



At the Nexus:

De Rotz's Letters to the Shanghai Procure

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Abstract: Through an analysis of a series of letters written by Marc de Rotz, a missionary from the Paris Foreign Missions Society (MEP) in Nagasaki, to Jean-Baptiste Martinet, the Society's procurator in Shanghai, this study reveals the crucial role of the Shanghai Procure as a central hub in the Catholic missionary network in East Asia during the late nineteenth century. In the circulation system of the MEP's Eurasian routes at the time, Shanghai was a vital gateway connecting Japan with the headquarters in Paris, thus forming a close link between Shanghai and Nagasaki. The letters show that in the face of challenges, De Rotz turned to Shanghai for theological guidance, material support, and assistance with personal needs. He consulted with the Jesuit priest Aloysius Sica in Shanghai, through the procurator Martinet, on how to handle the issue of traditional beliefs in Japan, which were similar to those in China. He requested prints from the Tushanwan Orphanage by Adolphe Vasseur to be replicated and disseminated in Japan. Additionally, with Martinet's help, he was able to withdraw funds he had raised in Europe from his Shanghai bank account to alleviate a famine in Sotome. The friendship between De Rotz and Martinet further facilitated the exchange of information and resources between them. This research emphasizes the lasting impact of the Shanghai Procure as a maritime link in the broader network of East-West exchange.

Keywords: Paris Foreign Missions Society, Shanghai Procure, Nagasaki, Marc de Rotz, Jean-Baptiste Martinet

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Prelude

On 18th March 1865, the day after the discovery of the hidden Christians in Nagasaki¹, Bernard Petitjean (1829-1884), Paris Foreign Missionary (*Missions Étrangères de Paris*, hereafter MEP) in Japan immediately sent news to the MEP Procure in Shanghai. This made the Shanghai Procure the first to be notified, receiving the news several days before the MEP superior in Yokohama was informed (Lettre du 18 mars 1865 de Bernard Petitjean 2024). Moreover, it was again via the Shanghai Procure, that this discovery and its consequence was sent to Paris. On 31st October, Petitjean hastily wrote in a post-script to François-Antoine Albrand (1804-1867), superior of the MEP Seminary in Paris that: “to speed up the arrival of letters from Paris to Nagasaki by a month or sometimes two, please do not put them in the envelope to Yokohama, but to the Shanghai Procure.” (Lettre du 31 octobre 1865 de Bernard Petitjean 2024, p. 141)

This centrally located Procure in Shanghai was a key MEP accounting institution in Asia. Serving as a maritime nexus, it offers a unique case study for examining the Eurasian network in the late nineteenth century. With the discovery of new primary sources stored at the *Archives des Missions Étrangères* (Archives of the Foreign Missions, hereafter AMEP) in Paris, recent studies have noted the close connections between the Shanghai Procure and Japan. It has been found that the AMEP holds numerous Shanghai-related documents, particularly correspondence, within the Japan Mission dossier. Based on a preliminary analysis, Le Roux Kiyono argues that the Shanghai Procure functioned as a vital logistical and financial “Gateway to Japan” for European missionaries (Le Roux Kiyono 2025). Yet, the details of why and how this institution played this role require further, in-depth analysis.

This article will particularly focus on the correspondence between Marc de Rotz (1840-1914), an MEP missionary in Nagasaki, and Jean-Baptiste Martinet (1844-1905), the Society's procurator in Shanghai during 1878-1882, to reveal the pivotal role of the Shanghai Procure as a nexus point providing theological guidance, material support, and personal assistance to the Japan mission, thereby further exploring the international interactions associated with this connection.

¹ In 1865, after the Oura Church in Nagasaki was inaugurated, a group of hidden Christians who had survived more than 250 years of persecution revealed their belief to Petitjean on 17th March. This not only led to the revival and conversion of local Catholics, but also provoked suspicion and hostility from the civil authorities, see Un Jubilé au Japon (1915).

