Translating Faith and Philosophy:

The Engagement of the Jesuit Strategy of Accommodation in Chinese Syncretic and Anti-Heterodox Traditions and the Reception of Chinese Ideas in Europe

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"I have quoted [the Confucian Classics]... which I knew you would understand. Had I preached the words of the Buddhist scriptures... it would have been like speaking to a blind man of the five colors or playing the five sounds to a deaf man." - Mou Tzu[1]

Introduction

When the Jesuits arrived in late-Ming China in the late 16th century, they would become deeply involved in the exchange of scientific and philosophical ideas between the East and the West. The strategy of cultural accommodation constructed by Father Matteo Ricci emphasized the importance of co-opting the Confucian texts, upon which Chinese civic culture and intellectual thought were based, in order to proselytize Christianity.[2] To educate themselves about Confucianism and the cultural practices of their Chinese audience, the Jesuits immersed themselves in Chinese language and culture. D.E. Mungello, perhaps the most significant living researcher of the Jesuit mission in China, describes the Jesuits as proto-sinologists, and Matteo Ricci is broadly considered by scholars of the Jesuit mission and by his numerous biographers as the father of sinology.[3] There is a plethora of critical biographical research on Ricci by scholars such as Ronnie Po-chia Hsia, who in his biography *A Jesuit in the Forbidden City* provides his own translations of many Chinese sources that illuminate the Chinese perspective on Ricci and his strategy of cultural accommodation. There has also been much discussion on the aspects of 16th century European influences that informed Ricci and the Jesuits in their unique approach to

[1] Wm. Theodore De Bary, Wing-Tsit Chan, and Burton Watson. *Sources of Chinese Tradition,* Introduction to Oriental Civilizations, ed. Wm. Theodore De Bary, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), 279.
[2] David E. Mungello, *Curious Land: Jesuit Accomodations and the Origins of Sinology*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989), 14-15.
[3] See Mungello, *Curious Land.*

China, from the dominance of Aristotelian philosophy to the expansion of mercantilist trade networks, but comparatively little on the Chinese influence that shaped their strategies.

Another neglected mystery of the Jesuit-facilitated exchange of ideas between Europe and China is the absence of significant European discussion about Daoism, one of the two native Chinese philosophical/religious traditions alongside Confucianism. Elizabeth Harper is among the few scholars that question this absence in her article "The Early Modern European (Non) Reception of the *Zhuangzi* Text." She questions the absence of the *Zhuangzi*, a foundational Daoist text, in scholarship about the Jesuit mission in China, including the work of Mungello, saying "from Ricci's establishment of a missionary residence in Beijing in 1601 and the proliferation of works engaging with the Confucian Classics... it will not be until the end of the nineteenth century that a full scholarly translation of the *Zhuangzi* will appear and a serious discussion of the text in Europe can begin."[4] Harper's scholarship builds on the works of scholars such as Haun Saussy and Mei Tin Huang who attempt to analyze the Jesuit translations for clues about this puzzling omission. This paper will build the connection between the position of Daoism in the native Chinese traditions that influenced the Jesuits and how the Jesuits introduced Daoism, alongside Confucianism, to Europe. In this way, I will provide another explanation of the absence of Daoism from 17th-18th century European scholarship.

In order to connect these disparate ideas, I will first provide a background on the Jesuit strategy of cultural accommodation and the Chinese traditions it engaged with, before delving further into how this engagement is reflected in the writings produced by Ricci and the Jesuits. The opening section of the paper will describe the inception and evolution of Ricci's strategy of

[4] Elizabeth Harper, "The Early Modern European (Non) Reception of the Zhuangzi Text," *Journal of East-West Thought* 9, no. 4 (2019), 25.

cultural accommodation in order to explain how Ricci came into contact with native Chinese intellectual traditions. The next section will define and explain said traditions, namely Chinese syncretism and anti-heterodox scholarship, and the influence of these traditions on Zhu Xi's brand of Confucianism, which was the accepted orthodoxy in late-Ming China at the time of the Jesuits' arrival. I will then examine Ricci's process of translation and his creation of a synthesis between Confucianism and Christianity and posit it as an example of his engagement in the Chinese syncretic tradition. I will contrast this with Ricci's simultaneous denunciation of Buddhism as an example of his participation in anti-heterodox scholarship, and briefly analyze Ricci's relationship with Daoism. In the last section, I will analyze the strategies that Ricci used to present Confucianism to his European audience before examining how other Europeans, namely the Dutch official Pieter Van Hoorn and the Jesuit Father Philippe Couplet, interpreted and received Confucianism. I will also use Philippe Couplet's writing on Daoism as a definitive example of how the neglect of Daoism in Chinese intellectual tradition prompted Ricci and the Jesuits to neglect the translation of Daoist knowledge to Europe.

Ricci's strategy of cultural accommodation sought to insert the Jesuits into the societal fabric of China alongside the literati elite in order to effectively proselytize Christianity to the Chinese. To achieve this, Ricci engaged in the Chinese intellectual traditions of syncretism and anti-syncretic scholarship to form a synthesis between Christianity and Confucianism and to distance himself from the teachings of Buddhism that were comparable to those of Christianity. By absorbing these traditions from the Chinese themselves and shaping a new synthesis of Western and Eastern thought, he translated Chinese ideas to Europe and facilitated the 16th-18th century European fascination with Confucianism. Similarly, his neglect of Daoism stemmed

from the neglect inherent in the Chinese tradition of anti-heterodox scholarship, both of which focused overwhelmingly on Buddhism. It is only much later that Couplet attempts to apply Ricci's syncretic strategy to Lao Tzu's *Dao de Jing*, but ultimately even he cannot decide whether to incorporate Daoism alongside Confucianism in one grand synthesis or to reject it as the Jesuits did Buddhism. Intent on proselytizing Christianity to the Chinese Confucian elite in the late 16th century, the Jesuit Father Matteo Ricci engaged in a process of cultural exchange and adopted the traditions of Chinese syncretism and anti-heterodox scholarship in order to present Christianity and Confucianism as compatible orthodoxies and elevate Christianity above the competing religions of Buddhism and Daoism. In turn, Chinese syncretism and anti-heterodox scholarship shaped the Jesuits' translation of Chinese ideas to Europe, which resulted in the idealization of Confucianism in the European imagination and the neglect of Daoism in European academia until the 19th century.

The Jesuit's Strategy of Cultural Accommodation

The origins of Mateo Ricci's strategy of cultural accommodation lie in the Jesuit's attempts to navigate past the strict regulations placed on foreign access to the Chinese mainland in order to proselytize directly to the Chinese peasantry. In the late 16th century, and indeed throughout much of its history, China was a closed country with an isolationist foreign policy similar to that of Tokugawa Japan. Foreigners were seen as uncultured barbarians, and their movements were strictly controlled and monitored by the Chinese government. Father Michele Ruggieri describes the difficulties the Jesuits faced in receiving permission to establish themselves inland, saying "[The Portuguese] are permitted for three months each year to engage

in trade there [in Canton/Guangzhou], but in such a manner they are not permitted to lodge on land... Nevertheless... the first time I went... *I would find favor in the sight of the Pharaoh*, that is, with one of those whom they call Mandarins who govern the city."[5] This excerpt touches on the strict regulations placed on the Portuguese in China, who enjoyed comparatively more rights than many other foreign visitors by virtue of their trade connections, effectively limiting them to the port of Macau in southeast China. To get around these restrictions, Ruggieri would seek to gain the favor of the "Mandarin," who would have been a Chinese literati official.

In the early stages of the Jesuit mission, before Ricci would become involved in the intellectual world of the literati, the missionaries relied on gift-giving in order to cultivate relationships with literati officials that governed the cities near the Portugese foothold in Macau.[6] In doing so, the Jesuits wittingly or unwittingly took advantage of Chinese traditions of friendship and the exchange of gifts and favors. Ruggieri describes these exchanges in his letters:

> Other Mandarins also gave me their friendship. Among them was a general of the army to whom I gave a clock. He wanted very much to lodge me even further inland.... Since I was gravely ill the *tu-t'ang* [the Chinese governor of the city] asked about me. The auditor [translator] replied that I was very sick, for which the *tu-t'ang* showed deep concern, and presented him with eyeglasses on my behalf, telling him that when I was cured I should return and bring him a very beautiful iron clock.... This *tu-t'ang*, by virtue of his greater authority, allowed us on rare occasions to observe the practices of their magistrates, practices which are no small impediment to the goals to which we aspire... He sent us things to eat, and sometimes money... we presented the clock to the *tu-t'ang*. It

[5] Michele Ruggieri, February 7, 1583, in *Jesuit Letters from China 1583-84*, ed. and trans. M. Howard Rienstra (Minneapolis: University of Michigan Press, 1986), 16.
[6] Jonathan D. Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci*, (New York: Viking Penguin, 1984), 179-180.

> pleased him very much as a thing of such ingenuity and completely new to China. We think he sent it to the king.[7]

These passages suggest that the Jesuits were able to leverage the curiosity that the literati showed towards them by providing gifts, the most popular of which were European mechanical clocks. In fact, Ricci would later be admitted to the capital of Beijing and have his clock presented to the Wanli Emperor (although he was barred from meeting the Emperor in person).[8] In exchange for, or to gain access to, the Jesuit's gifts and knowledge from Europe, the Chinese literati gave them privileges and gifts of their own. In this case, the official provided Ruggieri with money, food, lodging, insights into Chinese civil procedures, and, most importantly, introductions to other Chinese literati. While gift-giving would remain an important method of cultivating relationships with the literati elite, Ricci would later engage in the exchange of ideas and short publications with his close literati friends.[9] This intellectual exchange gained Ricci a reputation among the literati as a skilled debater and philosopher and introduced him to Chinese intellectual traditions, which he would explore and exploit in his mission to proselytize Christianity.[10]

In addition to cultivating relationships with the Chinese elite, the Jesuits also attempted to present themselves physically in terms familiar to the Chinese. In the city of Zhaoqing, the first inland Chinese city to host the Jesuit missionaries, Ruggieri and Ricci shaved their heads and beards and dressed as Buddhist monks. Ricci was convinced that by adopting the image of a Buddhist monk the Jesuits would be able to communicate their status as holy men but in a form

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[7] Ruggieri, *Jesuit Letters from China*, 17-18.
[8] R. Po-chia Hsia, *A Jesuit in the Forbidden City : Matteo Ricci 1552-1610*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 207, 209-210.
[9] Ana Carolina Hosne, "Friendship among Literati. Matteo Ricci SJ (1552-1610) in Late Ming China," *The Journal of Transcultural Studies* 5, no. 1 (2014), 194.
[10] Spence, *Memory Palace*, 160.

that was familiar with the Chinese. Ricci boasted "I have become a Chinaman. In our clothing, in our looks, in our manners and in everything external we have made ourselves Chinese."[11] Ricci had arrived at the decision to assume the identity of Buddhist monks because of the similarities he had perceived between Christian and Buddhist practices, namely the priestly robes, the conduct of religious services, the espousal of celibacy and poverty among the clergy, and the use of religious architecture and iconography for proselytization.[12] Thus, the image of a Buddhist monk contained many parallels with that of the Christian priest but would be much more familiar to a Chinese audience. However, as Ricci gained a greater understanding of the hierarchies within Chinese society, he realized that the Buddhist image was in fact harmful in his attempts to expand his connections among the Chinese elite.

