

The Jesuit Reading of Confucius:

The First Complete Translation of the *Lunyu* (1687) Published in the West

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## Acknowledgments

From 1999 to 2003, while still a young Jesuit in training, I studied Chinese philosophy at Peking University. One day, I received an unexpected request from an academic research center: to translate some Latin texts edited by Leibniz into Chinese. Later on, I was even more surprised to find out that these texts had been written in China by the Jesuits more than three hundred years ago. While these kinds of texts are important for the history of the transmission and influence of Chinese thought in the West, most of them are only available in Latin. In 2003, I started to read the *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*, in particular, the Latin version of the *Daxue*. First at Fordham University, New York, and then at Sun Yat-sen University, Guangzhou, I prepared a trilingual edition of the *Daxue* and commentaries in Chinese, Latin, and English. I also translated the preface of *Sinarum Philosophus*, which provides the first systematic account for a Western audience of the different schools of Chinese philosophy. This was published in 2011 as *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus (1687): The First Translation of the Confucian Classics*, by the Institutum historicum Societatis Iesu in Rome.

From 2009, I began to study the Latin version of the *Lunyu*, a much longer text than the *Daxue*. Two students in Latin from Poznań University visited Sun Yat-sen University and helped me with the translation of some parts of the Latin text: Maria Karnowska worked on chapters 13 and 14, and Otylia Stefańska on chapters 8, 15, and 19. For a couple of years, I offered Latin classes for students at Sun Yat-sen University based on the Latin version of the *Lunyu*, and I benefited a great deal from these class discussions. Wang Ge 王格, a doctoral student at Sun Yat-sen University, read my entire translation and notes, and made very useful comments on how the Jesuit translation of the *Lunyu* fitted with the traditional interpretation of the text in China and also how it brought some new perspectives to the text.

In February 2010, at the invitation of Professor Anne Cheng, I gave a lecture at College de France, entitled “The First Translation of the *Lunyu* (La première traduction des *Entretiens*).” I subsequently published two papers derived from this lecture, one in 2010 in English and Chinese in *Chinese Cross-Currents*, Macao, and another published in 2011 in *Etudes Chinoises*, Paris. Marye Moran and Alexandra Hawkins helped in polishing the English text.

I obtained a digital document of an early version of the translation of the *Lunyu* from Giuseppe Portogallo, Fondazione Intorcetta, which I was able to compare with the text of *Sinarum Philosophus*. On the basis of my English translation of the “Life of Confucius,” which has already been published in my previous book, I offer here a comparison with two other versions, analyzing how the Jesuits made some important changes as they became more knowledgeable about the texts of ancient China.

I express here my deepest gratitude to colleagues and students who have supported this endeavor. The Institutum historicum Societatis Iesu has kindly allowed me to reuse my translation of the “Life of Confucius,” to which I have made some minor corrections. Professor Paul Rule very carefully reviewed an earlier draft of the book and, being very learned in Latin and Chinese, made useful comments. I am also thankful to Robert Maryks, professor of Boston College and editor of the Jesuit Series at Brill, for his encouragement and advice.

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## Introduction

The very name of Confucius (551–479 BC) is a constant reminder that the “foremost sage” in China was first known in the West through Latin works.<sup>1</sup> Today, even the Chinese government has officially adopted the name of Confucius, having established more than three hundred Confucius Institutes throughout the world to promote Chinese language and culture.

The single book that contributed the most in spreading the name of Confucius is the *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* (Confucius, the Philosopher of China; abbreviated hereafter as *Sinarum Philosophus*), published in Paris in 1687. It included the Latin translation of the *Lunyu* (or *Analects*), the most important book for our knowledge of Confucius, along with the *Daxue* (or *The Great Learning*) and the *Zhongyong* (or *The Doctrine of the Mean*). For more than two hundred years, Western intellectuals like Leibniz (1646–1716) and Voltaire (1694–1778) read and meditated on the words of Confucius from this Latin version, which generated an abundant production of translations, commentaries, and essays in many Western languages.