Procure, De Dotz & Martient

Technically, the Shanghai Procure was one of the agencies in the multi-tiered MEP accounting system, functioning as the intermediary between Paris and the missions. Together with the Procures in Hong Kong (since 1847) and Singapore (since 1857), the Shanghai one received money from the European headquarters, decided the allocation according to the commissions from missions it served and sent annual reports of income and expenditure to Paris (*Notes sur les Diverses Procures de la Société des Missions-Étrangères* 1876). The Shanghai Procure was preliminarily established and operational from 1861. Relative to Japan by then, the Catholic mission in China had more freedom to carry out evangelical activities and build churches under French protection, backed by the treaty system signed with western countries.² Based on these conditions, French Jesuits had been well established here since 1842.³ Despite the predominant Jesuit presence, MEP and other congregations set up their own procures in Shanghai, not only as an account but also as real property, through which different communities maintained in contact.

Hence via Shanghai, requests kept flowing from Japan to Paris, asking for books, objects, personnel and overall support. Vice versa, to fulfil the commissions, equipment and new missionaries arrived at the Procures, including the one in Shanghai, the gateway to the East Asian destinations. Due to the convenience of the maritime route, Shanghai held a privileged position as a logistical link specifically to Nagasaki among the areas of the Japan mission. The regularity of this accessibility is indicated by the standard route depicted in the mission atlas published by the MEP in 1890: “by Messageries Maritimes boats, from Marseille to Shanghai 36 to 40 days; from Shanghai to Nagasaki by Mitsu-Bichi boats, 3 days.” (Launay 1890)

In 1865, seeing the increasing need for mission publishing, Petitjean wrote back: “if you think it would be a good idea to buy us a lithographic press, please send us the method for using it or, better still, a colleague who knows how to operate it.” (*Lettre du 14 octobre 1865 de Bernard Petitjean* 2024, p. 137) It was the vacancy of an operator that summoned Marc de Rotz (1840-1914).

² Under the Treaty of Nanjing 南京条约 (1842), five Chinese cities were opened to foreign trade. The Treaty of Whampoa 黄埔条约 (1844) legalized the practice of Christianity in China and allowed missionaries to construct mission buildings in treaty ports. The Convention of Peking 北京条约 (1860) stipulated that the religious establishments should be returned to their owners through the French Minister in China.

³ The Jesuits arrived in 1842, just as Shanghai was opened to foreign trade as a treaty port. In 1856, the Kiang-nan (Jiangnan) Apostolic Vicariate covering Shanghai was established and entrusted to the French Jesuits, see De la Servière (1983, p. 60).

On 15th April 1868, he departed with Petitjean from France. (Congrégation des Missions Étrangères 1868) Though Nagasaki-bound, he did not arrive directly. On 19th June, the Shanghai Procure recorded that: "Mgr. Petitjean and F. de Rotz embark for Nagasaki." (Procure de Shanghai 1861-1877)

It was the first time for De Rotz to land on this soil, where he would return briefly ten years later. Many things happened from 1868 to 1878 for the Japan mission and for him. In Nagasaki, the religious liberty initially granted only to foreigners did not prevent a resurgence of large-scale persecution in 1867, which led to the imprisonment of Christians and the suppression of local Christian villages. MEP missionaries went underground again until the abolition of the ban on Christianity in 1873. During the difficult period of 1868-69, De Rotz still made efforts to publish books and pamphlets using lithographical printing. Having recovered from smallpox (Villion 1923, p. 54), De Rotz was assigned to Yokohama in 1871 where he arrived with 52 cases. He was building the new facilities for the Sisters of the Child Jesus, administrating the services for French engineers at the chapel of the Yokosuka arsenal, as well as continuing the printing work with the help of the paper sent from the Hong Kong Procure (Japon Avant Division 1839-1872). When the ban on Christianity was lifted, De Rotz returned to Nagasaki to take care of the needs for publications, medicals and the seminary construction (Nécrologe 1916, external resources pp. 211-212). But as the number of Christians grew, challenges and divisions also emerged. In a foreign land, missionaries were surrounded by customs totally different from their home countries (De Rotz 1879a). Unable to reach a consensus on how to deal with local customs that clash with Christian doctrine among themselves concerning day-to-day cases, the MEP needed external resources and support.