As the Jesuit mission evolved and Ricci was able to travel closer to Beijing and the emperor's court therein, he would abandon his efforts to emulate Chinese holy men in 1592 in favor of adopting the style of the literati. This change was brought on by the realization that the literati were not only the academic and cultural elite but also the political elite, and becoming associated with this group would open doors such as the right to establish missions inland. To this end, Ricci emulated the expressions of rank and the aesthetic style of the elite:

> We have let our beards grow and our hair down to our ears; at the same time we have adopted the special dress that the literati wear on their social visits....
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> To gain greater status we do not walk along the streets on foot, but have ourselves carried in sedan chairs, on men's shoulders, as men of rank are accustomed to do. For we have great need of this type of prestige in the region, and without it would make no progress

[11] Matteo Ricci, November 24, 1585, in *Opre Storiche del P. Matteo Ricci S.I.*, vol. 2. ed. Tacchi Venturi, (Macerata, Italy: Stab. Tip. Giorgetti, 1911-1913), in Spence, *Memory Palace*, 114.
[12] Spence, *Memory Palace*, 114.

> among these gentiles: for the name of foreigners and priests is considered so vile in China that we need this and other similar devices to show them that we are not priests as vile as their own.[13]

Ricci advocated for the adoption of rituals and dress that imitated those of the literati because he wanted the Jesuits to be associated with the elites in dress, style, social status, and intellectual privilege. Indeed, the adoption of literati customs closely parallels Ricci's increasing involvement in the intellectual exchange of ideas among his growing number of literati friends, and was likely meant to enhance his reputation among them as a debater and philosopher. In addition, the second passage shows that Ricci was becoming more informed of the attitude of the literati towards Buddhist monks and thus became aware of the relatively low social status they occupied. Accordingly, Ricci stresses that the Jesuits must abandon their constructed Buddhist association and elevate themselves above the "vile" Buddhist clergy, as doing so would theoretically give the Jesuits more authority in relation to the Chinese elite and thus aid in the cultivation of further relations with them.

Ricci was able to cultivate friendships with many literati during his exploration of Southern China, but he would reach the height of his popularity upon his entry into Beijing in late 1600. Ricci was seen as "the newest social fad among the elites in Beijing," and many literati flocked to see the curious Westerner who was gaining a reputation for discussion and debate.[14] "We can say that all sorts of weighty people come and visit," observed Ricci, "and it seemed that nobody there who had any authority did not appreciate having a conversation with the fathers or having the fathers come to their houses."[15] Among his visitors were some of the

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[13] Spence, *Memory Palace*, 115.
[14] Hsia, *Jesuit in the Forbidden City*, 212, 214.
[15] Matteo Ricci, *Shi ke wenda*, trans. R. Po-Chia Hsia, in Hsia, *Jesuit in the Forbidden City*, 214.

highest government officials in the Ming court, namely three of the six ministers of state (Li Dai, Xiao Daheng, and Feng Qi) and the grand secretary (Shen Yiguan), whom he befriended through discussions about the Confucian classics, Christian virtue, and human nature (among other related topics).[16] These discussions often took the form of short publications presented as gifts among the literati, which reflects the full realization of Ricci's engagement with the Chinese tradition of friendship and gift-giving. The powerful literati who came to know Ricci for his intellect pushed him to publish translations of Christian doctrines and descriptions of Christian practices as well as translations of scientific and mathematical knowledge from the West.[17] Ricci would take full advantage of the attention he received from these powerful literati by publishing letters, treatises, and books using the Confucian canon to legitimize Christian doctrines, unwittingly emulating the pre-Ming tradition of syncretism.

Chinese Syncretism, Confucian Anti-Heterodoxy, and Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucianism

Chinese syncretism refers to the process through which elements of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism were combined to create a synthesis of two or all three religions or co-opted to serve as the means for proselytization. Upon the introduction of Buddhism to China sometime in the first century C.E., the foreign religion was accepted as another aspect of Daoism. Indeed, during the Eastern Han dynasty (C.E. 25-220) the Buddha was worshipped alongside Confucius, the Yellow Emperor, and Lao Tzu in the same temple, reflecting the

[16] Hsia, *Jesuit in the Forbidden City*, 215-218.
[17] Some of Ricci's most successful works were essays on the topic of friendship itself, such as *JiaoYou Lun, One Hundred Maxims for a Chinese Prince* which used excerpts from classical Greek and Roman authors to explain the concept of friendship found in European antiquity, and *On Friendship* which placed the European tradition in dialogue with the Chinese Confucian idea of friendship. See Ana Carolina Hosne, "Friendship among Literati. Matteo Ricci SJ (1552-1610) in Late Ming China," *The Journal of Transcultural Studies* 5, no. 1 (2014), 190-214.

syncretic characteristics of practicing religion in China.[18] Towards the end of the second century C.E., this initial assumption about Buddhism and Daoism was mythologized in a story of Lao Tzu's disappearance to the west and his conversion of "barbarians," i.e. the Indians, which justified the acceptance of the Buddha on an equal footing with the native Chinese deities. This early syncretic project reflects the ability of syncretic scholars to recognize the inherent truth in each religion, even while keeping them conceptually separate as three distinct belief-systems. Indeed, this myth was the beginning of the "Different Paths—Same Source" teaching, which held that each of the Three Ways, that is Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, were derived from a single Chinese source. During the synthetic brand of syncretism that emerged during the late-Ming dynasty, this idea was one of the two justifications for asserting the oneness of the Three Teachings, the other being the idea of "Different Paths—Same Ending".[19] Additionally, the origins of the syncretic tradition in the association of Buddhism and Daoism is a significant factor in why anti-heterodox scholars, Ricci among them, rarely if ever mention Daoism in their critiques of heterodox traditions, as Buddhism eclipsed Daoism in popularity and thus was the biggest threat to the dominance of Confucianism.

A key part of the tradition of Chinese syncretism is the strategic use of co-opting the Confucian classics to advocate for foreign religions, as the Buddhists and, much later, the Jesuits did. Mou Tzu, a Han dynasty Buddhist monk, is one of the earlier examples of using the Confucian classics as a conscious form of proselytizing. When questioned why he used the

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[18] The Yellow Emperor is the mythical Emperor Huangdi (personal name Gongsun Xuanyuan), the first Chinese emperor who is worshipped in Chinese folk religion and is a powerful figure in Chinese cultural identity. Lao Tzu is a contemporary of Confucius who authored the *Dao de Jing* and founded philosophical Daoism.

[19] Edward T. Ch'ien, *Chiao Hung and the Restructuring of Neo-Confucianism in the Late Ming,* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 2-3.

Confucian *Book of Odes* and *Book of History*[20] instead of the Buddhist sutra in his arguments, he responded "I have quoted these things... which I knew you would understand. Had I preached the words of the Buddhist scriptures... it would have been like speaking to a blind man of the five colors or playing the five sounds to a deaf man."[21] Mou's purely practical use of the Confucian text is indicative of the broader Buddho-Confucian strategy that correlated Confucian and Buddhist concepts to demonstrate the compatibility of the two teachings, lending Buddhism the authority of the Confucian canon.[22] However, Mou and the Buddho-Confucians he represented did not combine the doctrines of the two religions into one belief system, preferring instead to use Confucian concepts as a tool to preach Buddhist doctrines. This characteristically Buddhist strategic strain of the syncretic tradition would be adopted by Ricci to proselytize Christianity to the Confucian elite, which in his catechism *The True Meaning of the Lord in Heaven* would evolve into a synthesis of Christian spirituality and Confucian moral philosophy.

Accompanying this early evolution of Chinese syncretic tradition was the first concern of orthodox Confucian scholars over the introduction of heterodox beliefs that they feared would undermine the Confucian government's authority. One of the earliest anti-heterodox thinkers was Hsun Chi in the 6th century, who argued against Buddhism in political, economic, and social terms. He claimed that Buddhists "practiced abortion and murdered their offspring... indulged in wanton promiscuity, and brought confusion to the teachings. Therefore, they caused the [Liu] Song and [Southern] Qi dynasties to be crushed and destroyed [because they embraced

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[20] The *Book of Odes, Book of History, Book of Rites, Book of Changes,* and *The Spring and Autumn Annals* are the Five Classics in the Confucian canon, alongside the Four Books (*Great Learning, Doctrine of the Mean, Analects,* and *Mencius*). These works formed the core of the Confucian canon, and different interpretations and commentaries, such as those of Zhu Xi, gained and lost popularity throughout Chinese history.

[21] De Bary et. al, *Sources of the Chinese Tradition*, 279.

[22] Ch'ien, *Chiao Hung*, 7.

Buddhism].”[23] He uses intentionally inflammatory language to criticize the Buddhist disruption of the family through their emphasis on celibacy, in doing so equating the act of not having children with immorality.[24] The significance of this argument would not have been lost on Chinese scholars, as the origin of social harmony in Confucian thought is based in a large part on filial piety and familial relationships.[25] It also hints at his economic critique of Buddhism, namely that it drew people away from “worthwhile occupations” and encouraged them to “squander... wealth on unproductive activities.”[26] Finally, the connection he draws between the fall of past dynasties and their embrace of Buddhism provides a historical basis for his critique that Buddhism subverted the power of the throne, usurped imperial and ceremonial authority, and, of course, undermined the Confucian government by discouraging its members from performing their proper roles.[27] These early critiques, especially those concerned with Buddhism’s challenge to the Confucian social and governmental hierarchy, would be echoed by the orthodox scholars in the late Ming dynasty and even by the early Qing emperors.[28]

The influence of anti-heterodox scholarship experienced a significant boost under the Qing dynasty (1644-1912), possibly as an attempt to legitimize the foreign Manchu rulers by emphasizing their adherence to orthodox Confucianism. In an edict issued by the Yung-cheng

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[23] Ch'en, Kenneth, "Anti-Buddhist Propaganda During The Nan-ch'ao," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 15, no. 1/2 (1952), 191.
[24] Ch’en, “Anti-Buddhist Propaganda,” 187.
[25] The Confucian social hierarchy is in part based on the fundamental Five Relationships: father–son, husband–wife, ruler–subject, friend–friend, and elder–younger. Additionally, the practice of ancestor worship was and remains an incredibly important aspect of Chinese culture, reflecting the importance of family in Chinese cultural identity.
[26] Cohen, *China and Christianity*, 6-7.
[27] Cohen, *China and Christianity*, 6.
[28] Cohen, *China and Christianity*, 12-15.

emperor in 1727, one can see the specific reasons that Buddhism was considered a heterodox teaching:[29]

> Hitherto Buddhists and Taoists have maligned the religion of the West, and the Westerners have heaped discredit on the falsehoods of Taoism and Buddhism.... When they [the Buddhists] say that one should ignore the obligations existing between ruler and minister and disregard those between father and son, abandon the proper human relationships and return to Nirvana.... talk wildly about misery and bliss in order to agitate and deceive the ordinary people, and to avail themselves of Buddhism to cover up their treachery—this then becomes the heterodoxy within Buddhism.[30]

The close association between the Buddhists and the Daoists established in the first sentence reflects the belief of orthodox Confucian scholars that the two were similar, a consequence of the origins of syncretism described above. This passage exemplifies the anti-heterodox habit of focusing their arguments exclusively on Buddhism and implicitly extending their criticism to Daoism, rather than directly criticizing Daoist tenants. This aspect of the anti-heterodox tradition meant that Ricci and the Jesuits had much easier access to arguments against Buddhism that they could engage with than they did to information on Daoism. The Emperor goes on to explicitly state the subversion of the Confucian social order that Buddhism, and Daoism, encourage through their teachings. He also emphasizes the populist methods that they use to proselytize to

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[29] This edict was written to address the discord between the Jesuits and the Buddhists, who accused each other of heterodoxy. The document was meant to establish that both Christianity and Buddhism were heterodox in their diversion from the Confucian "truth." For Christianity, this was the claim that heaven, *tian*, manifested itself on earth as a man. The same Yung-cheng emperor also composed what is perhaps the most widely publicized document in anti-heterodox thought, the *Sacred Edict* (*Sheng-yü kuang-hsün)*. See Cohen, *China and Christianity*, 10-13.