In a previous study on the *Sinarum Philosophus*, I presented the history of its redaction and its hermeneutic principles, based on Western philosophy and on the Chinese interpretative tradition. I also offered an annotated translation from Latin into English of the preface of the work, and a translation from Latin into English of the *Daxue*.

The present work deals with the Jesuit translation and commentary of the *Lunyu*. This introduction exposes the different stages of the redaction, first focusing on the role of the Jesuits as translators (part I), before examining the reasons underlying their choices with regard to the commentaries they adopted in their translation. In part II, I aim to show how the Jesuits interwove different Chinese interpretations of the same text. Part III then goes on to discuss the innovative editorial decisions that the Jesuits had to make in order to arrange the different layers of the text given the formidable challenge of translating the Confucian classics with their Chinese commentaries for a Western audience. Although the Jesuit reading of the *Lunyu* is based on Chinese sources and interpretations, their translation also contains some distinctive themes, and these are discussed in part IV: the figure of Confucius as a philosopher and saint; the understanding of the concept of *Ren* between Neo-Confucianism and Christianity; the question of the legitimacy of hatred; and the representation of a hierarchical political order.

The Jesuits realized very early on that it was not enough to express the teaching of Confucius; they also needed to provide a biography, documenting the basic facts of his life, which would also work to dispel any misperception about his thought. Indeed, while some missionaries saw Confucius as a practitioner of idolatry, or even the object of idolatrous worship, others considered him an atheist. As the controversy surrounding Confucius unfolded, the biography, initially inserted in 1662 in the *Sapientia Sinica* (Chinese wisdom), was modified twice in order to answer to the disparagers of Confucius. The *Portrait of Confucius* inserted in the *Sinarum Philosophus* was intended to project an acceptable image of him to the West, as is discussed in part V.

After its initial publication in 1687, the *Sinarum Philosophus* achieved immediate success and was later reviewed, copied, translated, and quoted abundantly. In part VI, the introduction concludes by examining two books published in 1688, which show

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<sup>1</sup> Confucius is usually called *Kongzi* in China.

how the message of Confucius was received for the first time in the West.

### **I. The Genesis of the *Sinarum Philosophus* and its Prototypes**

By the end of the seventeenth century, a few missionaries had attempted to publish a Latin translation of the canonical books of Confucianism, the *Four Books* (i.e., *Daxue*, *Zhongyong*, *Lunyu*, and *Mencius*), but none succeeded. Between 1660 and 1661, a translation team of four young Jesuit companions was formed, and one of them, Philippe Couplet (1623–93), finally succeeded in publishing a text given the formidable challenge of translating the Confucian classics with their Chinese commentaries for a Western audience. Although the Jesuit reading of the *Lunyu* is based on Chinese sources and interpretations, their translation also contains some distinctive themes, and these are discussed in part IV: the figure of Confucius as a philosopher and saint; the understanding of the concept of *Ren* between Neo-Confucianism and Christianity; the question of the legitimacy of hatred; and the representation of a hierarchical political order.

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### **I. The Genesis of the *Sinarum Philosophus* and its Prototypes**

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#### **Ruggieri and the First Attempt**

The Italian Jesuit Michele Ruggieri (1543–1607) arrived in Macao in July 1579, and was instructed to study the Chinese language by Alessandro Valignano (1538–1606), the Jesuit visitor for all Asia.<sup>2</sup> In December 1582, the local Chinese government

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<sup>2</sup> See Louis Pfister, *Notices biographiques et bibliographiques sur les Jésuites de l'ancienne mission de la Chine 1552–1773* (Chang-hai [Shanghai]: Imprimerie de la Mission Catholique, orphelinat de T'ou-Sé-wè, 1932), 15–21.

