Widmaier (ed.), *Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. Der Briefwechsel mit den Jesuiten in China (1689-1714)*. Französisch/Lateinisch-Deutsch. Textherstellung und Übersetzung von Malte-Ludolf Babin (Hamburg 2006).
- Ludovici Dutens (ed.), *G.G. Leibnitii Opera Omnia* t. IV/1 (Genevae 1768), with:
  - Bouvet an Charles Le Gobien, für Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, 8. Novembre 1700, pp. 146-151 (without manuscript);



Bouvet an Leibniz, Peking, 4. November 1701, pp. 152-164 (abbreviated), also: *Mémoires de Trévoux* XI (janv. 1704) pp. 128-165;  
Bouvet an Leibniz, Peking, 8. Novembre 1702, pp. 165-168.

- “Lettre, 5 juin 1698”, in: *Mercurie Galant* [Paris 1699], Mars, pp. 43-52.
- “Lettre, Peking, 30. Novembre 1699, au Père de la Chaise”, *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses* vol. II (Paris 1703) pp. 119-150, other edition: vol. XVI (Paris 1781) pp. 372-392, other edition: vol. IX (Lyon 1819) pp. 229-241; other edition: vol. III (Paris 1843) pp. 17-22; German: *Der Neue Welt-Bott*, vol. I/2 (Augsburg 1727) Brief # 41 (parts of it); *Travels of the Jesuits*, vol. 1 (London 1762) pp. 130-144; *Scelta di Lettere edificanti*, vol. 1 (Milano 1825) pp. 726-739 (Paris. B.Nat., Ms.fr. 17 240, 43-52).
- Claudia von Collani (ed.), *Eine wissenschaftliche Akademie für China. Briefe des Chinamissionars Joachim Bouvet S.J. an Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz und Jean-Paul Bignon über die Erforschung der chinesischen Kultur, Sprache und Geschichte* (Studia Leibnitiana Sonderheft 18) (Stuttgart 1989), with:
  - “Lettre, Peking, 15. Septembre 1704”, an Abbé Bignon und Leibniz, pp. 32-85 (Paris, B.Nat., Ms.fr. 17240, 17-36; ARSJ, FG 730 II, 462-479; BL, Add. Mss. 26817, 351-365 (parts));
  - “Supplément à une lettre non identifiée”, Peking, 27. Octobre 1704, pp. 86-117 (Paris, B. Nat., Ms.fr. 17240, 318-325);
  - “Lettre, Peking, 27. Octobre 1704, an P. Bertrand-Claude de Tachereau de Linyères Paris”, pp. 118-125 (B.Nat., Ms.fr. 17240, 260-261).
- “Lettre, 1706”, *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses*, vol. XVIII (Paris 1781) pp. 77-83.
- “Lettre, 25. octobre 1707”, to Antoine de Beauvillier, in: Claudia von Collani, “Zwei Briefe zu den figuristischen Schriften Joachim Bouvets”, *Sino-Western Cultural Relations Journal* XIV (1992) pp. 30-33 (ARSJ, JS 170, ff. 42r-v).
- “Lettre, 25. octobre 1707”, to Giuseppe Provana, in: von Collani, “Zwei Briefe...”, pp. 33-37 (ARSJ, JS 171, 51r-52v).
- “Lettre, 28. Juli 1708”, to Antoine Thomas, in: Claudia von Collani, “Matteo Ricci in der Chronik der Ming-Dynastie. Der Bericht Joachim Bouvets S.J. an Antoine Thomas S.J. aus dem Jahre 1707”, *Monumenta Serica* 41 (1993) pp. 189-203 (ARSJ, JS 170, 306-307.).

- “Lettre, Peking, 30. octobre 1707”, in: *L’Etat présent de l’Eglise de la Chine* (Paris 1709) pp. 303-308.
- Claudia von Collani “The first Encounter of the West with the Yi-jing. Introduction to and Edition of Letters and Latin Translations by French Jesuits from the 18th Century“, *Monumenta Serica* LV (2007), with:
  - “Lettre, Peking, 30. October 1712”, to: Michelangelo Tamburini, pp. 288-290 (ARSJ, JS 174, 266r-v);
  - “Lettre, 20. Novembre 1712”, to: Michelangelo Tamburini, pp. 291-292 (ARSJ, JS 174, 279r-v);
  - “Lettre, 3. Novembre 1714”, to: Michelangelo Tamburini, pp. 293-295 (ARSJ, JS 176, 114-115);
  - “Idea Generalis doctrinae libri ye kim sive expositio brevis totius systematis sapientiae jeroglyphicae in antiquissimis Sinarum libris contentae, facta Reverendo Patri Joanni Gozani Visitatori hanc exigenti”, Nov. 1712, pp. 278-283, English: pp. 283-288 (ARSJ, JS 174, 290-291; B.Nat., Ms.fr. 17239, 35-39);
  - “Lettre, 30. aout 1716: A mes Reverends Peres, Les RR. Peres Jesuites François Missionnaires dans les diverses Province de la chine”, pp. 296-313 (ARSJ, JS IV, 5, E).
- Geneviève Javary (ed.), ”Hou Ji, Prince Millet, l’agriculteur divin: interprétation du mythe chinoise par le R.P. Joachim Bouvet S.J.”, *Neue Zeitschrift für Missionswissenschaft* 39 (1983) 16-41, 107-119.
- “Lettre, 25. octobre 1725”, to: Étienne Souciet, *Revue de l’Extrême-Orient* III (1885) pp. 67-68.
- “Lettre, 18. octobre 1727”, to: Étienne Souciet, *Revue de l’Extrême-Orient* III (1885) pp. 218-220.
- “Lettre, 23. novembre 1728”, to: Étienne Souciet, *Revue de l’Extrême-Orient* III (1885) pp. 64-65 (Chantilly, Brotier, 110, n. 12, fo 22r).
- “Lettre, 13. novembre 1729”, in: Bonnetty-Perny (eds.), Joseph-Henri de Prémare, *Vestiges des dogmes chrétiens, tirés des anciens livres de la Chine* (Paris 1878) pp. 12-14

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