[30] *Yung-cheng shang-yü* (Edicts of the Yung-cheng Emperor), comp. Chang T'ing-yü, trans. Paul A. Cohen, (Beijing: 24 ts'e; 1741). in Cohen, *China and Christianity*, 14.

the common people, referring to their belief in reincarnation and enlightenment as deception meant to agitate the commoners into potentially revolting against the Confucian order. Here we see heterodoxy defined as anything that subverts the truth of the Confucian canon, which the emperor goes on to extend to Christianity and even wayward Confucian scholars, perhaps referencing the syncretist Neo-Confucianism of the previous Ming dynasty.

The brand of Confucianism that dominated Ming China, and was then considered orthodox by Confucian scholars, wasn't formed until the late 12th century in the writings of Zhu Xi. Zhu created a synthesis between Daoist cosmology, Buddhist spiritualism, and Confucian teachings to create a version of Confucianism that provided spiritual fulfillment as well as instructions on moral cultivation. In doing so, he explicitly defined which aspects of Daoism and Buddhism could be incorporated into the Confucian orthodoxy and which aspects were fundamentally incompatible with Confucian beliefs, which in turn enabled Confucian scholars to criticize the other religions more authoritatively. Zhu's focus on this separation likely stems from his extensive background in Daoist and Buddhist studies, an influence so strong that he used Chan Buddhist ideas in his civil service examinations, which made him acutely aware of Confucianism's comparative lack of spiritual fulfillment.[31] Despite this heterodox influence, his focus remained on the characteristically Confucian idea of moral self-cultivation, and the Daoist and Buddhist principles he incorporated were changed to explicitly fit into this Neo-Confucian model.[32] Zhu's Neo-Confucianism grew in popularity during the Southern Song dynasty (1127-1279) and subsequent Yuan dynasty (1279-1368), during which his edition of the *Four*

[31] Kirill Thompson, "Zhu Xi, " *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2020 Edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, last modified September 17, 2020. <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/zhu-xi/>.
[32] The term "Neo-Confucian" is a western invention used to refer to the revitalization of Confucianism by Zhu Xi. As such, there is no separation between Neo-Confucian and Confucian thought in Chinese writing, as the former is considered a development of traditional Confucian ideas.

Books (part of the Confucian canon alongside the *Five Classics*) became the basis of the imperial examination system that endured until the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1912.[33] Accordingly, despite the syncretic origins of Zhu's Neo-Confucian philosophy, his critiques of Buddhism and Daoism came to reflect the general Neo-Confucian criticism that occasionally manifested in political and academic purges of heterodox thought.

Apart from his specific attempts to separate his own Neo-Confucian philosophy with similar ideas in Daoism and Buddhism, Zhu Xi's criticism largely echoes the writings of earlier critics. Although taking a far more conciliatory approach than Hsun Chi, Zhu's criticism follows similar themes and largely focuses on Buddhism and Daoism's lack of social and political engagement and rejection of Confucian social and ethical norms. He says "Buddhism had already broken with human relations. But Chan [Buddhism], right from its start, completely eradicated moral pattern-principles, leaving no trace."[34] The "moral pattern-principles" Zhu refers to here are mainly in reference to the Confucian patterns of the world, society, people, and proper conduct, including the "five relationships" that guarantee social harmony.[35] In essence, these patterns constitute the social hierarchies that ruled Chinese society and were held up by Confucian scholars as the pillars of social harmony and just rule. Zhu argues that Buddhism's rejection of the established Confucian hierarchy and lack of social engagement not only render it a less authoritative belief system but also implicitly present it as a threat to social harmony and peace. Even so, one can see Zhu's loosely structured hierarchy of heterodox thought beginning to

[33] Thompson, "Zhu Xi."
[34] Zhu Xi, *Zhu Xi: Selected Writings*, trans. Philip J. Ivanhoe, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019),142.
[35] Thompson, "Zhu Xi."

form through his implication that Buddhism broadly leaves room for the Confucian hierarchy while Chan Buddhism firmly rejects it.

While he broadly condemns Buddhism, Zhu retains a certain respect for Daoism, specifically the Daoist philosopher Zhuang Zhou (Zhuangzi), even while criticizing its rejection of Confucian social norms:

> I do not know from whom [Zhuangzi] received the transmission, but he himself had insight into the Way itself.... I think that the source [of his ideas] must have been received from a follower in the Confucian school. Later, any of the good points in Buddhist teachings all came from Zhuangzi. However, Zhuangzi's knowledge was not perfected, because his practice lacked a certain refinement. Within a short time, all his teachings degenerated....
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> It was asked, "What is the difference between Buddhist non-being and Daoist non-being?" [Zhu Xi] replied, "The Daoists still have being. This is seen in the line, 'Be without desires to see its mysteries; have desires to see its manifestations.' The Buddhists, however, take Heaven and Earth to be an illusion and the Four Elements [earth, water, fire and wind] to be transitory and unreal. That is complete non-being.[36]

In these passages, Zhu clearly seeks to elevate Daoism above Buddhism in terms of its understanding of the (Confucian) "Way" and in doing so claims that it presents a far lesser threat to the Confucian social order than Buddhism. The construction of this hierarchy is especially evident in his claim that Zhuangzi must have had a Confucian master who imparted his own orthodox understanding of the Way which was only confused and diminished by Zhuangzi's own

[36] Zhu, *Zhu Xi: Selected Writings*, 143-144.

failures as a scholar. He further hints at the similarities between the Daoist and Confucian beliefs in the second passage, where Zhu attempts to highlight the sameness of Daoist and Confucian cosmological beliefs and compares them to the drastically different characteristics of Buddhist cosmology. The effects of this strategy are that Daoism is relegated to a space in between orthodox Confucianism and heterodox Buddhism, retaining the legitimacy of Confucianism by association with the Confucian canon but being associated with Buddhism via the origins of Chinese syncretism discussed above. Zhu further reinforces this association by claiming that the best points of Buddhism originate with Daoism, reflecting the close association between the two religions and the primacy of Daoism within this relationship. Thus, Daoism occupies a relatively ignored conceptual space in terms of the battle in between the two rival philosophies. As a result of this ambiguity, Ricci was completely silent on Daoism and the Jesuits would only broach the subject in a brief section of Philippe Couplet's *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*.

While Zhu Xi's writings still had considerable influence in late-Ming Neo-Confucian philosophy, the Jesuits would arrive at a time when Neo-Confucianism was in the midst of being transformed by a resurgence in Daoist insight and influence.[37] Specifically, this transformation would take the form of an evolution of traditional Chinese syncretism, which argued for the universal truth of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, but acknowledged them as distinct and separate religions, into an explicit synthesis of the "Three Ways". The first notable and popular cult of this synthetic syncretism was founded by Lin Chao-en, who organized the Three Ways into a beginning, middle, and end. Specifically, he claimed that Confucianism "establishes the basis," Taoism "enters the gate," and Buddhism "makes principles ultimate." By mastering this

[37] Thompson, "Zhu Xi."

orderly process of cultivation, one could finally realize that "the teachings of Confucius, Lao Tzu, and Shakyamuni all have the beginning, middle, and end," or in other words that truth is contained in all three teachings.[38] As part of this project, Lin had to explain away the differences and incompatibilities between the three teachings as "errors," which put him in direct conflict with the orthodox scholars in debates over the authority of the Confucian beliefs. Other contemporary Ming syncretists such as Chiao Hung would also engage in this debate with orthodox Confucian scholars, eventually igniting larger purges of the government ranks of heterodox scholars by the dominant orthodox literati.[39] These opposing forces created an environment Ricci exploited in order to, on the one hand, engage in a syncretic project to proselytize Christianity to the syncretist cults of the literati and, on the other hand, harshly criticize Buddhism to gain support from the conservative anti-heterodox literati.

Ricci's Syncretism: a Synthesis of Confucianism and Christianity

Translation lay at the very heart of the Jesuit mission in China, and among the first translations they had to puzzle out was the name for the Christian god, as the Latin term *Dio* could not be translated phonetically into Chinese.[40] The first translation is derived from the Chinese character *tian*, meaning heaven, which in Ricci's words the Chinese "attribute[d] everything to.... it is like their father from whom they receive everything."[41] One of the first Chinese converts by the name of Cheng suggested that the Jesuits use the word *tianzhu*, *tian*

[38] Ch'ien, *Chiao Hung*, 15, 118.
[39] Ch'ien, *Chiao Hung*, 118-119.
[40] Ana Carolina Hosne, "Dios, Dio, Viracocha, Tianzhu: 'Finding' and 'Translating' the Christian God in the Overseas Jesuit Missions (16th-18th centuries)," in *The Rites Controversy in the Early Modern World*, ed. Ines Zupanov and Pierre-Antoine Fabre, (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2018), 323.
[41] Matteo Ricci, *Opere Storiche,* 402. in Ana Hosne, "Dios, Dio, Viracocha, Tianzhu," 330.

meaning heaven and *zhu* meaning lord or master (e.g. the Lord of Heaven). Ricci would canonize this translation in his Chinese catechism *Tianzhu Shiyi*, or *The True Meaning of the Lord in Heaven*.[42] The character *tian* is central to Chinese belief and appears in texts on all three of the major Chinese religions, constituting an ambiguous higher power seeped in ancient folklore. This translation for the Christian god would eventually be used in China to refer to Christianity itself, a fact which showcases its effectiveness.[43] The other translation that Ricci canonized in his catechism is the word *shangdi*, *shang* meaning high and *di* meaning lord (e.g. the Lord on High), which is a term found in the Confucian classics to refer to an ambiguous higher power.[44] Thus, the two Jesuit translations for the word "God" reinvented and reinterpreted terms already familiar to the Chinese. The *tianzhu* translation reflects Ricci's skill at constructing a synthesis between Christian and Confucian concepts, while the *shangdi* translation showcases his strategic use of the Confucian texts to legitimize Christian doctrines.