authorized Ruggieri to settle in the city of Zhaoqing 肇慶, in Guangdong province. In just a few years, the young Jesuit's written ability in Chinese made significant progress, so much so that he could express the basics of the Christian faith in the *Tianzhu shilu* 天主實錄 (Real exposition on the “lord of heaven”), published in November 1584, with the authorization of Valignano.<sup>3</sup>

The *Tianzhu shilu* exhibits a strong Buddhist flavor, with Ruggieri presenting himself as a monk from India — an identity both familiar and acceptable to the Chinese, and using many Buddhist concepts to express the Christian faith. Yet, this work is very contradictory, as Ruggieri vehemently refutes some fundamental Buddhist tenets, such as the transmigration and the cycle of incarnations. The degree of engagement with Confucianism is minimal; while Ruggieri makes one passing reference to the “five moral relationships” (*wulun* 五倫) and to the “five Confucian virtues” (*wuchang* 五常), he makes no mention of the *Four Books*. This indicates that, at the time of the composition of the *Tianzhu shilu*, Ruggieri had not studied the *Four Books*, or at least did not see the *Four Books* as relevant for his missionary work.

Ruggieri's engagement with the *Four Books* most likely began around 1584 and continued until 1588, the year he returned to Europe in the hope of organizing a papal mission. Ruggieri started to translate the *Four Books* into Latin to improve his understanding of Chinese language and culture. Interestingly enough, Ruggieri did not decide to translate the *Three Character Classic* (*Sanzijing* 三字經), a text written during the Song dynasty (960–1279) that had become the standard textbook for teaching young children Chinese characters and grammar, as well as Confucian morality. For a Renaissance man like Ruggieri, it was probably more appealing to go directly to the source text, the *Four Books*.

After his return to Italy in 1590, Ruggieri did not achieve a great deal in terms of organizing a papal delegation to China because four popes (Sixtus V [1521–90], Urban VII [1521–90], Gregory XIV [1535–91], and Innocent IX [1519–91]) died one after another in the space of two years. The paralysis that ensued in the Vatican gave Ruggieri some time to work on his translation of the *Four Books*. In 1593, Antonio Possevino (c.1533–1611), another Italian Jesuit, published Ruggieri's Latin translation of the first three quarters of the preface to the *Daxue*.<sup>4</sup> However, Valignano then wrote to Claudio Acquaviva (1543–1615), the superior general of the Jesuits in Rome, to argue that Ruggieri had limited linguistic abilities and should not be allowed to publish his translations.<sup>5</sup>

Valignano's claim about Ruggieri's poor level of Chinese language was accepted for a long time, but more recently this view has been questioned by historians. For instance, the Jesuit scholar Albert Chan's study of Ruggieri's poems reveals a great

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<sup>3</sup> The complete title is: *Xinbian xizhuguo tianzhu shengjiao shilu* 新編西竺國天主聖教實錄 [New version of the real exposition of the holy teaching on the “lord of heaven” by a monk from India]. For a description of this work, see Albert Chan, *Chinese Books and Documents in the Jesuit Archives in Rome, a Descriptive Catalogue: Japonica-Sinica I–IV* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2002), 90–96. For a modern reprint: *Chinese Christian Texts from the Roman Archives of the Society of Jesus*, vol. I, ed. Nicolas Standaert and Adrian Dudink (Taipei: Taipei Ricci Institute, 2002), 1–86.

<sup>4</sup> Michele Ruggieri, “Quibus rationibus gentes, et Indi innuari possint, qua occasione id certioris historiae de regno sinarum innuitur quod hactenus ignoratum est, quodque auctor reliquis suis commentariis in lucem postea edendis copiosus adtexuit: *Liber Sinensium*,” in Antonio Possevino, *Biblioteca selecta qua agitur de ratione studiorum* (Rome, 1593), 581–86.

