



PROJECT MUSE®

The Intricacies of Accommodation: The Proselytizing Strategy
of Matteo Ricci

Yu Liu

Journal of World History, Volume 19, Number 4, December 2008, pp. 465-487
(Article)

Published by University of Hawai'i Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jwh.0.0030>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/257878>

The Intricacies of Accommodation: The Proselytizing Strategy of Matteo Ricci*

YU LIU

Niagara County Community College

IN the early modern intellectual interaction of Asia and Europe, no figure loomed larger or more illustrious than that of Matteo Ricci, a native son of Macerata, Italy, and a missionary from the Society of Jesus. Ricci was not the first European to set foot in China nor even the first foot soldier of the Christian God to fight or toil in the Chinese evangelical field, but he was the inspired and inspiring de facto founder of a small Jesuit mission in the middle kingdom, and he made accommodation or deliberate alliance with Confucianism the centerpiece of a proselytizing strategy that enabled him and his Jesuit confreres to penetrate deeply into the interior of that vast country. Patient, resourceful, ever ready to adapt himself to the challenging milieu of a very different culture, and ingenious at using this highly conscious self-adaptation for his ecclesiastical purposes, Ricci has been rightly celebrated today as what the late Pope John Paul II calls “a veritable

* In addition to a John Simon Guggenheim Foundation fellowship and a sabbatical leave grant of Niagara County Community College during the 2006–2007 academic year, the author would like to acknowledge the crucial support of short-term fellowships received in the last several years at the Huntington Library, the Clark Library of UCLA, the Lewis Walpole Library and the Beinecke Library of Yale University, Yale Center for British Art, the Ransom Center of the University of Texas at Austin, and the Warburg Institute of London University. The author would also like to express sincere appreciation for the constructive criticisms of Professor Jerry H. Bentley and two anonymous readers who commented on earlier versions of the essay for the journal.

'bridge' between the two civilizations, European and Chinese."¹ No matter how legendary he was as one of the greatest ever of what Geoffrey C. Gunn terms "cultural brokers,"² however, it is necessary and indeed salutary to realize that his achievement in this regard came about largely inadvertently as a byproduct of his missionary enterprise that did not win him as long-lasting or indisputable fame. To understand his truly extraordinary experience in China, it is crucially important to recognize the many intricacies which either led to or resulted from his particular use of accommodation as an evangelizing policy and which made him both remarkably successful in what he did not necessarily plan to do and noticeably unsuccessful in what he single-mindedly set out to accomplish.

As a companion to another Jesuit missionary, Michele Ruggieri, who was then senior to him both in age and in authority, Ricci entered China in 1583. While making preparations, he and Ruggieri are known to have been instructed by Alessandro Valignano, their superior and the Jesuit visitor to the Indies, "to introduce themselves in China as men of letters (*homes letrados*) . . . [and to dress themselves] in the Chinese fashion, in capes with long sleeves and four-cornered hats, in the same way as some of their literati (*letrados*)."³ Just before their historic trip, however, they took the suggestion of a local Chinese official by cutting off their beards, shaving off their hair, and putting on the robes of Buddhist monks. At the time, the move seemed both prudent and appropriate. After all, in addition to being similar in the setting and general atmosphere of their places of worship, Buddhism and Christianity resembled each other in the teaching of contempt for sensual pleasure and in the use of rewards and punishments in the next world as an enticement for interest in individual salvation in this world. Only after being in China for some time and after learning the Chinese language and custom well did Ricci gradually realize that Buddhist monks had a very low social standing, and any association with them in the public perception made it more difficult for him to gain Christianity

¹ Pope John Paul II, "Address at the Georgian University Session on October 25, 1982 of the Macerata Conference commemorating the 400th anniversary of the arrival in China of Matteo Ricci, S.J.," in *International Symposium on Chinese-Western Cultural Interchange in Commemoration of the 400th Anniversary of the Arrival of Matteo Ricci, S.J. in China* (Taipei, 1983), p. 2.

² Geoffrey C. Gunn, *First Globalization: The Eurasian Exchange, 1500–1800* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), p. 172.