Ricci also engaged in the translation of Christian images to aid in his telling of the Gospel stories. Cheng Dayue's "Ink Garden," a collection of images published in 1606 to showcase Cheng's mastery of ink-cake manufacturing, contains three images of the gospels with an accompanying text and showcases the visual side of Ricci's translation efforts.[45] The first of these pictures depicts the passage from the Gospel according to Matthew 14:22-33, which describes Jesus walking on water towards a boat containing his disciples, Peter hastily jumping out to meet him before sinking, and finally Jesus lifting him out of the water (fig.1). In the image, copied from Ricci's original by a Chinese artist, one can see the combination of a Western

[42] Ana Hosne, "Dios, Dio, Viracocha, Tianzhu," 331.
[43] Ana Hosne, "Dios, Dio, Viracocha, Tianzhu," 331.
[44] Mungello, *Curious Land*, 61-62.
[45] "Ink Garden of the Cheng Family," The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Accessed November 11, 2020, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/77119.

aesthetic with that of the Chinese. The Chinese influence is most striking in the facial features of the figures, especially the narrow eyes of Jesus and Peter.[46] Peter's facial hair contrasts sharply with that of the other figures and more closely resembles figures in classical Chinese paintings than those in the European tradition. Through these characteristics, one can clearly see the Chinese artist adapting the original print to suit his own art style and, by extension, the aesthetics of Chinese painting. The image is accompanied by a description in Chinese authored by Ricci translated into two paragraphs. The first is a retelling of the Bible story, while the second, reproduced below, is of Ricci's own invention:

> A man who has strong faith in the Way can walk on the yielding water as if on solid rock, but if he goes back to doubting, then the water will go back to its true nature, and how can he stay brave? When the wise man follows heaven's decrees, fire does not burn him, a sword does not cut him, water does not drown him. Why should wind or waves worry him? This first follower doubted so that we might believe; one man's moment of doubt can serve to end the doubts of all those millions who come after him. If he had been made to doubt, our faith would have been without foundation. Therefore we give thanks for his faith as we give thanks for his doubts.[47]

Ricci takes advantage of the lack of a Chinese translation of the Bible at this time to fit in this second passage, which explicitly interprets the Gospel story in a way that would be familiar to the literati. His "wise man" is an allusion to the sages of China's philosophical tradition, especially those of Confucianism and Daoism.[48] His description of the wise man as "following

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[46] Ricci translated Peter's name as "Bo-do-lo," the closest he could get phonetically to the name Pietro, Pedro, or Petrus.
[47] Matteo Ricci, *Li Madou ti baoxiang tu* [Ricci's commentaries on the sacred pictures] in Spence, *Memory Palace*, 62.
[48] Spence, *Memory Palace*, 62.

heaven's decrees" is his attempt to associate the character *tian* with Jesus, drawing a parallel between the Chinese concept of heaven and the Christian god. Thus, Ricci explicitly connects concepts from the Confucian canon to the Gospel story, drawing parallels to Christian concepts and presenting a synthesis of Confucian and Christian ideals to his literati audience.

The primary example of Ricci's synthesis of Confucianism and Christianitity is his catechism *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, published in 1603. Written as a dialogue between a Westerner and a Chinese scholar, Ricci's book builds upon earlier works by his mentor Alessandro Valignano by adapting the use of Western rational philosophy to discredit pantheistic (e.g. Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist) concepts of a divine being.[49] He also adds to these strategies by using the Confucian classics to prove the arguments derived from Western philosophy, thereby legitimizing the Christian god and delegitimizing the pantheistic deities using the Confucian canon. Ricci encapsulates this strategy in the introduction to the book, where he writes,

> All doctrines of peaceful and just rule depend on the principle of oneness; therefore the sages admonish officials to be loyal. What is loyalty but devotion to the one [lord]. Among the Five Human Relationships, the most important concerns the ruler, and the relationship between the ruler and his official represents the first of the Three Bonds....

Interestingly, Daoist "wise men" and sages had long been associated with magic and immortality. Daoist magicians and diviners are prevalent in many examples of Chinese literature such as the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* and *Bandits of the Marsh*. Ricci's use of the allusion suggests that he was, at this time at least, unfamiliar with the connection.

[49] Valignano's 1582 catechism for the Jesuit mission in Japan, the *Catechismus Japonensis,* is believed by some scholars to be the template for Ricci's catechism. Valignano focused on providing rational and logical arguments for the existence of the Christian God and the immortality of the soul, as well as philosophically debating the legitimacy of native Japanese religions, before describing particular Christian doctrines. Ricci would adopt this pragmatic approach by necessity, tweaking it to fit into the Confucian template. See Thierry Meynard, "The overlooked connection between Ricci's Tianzhu shiyi and Valignano's Catechismus Japonensis," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* Vol. 40, No. 2 (2013), 305.

> Every country has a lord; can it be that only heaven and earth have two lords? A country is unified under one lord, how can heaven and earth have two lords? A gentleman cannot but know and reflect upon the origins of the universe and the source of creation.[50]

The passage uses the logical argument that oneness or unity is the key for prosperity and just rule, and therefore there must be just one deity who rules over both heaven and earth as one realm. This argument is enhanced by his use of the Confucian relationship between ruler and official, using the concepts of the Five Human Relationships and the Three Bonds, to explain the Christian ideal of the relationship between god and the faithful.[51] The final sentence ties these ideas together by claiming that a learned Confucian gentleman would accept this logical synthesis as truth, giving Ricci space to convince his audience to accept the larger syncretic argument he presents in the rest of the book.

In the dialogue between the Westerner and the Chinese scholar, Ricci's catechism follows a logical line of reasoning designed to convince his Chinese audience of the truth of certain simplified tenants of Christian belief. Chapter one builds upon the ideas in the introduction to logically establish the rule of a single deity rather than a pantheon of gods. Chapters two, four, five, and parts of six and seven are devoted to refuting the divine figures in Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism and to attacking Buddhism more broadly, especially the concepts of reincarnation and non-violence, which will be discussed in the next section of this paper. Chapter three establishes the Christian doctrine of the immortal soul and the dialogue is based on a

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[50] Matteo Ricci, *Tianzhu Shiyi : The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, trans. R. Po-Chia Hsia, in Hsia, *Jesuit in the Forbidden City*, 225.

[51] The Three Bonds were a development of Confucian philosophy during the early Han empire, and emphasize the ruler-subject, father-son, and husband-wife relationships. These three relationships were considered natural expressions of yin and yang rather than social constructs, although in Confucius' original text they were only explicitly listed in the Five Human Relationships, which was itself a template for proper social hierarchies.

conversation Ricci had with Feng Qi, one of the six high officials in the Ming court. This conversation largely consists of a lament by the Chinese scholar that animals seem happier than humans and a comparison with the Buddhist idea of the afterlife.[52] Ricci's long reply is grounded in Western theology, using the Aristotelian idea of a hierarchy of souls which placed human souls at the top. He developed his argument in three key arenas: an analysis of human desires, "from the diversity of the natural desires and inclinations which show that our soul is a spiritual substance"; an analysis of knowledge, "from the way of knowing and understanding things that the author of nature has impressed into the human mind"; and, in an abrupt departure from the two preceding concepts, the establishment of the fundamental truth of the blessing of humans "from the special providence of the one God on High."[53] He especially stresses the last point, as this is the basis for the Christian concept of an immortal human soul destined for eternal punishment or reward in heaven or hell.[54] While Ricci primarily draws on Western theology in this chapter, in the next several chapters he introduces Confucian sources to critique the Buddhist concept of the immortal soul that is bound in a cycle of reincarnation, enhancing his argument for the Christian concept of the immortal soul. I will discuss these chapters in the next section of the paper. After this brief detour, Ricci elaborates on the Christian concept of the immortal soul and free will by connecting them with similar Confucian ideas.

Chapter six, titled "An explanation of why man cannot be free of intentions, and a discussion of the reward of good and evil in heaven and hell after death," builds on the concept of the immortal soul in chapter three and also introduces the concept of free will and salvation. The chapter opens with the Chinese scholar asking,

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[52] Hsia, *Jesuit in the Forbidden City*, 229.
[53] Meynard, "The overlooked connection," 316.
[54] Hsia, *Jesuit in the Forbidden City*, 229.

> But surely talk of heaven and hell has no place in the teachings of the Lord of Heaven. To persuade people to do good or to prohibit them from doing evil because of the gain or loss that will accrue from such conduct is to try to profit from good deeds and to avoid harm by refraining from evil; it is not to delight in goodness or to hate evil, which should be one's true ambition. Our ancient sages taught men not to discuss profit, but only humanity and righteousness.[55]

Here, the scholar highlights the ethical dilemma of using threats and coercion to achieve good behavior, arguing that this strategy encourages profit-based decision-making rather than genuine moral righteousness. Ricci replies by explaining the Catholic doctrine of free will through the Confucian ideal of sincerity, saying "Confucianism regards sincerity as the foundation for rectification of the mind, for self-cultivation, for the regulation of the family, for the ordering of the state, and for the bringing of peace to the world."[56] He argues that free will occupies a similar foundational space in the world, using this basis to claim that free will is the origin of all intentions and actions, which are then rendered indistinguishable in moral terms. By equating these two terms, Ricci permits the Chinese scholar to draw upon Confucian debates to enhance his understanding of Christian doctrine. This strategy also lends the authority of the Confucian canon to Ricci's argument, and connects Confucian and Christian concepts in a way that highlights their similarities. The chapter continues weaving this synthesis as the Westerner and the Chinese scholar debate the meaning of the *Book of History* and *The Spring and Autumn Annals*, and the Westerner uses theatrical metaphors to elaborate on the doctrine of the immortal

[55] Matteo Ricci, *Tianzhu Shiyi* ,in Hsia, *Jesuit in the Forbidden City*, 232-233.
[56] Matteo Ricci, *Tianzhu Shiyi* ,in Hsia, *Jesuit in the Forbidden City*, 233.

soul and the concepts of heaven and hell.[57] These examples illustrate Ricci's attempts to present Christianity to his Chinese audience as a religion that is compatible with Confucian doctrines and ideas. As he engages with this syncretic process, he produces a synthesis of Christianity and Confucianism that combines Confucian moral philosophy with Christian spiritualism and cosmology. This emphasis Confucian moral philosophy and preoccupation with moral cultivation resulted in Ricci's conception of Confucianism as a secular moral philosophy, which in turn was reflected in the Jesuit portrayal of Confucius as a secular philosopher in Europe which I will discuss later in this paper. To defend the orthodoxy of this synthesis, Ricci engaged in anti-Buddhist scholarship alongside orthodox Confucian scholars in order to emphasize the differences between Christianity and Buddhism.[58]

Ricci's Involvement in Anti-Heterodox Scholarship

As early as 1585 Ricci had begun to gain a fairly accurate understanding of the late-Ming synthetic evolution of Chinese syncretism, which explicitly combined the Three Ways into one overarching belief-system, and aligned himself firmly against it. Through his interactions with the literati, Ricci observed that "the commonest opinion held here among those who consider themselves the most wise is to say that all three of those sects come together as one, and that you can hold them all at once; in this way they deceive themselves and others and lead to great disorder by its appearing to them that as far as religion is concerned the more ways of talking

[57] The theatrical references would have had a wide appeal to Ricci's Chinese audience, as the 16th century was the great age of Chinese drama and witnessed the development of the Kun opera in particular. See Hsia, *Jesuit in the Forbidden City*, 234.