<sup>5</sup> See Knud Lundbaek, “The First Translation from a Confucian Classic in Europe,” *China Mission Studies Bulletin* I (1979): 10–11.

degree of writing ability in Chinese.<sup>6</sup> It seems that Valignano did not trust Ruggieri to lead the China mission, and when Ruggieri advanced the idea of a papal mission, Valignano may have found it a convenient way to send him away from China. From Asia, Valignano gave instructions in Rome to prevent Ruggieri from publishing his translations of the *Four Books*, and from returning to China. In 1607, seventeen years after his return to Europe, Ruggieri died in Italy, and most of his translations were never published.

The translations of Ruggieri are kept today in a manuscript at the Biblioteca Nazionale V. Emanuele II, Rome (Fondo Gesuitico 1185).<sup>7</sup> The manuscript contains the translations of the *Daxue* (*Täschio, humana institutio*), the *Zhongyong* (*Ciumyum, semper in medio*), and the *Lunyu* (*Lunyum, de consideratione*), followed by a compilation of texts from different writers (*Diversorum autorum sententiae*), and finally the translation of the first part of the *Mencius* (*Mentius*). Experts have identified the handwriting of Ruggieri on the manuscript, and it is not difficult to identify the author of the compilation of famous sayings since Ruggieri declares at the end of this section to be the translator. However, there have been some discussions about the authorship of the translation of the *Four Books*. Was Ruggieri the translator? Or was he copying the translations that Matteo Ricci (1552–1610), his successor in the mission, made in China?

In 1935, the Italian Jesuit scholar Pasquale D’Elia (1890–1963) put forward the hypothesis that Ricci was the translator, and that he had sent his translations to Ruggieri. The hypothesis rests on two grounds. First, a coincidence of dates: Ruggieri wrote the translations of the *Daxue*, *Zhongyong*, and *Lunyu* between November

1591 and August 1592,<sup>8</sup> and this corresponds to the period in which Ricci began working on those translations in China, and thus he may have sent them to Ruggieri. Second, D’Elia claimed that Ruggieri’s Chinese was not sufficient for carrying out the task.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the translations of the *Four Books* in the manuscript would have been made by Ricci in China, and later copied by Ruggieri in Rome.

D’Elia subsequently changed his opinion and argued that Ruggieri translated the *Four Books* in China, before polishing them in Rome in 1591–92. Ruggieri showed them to Acquaviva with the intention of publishing them. However, in 1596, Valignano, who was in charge of the missions in the Far East and did not have faith in Ruggieri’s knowledge of Chinese, wrote to Acquaviva, asking him to stop the publication.<sup>10</sup>

In 1998, the Italian scholar Francesco D’Arelli advanced a number of arguments that sought to question the attribution of the translations to Ruggieri.<sup>11</sup> First, the

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<sup>6</sup> Albert Chan, “Michele Ruggieri, S.J. (1543–1607) and his Chinese Poems,” *Monumenta Serica* 41 (1993): 139–57.

<sup>7</sup> These translations are kept in Rome: Michele Ruggieri, *China, seu humana institutio*, Biblioteca Nazionale V. Emanuele II di Roma, Fondo Gesuitico (FG) 1185 (3314). Most scholars who have examined the manuscripts have attributed them to Ruggieri: Pfister, *Notices biographiques*, 21; Pasquale D’Elia, *Fonti Ricciane*, vol. 2 (Rome: Libreria dello Stato, 1942–49), 43; Lundbaek, “The First Translation,” 9.

<sup>8</sup> On the last page of the translation of the *Lunyu*, Ruggieri wrote that he finished this part on the day of Saint Lawrence, most probably Saint Lawrence of Rome, celebrated on August 10: “Laus Deo Virgini Matri Mariae ac Beato Laurentio cuius diei impositus est finis huic opera” (125).

<sup>9</sup> Manuscript note dated January 4, 1935, by Pasquale D’Elia on the document of the Fondo Gesuitico (3314) 1185 at Biblioteca Nazionale V. Emanuele II di Roma.

