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 Johann Adam Schall von Bell:**

- 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 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.: *Buxian biao* (1635).

• 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. Kepleri* (Sagani 1630).


• *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*.


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1959) pp. 182, 444.
76-78.
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Author(s) of this contribution:
Claudia von Collani