³ Alessandro Valignano, "Letter to the Bishop of Evora, Dom Theotonio de Braganca, from Goa, 23 December 1585," quoted in Paul A. Rule, *K'ung-tzu or Confucius? The Jesuit Interpretation of Confucianism* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1986), p. 3.

the kind of respect that he needed for his evangelical work. Finally, after maneuvering out of China in 1588 his senior colleague Ruggieri, who still favored a cordial relationship with the Buddhists,⁴ Ricci decided in 1595 to discard his Buddhist clothes, grow back his beard and hair, and present himself in the garb and guise of a Confucian scholar-official as Valignano originally instructed and as his Chinese friends encouraged him.

Backed up by the technological advantage and military power of post-Renaissance Europe, Christian missionaries had been able to cross the oceans in the company or footsteps of other European adventurers and to remake everything in their image or the image of their deity in Africa, America, and parts of Asia. Since everywhere they went they deemed the indigenous people as barbarous, they were unpleasantly surprised to find that they were in their turn regarded as uncivilized in China. Before Ricci and Ruggieri entered the middle kingdom via Macao in 1583, a few Franciscans associated with the Spanish in the Philippines had appeared on the Chinese coast, and they had quickly made a nuisance of themselves with their ostentatious self-righteousness and evangelizing zeal. As a result, they were soon kicked out and kept out much like the illiterate or half-illiterate Portuguese sailors and merchants who reached the shores of China in the early sixteenth century and who blatantly tried by coercion and violence to impose their religious faith on the local residents. In conformity with the fierce reputation of their ecclesiastical order in Europe as the storm troopers of the Pope during the Counter-Reformation, Ricci and Ruggieri could also have been as aggressive in their evangelism as the Franciscans and the Portuguese, but their effort would not have got them very far. Like the Franciscans and other Europeans, Ricci was animated by “a will to conquer and proselytize.”⁵ Unlike them, however, he recognized and accepted the limitations of European power in China. Even when he dressed himself in 1583 as a Buddhist monk, he already indicated his desire and willingness to adapt, but when he refashioned himself in 1595 as a Confucian scholar-official, he revealed in addition his newly acquired sense of how accommodation could be best utilized for his evangelical purposes.

From experience, Ricci learned that, next to the emperor, the most influential people in the Chinese society were the scholar-officials who

⁴ For a detailed discussion of Ricci's relationship with Ruggieri, see Rule, *K'ung-tzu or Confucius*, pp. 3–10.

⁵ Jacques Gernet, *A History of Chinese Civilization*, trans. J. R. Foster and Charles Hartman, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 449.

were educated in the doctrine of Confucius and who were selected for the vast local and national bureaucracy not by the emperor arbitrarily but by competitive examinations about Confucius's theories of ethics and government. As a member of a religious order whose training for its novitiates included a great deal of secular learning, he naturally warmed up to the learned Confucian scholar-officials whom he saw as his closest intellectual counterparts. By befriending them, he was able to move gradually from the southern coastal area to the interior cities and eventually to Beijing, the seat of the highest governing power in the country. No matter how he appreciated them, however, he could not help seeing his friendship with them as a means to an end. As a missionary well drilled in the characteristically Jesuit strategy of working from the top downward, he always had his ultimate sight on the emperor, hoping to win him over so as to bring about a quick and easy Constantine-style conversion of the entire nation. After years of efforts, he finally reached Beijing in 1601 and quickly made himself indispensable to the reclusive Wanli emperor through maintenance services for the mechanical gadgets that he brought to the capital as gifts or baits. After his death in 1610, several generations of Jesuit missionaries made themselves similarly needed at the imperial court as calendar reformers, cannon makers, translators, and so on, but they were never as successful there as missionaries as they were as technical experts. In contrast, as recent scholars of Christian missionary history in China perceptively point out, Ricci's patient work with the Confucian scholar-officials turned the last few years of the sixteenth century and the first few decades of the seventeenth century into "the moment of greatest opportunity."⁶

With the bold change of his costume and personal appearance in 1595, Ricci won instant applause from his Chinese friends and acquaintances who were mostly well educated and belonged to the scholar-official class. By itself, however, the self-refashioning of Ricci did not make it much easier for him to promulgate a religious faith that was not only different but also foreign. Aside from a photographic memory and a natural gift for languages, Ricci had a compelling personality. Well trained in not only theology and philosophy but also astronomy, cartography, mathematics, and other natural sciences, he already could spellbind crowds of curious people he lured to him with prisms, sun dials, clocks, religious paintings, ethical sayings of European classical