<sup>10</sup> D’Elia, *Fonti Ricciane*, 43n2; 148n2; 250n1.

<sup>11</sup> Francesco D’Arelli, “Matteo Ricci S.I. e la traduzione latina dei *Quattro libri* (*Si shu*): dalla tradizione storiografica alle nuove ricerche,” in *Le marche e l’oriente: una tradizione ininterrotta da*



*Catechismus* of Ruggieri published by Possevino is followed by a translation of the beginning of the *Daxue*, which matches with the manuscript, but Possevino does not explicitly mention that Ruggieri made the translation himself, and there are no extant letters written by Ruggieri mentioning that he was engaged in translating the *Four Books*. Secondly, in the manuscript Ruggieri declared that he was the “collector” of the translations of the *Daxue*, *Zhongyong*, and *Lunyu*. Furthermore, D’Arelli attempts to prove that the translations should be attributed to Ricci. According to D’Arelli’s analysis of Ricci’s letters, Ricci translated the *Four Books* from February 1593 to November 1594. However, starting from the year 1584, Ricci had begun reading the *Four Books* with a Chinese scholar. As a result, D’Arelli puts forward the hypothesis that Ricci had completed an earlier draft of the translations, which he then sent to Ruggieri, who copied them in 1591–92.

D’Arelli’s arguments are inconclusive. The underlying assumption is that Ruggieri’s Chinese language was not good enough, but this was proven wrong with the publication of his poems by Albert Chan, as was mentioned above. Also, the fact that there are no extant letters from Ruggieri mentioning the translations does not prove that he did not make them. If Possevino does not state a clear attribution of the translation to Ruggieri, it is strongly implied since the translation follows his *Catechismus*. Furthermore, D’Arelli does not provide any proof that Ricci had begun translating the *Four Books* before 1593—he only shows that Ricci was studying them. Finally, I would like to show also that, on the crucial point of the *guishen*, the translations of the manuscript cannot be attributed to Ricci, but should be attributed to Ruggieri.

In the section I have examined, the manuscript translates *guishen* or “other spirits” as diabolic (*Lunyu* 2.24, 3.12, 3.13, 6.20). The *guishen* are thus identified with the notion of idols. The Chinese commentaries, in contrast, do not make this kind of negative association: for instance, Zhu Xi (1130–1200), the great Chinese philosopher and exegete of the Confucian classics, never refers to the *guishen* as evil forces. As we shall see below, when Ricci discusses the above passages of the *Lunyu*, he describes the *guishen* as spiritual beings, rather than diabolic forces, whose principal function is to execute the commands of the lord of heaven. D’Arelli’s suggestion that Ricci is the author of the manuscript cannot hold because of this discrepancy in understanding the *guishen*. Ricci translated the *Four Books* in order to find a basis for his Confucian–Christian synthesis, adopting from the ancient books of China the two notions of Shangdi and *guishen*. The former was an equivalent to the Christian God, and the latter was an equivalent to the angels. In conclusion, I hold that the manuscript should be attributed to Ruggieri.

### **Ricci and his Lost Translations of the *Four Books***

In 1593, the same year in which Ruggieri’s partial translation of the *Daxue* appeared in the West, Valignano in the Far East instructed Ricci to translate the Confucian classics into Latin in order to write a new catechism to replace Ruggieri’s *Tianzhu shilu*.<sup>12</sup> This is unlikely to be a pure coincidence because Valignano believed that Ruggieri was unable to translate the *Four Books* and that this important work should

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Matteo Ricci a Giuseppe Tucci, ed. Francesco D’Arelli (Rome: Istituto Italiano per l’Africa e l’Oriente, 1998), 163–75.

<sup>12</sup> Letter of Ricci to Claudio Acquaviva, , Shaozhou, December 10, 1593; in *Lettere*, edizione di Piero Corradini (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2001), 184: “Questi anco mi fa il p. visitatore traslatare in latino per agiutarmi di quello in fare un nuovo catechismo, di che abbiamo molta necessità, in sua lingua.”

be entrusted to Ricci, whom he had known in Rome between 1571 and 1573, when Ricci was trained as a novice, with Valignano as novice-master.