[58] Ana Carolina Hosne, "From Catechisms to Prayer Books in the Early Jesuit China Mission: Tracing the Images the Chinese 'should and should not venerate' (16th-17th centuries)" in *Translating Catechisms, Translating Cultures : The Expansion of Catholicism in the Early Modern World*, ed. Antje Flüchter and Rouven Wirbser (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2017), 319.

about religion there are, all the more benefit will that bring to the kingdom."[59] Here, Ricci describes the brand of syncretism that was popular among the literati and expresses his characteristically Christian rejection of the idea that truth can be expressed in multiple religions, let alone multiple non-Christian religions. Indeed, Ricci found fault not only with late-Ming syncretism but also Zhu Xi's brand of Neo-Confucianism, which contained elements of Daoist cosmology and Buddhist spirituality that Ricci sought to discard in favor of Christian theology and spirituality. Even so, his critique of the heterodox influences in Neo-Confucianism fell broadly within the bounds of contemporary orthodox Chinese criticism and, as he was deeply involved in a syncretic project himself, his criticism did not extend to the Confucian texts themselves. In fact, during the Qing dynasty Chinese scholars would follow a similar path of renewed interest in the original Confucian texts rather than the interpretations of later sages like Zhu Xi.[60]

Ricci includes his criticism of the Three Ways in chapter two of *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, where he refutes all Chinese ideas of divinity while also giving the Confucian concept of the divine room to be synthesized into Christianity. Indeed, he immediately rejects the Buddhist and Daoist concepts of "nothingness" and "emptiness" as the origin of the universe, similar to Zhu Xi's criticism of "nonbeing."[61] Despite this similarity, most of the chapter is devoted to building an argument against Zhu Xi's interpretation of creation and the materialist philosophy of Neo-Confucianism, which described a "self-generating universe, born out of undivided matter, the Supreme Ultimate [*taiji*, a Confucian concept of the divine], the forces of

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[59] "FR, Fonti Ricciane," *Storia dell'Introduzione del Cristianesimo in Cina* [The annotated version of Ricci's original manuscript of the Historia] vol. 3, ed. Pasquale M. d'Elia S.J., (Rome: 1942-49), in Spence, *Memory Palace*, 117.
[60] Mungello, *Curious Land*, 59-64.
[61] Hsia, *Jesuit in the Forbidden City*, 227.

yin and yang, and the five elements."[62] These principles are united in Zhu Xi's concept of *li*, borrowed from Buddhist texts, which Ricci would refute by interpreting the original words of Confucius in a different way:

> Our Lord of Heaven (*tianzhu*) is the Emperor on High (*shangdi*) mentioned in the ancient texts. In the *Doctrine of the Mean*, Confucius is quoted as saying: 'The ceremonies of sacrifices to Heaven and Earth are meant for the Emperor on High.' Zhu Xi comments that not mentioning Emperor Earth was for the sake of brevity. In my humble opinion Confucius wanted to say that the One [i.e. Emperor on High] cannot be mistaken for duality.[63]

Ricci quotes the ancient text verbatim to suggest a new interpretation that contradicts those of Zhu Xi. This strategy gives his argument for the existence of a single (Christian) God the authority of the Confucian canon and also serves to position Christianity as more true to the original words of Confucius himself than Zhu's Neo Confucian interpretation. Interestingly, Ricci wraps up his chapter with a metaphor, saying that "perhaps there are still some things that the Chinese do not see: they worship heaven instead of the Lord of Heaven the way a foreigner comes to the imperial capital, and on seeing the magnificent palaces kneels down in prostration, mistaking the buildings for the person of the emperor."[64] Here we see the logical conclusion of the translation of *tian* and *tianzhu* in Ricci's thinking, which encapsulates Ricci's argument that Confucius had a concept of a single divine entity, but that his original insight was lost in subsequent interpretations.[65] This metaphor also positions Ricci as a cultural insider rather than

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[62] Hsia, *Jesuit in the Forbidden City*, 228.
[63] Matteo Ricci, *Tianzhu Shiyi* ,in Hsia, *Jesuit in the Forbidden City*, 228.
[64] Hsia, *Jesuit in the Forbidden City*, 229.
[65] Mungello, *Curious Land*, 63-64.

as a foreign outsider, which reflects the continuation of his attempts to become accepted as part of Chinese elite society.

An overwhelming amount of Ricci's participation in the denunciation of heterodoxy is focused on Buddhism, following the trend within anti-heterodox scholarship established earlier in this paper.[66] Ricci was concerned with creating an explicit separation between Buddhism and Christianity not only to downplay the similarities between the two religions, which he had at first sought to highlight in the early days of the Jesuit mission, but also to align Christianity with orthodox Confucianism.[67] Examples of this strategy are evident in chapters four, five, six, and seven of the *True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, and constitute a criticism of the Buddhist pantheon and the doctrines of reincarnation and pacifism. In chapter five, Ricci attacks the Buddhist principles of reincarnation, vegetarianism, and the rule against the killing of animals in one inter-related argument.[68] This argument is based on Confucian morals and the importance of filial piety as a central tenet of morality. First, he establishes that Buddhists advocate non-killing because animals could be the earthly reincarnation of one's parents, and thus would contradict the values of filial piety. However, he goes on to say according to this logic one would have to abandon agriculture, since it would also be offensive to ride and yoke beasts of burden that could be reincarnations of one's parents. He also claims that the doctrine of reincarnation contradicts other Confucian ethics, arguing that marrying a woman who could be the reincarnation of one's mother would be an act of incest and that employing a servant who could be a reincarnation of one's father would undermine the hierarchy of the Five Relationships.[69] His focus on

[66] Mungello, *Curious Land*, 68-70.
[67] Hosne, "From Catechisms to Prayer Books," 319.
[68] Hosne, "From Catechisms to Prayer Books," 320.
[69] Hsia, *Jesuit in the Forbidden City*, 231.

reincarnation reflects his ambition to contrast the Buddhist and Christian concepts of the immortal soul, and argues that the Christian concept, unlike the Buddhist concept, is compatible with Confucian values. This association further synthesizes Christian and Confucian cosmology at the expense of Buddhism. In short, he uses a novel argument making use of Western logic to echo the traditional orthodox claim that Buddhism undermines the social hierarchies established by Confucianism in order to contrast Buddhism's heterodoxy with Christianity's apparent orthodoxy.

Ricci's harsh criticism of Buddhism provoked some Buddhist scholars to react in open letters to Ricci, which he simply used to affirm his critiques of Buddhism. The scholar Yu Chunxi wrote an open letter in response to Ricci's *Ten Discourses of the Man of Paradox*,[70] another of Ricci's writings constructing the Christian-Confucian alliance against Buddhist heterodoxy, chastising Ricci for his uninformed criticism:

> I have heard recently that you, sir, who hail from the West, look down on Siddhartha [Buddha]: is this not similar to the people of ancient Lu dismissing Confucius out of familiar contempt?... it seems that you have not flipped through the books [of Buddha] and do not understand their meanings.... I dare to invite you to peruse the entire Buddhist Canon issued by the emperor, to classify all the points of similarity and difference, to criticise the shortcomings, and then to publish a book.... But I see you do not do this, saying instead slanderous remarks that make other people laugh behind your back. Have you no better plan?.. Please start reading these books....[71] Find out the subtleties and

[70] This book, first published in 1608, is a collection of conversations Ricci had with some of the most influential intellectuals in China over Confucianism, Christianity, ethics, culture, and social values.
[71] Namely: *Zong jing lu (Selection of the Mirrors of Eminent Monks), Jie fa yin (Exposition on Buddhist Rules), Xi yu ji (History of the Western Region), Gao zeng zhuan (Biographies of Eminent Monks),* and *Fa yuan zhu lin (Trees from the Park of Dharma).*

> arguments, if only to begin to offer an apology.... [The Confucian philosophers] Lu Xiangshan and Wang Yingming have transmitted Buddhist learnings, and yet their statues are honored in Confucian temples: thus we know that Buddhist scriptures are similar to the teachings of neo-Confucianism.[72]

Yu opens by using an example from Chinese, and more specifically Confucian, history to establish his own authority as a Buddho-Confucian scholar and criticize Ricci in terms familiar to his audience of Chinese literati. He then attacks Ricci's reputation among the literati as a philosopher and a scholar by accusing him of rushing to conclusions and demonstrating a willful ignorance of Buddhist teachings. He even goes so far as to give Ricci a reading list so that he can educate himself in order to more clearly differentiate Christianity with Buddhism and make informed criticisms of the latter. Within this calculated critique, his invocation of the emperor as a source for the Buddhist Canon alludes to Buddhism's long history in China and its ties to past dynasties, lending more historic weight to his defense of Buddhism. He closes by highlighting the history of Chinese syncretism by using two specific examples of respected Neo-Confucian scholars who were involved in spreading Buddhist teachings to undermine Ricci's attempts to segregate Christian-Confucianism and Buddhism. In short, Yu adopts elements of syncretism to highlight the historical connection between China, Confucianism, and Buddhism in order to undermine Ricci's syncretic arguments and anti-heterodox critiques and attack his legitimacy as a scholar.

Ricci responded by reiterating his arguments from *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* and by undermining Yu's historical arguments for the harmonious position of Buddhism

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[72] Lu Chunxi, *Li Madou Zhong wen ju xi ji*, ed. Zhu Weijing, trans. R. Po-Chia Hsia, (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2001), in Hsia, *Jesuit in the Forbidden City*, 270-271.

in Chinese society. He begins by claiming that his opposition to Buddhism stems from his own Christian beliefs rather than a desire to pander to the Confucian literati, saying "of the Ten Commandments I obey, one of them forbids slander.... I hold firmly to the commandments with all my heart, and judge everything according to them. I affirm the sages for they taught moral cultivation of the self and worship of the God on High, *Shangdi*; I negate Buddha, for he disobeyed *Shangdi* and wished to put himself in his stead."[73] He seizes the opportunity to construct the Ten Commandments as pillars of virtue, an attractive concept to his literati audience, and connects them to the moral teachings of the Confucian sages and his own interpretation of *Shangdi* from the Confucian text itself. He uses this connection to deny the charge of slander, explain his criticism of Buddhism, and reject Lu's implication that he is simply using Confucianism as a tool of proselytization. Ricci goes on to reinforce this argument by equating Buddha's usurpation of the one true god to a disruption in the natural hierarchy of relationships, alluding once again to the Five Relationships and the connection between the lord and his subject as a cornerstone of social harmony. He solidifies his own status as an ally of orthodox Confucianism when he says "the sutras are full of obscure, contrived, and arcane meanings... [they] have usurped orthodox institutions and laws and yet remain unorthodox. How can officials [of orthodox rule] praise their culture and civilization?"[74] Here Ricci portrays himself as an orthodox scholar, a strategy meant to align his simplified version of Christianity, contained in the pages of the *True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, with orthodox Confucianism.