⁶ *Handbook of Christianity in China*, vol. 1, 635–1800, ed. Nicolas Standaert (Leiden: Brill, 2001), p. 483.

writers, and the famous or notorious world map that he purposefully modified so as to place China at the center rather than at the extreme eastern corner. However, even with his new dress code and personal appearance and with his impressive knowledge of Chinese classics that he occasionally showed off publicly backward and forward for calculated effects, he knew how difficult it still was to make any headway at all in the evangelical work for which alone he accepted the sacrifice of leaving his family and friends and spending the best part of his life in a land far away from home. Whatever image of himself he projected, his vocation as a religious teacher was known, and wherever he went, his unusual belief about *tian-zhu* or the lord of heaven provoked interest, but it was the last of his many attractions, and as he explained in a letter dated 4 November 1595 from Nanchang, the capital city of Jiangxi Province, “those who come for the last reason are the least numerous.”⁷

Always remembering who he was and why he was in China, Ricci knew he had to go beyond being indifferently tolerated or accepted for what he was not. To avoid any unnecessary open confrontation, he needed to blend in, but to make any progress at all in his evangelical effort, he also needed to stand out. The tactic that he gradually developed and that enabled him to differ from the Confucian scholar-officials while appearing in solidarity with them in dress, personal appearance, language, learning, ethical values, and politics was to make himself out as an admirer of Confucius and as a defender of Chinese philosophical and religious orthodoxy. In the late sixteenth century, there were three main schools of thought in China: Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism. Always influencing each other and to that extent already inextricably intertwined with one another, they were nevertheless also in a relationship of rivalry. Their contention against each other was especially acute in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, because the country, though idealized by Ricci in his communications to his European audiences as a utopia or a miraculously realized Platonic republic, was then in a profound crisis. To avert the impending disaster, reform-minded Confucian scholar-officials belonging to the Donglin party or faction conveniently seized upon the rivalry with the Daoists and the Buddhists, using it as a rallying cry to fight against what they did not like. Siding with the Confucian reformers in their

⁷ Tacchi Venturi, *Opere storiche del P. Matteo Ricci* (Macerata, 1911–1913), 2:209; quoted in Jacques Gernet, *China and the Christian Impact: A Conflict of Cultures*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 18.

antagonism, Ricci summarily dismissed Buddhism and Daoism as superstitious, thereby making sure that Christianity would stand out from those ceremonies and dogmas with which it might otherwise get confused. Imitating the Confucians even further in their subtle reappraisal of history and tradition, he also carefully manipulated the canonical works of early Confucian masters against the exegeses of later commentators, thereby differentiating himself from the very people with whom he might otherwise seem to be aligned.

Motivated by his evangelical concerns, Ricci's wholesale dismissal of Buddhism and Daoism showed no deep knowledge of the involved religious and philosophical traditions. Though driven by the same needs of his evangelism, his finely calibrated relationship with Confucianism was not likewise based on ignorance. Through diligent studies of Chinese classics, he apparently developed a genuine admiration for Confucius, whom he eulogized as "the equal of the pagan philosophers and superior to most of them."⁸ He was never tired of publicizing this admiration. However, it was not this respect for the high prince of Chinese philosophers that alone led him to throw away the initial association with Buddhism and to cast or recast the Jesuit mission into what Lionel Jensen calls "a Chinese fundamentalist sect that preached a theology of Christian/Confucian syncretism."⁹ In the middle kingdom he gradually came to feel at home, but he always remembered that he was not in the country to become a Chinese or a follower of Confucius. To be accepted by the educated Chinese, he was ready to adapt. Nevertheless, what pleased them had to be at the same time what could most advance or enhance his evangelical enterprise. To fit in with the exigencies of the situation, he was willing to change himself, but he did not therefore ever forget that in relation to his host country he himself was an agent of change and his goal was nothing less than the spiritual conquest of the entire nation.

Ricci's particular approach to his missionary work has recently attracted two influential though clearly conflicting interpretations. On the one hand, his deliberate enlistment of ancient Chinese texts in the service of his evangelism has won admiration from scholars such as David E. Mungello. Evidently having in mind how well Ricci was received by the educated Chinese of the late Ming dynasty, includ-

⁸ Matteo Ricci, *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Matthew Ricci: 1583–1610*, translated from Latin by Louis J. Gallagher, S.J. (New York: Random House, 1953), p. 30.