In 1876, Jean-Baptiste Martinet (1844-1905) was appointed to be the procurator in Shanghai. He was no stranger to the city: upon his arrival for the procure post in Hong Kong, he sojourned in Shanghai for about five months and learned Chinese (Procure de Shanghai 1861-1877). He was not an outsider of the Japan mission either. In July 1877, Bishop Petitjean stopped by Shanghai on his way from Europe back to Japan. Martinet accompanied him to visit the Jesuit mission complex, Xujiahui (Zi-ka-wei) 徐家匯, where they had dinner (Palatre 1878, p. 276). In May 1878, Martinet made a one-month trip to the Apostolic Vicariate of Southern Japan (*Japon Méridional*), i.e. Nagasaki and Fukuoka areas (Procure de Shanghai 1878-1906; Japon Avant Division 1873-1884).

It was very probable that Martinet and De Rotz got along well with each other on that occasion, because soon after Martinet's return, De Rotz not only stopped over Shanghai to pay him a visit, but also started writing a series of letters addressed to him at the Shanghai Procure, precisely:

三德堂Procure des Missions Étrangères
French Bund, above S.S.N. Co. (Shanghai Steam Navigation Company)'s
Godowns No.16
Martinet, Rev. J. B. (The North China and Japan Desk Hong List for 1877 1877,
p. 21)

In the letters, De Rotz talked about his concerns and needs for the improvement of the Japan mission, and later the Sotome parish where he devoted most of his lifetime. Working at the nexus connecting Nagasaki to anywhere and anyone else, Martinet helped him with getting advice, obtaining supplies, and providing personal considerations. Though long gone, these words and phrases capture the crisscrossed paths and trails in that spatiotemporal moment.

About Advises

On 1st July 1878, Joseph Marie Laucaigne (1838-1885), Auxiliary to Bishop Petitjean, notified the procures in Hong Kong and Shanghai respectively that De Rotz, exhausted, would depart for the Béthanie Sanatorium in Hong Kong and made a stop in Shanghai. Ten days later, De Rotz arrived at the sanatorium where he would stay for about two months (Japon Avant Division 1873-1884). It turned out to be more than a journey for recuperation. His trip to Hong Kong and Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City) was deemed to gather references outside Japan to properly deal with Japanese Christians' superstitions, according to Flourentin Bourelle's (1847-1885) letter to the MEP Paris seminary (Bourelle 1879).

On 2nd August 1878, De Rotz wrote to Martinet that he had left for Saigon with Eugène Lemonnier (1828-1899), the Hong Kong procurator. Having already gathered a few questions, he would like to ask for answers from a certain "P. Sica" in Shanghai (Japon Avant Division 1873-1884). A month later, responses from Sica via Martinet reached De Rotz, which he deemed to be "helpful" (De Rotz 1878a).

This resourceful "P. Sica" was Aloysius Sica 薛孔昭 (1814-1895), a Jesuit missionary in Shanghai. During 1876-1878, he was based at the Major Seminary and the St Ignatius Middle School 徐汇公学 in Xujiahui, teaching scripting and exhortation, as well as listening to confessions at several Xujiahui establishments (Palatre 1878, p. 283). He had written about consciences and the ways of conducting affairs with Chinese (Sica 1877; Sica 1884). But the most important reason for De Rotz's seeking his expertise was his contributions to *Monita ad Missionarios Provinciae Nankinensis* (Monita ad Missionarios Provinciae Nankinensis 1871): "Did you receive your *Monita ad*

Missionarios from the Jesuit fathers?" (De Rotz 1879c) This was the question he asked Martinet.

Monita was first published in 1871. Commissioned by Adrien Languillat (1808-1878) 郎怀仁, Jesuit Vicar Apostolic of Nanjing, Sica together with some others drafted a detailed guidance of conducts, which for a long time was a necessity for the missionaries (Colombel n.d., p. 206). Drawing upon the theological principles from the Council of Trent (1545-1563), the First Vatican Council (1869-1870) and the Bull on the Chinese rites (1715), *Monita* regulated the issues of the governance of the vicariate, the training of catechumens, the main Chinese superstitions, the administration of the sacraments, virgins and confreres, etc (De la Servi re 1914b, p. 187).