[73] Ricci, *Li Madou*, in Hsia, *Jesuit in the Forbidden City*, 270-271.
[74] Ricci, *Li Madou*, in Hsia, *Jesuit in the Forbidden City*, 272-273.

Ricci continues by defending his image as a Confucian scholar and making further attacks against the Buddhists. Following a brief overview of his arguments against the Buddhist idea of heaven and hell, he says:

> For all religions that seek to spread their teachings far and wide, they all depend on reason and intelligent scholars. Once the religion has been introduced and many writings are produced, people would begin to believe. What is important is to know the origins and end in order to determine what is correct and incorrect. The difference between Buddhists and people like me is this: they are empty, I am practical; they are selfish, I am public spirited; they split into many paths, I stay true to the one origin... They disobey [God], I serve [God].... Moreover, it has been two thousand years since Buddhism was introduced to China... Yet, the morality of your esteemed country is no better than the three dynasties of antiquity.[75]

Ricci uses the first three sentences to present a defense against the charge of slander by alluding to the Confucian veneration of the ancient texts, the source of all following scholars' interpretations of the sages' wisdom, which also serves to legitimize his own interpretation of the Confucian canon. He then makes attacks against the Buddhist concepts of non-being (they are empty), reincarnation (they are selfish), the lack of a strong central Buddhist teaching (they split), and finally Buddhist polytheism (they disobey). Again, this list of criticism reflects that of historical and contemporary Confucian scholars, and focuses heavily on Buddhism's rejection of the material world and the Confucian social order. He ends by undermining Lu's historical argument by claiming that Buddhism has not enhanced the morality of China in its long history,

[75] Ricci, *Li Madou*, in Hsia, *Jesuit in the Forbidden City*, 272-273.

implying its inferiority to both Christianity and Confucianism. Ultimately, his letter is an example of his participation in the anti-heterodox Confucian tradition, his ambition to synthesize Confucianism and Christianity into one orthodoxy, and, ironically, his use of syncretism to proselytize Christianity.

Ricci was much more ambiguous about his opinions of Daoism, likely due to the fact that Daoism did not present a significant threat to Christian tenets and the lack of attention that contemporary Chinese anti-heterodox scholars paid to Daoism in comparison with Buddhism. He wholly ignored philosophical Daoism and tended to lump religious Daoism together with Buddhism in the manner of the Confucian critics.[76] In addition to the influence of the anti-heterodox tradition on Ricci's conception of Daoism, this ignorance can in part be attributed to Ricci's all-consuming focus on the Confucian classics as a tool of proselytization. In the previously mentioned response to Yu, Ricci states his intentions clearly: "Since entering China, I have learned only of Yao, Shun, the Duke of Zhou and Confucius and I do not intend to change." [77] Another way to explain Ricci's ambivalence towards Daoism may lie in his understanding of how the Chinese literati perceived him. Ricci was attributed in many of his works as *Li Madou shanren* (Ricci the Mountain Recluse), a practice in part stemming from his own signature *Da Xi yu shanren* (Man of the Mountain of the Great Western Region) in one of his earlier works written for one of his literati friends.[78] The term *shanren* was often used in the Chinese literary tradition and was associated with literati who did not occupy a formal government office. These

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[76] Mengello, *Curious Land*, 70.
[77] Matteo Ricci, *Li Madou Zhong wen ju xi ji*, ed. Zhu Weijing, trans. Jaques Gernet, (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2001), in Jacques Gernet, *China and the Christian Impact : A Conflict of Cultures,* (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire] ; New York : Paris: Cambridge University Press ; Editions De La Maison Des Sciences De L'homme, 1985), 214.
[78] Haun Saussy, "Matteo Ricci the Daoist," in *Cross-cultural Studies: China and the World : A Festschrift in Honor of Professor Zhang Longxi*, ed. Qian Suoqiao, (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2015), 187.

hermit-scholars, who were schooled in the manner of the literati elite but rejected their political responsibilities in the material world, were in turn associated with Daoism.[79] While Ricci likely used this term to express a humble awareness of his place in Chinese society, the label associated him with Daoism and resulted in many of his friends and opponents alike viewing him as a pseudo-Daoist sage rather than as a Confucian scholar.[80] It appears that Ricci was content with this label and devoted his energies to distancing himself from Buddhism instead, leaving much more room for later Jesuit scholars to further examine Daoism themselves.

The Presentation of Chinese Philosophy and Religion to Europe

The political and religious upheaval as well as the influence of the Renaissance on the educational institutions of Europe in the late 16th to the 17th centuries created a very receptive audience for the Jesuit's translation of Confucianism. The importance of classical philosophers, especially Aristotle, in the Middle Scholasticism and Humanistic education that dominated European universities was a great boon to Ricci, who strategically placed Confucius foremost among the philosophers of antiquity.[81] This move associated Confucianism with highly respected traditions in both philosophy and education, giving it academic authority based on ideas familiar to educated Europeans. The Reformation resulted in a drastic decrease in the power of the Catholic Church and its moral authority as well as devastating religious wars, most notably the Thirty Years War (1618-1648). These events would do much to lead European intellectuals towards Ricci's depiction of the moralistically ordered and peaceful Chinese state as a better

[79] Hsia, *Jesuit in the Forbidden City*, 156.
[80] Saussy, "Matteo Ricci the Daoist," 190.
[81] Mungello, *Curious Land*, 25.

model of social harmony.[82] The importance of moral development for Protestants made Confucianism even more attractive as a tool of individual moral cultivation. Ricci had, after all, labeled Confucianism as a "moral philosophy."[83]

The Jesuit translation of Confucianism for their European audience, much like Ricci's interpretation of Confucianism he wrote for his Chinese audience, was motivated by political and pragmatic considerations. Ricci was principally concerned with asserting that Confucianism was a moral philosophy that had no religious significance to the Chinese in order to protect his synthesis,[84] and the broader strategy of cultural accommodation, from critics in Rome.[85] To this end, he equated Confucius with the great philosophers of European antiquity, saying "he was the equal of the pagan philosophers and superior to most of them."[86] He placed Confucius in the category of esteemed European philosophers like Plato and Aristotle, whose works flourished during the Renaissance and were a key part in contemporary European education.[87] To stress this point, he says:

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[82] Elizabeth Harper, "The Early Modern European (Non) Reception of the Zhuangzi Text," *Journal of East-West Thought* 9, no. 4 (2019), 26.
[83] Mungello, *Curious Land*, 67.
[84] It should be noted, however, that Confucianism as a belief-system was in fact largely concerned with moral cultivation. Indeed, Zhu Xi's Neo-Confucianism was aimed at incorporating Buddhist and Daoist spirituality with Confucianism precisely to make up for its lack of spiritual fulfillment. Thus, Ricci's claim that Confucianism was not a religion has some merit.
[85] Ricci and the Jesuits interpreted Chinese ancestor worship as a civic ceremony rather than a religious one, likely because it was an aspect of Confucian practice and a central part of Chinese culture. In the 17th century, Dominican and Franciscan missionaries claimed the practice as idolatry, and managed to petition Rome to ban the practice among Chinese Christians from 1645-1656, when the Jesuits convinced Rome to lift the ban. By the end of the 17th century, the Dominican, Franciscan, and Jesuit orders had largely agreed to accept the practice, but Rome banned it despite their protests in 1704. This inevitably led to the outright expulsion of Christian missionaries from China by the Kangxi emperor in 1721. See Mungello, *Curious Land*, 57.
[86] Matteo Ricci, *China in the Sixteenth Century : the Journals of Matteo Ricci 1583-1610,* ed. Nicolas Trigault, trans. Louis J. Gallagher, S.J. (New York, 1953). in Mungello, *Curious Land*, 57.
[87] Ricci's vigorous attempts to associate Confucius with European philosophical tradition was also aimed at downplaying the worship of Confucius in Chinese temples. As with ancestor worship, the Jesuits sought to portray the worship of Confucius as a civic tradition and not as an example of idolatry. See Mungello, *Curious Land*, 57.

> Of all the pagan sects known to Europe, I know of no people who fell into fewer errors in early stages of their antiquity than did the Chinese. From the very beginning of their history it is recorded in their writings that they recognized and worshipped one supreme being whom they called the King of Heaven.... [they] also taught that the light of reason came from heaven and that the dictates of reason should be hearkened to in every human action.[88]

Ricci continues to associate Confucius with European philosophy, highlighting the importance of reason in Confucian philosophy. His claim that the Chinese worshipped one divine being stems from his own interpretation of the Confucian classics and serves to legitimize his synthesis of Christianity and Confucianism to his European audience. This strategy would also have the effect of elevating Confucian philosophy above that of European antiquity, as even Plato and Aristotle committed the "error" of believing in multiple divine beings. His focus on philosophical Confucianism created the impression that the Chinese government was run by philosophers, similar to Plato's ideal in his *Republic*, which had an enormous effect on creating an idealized image of China in the eyes of educated European society.[89]

European images of Confucius from Jesuit Father Philippe Couplet's *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* and the Lutheran theologian Gottlieb Spitzel, the first Dutch sinologist, illustrate the ways in which Europeans interpreted the figure of Confucius and by extension his teachings. Although these works were published decades after Ricci's time in the late 17th century, they represent a continuation of and response to his work. On the title page of the *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*, the Couplet and the Jesuits sought to portray Confucius as a European style secular

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[88] Ricci, *Journals of Matteo Ricci,* in Mungello, *Curious Land*, 63-64.
[89] Mungello, *Curious Land*, 67.

philosopher while retaining his Chinese aesthetic (fig. 2). This image effectively reverses the translation that Ricci undertook with the image from Matthew 14:22-33, taking the Chinese figure of Confucius and presenting him according to a Western conception of academia. The library setting, complete with scholars copying books in the background, associates Confucius with the academic world and the educational traditions of Europe. However, his Chinese identity is painstakingly retained through his garb and the Chinese characters that frame his figure. In addition, the scholars behind him wear cone-shaped hats that signify their Chinese identity to the European viewer. By contrast, Spitzel's engraving is an attempt to portray Confucius as a figure of idolatry, and reflects the outspoken criticism of the Jesuit presentation of Confucius to European audiences. To this end, Spitzel portrays Confucius with distinctly European features, alluding to his Chinese identity only by the length of his fingernails and the decorations on his sash (fig. 3).[90] His statuesque Confucius is situated on an altar and the shading behind his head resembles the halos that characterize European portrayals of biblical figures, namely Jesus. The religious iconography in Spitzel's image is designed to present Confucius as a crude foreign imitation of Jesus and an object of Chinese idolatry. Luckily for the Jesuits, it appears that this interpretation of Confucius was not nearly as popular as their own portrayal, likely due to the fact that the Jesuits enjoyed the reputation of being the only Europeans with extensive knowledge of the Chinese language and experience living in China.[91]

Despite the hostility of Spitzel's Dutch print, the Dutch colonial official Pieter Van Hoorn's translation of Confucius' *Analects*, printed 12 years before Couplet's *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* in 1675, was consciously commissioned as a tool of moral self-cultivation. Van

[90] The markings resemble Chinese characters, but are in reality nonsensical decorations.
[91] M.A. Weststeijn and Trude Dijkstra, "Constructing Confucius in the Low Countries." *De Zeventiende Eeuw* 32, no. 2 (2017), 138-139.