⁹ Lionel Jensen, *Manufacturing Confucianism: Chinese Traditions and Universal Civilization* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997), p. 34.

ing those who did not actually accept his Christian teaching, and how some of his Chinese writings including his major proselytizing work were later even included in the imperial library of preserved books collected during the Qianlong era (1736–1796) of the Qing dynasty (*si-ku-quan-shu*), Mungello construes his accommodation policy as based on “a brilliant insight which not only accorded with contemporary reality, but also melded with what little was known of high Chinese antiquity and appealed to the Chinese reverence of antiquity.”¹⁰ On the other hand, Ricci’s conspicuous effort to make his European religion somewhat native in China through his manipulation of canonical works in Chinese antiquity has been considered as disingenuous or deceptive by scholars such as Jacques Gernet. Citing fundamental and irreconcilable differences of China and Europe in philosophical and religious thinking, Gernet presents Ricci’s well-publicized alliance with Confucianism as nothing but “[an] enterprise of seduction.”¹¹ As much as his complex juggling of simultaneous approval and repudiation concerning Confucianism, Ricci’s painstaking appropriation of Chinese classics for his ecclesiastical purposes was a very important aspect of his missionary work in China. While the former proved in the actual turn of events to be one of his most important legacies, however, the latter did not.

Take, for example, Ricci’s claim of theistic compatibility between Confucianism and Christianity. “He who is called the Lord of Heaven in my humble country,” as he said to his Chinese friends, “is He who is called *Shang-ti* (Sovereign on High) in Chinese.”¹² “Of all the pagan sects known to Europe,” as he similarly told his European audiences, “I know of no people who fell into fewer errors in the early ages of their antiquity than did the Chinese.”¹³ “From the very beginning of their history,” he contended, “it is recorded in their writings that they recognized and worshipped one supreme being whom they called the King of Heaven, or designated by some other name indicating his rule over heaven and earth.”¹⁴ At first sight, Ricci’s argument for Confucian theism seems preposterous. After all, the very beginning of Chinese philosophy in the twelfth century B.C.E. was marked by a clear move-

¹⁰ David E. Mungello, *Curious Land: Jesuit Accommodation and the Origins of Sinology* (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner Verlag, 1985), p. 18.

¹¹ Gernet, *China and the Christian Impact*, p. 15.

¹² Matteo Ricci, S.J., *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* [T’ien-chu Shih-i], trans. Douglas Lancashire and Peter Hu Kuo-chen, S.J. (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1985), p. 121.

¹³ Ricci, *China in the Sixteenth Century*, p. 93.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

ment away from any anthropomorphized idea of deity,¹⁵ and ancient Chinese thinkers never envisioned the origin of the world in terms of what Frederick W. Mote describes as “conceptions of creation *ex nihilo* by the hand of God, or through the will of God, and all other such mechanistic, teleological, and theistic cosmologies.”¹⁶ Upon reflection, however, Ricci’s theistic reading of Confucianism can be seen as unusually penetrating. Chinese philosophers were always opposed to the notion of a personal God, but they never stopped acknowledging the idea of something that inhered in us and everything else, that served as the anchor and guide of all our moral and physical being, and that at the same time was distinct from us and anything else. Leaving room tantalizingly for what Kenneth Scott Latourette notes as “a tendency toward theism”¹⁷ or what Julia Ching depicts as “some kind of rational design, which is open to more direct or mystical communion,”¹⁸ this consistent acknowledgment of something at once in and beyond us cannot but give credence to Ricci’s seemingly bizarre contention for Confucian theism.

By claiming a monotheistic impulse for Confucianism, Ricci made it possible for the dominant Chinese philosophical tradition to have a point of conceptual contact with Christianity. In spite of the erudition that he abundantly displayed about ancient Chinese history, philosophy, and literature, however, the many specific references to the idea of divinity that he laboriously culled from Chinese antiquity to support his claim impressed few, if any ever, Chinese scholars. In the *Book of Odes*, a collection of early Zhou-dynasty court and folk songs, for instance, there is a piece about King Wen after death. “King Wen is on high;” it is said there, “Oh! Bright is he in heaven . . . King Wen ascends and descends, on the left and right of [the emperor].”¹⁹ To prove that ancient Chinese thinkers had an idea of rewards and punishments in the next world much like the heaven and hell of Christianity, Ricci quoted, among many others, this particular verse. When

¹⁵ Cf. Wing-Tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, trans. and comp. Wing-Tsit Chan (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 3–13; and Fung Yu-Lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, trans. Derk Bodde (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1952), 1:7–21.