Many could be used as references for similar situations in Japan, for example about dealing with Buddhism or about local practices of marriage. In fact, ever since the discovery of hidden Christians, Petitjean had begun consulting the Holy See for proper rules to be adopted on baptism, marriage and superstitions (Japon Avant Division 1839-1872). Attending the First Vatican Council (Perraud 1884, pp. 8-9), Petitjean was very likely to come across Sica there: Languillat selected Sica to accompany him from Shanghai to Rome to be his theologian during the Council (Colombel n.d., p. 216).

Around 1878–1879, the central conflict among the MEP missionaries in Japan revolved around the question of how strictly to police the Japanese converts' traditional customs and "superstitions." As mentioned above, De Rotz carried out an investigation outside Japan. He compiled the cases into a notebook as early as his short stay in Shanghai in July 1878, a process Martinet was well aware of (De Rotz 1879a). This investigation was in fact under the direction of Laucaigne, who intended to use this information to identify and eradicate all perceived "faults" (Ramos 2024). But this purpose of a thorough implementation caused backlash from opposing confreres, thereby bringing the mission's work to a standstill. "So far since January the ministry of the sick only has not been interrupted. The reason for this was superstitions. It has been thought that we were all too ignorant of them to be able to instruct Christians usefully", Bourelle reported in 1879 (Bourelle 1879). Given the circumstances, De Rotz resorted to Sica for advice, although not always satisfactory.

On 30th September 1878, De Rotz asked Martinet: "I beg you to send this little note to Fr. Sica. It is purely a theological matter but since it is a practical case here, it must be kept secret. Besides, in my little note, I tell him and ask for a response." (De Rotz 1878b). In another letter dated 19th October, hoping to get a valid answer from Shanghai instead of waiting for one from Paris for months, De Rotz requested: "Mgr. Laucaigne would like to ask you to present these marriage cases to Fr. Sica without mentioning from which mission these

cases are sent for his consideration. The two bishops, [Amédée] Salmon, and all of us have been so tangled up that...we ask you to seek a solution from Fr. Sica. The solution should be written, of course." (De Rotz 1878c)

Unfortunately, "Fr. Sica's letter did not clarify anything at all. Now, how to untangle this whole question, I do not know." (De Rotz 1878d) De Rotz complained to Martinet a fortnight later. This disappointment did not frustrate him. In April next year, he turned to the wise man again: "Why don't we have the new cases from Fr. Sica to help us? Why have they not yet appeared?" He presented questions including attending non-Christian funerals, weddings and other ceremonies to Martinet "If you could use your nicest pen to ask Fr. Sica for the solutions to the following three cases, you would render us a great service." (De Rotz 1879c)

It was probably beyond De Rotz's ability and authority to solve the difficulty in its entirety. His letters did not disclose the outcomes, especially after being fully engaged with Sotome in 1879. Nevertheless, it was certain that the MEPs continuously looked to Sica for references when in doubt: in May 1879, Petitjean requested Sica's book; in October 1883, Jean-Marie Corre (1850-1911) ordered 30 copies of *Monita*; in November, Corre submitted doubts to Sica concerning the profession of faith of Pius IV, appendix No.2 in *Monita*. All the correspondence was handed back and forth by Martinet. (Japon Avant Division 1873-1884) Whether or not Sica helped, the Shanghai Procure played its role in putting in touch with qualified advisors.

About Supplies

In addition to the main contents of theological difficulties, De Rotz tended to simultaneously attach his needs for supplies at the end of the letters to Martinet. In charge of printing since his arrival, he maintained and developed this work by securing new resources.

According to the study of Nanyan Guo, the "De Rotz Prints", lithographic and woodblock prints of biblical stories, were imitated after the Jesuit Adolphe Vasseur's 范式熙 (1828-1899) project carried out in the Tushanwan Orphanage (*L'Orphelinat de T'ou-sè-wè*) 土山灣 (further details below), due to the similarities they bear. (Guo 2023) It was likely that De Rotz had been interested in the effects of images for a long time and joined Vasseur's initiatives. In 1882, Vasseur promoted his idea of religious paintings done by mission workshops adopting local styles in *Les Missions Catholiques*, which mentioned that: "Several mission centres...have their own painting workshops to decorate churches and serve the propagation of the faith. Among others, we will mention those set up by Fr. Vasseur at the Tou-Sei-Wei [Tushanwan] orphanage (Kiang-Nan [Jiangnan]), by Fr. Taïx in Madagascar and by Fr. De Rotz in Yokohama (Japan)." (Vasseur 1882, p. 515) By that time,

De Rotz was no longer stationing in Yokohama. Probably because Vasseur had been away from Shanghai from 1871, he lost the updates of De Rotz's whereabouts. Nonetheless, this misinformation indicates that they knew about each other's activities well before 1873.