Hoorn believed that "much has been written about virtue.... But it seems to me that the Chinese Confucius has expressed and depicted it with words better and clearer than any European author."[92] He was so thoroughly enraptured by Confucius that he became in a sense sinicized, much as the Jesuits had been, and attempted to incorporate Confucian teachings into his life as a European elite.[93] As a result, his translation demonstrates much more poetic license with the original text than Couplet's translation, presenting it in prose whereas the original takes the form of a dialogue between Confucius and one of his disciples. His translation also differs from that of Couplet in that he does not include additions of Western philosophy or allusions to Christianity, key aspects in the Jesuit translation that continued Ricci's syncretic strategy.[94] Another reason for Van Hoorn's faithfulness to the original Chinese is that he relied exclusively on Chinese scholars to translate the original Chinese text, having made connections in his role as the Dutch ambassador to China and governor-general of Batavia (modern-day Jakarta), the capital city of the Dutch East Indies.[95] Van Hoorn is an example of the favorable reception that Protestant Europeans extended to the Jesuit interpretation of Confucius as a secular philosopher and highlights the popularity of Confucian moral philosophy across religious lines.

Philippe Couplet's *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*, translated as *Confucius the Philosopher of China*, or, more appropriately, *The Knowledge of China Translated into Latin*, includes the most significant description of Daoism and Daoist teachings to reach the West until the 19th century.[96] Couplet follows Ricci's method of privileging the sources of Chinese

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[92] Van Hoorn, *Eenige voorname eygenschappen*, trans. M.A. Weststeijn and Trude Dijkstra, in Weststeijn and Dijkstra, "Constructing Confucius."
[93] Weststeijn and Dijkstra, "Constructing Confucius," 147.
[94] Weststeijn and Dijkstra, "Constructing Confucius," 148-149.
[95] Weststeijn and Dijkstra, "Constructing Confucius," 153.
[96] Harper, "(Non) Reception of the Zhuangzi Text," 33.

philosophical tradition and presents Lao Tzu, the founder of philosophical Daoism, as a "philosopher... He belongs to the same period as Confucius, though is a little bit his senior."[97] While he does not make explicit connections to the European philosophers as Ricci does with Confucius, Couplet's connection between Lao and Confucius elevates Lao to the same level of respect and authority. He continues to follow Ricci's example by attempting to bypass popular Chinese understandings of Daoism and reinterpret the source text in a way that is harmonious with Christian doctrines. To this end, he uses an excerpt from chapter forty-two of the *Dao de Jing* one of the principle texts of the Daoist canon attributed to Lao Tzu:[98] "The Tao gave Birth / To the One. The One gave Birth / To the Two. The Two gave Birth / To the Three. The Three gave Birth / To the Myriad of Things."[99] He claims that the "Tao," literally translated as "The Way," was Lao's clouded understanding of the Christian God. According to Couplet, Lao "was aware of a kind of first and supreme deity," but mistakenly conceived of this deity as "corporeal... ruling over all other deities, like a king rules over his vassals."[100] This interpretation reinforces Ricci's claim that early Chinese philosophers had an imperfect concept of a single divine being. However, Couplet's criticism of the source text suggests that Lao was inferior to Confucius in his understanding of the Christian god, as the Jesuits explicitly avoided criticizing Confucius' texts directly. Thus, he places Daoism below Confucianism in a hierarchy of truth and leaves room for further criticisms of Daoist teachings. Couplet's interpretation continues the

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[97] Philippe Couplet, *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*, trans. Mei Tin Huang, in Huang, "The Encounter of Christianity and Daoism," 621.
[98] The main Daoist canon consists of four main texts; the *Dao de Jing*, the *Zhuangzi*, the *I Ching (Yijing)*, and the *Daozang* (lit. "Daoist Canon").
[99] This excerpt is from chapter 42 of the *Dao de Jing*, titled in Minford's translation "One, Two, Three." The ambiguity of the original text makes a definitive interpretation difficult to achieve. This ambiguity stems from Lao Tzu's concept of the Dao, the Way, as a concept that cannot be spoken, only realized. See Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*: *The Essential Translation of the Ancient Chinese Book of the Tao*, trans. John Minford, (New York: Viking Press, 2018), 152.
[100] Couplet, *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*, in Huang, "The Encounter of Christianity and Daoism," 622.

tradition of native Chinese scholars in relegating Daoism to an ambiguous space between being an accepted orthodoxy and being a subversive heterodoxy.

Couplet's critique of Daoist doctrine follows Ricci's critique of Neo-Confucian syncretism in that it focuses its criticism on those who reinterpreted the original texts. Despite arguing that Lao Tzu had an understanding of the Christian god, Couplet is unwavering in his denunciation of Lao's disciples, saying,

> It is beyond controversy that many of the people who were, or claimed to be, his disciples... were in fact vicious and evil men... many of them practiced sorcery under the emperor Shi Huang of the fourth dynasty Qin, this famous adversary of the literati who ordered almost all the books to be burnt... he allowed himself to be convinced by the magicians and by the fake disciples of Li Laojun to be given a portion of immortality... which when drunk could supposedly grant a human being eternal life.[101]

The first sentence of the passage preserves the memory of Lao Tzu and separates him as the author of philosophical Daoism from his later followers who transformed his teachings into religious Daoism, who "spread... diabolical tricks far and wide."[102] Couplet portrays the Daoists as malicious tricksters and sorcerers, alluding to the historical Christian aversion to pagan magic and superstition. He focuses in particular on the falseness and wickedness of Daoist alchemy and its search for immortality because this teaching presents a direct challenge to the Christian concept of the immortal soul. By using the example of the Qin emperor to make this point, he also positions Daoist superstition against the Confucian literati by labeling the emperor as the "famous adversary of the literati" and emphasizing the famous burning of the books. This also

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[101] Couplet, *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*, in Huang, "The Encounter of Christianity and Daoism," 619.
[102] Couplet, *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*, in Huang, "The Encounter of Christianity and Daoism," 620.

serves to enhance the distinction between Confucianism and Daoism, a comparison that Couplet would use to claim that Confucianism was "free of superstitious religiosity."[103] This unrelenting criticism of religious Daoism reflects a European version of Chinese anti-heterodox thought, and delegitimizes Daoism as a legitimate belief-system to the educated European elite. Thus, despite Couplet's praise of Lao Tzu, he ultimately dismisses Daoism as a degenerative religious tradition and ironically neglects to include any meaningful translation of the Daoist texts in *The Knowledge of China Translated into Latin*.

Conclusion

Ricci's strategy of cultural accommodation presents a stark contrast to the typical narrative of colonial Christian proselytization. From the beginning, the Jesuit position in China was characterized by their absolute reliance on Chinese officials to grant them permission to enter and reside in the Chinese inland cities. The Jesuits were able to foster relationships with the literati first by taking advantage of the Chinese concept of friendship and gift-giving, then by Ricci's trailblazing attempts to assimilate into the Confucian scholar-elite. He was able to do so in a way that furthered his goals of proselytizing Christianity because of the ancient Chinese tradition of syncretism, which provided him with the tools to create a Christian-Confucian synthesis attractive to his Chinese audience. His methods mirrored those of Mou Tzu and other early Chinese syncretists who used the Confucian canon to legitimize their own religion in terms familiar to the Confucian literati-elite. Without this Chinese precedent, Ricci would have been

[103] Mei Tin Huang, "The Encounter of Christianity and Daoism in Philippe Couplet's 'Confucius Sinarum Philosophus'," *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* 9, no. 4 (2014), 615-24.

unable to synthesize European and Chinese thinking as he did in *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*.

To aid the efficacy of this synthesis, Ricci also heavily engaged in anti-heterodox scholarship to more closely align Christianity and Confucianism in the Chinese intellectual landscape. In his arguments against Buddhism, Ricci incorporates his syncretic ideas to simultaneously place Christianity and Buddhism in opposition and draw Christianity and Confucianism together as one orthodoxy. As a result, his final synthesis constitutes an assimilation of European ideas into a Chinese intellectual framework, necessitating an inclination towards Confucianism and away from Buddhism and Daoism. This neglect of Daoism then originates in earlier Chinese critiques, such as those by Zhu Xi, which privilege Daoism in certain respects but ultimately reject it as syncretic material. Philippe Couplet's writing is an example of the influence of both Ricci's syncretic strategy and the historical neglect of Daoism in China in the final Jesuit translation and presentation of Confucianism and Daoism to Europe. This ambiguity and neglect of the principle Daoist sources is what resulted in the large gap between European reception of Confucianism in the 17th century and its much later "discovery" of Daoism in the 19th century.

The Jesuit strategy of cultural accommodation provides an unprecedented view into the complexities involved in the cultural exchange between China and Europe, East and West, and the capacity of both cultures to peacefully coexist or even combine into new forms. Although Ricci never lost sight of his ultimate goal of proselytization, it cannot be denied that he was profoundly changed by the 28 years he spent among the Chinese. His experience offers a rare example of an inquisitive and accommodative exploration of different cultures amidst the

divisive and hostile interactions that characterize the colonial past. It also speaks to the increasingly relevant concept of Chinese exceptionalism and the power of Chinese culture to incorporate (sinicize) other cultures into itself. As China gains power and prominence in the modern era, the Jesuit mission provides a history that enables those in the West to gain a deeper understanding of not only Chinese culture but also of the historical interconnectedness between Europe and China.