¹⁶ Frederick W. Mote, *Intellectual Foundations of China* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971), p. 20.

¹⁷ Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of Christian Missions in China* (New York: Macmillan, 1929), p. 21.

¹⁸ Julia Ching, *The Religious Thought of Chu Hsi* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 6.

¹⁹ *The Chinese Classics*, trans. James Legge, 5 vols. (Oxford, 1893–1895), 4:427–428.

asked indirectly in the early seventeenth century whether Ricci was correct in this interpretation, a prominent Chinese scholar who was also one of the foremost Christian converts is known to have answered in the negative. “The poet endeavours to magnify Vuen Vuang [King Wen],” he was reported as saying, “feigning that the Heavenly Body is like a King, and he sits by his side like Loyal and well-belov’d Subject.”²⁰ When discussing the same situation, recent Chinese scholars are much more blunt. Ricci’s interpretation, they go so far as to say, is “pure nonsense (*chun-xi-wu-ji-zhi-tan*): he was reading meaning into the text rather than giving a textual interpretation.”²¹ Though unflattering to Ricci, the same can be said about all other instances where he made Chinese classics sound like they were amenable to Christianity only because he deliberately chose to be literal in his reading of the involved Chinese texts.

Similarly, Ricci’s division of early and late Confucianism is complex. “The doctrine most commonly held among the Literati at present,” he said, “seems to me to have been taken from the sect of idols, as promulgated about five centuries ago.”²² “This doctrine,” he explained, “asserts that the entire universe is composed of a common substance; that the creator of the universe is one in a continuous body, a corpus continuum as it were, together with heaven and earth, men and beasts, trees and plants, and the four elements, and that each individual thing is a member of this body.”²³ “From this unity of substance,” he went on to point out, “they reason to the love that should unite the individual constituents and also that man can become like unto God because he is created one with God.”²⁴ “This philosophy,” he concluded, “we endeavor to refute, not only from reason but also from the testimony of their own ancient philosophers to whom they are indebted for all the philosophy they have.”²⁵ Even though he directed his criticism here at the so-called neo-Confucians of the twelfth century, he was in reality confronting the very essence of Chinese philosophy, because the involved theory embodied nothing less than what Wing-Tsit Chan calls the uniquely Chinese brand of humanism, “not the humanism

²⁰ Niccolo Longobardo, “A Short Answer Concerning the Controversies about Xang Ti, Tien Xin, and Ling Hoen and other Chinese Names and Terms (1623–1624),” in *A Collection of Voyages and Travels* (London, 1704), 1:221.

²¹ Li Shuzeng et al., *The Chinese Philosophy of the Ming Dynasty (zhongguo mingdai zhexue)* (Zhengzhou: People’s Press of the Henan Province, 2002), p. 1790.

²² Ricci, *China in the Sixteenth Century*, p. 95.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

that denies or slights a Supreme Power, but one that professes the unity of man and Heaven.”²⁶ From the very start, Chinese philosophical thinkers were driven by the sense of something at once in and beyond each human being to teach the idea of respecting, fearing, and serving Heaven (*jing-tian*, *wei-tian*, and *shi-tian*). However, the notion of divinity was never more than what Chan terms “a self-existent moral law”²⁷ with which humanity is inexorably linked as its actual or potential embodiment. The neo-Confucians may use such new terms as *tai ji* (the great ultimate), *li* (principle), and *qi* (material force), but the substance of their ideas as “a conscious synthesis of previous philosophies”²⁸ is the same as the old correspondence of humanity and divinity.