Returning from the trip in 1878, De Rotz kept discussing sacred images with Martinet. Due to the succinctness in the descriptions, it is difficult to identify whether the pictures referred to belonged to Vasseur's portfolio or not. What could be extracted from the messages is that he had seen a collection of images produced by Tushanwan in Shanghai, and decided to make his own reproductions in Nagasaki: "If I reproduce two or three of the large images from Shanghai on wood, what would they say? Would they want them engraved? We are waiting here impatiently for the images from Sicawei [Zi-ka-wei], which should be in colour." (De Rotz 1878a)

As aforementioned, Vasseur ran his project at the Tushanwan Orphanage, one of the establishments in Xujiahui. Since the completion of the Jesuit residence in 1847, several institutions were added to the complex: St. Ignatius Middle School (1849), St. Ignatius Cathedral (1851), Tushanwan Orphanage (1864), Shengmuyuan (*Seng-Mou-Yeu*, Convent of the Helpers of the Holy Souls, 1868), Xujiahui Museum (1868) and Xujiahui Observatory (1872). By 1868, the Orphanage accommodated over 300 children. In addition to nourishing them with food, it taught them technical skills to "learn a lucrative trade" by opening several workshops. (De la Servière 1914a, p. 225)

The main workshops included the painting studio, printing, woodcraft and goldsmithery. The studio for religious arts and sculpture in Xujiahui had existed since 1852 and moved to Tushanwan in 1868, where boys were taught Chinese and Western painting skills (Anonymous 1996, pp. 2503-2504). Together with other workshops, Tushanwan produced numerous religious images and objects for churches both in China and abroad (Colombel n.d., pp. 240-244).

In 1878, De Rotz requested from Tushanwan the images of the "Stations of the Cross", "two kneeling angels (seen in Saigon)" (De Rotz 1878b), "Sacred Heart", "the Holy Virgin and St. Joseph" (De Rotz 1878d). With the help of Martinet, they reached De Rotz in good condition (De Rotz 1878e). In the next year, he sent his reproductions to Martinet: "from your poor friend a disguised Jesuit copy⁴, engraved, printed and coloured at home, and two or three Stations [of the Cross] drawn on stone here and printed here too." He added that "the price would be very moderate", if other missions needed them (De Rotz 1879b).

The transmission of images only accounted for a very small portion of the

⁴ It probably means a pirated copy of the images made by the Jesuits.

supplies from the Shanghai Procure. According to the letters, De Rotz had set up his own bank account in Shanghai to receive money from his family and friends in France, for the use in his parish in Nagasaki, which was managed by the procure.

"So here I am, the parish priest of Sotome, with two chapels, one in Shitsu and the other in Kurosaki" (De Rotz 1879d) De Rotz declared to Martinet of his new position in August, 1879. The different nature of work gave rise to new requirements, as he wrote: "I thank you for shipping the objects I asked for my horse which could be called a donkey, and for the pen with which I am writing today." But the challenging part was the resources for construction and relief. He asked Martinet to draw money on his behalf in 1880: "what documents you would need so that you can obtain in my name from the Shanghai bank account (*comptoir d'escompte de Shanghai*)"? He urgently needed the annual pension, inheritance from his father in Normandy, to build a church in Shitsu and two schools without delay (De Rotz 1880).

In 1882, there was a shortage of food in his parish: "my district is in grinding misery because the harvests have been so bad, that 64000 pounds of [sweet] potatoes are not enough for one month." De Rotz tried all means to borrow money for food purchase: "I want to buy now to avoid having to pay twice as much later on; the price right now is already three times higher than the ordinary price." He asked Martinet to check whether the 1500 francs he had asked for could be lent to him through the bank account in Shanghai. Further on, he jotted: "Today I am writing to my family and friends in France so that they can help me, because starvation will have to be taken in its real sense." (De Rotz 1882) As the usual practice, these supplies for relief would go through his bank account in Shanghai. De Rotz fully entrusted them to Martinet, not merely a colleague, but a dear friend.