Images

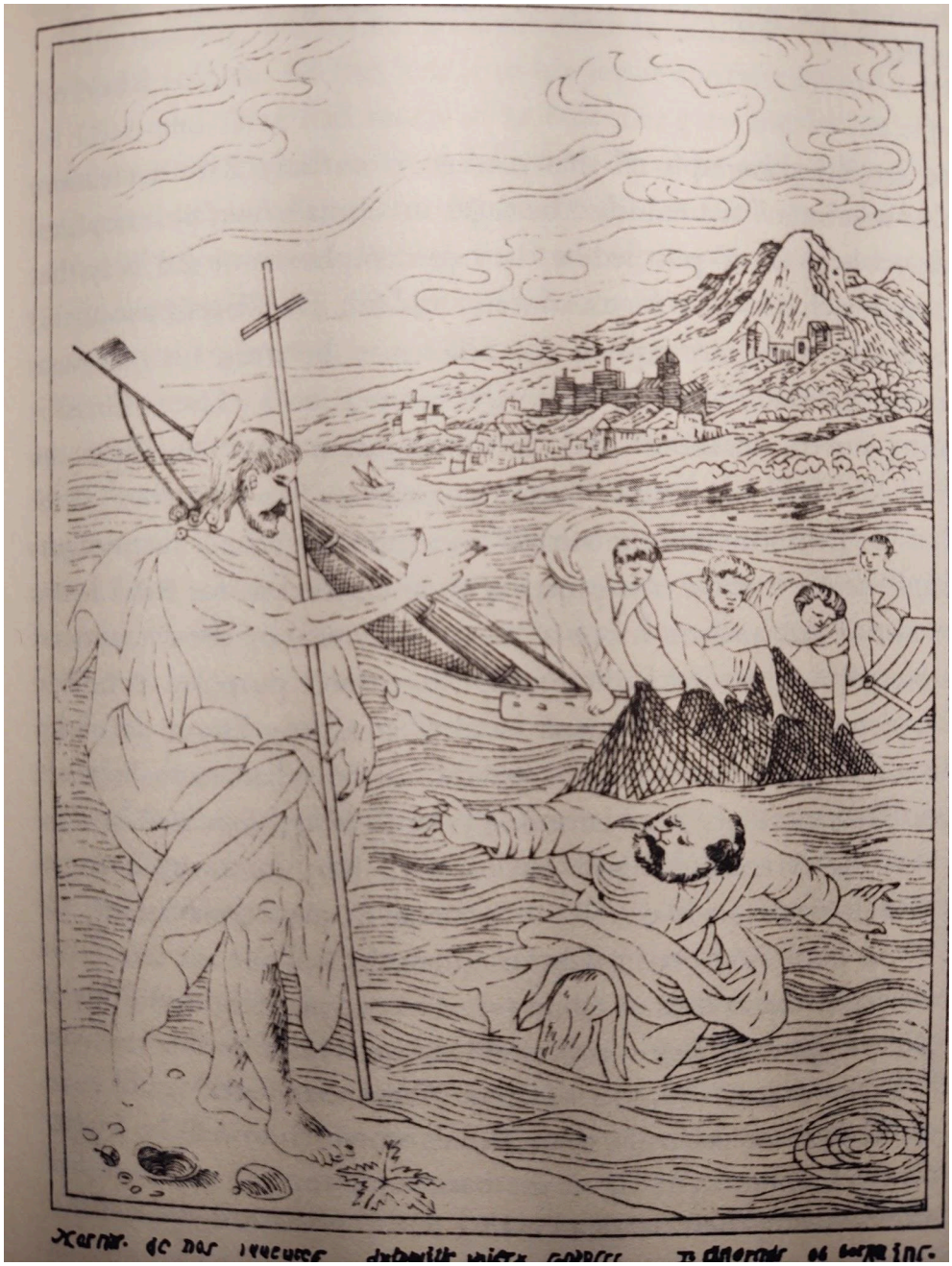


Fig. 1: Reproduction of original print depicting Matthew 14:22-33, included in Cheng Dayue's *Chengshi moyuan* (1606) in the Metropolitan Museum of art, in Spence, Jonathan D. *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci*. New York: Viking Penguin, 1984, 61. The placement of Jesus in the image is notably different from the Gospel text; he stands on the seashore and gestures towards Peter instead of walking on the water and pulling Peter out of the waves. Ricci had to

make use of a different image that he had on hand depicting a scene from the Gospel according to John, chapter 21, and adapt it to fit the story he wanted to tell.

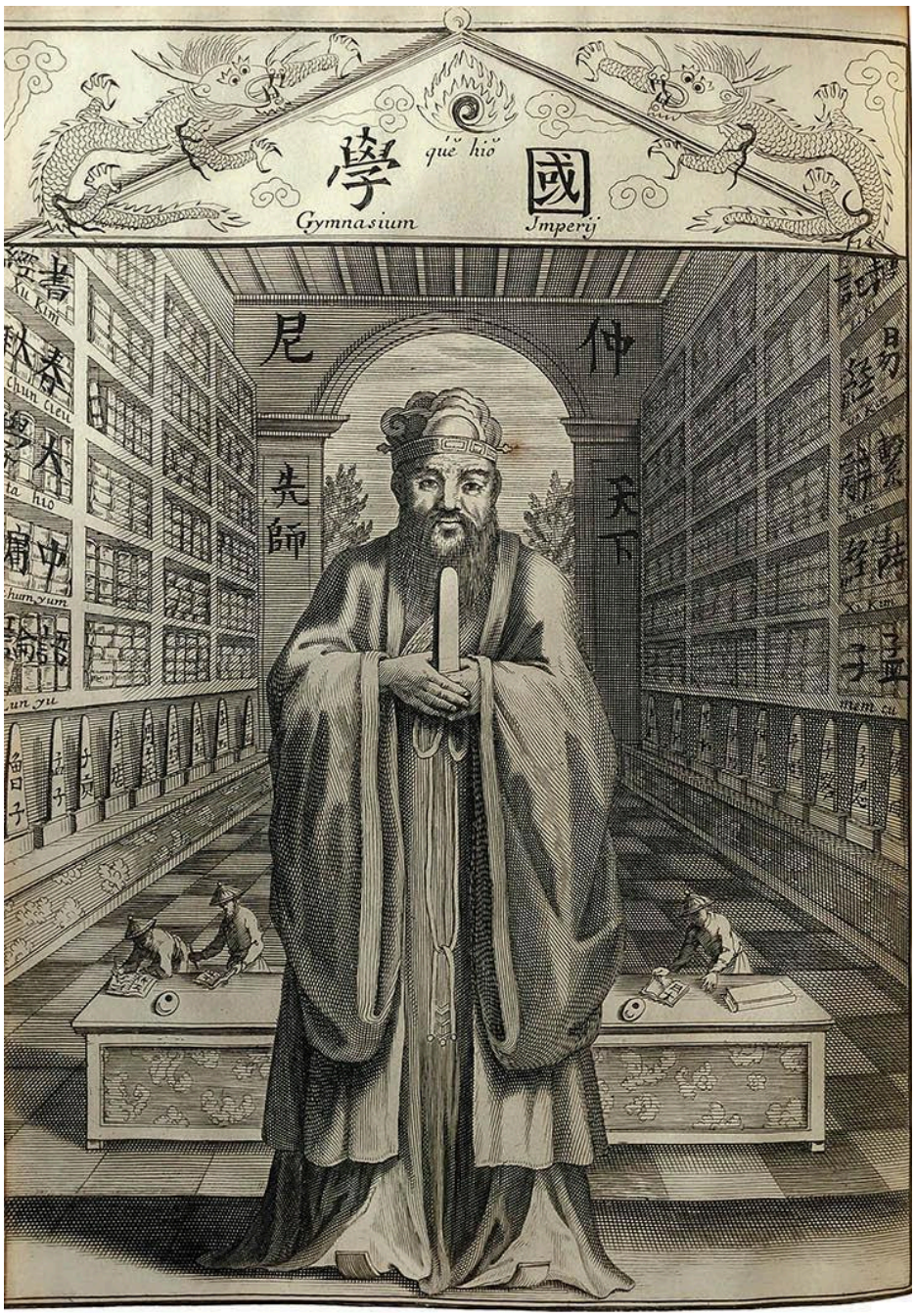


Fig. 2: Portrait of Confucius, engraving, in: P. Couplet and others, *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*, Paris 1687, University of Amsterdam, Special Collections, in M.A. Weststeijn and

Trude Dijkstra, "Constructing Confucius in the Low Countries." *De Zeventiende Eeuw* 32, no. 2 (2017), 140.

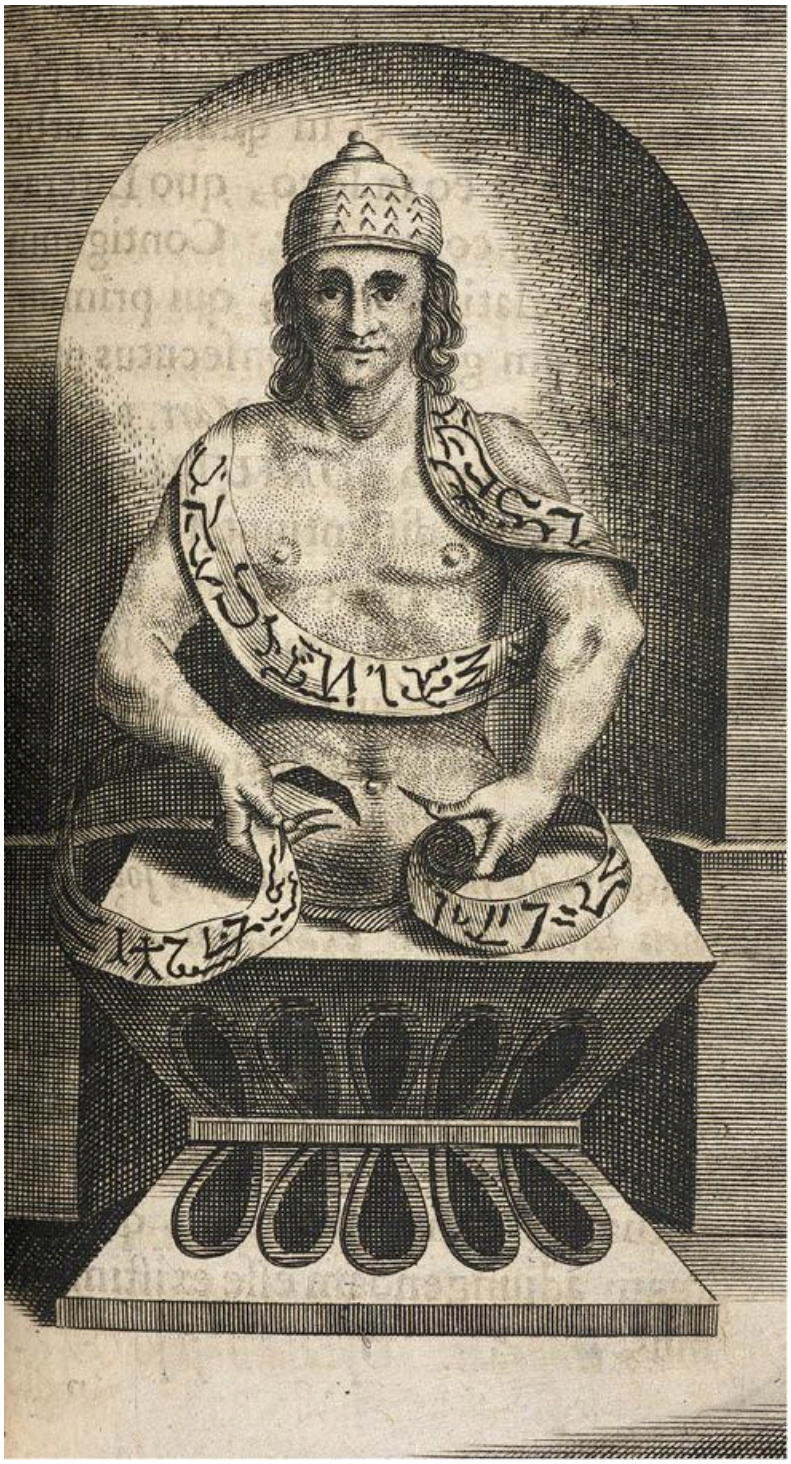


Fig. 3: Idol of Confucius, engraving, in: G. Spitzel, *De re litteraria Sinensium commentarius*, Leiden 1660, p. 119, British Library London. in M.A. Weststeijn and Trude Dijkstra, "Constructing Confucius in the Low Countries." *De Zeventiende Eeuw* 32, no. 2 (2017), 143.

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