As with his uncanny sense of Confucian theism, Ricci’s attack on the theory of humanity’s union with heaven (*tian-ren-he-yi*) brought the dominant Chinese philosophical tradition into contact with Christianity. No matter how perceptive he was about the difference as about the similarity of China and Europe, he did not and could not find a sympathetic reception for his criticism. For his own purposes, he isolated neo-Confucian cosmology from Confucius and categorized it as a confusion of ideas from a European perspective. However, just as his literal interpretation of figurative references to the idea of divinity in ancient Chinese texts was unconvincing, so his willful application of European logic was unpersuasive, because the very notion of a union between humanity and divinity already implies the prior distinction of the involved concepts. In the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, there were Chinese thinkers who were as critical of neo-Confucianism as Ricci was. Li Zhi, the ultra Chinese individualist and arguably “the greatest heretic and iconoclast in China’s history,”²⁹ for instance, ridiculed what he perceived to be the servile neo-Confucian emphasis on such socially sanctioned values as chastity, righteousness, filial piety, and political loyalty. Nevertheless, when using the notion

²⁶ Chan, *Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, p. 3. To see the unequivocal difference of China from Europe in this regard, it is helpful to remember what Ernst Cassirer describes in *The Individual and the Cosmos in Renaissance Philosophy*, trans. Mario Domandil Mineola (New York: Dover, 2000). What he says there about the revived “Pelagian spirit,” “the basic Faustian attitude,” or “[the] striving for the infinite, the inability to stop at any thing given or attained” (pp. 43, 69, and 69) may be a concise and insightful encapsulation of post-Renaissance European humanism, but the involved spirit is utterly alien to Chinese humanism.

²⁷ Chan, *Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, p. 3.

²⁸ Hans Kung and Julia Ching, *Christianity and Chinese Religions* (New York: Doubleday, 1989), p. 78.

²⁹ Wm. Theodore de Bary, *Self and Society in Ming Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), p. 188.

of spontaneity or the “infant’s heart” to conceptualize true morality as inborn rather than being determined after birth by any external standard, he was drawing inspiration not only from Mencius, Zen Buddhism, and Wang Yangming’s subjectivist version of neo-Confucianism but also from the earliest Chinese philosophical belief about the self-existent *yi* as “a principle of accordance with heaven and earth”³⁰ which, as explained in a commentary on *The Doctrine of the Mean* by the greatest neo-Confucian philosopher, Zhu Xi, “shows clearly how the path of duty is to be traced to its origin in Heaven, and is unchangeable, while the substance of it is provided in ourselves, and may not be departed from.”³¹

Whether having a monotheistic impulse or not, the Confucian belief in *tian* or heaven is not equivalent to European theism, because it is against any anthropomorphized idea of deity. Whether incompatible with Christianity or not, the dominant Chinese philosophical tradition is also not identical with European atheism or materialism, because it is opposed to any vision of life as “the spontaneous and casual collision and the multifarious, accidental, random and purposeless congregation and coalescence of atoms.”³² Since Ricci’s theistic approval of Confucianism depended on the manipulation of ancient Chinese texts as much as did his repudiation of it, Mungello and Gernet may both seem to be validated in their interpretations of his missionary work. In reality, both of their views are seriously problematic. With his contentious claim of Confucian theism and with his Christian criticism of neo-Confucian cosmology, to be specific, Ricci apparently grasped something crucially important about the ambiguous contrast of China with Europe in philosophical and religious thinking. However, few, if any, of those Chinese scholar-officials he attempted to proselytize did or could accept his unmistakably European and therefore foreign interpretation of Chinese classics. When his particular use of accommodation as an evangelizing policy became contested in the early seventeenth

³⁰ *The I Ching or The Book of Changes*, trans. James Legge, 2nd ed. (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1963), p. 354.

³¹ *The Doctrine of the Mean*, in *Confucian Analects, The Great Learning & The Doctrine of the Mean*, trans. James Legge (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1971), p. 385.

³² Lucretius, *On the Nature of the Universe*, trans. R. E. Latham (London: Penguin Books, 1994), p. 64. Ricci’s theistic reading of classical Confucianism was at least partly connected with his correct sense of the Chinese opposition to philosophical materialism. When repudiating Ricci’s Christian reading of ancient Chinese texts, his opponents, such as Longobardo, usefully exposed his incorrect identification of Confucianism with Christianity. However, Longobardo’s own use of the European dualistic framework to link Confucianism with European materialism was in its own way incorrect.

century, his opponents within the Jesuit order most prominently cited this fact against him. His strategy of turning one version of Confucianism against another might have looked good on paper, but since it was unpersuasive to the Chinese, it is hard to see how it can in reality be categorized as “brilliant” as Mungello thinks it was. Since his willful appropriation of canonical Chinese works for his own purposes was unconvincing to the Chinese, it is also hard to see how it can be conceptualized as “deceptive,” as Gernet describes it.