About Friendship

"I do not know if I said good evening to you, but what I am certain of is that I did not thank you...So, I beg your pardon for having behaved unwittingly like a rude person. Please accept today all my most friendly and grateful greetings." (De Rotz 1878a) In 1878, back from the trip to Hong Kong and Saigon, De Rotz wrote cordially to Martinet. Though briefly, the reunion in Shanghai was so memorable that by the end of 1880, he still held on to the good memory: "I want to send you my best wishes for 1881 from an old friend who cannot forget your hospitality while in Shanghai." (De Rotz 1880)

It was apparent in the letters that De Rotz was vexed during that time. He shared all the problems and moods honestly with Martinet: "If I haven't responded to your good letter sooner, it is not because I wanted to break off with you, even for a moment." (De Rotz 1878e) Apart from helping him find

solutions, Martinet was concerned about his wellbeing, in view of De Rotz's responses disclosing his health issues just before moving to Sotome: "Yours truly is currently being torn down by illness: the liver, that old problem, the spleen, and the left kidney are all failing. I've been in treatment for two days because I had to leave my post...Forgive me for not writing to you sooner; my situation here was such that I preferred to suffer alone and not speak of it. When I was about to leave for my district, I had so much to do that I couldn't manage it either." (De Rotz 1879d)

The friendship and concerns were reciprocal. On 15th August 1879, the MEP Procure narrowly escaped a disastrous fire breaking out at 5:45 a.m. in the French Concession in Shanghai. According to the news reports from *The North-China Daily News* in Shanghai: "in the extent of its destruction, is unparalleled in the history of the Settlements" (Great Fire in the French Concession 1879), "Literally the whole area of property, except the China Merchants' Company's godowns and the front premises of the Procure des Missions des Étrangères, bounded by the Rue Takou, (opposite the Tientsin Wharf,) on the north, the city Moat on the west and south, and the Bund, or Quai de France, on the west, has been reduced to ruins." (The Fire on the French Concession 1879)

At the critical moment, the Procure was luckily guarded by a fire engine pouring water, based on the account of the district engineer of the French Settlement working at the scene: "The No. 2 engine had charge to protect the Missions Étrangères." This survived house became a temporary safety zone for everyone: "After that terrible struggle every man without exception was exhausted. The Missions Étrangères had their house open...Great credit is due to the Fathers of the Missions for their kindness in providing for and waiting on the people." (Charrier 1879) The comparatively few casualties occurred during the disaster was the only relieving point, "doubtless owing to the ice and cold light drinks that were supplied without stint to the firemen and others engaged in extinguishing the flames." Joining the hotel proprietor who liberally provided the provisions at disposal, "the Rev. J. B. Martinet and the other missionaries at the Strangers' [Foreign] Mission also rendered valuable aid in a similar manner." (The Fire on the French Concession 1879) Moreover, the MEPs offered first aids: "at 9 o'clock the Missions provided an ambulance, for it was at that hour most men fell sick and the first treatment was given by the Fathers." (Charrier 1879)

Martinet might have told De Rotz about the calamity and the aftermaths, after the fire had totally burned out and the extent of the disaster had become clear. On 18th August, De Rotz wrote to him: "Now let me send you my condolences and congratulations on the fire that did nothing, but burn down your kitchens and toilets." (De Rotz 1879d)

There were other common friends of them in Shanghai, to whom De Rotz always asked Martinet to pass his greetings: "My regards to Fr. Bettembourg" (De Rotz 1878a); "I think I can give a good handshake to Fr. Bettembourg. He is not happy either" (De Rotz 1878b); "My regards to Fr. Bettembourg, who is also not happy" (De Rotz 1878d). At the end of year 1878, he wrote: "With this, I wish you a good year as well as Fr. Emery [Aymeri] and Fr. Bettembourg. How I wish I could wish you that in person. I would have so many things to tell you." (De Rotz 1878e)

