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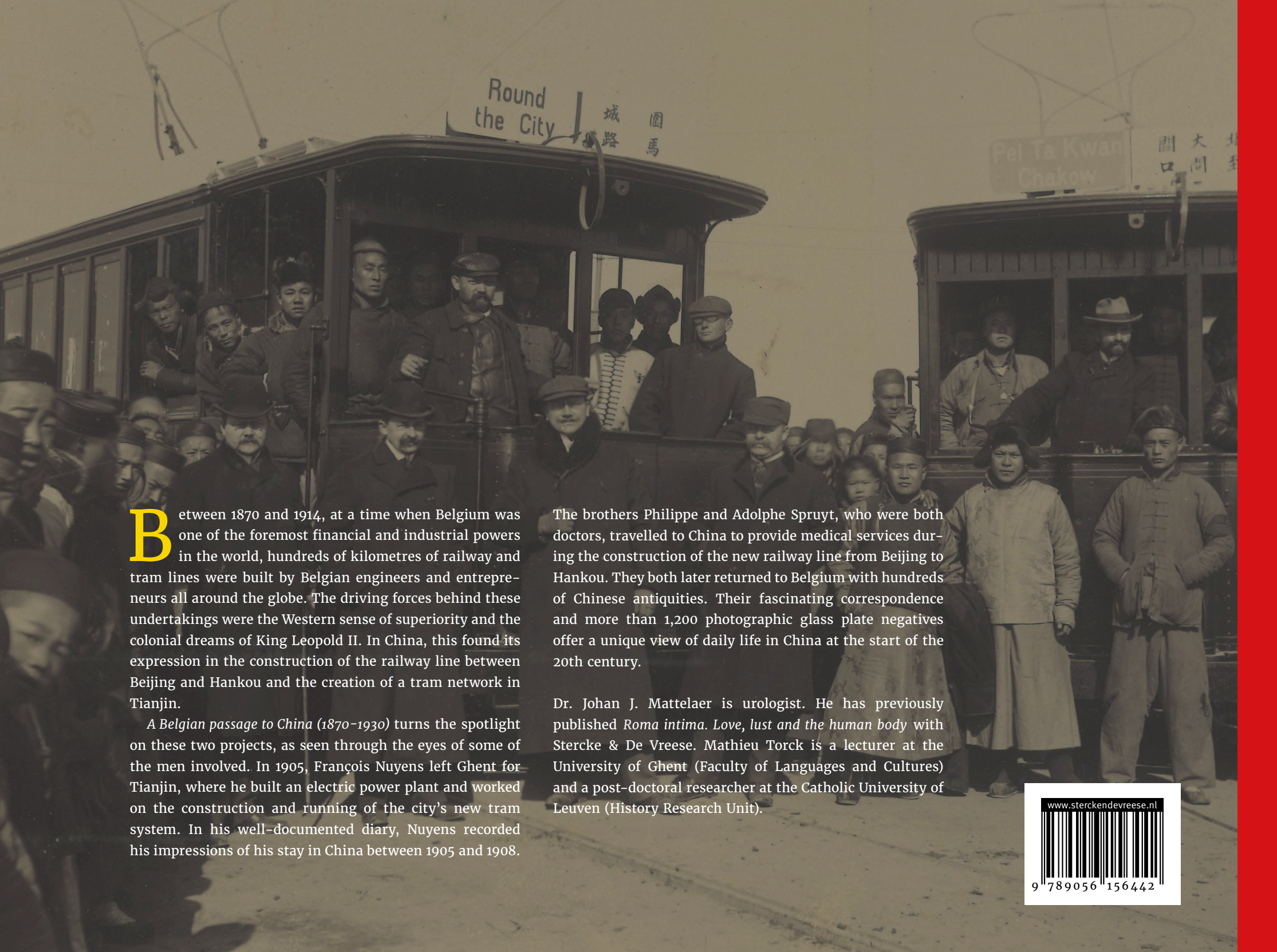


A BELGIAN (1870-1930)
PASSAGE TO CHINA

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Deux copains en rickshaw (voiturette chinoise) 1907



Between 1870 and 1914, at a time when Belgium was one of the foremost financial and industrial powers in the world, hundreds of kilometres of railway and tram lines were built by Belgian engineers and entrepreneurs all around the globe. The driving forces behind these undertakings were the Western sense of superiority and the colonial dreams of King Leopold II. In China, this found its expression in the construction of the railway line between Beijing and Hankou and the creation of a tram network in Tianjin.

A Belgian passage to China (1870-1930) turns the spotlight on these two projects, as seen through the eyes of some of the men involved. In 1905, François Nuyens left Ghent for Tianjin, where he built an electric power plant and worked on the construction and running of the city's new tram system. In his well-documented diary, Nuyens recorded his impressions of his stay in China between 1905 and 1908.

The brothers Philippe and Adolphe Spruyt, who were both doctors, travelled to China to provide medical services during the construction of the new railway line from Beijing to Hankou. They both later returned to Belgium with hundreds of Chinese antiquities. Their fascinating correspondence and more than 1,200 photographic glass plate negatives offer a unique view of daily life in China at the start of the 20th century.