Ruggieri had studied and translated the *Four Books* mostly for linguistic and cultural purposes. However, Valignano's instructions to Ricci reveal another rationale for translating these texts: the *Four Books* could be legitimate resources to reinforce the Christian message, but caution was to be used, and it was first necessary to translate the *Four Books* into Latin to secure their meaning before they could be used in the catechism in Chinese in order to prevent any hint of idolatry or superstition from creeping into the catechism. The *Four Books* thus took on a completely new role—aside from helping the missionaries to learn the Chinese language and to familiarize themselves with Chinese culture, the *Four Books* were used as a tool for converting the Chinese people to Christianity.

In a letter written in 1594, Ricci mentioned that he had started a new “catechism.”<sup>13</sup> Almost ten years later, in 1603, Ricci finally published the *Tianzhu shiyi* 天主實義 [Real Meaning on the “lord of heaven”] in Beijing. The work includes quotes or references to the *Four Books*: three to the *Daxue*, seven to the *Zhongyong*, thirteen to the *Lunyu*, and twenty-three to the *Mencius*.<sup>14</sup>

Ricci quoted from *Lunyu* 6.20 that one should “respect the spirits (*guishen*) and keep them at distance” (敬鬼神而遠之).<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, in order to show that religious celibacy is not contrary to Chinese culture, Ricci argued that Confucius had said nothing against it in the *Lunyu*. Thus, the later view of Mencius, according to whom “among the three un-filial deeds, the worst is to be without son” (不孝有三, 無後為大), does not reflect the opinion of Confucius, who praised three ancient sages, Boyi, Shuqi, and Bi Gan, even though they were apparently childless.<sup>16</sup> Ricci quotes two passages from the *Lunyu* that convey a similar message to the golden rule of Western ethics (“Do to others what you would want them to do to you”).<sup>17</sup> Ricci sees ethics as reaching its ultimate end in God, but God should not be considered as an external aim, just as Confucius did not regard *Ren*, or love for others, as something external.<sup>18</sup>

However, in one instance, Ricci expresses his complete opposition to Confucius's statement that “A father hides the crimes of his son; and the son the ones of his father” (*Lunyu* 13.18: 父為子隱, 子為父隱). In the *Tianzhu shiyi* (§337), Ricci considers that both the action and the intention of the father and the son are wrong. In the same way, Ricci criticizes the interpretation by the School of Mind

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<sup>13</sup> Letter of Ricci to Girolamo Costa, Shaozhou, October 12, 1594; in *Lettere*, 189: “E cosi cominciai un libro delle cose della nostre fede, tutto di ragioni naturali, per distribuirlo per tutta la Cina quando si stamparà.”

<sup>14</sup> See “Index of Chinese Classical Texts,” in Matteo Ricci, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* (Taipei: Ricci Institute, 1985), 483–85.

<sup>15</sup> Matteo Ricci, *Le sens réel de Seigneur du Ciel*, ed. Thierry Meynard (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2013), 96 (§206).

<sup>16</sup> *Lunyu* 7.14 and 18.1, mentioned in *Le sens réel de Seigneur du Ciel*, 237 (§553).

<sup>17</sup> In Luke 6.31, the formulation is expressed as a direct form, but the two expressions of the *Lunyu* are expressed as a cautionary form. *Tianzhu shiyi* (§245 and 295) has a similar wording and meaning as *Lunyu* 12.2 (己所不欲, 勿施於人) and *Lunyu* 5.11 (我不欲人之加諸我也, 吾亦欲無加諸人).

<sup>18</sup> *Lunyu* 12.22: 問仁, 子曰: 愛人, quoted in *Tianzhu shiyi* (§457).