Fr. Bettembourg and Fr. Aymeri were not MEPs but Lazarist (Congregation of the Mission) procurators. Close to the MEP one, the Lazarist Procure 首善堂 was located on Rue Laguerre, French Concession (The North China Desk Hong List 1877, p. 26). It appeared that the two congregations also had frequent communications, in addition to the MEP connections with the Jesuits. Nicolas Bettembourg 邝 (1850-1926), French, arrived at the Procure in 1878. He later returned to France in 1881, and served as Visitor to Argentina (Catalogue des Prêtres, Clercs, et Frères de la Congrégation de la Mission qui ont Travaillé en Chine depuis 1697 1911, pp. 20-21; Van den Brandt 1936). Michel-Ange Aymeri 高慕理 (1820-1880), Italian, appointed to the Shanghai Procure in 1857 after the post in Beijing, perished in the last stop in 1880 (Catalogue des Prêtres, Clercs, et Frères de la Congrégation de la Mission qui ont Travaillé en Chine depuis 1697 1911, pp. 12-13; Van den Brandt 1936). Overall their time overlapped with De Rotz was short, but in any case, De Rotz cherished the bond.

In 1886, Martinet made a trip to Japan to visit both the Northern and Southern vicarates, with "good impression of the Japan missions" (Procure de Shanghai 1878-1906). A new missionary François Bonne (1855-1912) at the Nagasaki seminary particularly wrote to thank him for his gifts to the seminarians. At the beginning of the following year, Bonne informed Martinet that De Rotz left for Hong Kong (Japon Méridional 1885-1905). Without other records, it could only be inferred that, as was the case in May 1878, Martinet and De Rotz probably met up in Nagasaki, and then on the way to or return from Hong Kong, De Rotz passed by the Shanghai Procure again. In 1891, Martinet was called to Hong Kong as the General Procurator and left Shanghai for good.

Epilogue

On 19th November, 1914, about 10 days after the sudden death of De Rotz, an obituary appeared in *The China Press*, an English periodical in Shanghai:

The Nagasaki Press reports the death of Father de Rotz, a missionary of the Roman Catholic Church, aged 75 years. Death was rather sudden, an attack of illness on

Friday, the 6th instant, ending fatally next morning at ten o'clock.

Father de Rotz went to Japan in June, 1868, three months earlier than Father Salmon. For the past 35 years he was stationed at Kurosaki-mura, Nagasaki-ken, a village with three thousand Roman Catholics. He was a descendant of a noble family of Normandy, and his father, with memories of the great Revolution to prompt him, insisted that he should learn some useful trade or profession. He therefore became an architect, and as such superintended the erection of the residential building next to the cathedral on Minami-yamate, Nagasaki, forty years ago. The building now being erected to replace that was also designed by him, and during the last twelve months he spent considerable time in Nagasaki superintending the work. His death occurred during a visit to the port. A service was held in the Cathedral, the remains being afterwards removed to Kurosaki-mura for interment at the scene of his lifework (Obituary 1914).

For the last time and in a different way, De Rotz returned to Shanghai. By that time, his old friend Martinet had been deceased for nine years due to incurable disease. The location of the Shanghai Procure had moved from the French Bund to Quai du Yang King Pang. The vicariates in Japan gradually became dioceses, relying less on the externals. Nevertheless, new procurators took over. In 1922, a notice from the Shanghai Procure regarding placing orders with the Jesuit Tushanwan workshops, instructed that all the orders from the MEP missions shall be made through the procure with clear indication of recipient address in accordance with the Chinese postal system (Procure de Shanghai 1922). For a long time already and for some time still, the Procure carried on as the nexus between Japan and the wider world, between MEP and the Catholic communities.

Ultimately, the significance of the correspondence between De Rotz and Martinet is twofold. On one hand, the letters reveal the detailed and comprehensive role the Shanghai Procure played in the Japan mission, demonstrating its wide scope of assistance. On the other hand, they illuminate a new maritime perspective in which sea routes serve as the main mechanism for the movement of people, goods, information, ideas and emotions, shaping the relevant regions. By moving beyond traditional bilateral relationships confined by national boundaries, the Shanghai Procure, as a maritime nexus within this Eurasian network, provides an insight into the intensity of cross-border exchanges in the late nineteenth century.

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