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CONTENT

| | | | | | |
|-------------------|---|----|--------------------|---|-----|
| | FOREWORD | 7 | | | |
| | PREFACE | 11 | | | |
| CHAPTER I | CHINA AND THE WEST FROM ANCIENT TIMES TO THE BOXER UPRISING: FROM EXPLORATION TO EXPLOITATION | 17 | | | |
| | A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF CHINA'S HISTORY | 17 | | | |
| | TRADE AND POLITICAL EXCHANGES UNTIL THE MIDDLE AGES | 20 | | | |
| | MISSIONARIES AND SCIENTIFIC EXCHANGES FROM THE 16TH CENTURY ONWARDS | 27 | | | |
| | THE AGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT: A SINOPHILE PERIOD IN EUROPE AND TRADE BETWEEN BELGIUM AND CHINA DURING THE 18TH CENTURY | 34 | | | |
| | FROM THE OPIUM WARS TO THE CONCESSIONS | 45 | | | |
| | FROM MISSIONARIES TO SCIENTIFIC EXPERTS | 52 | | | |
| CHAPTER II | THE MODERN HISTORY OF BELGIAN-CHINESE RELATIONS | 63 | | | |
| | LEOPOLD II AND THE BELGIANS IN CHINA | 63 | | | |
| | FROM IMPERIAL CHINA AND THE REPUBLIC OF CHINA TO THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA TODAY | 86 | | | |
| | | | CHAPTER III | THE BEIJING-HANKOU RAILWAY PROJECT AND THE BELGIAN DOCTORS PHILIPPE AND ADOLPHE SPRUYT | 101 |
| | | | | THE BEIJING-HANKOU RAILWAY PROJECT: BELGIAN EXPERTISE AT ITS BEST | 101 |
| | | | | THE GHENT PHYSICIANS PHILIPPE AND ADOLPHE SPRUYT AND THEIR CHINA COLLECTIONS | 111 |
| | | | CHAPTER IV | FRANCOIS NUYENS AND LA COMPAGNIE INTERNATIONALE DE TRAMWAYS ET D'ECLAIRAGE DE TIANJIN | 145 |
| | | | | THE COMPAGNIE INTERNATIONALE DE TRAMWAYS ET D'ECLAIRAGE DE TIANJIN | 145 |
| | | | | FRANÇOIS NUYENS: ENGINEER, DRAFTSMAN AND DIARIST | 160 |
| | | | | FRANÇOIS NUYENS' DIARY AND OTHER DOCUMENTATION | 165 |
| | | | CHAPTER V | FROM EUROPE TO CHINA OVERSEAS AND BY RAILWAY AT THE START OF THE 20TH CENTURY - THE DIARY OF FRANÇOIS NUYENS AND PHILATELY | 169 |
| | | | | FROM GHENT TO TIANJIN BY SEA - TRAVEL IMPRESSIONS | 172 |
| | | | | FROM TIANJIN BACK TO GHENT BY THE TRANS-SIBERIAN RAILWAY | 188 |
| | | | | CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN BELGIUM AND CHINA BY POST: PHILATELY AND PRE-PHILATELY DURING THE BELLE EPOQUE, 1870-1914 | 198 |

| | | | | | |
|--------------------|--|------------|---------------------|--|------------|
| CHAPTER VI | FRANÇOIS NUYENS' LIFE AND IMPRESSIONS IN TIANJIN (1905-1908) PAGES 99 TO 190 OF HIS DIARY | 205 | CHAPTER VIII | 1971-2021: 50 YEARS OF DIPLOMATIC AND ECONOMIC RELATIONS BETWEEN THE NEW PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA AND BELGIUM | 287 |
| | LIVING IN TIANJIN | 205 | | REFLEXIONS BY A YOUNG BELGIAN ENTREPRENEUR IN CHINA TODAY | 287 |
| | A VISIT TO BEIJING | 230 | | FROM THE OLD SILK ROAD TO A MODERN BELT & ROAD INITIATIVE | 290 |
| | EVENTS THAT PRECEDED OUR DEPARTURE | 238 | | SOME EXAMPLES OF THE COOPERATION BETWEEN BELGIUM AND CHINA TODAY | 293 |
| | ATTACHMENTS | 242 | | END NOTES | 299 |
| CHAPTER VII | CHINA 120 YEARS AGO - UNEDITED PICTURES | 249 | | COLOPHON | 304 |
| | PICTURES BY PHILIPPE AND ADOLPHE SPRUYT | 251 | | | |
| | PICTURES FROM HANKOU - HANYANG - WUCHANG | 251 | | | |
| | PICTURES FROM TEMPLES, PAGODAS AND TRIUMPHAL ARCHES | 260 | | | |
| | THE DAILY LIFE OF THE PEOPLE | 262 | | | |
| | TRANSPORT AND THEATRE | 266 | | | |
| | RITUALS AND CEREMONIES | 269 | | | |
| | HORSE RACES IN HANKOU | 270 | | | |
| | A VISIT TO WUCHANG BY DR. PHILIPPE SPRUYT AND A VISIT TO A MILITARY CAMP | 271 | | | |
| | PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN BY ADOLPHE SPRUYT IN BEIJING | 272 | | | |
| | THE ALBUMS OF FRANÇOIS NUYENS | 273 | | | |
| | FRANÇOIS NUYENS, FRIENDS AND FAMILY IN TIANJIN | 281 | | | |

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