After his death, Ricci’s theistic appreciation of Confucianism and his attack on neo-Confucianism were both well publicized in Europe. Going to China as a foot soldier of the Christian deity, he unwittingly came back in his writing as ammunition for those European philosophical thinkers most bent on subverting the Church-centered old establishment. If Confucianism were somehow theistic, as he claimed in effect, it would mean the non-uniqueness of Christianity. If the ethical teaching of Confucius’s latter-day followers were atheistic or pantheistic, as he also intimated, it would imply the possible dispensability of the Christian faith in relation to morality and civil government. Either way, Ricci’s information on China played a well-recognized role in European enlightenment, but it was a role limited to not only what European thinkers already were doing but also what was misconstrued about China or Ricci’s actual insight into it. Even though Confucianism could be proved to be somewhat theistic, as mentioned before, it was not therefore the same as European theism. Even though the lack of equivalence showed the dominant Chinese philosophical tradition as different from Christianity, it was not therefore identical with European atheism or pantheism. Neither the one nor the other, what is so important about Chinese philosophy in Ricci’s understanding or composite presentation of it is how it is somehow simultaneously similar to and different from its European counterparts. Learning about China mainly for the purpose of changing it, Ricci did not see the provocative implication of this ambiguous contrast for his own tradition. However, others apparently noticed it, and it evidently had a great deal to do with the revolutionary development of a new European philosophical and religious idea that began then and that, as an effort to reconcile the concepts of necessity and freedom, eventually evolved into what Frederick C. Beiser calls “a middle path.”³³

Because his theistic reading of actual Chinese texts was too far-

³³ Frederick C. Beiser, “Kant’s intellectual development: 1746–1781,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Kant*, ed. Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 30.

fetched and because his attack on neo-Confucian cosmology sounded like an exposure of his own inapt understanding, Ricci's particular use of accommodation could not possibly have worked in any other Chinese historical period than the Wanli era (1573–1620). Coming to the throne when he was only nine years old, the Wanli emperor was fortunate in the first ten years of his reign to have the service of a capable though authoritarian Confucian scholar-official named Zhang Juzheng, who, as a strict and stern taskmaster, was also his personal tutor. After Zhang's death in 1582, he quickly turned delinquent in the exercise of the highly centralized governmental power that was vested in him. Because he simply refused for years to see the highest-ranking Confucian scholar-officials who prepared various suggestions and policies for him to sign into imperial edicts, he gradually paralyzed the routine administration of the entire government by blocking normal appointments, transfers, leaves, retirements, and disciplinary actions and by delegating instead large numbers of eunuchs to the provinces as his personal tax commissioners. It is this very unusual situation that gave Ricci a chance. In spite of his implausible Christian reading of Confucianism, reform-minded scholar-officials embraced him as an ally against eunuchs who were generally followers of Buddhism and Daoism. Accepting his word about his religious faith as consistent with the old Confucian idea of respecting, fearing, and serving heaven (*jing-tian*, *wei-tian*, and *shi-tian*), they also welcomed his scientific knowledge as useful in their championship of pragmatic or utilitarian learning (*jing-shi-zhi-yong*) over the subjectivist and individualist theories of Wang Yangming and Li Zhi that they considered to be self-indulgent and socially harmful, and over the purely philological and literary studies of the neo-Confucian *li* or *qi* that they regarded as vain and useless.

Among Ricci's most important converts were Xu Guangqi, Li Zhizao, and Yang Tingyun. Baptized as Paul, Leo, and Michael respectively and known as the three pillars of the early Chinese Christian church, all of them were distinguished Confucian scholars and high officials in the Ming government. Xu and Li were first attracted to Ricci by his knowledge of mathematics and cartography, while Yang, a disillusioned Buddhist, was attracted by his ethical and religious teaching. Whatever made them initially interested in Christianity, they all ended up seeing Ricci's doctrine about the lord of heaven and the palpably useful scientific and ethical learning of Europe as closely connected with each other and equally worthy of promulgation in the middle kingdom. "While learning about their faith," as Xu Guangqi said, "I came to understand how it can supplement Confucianism and fight against Buddhism (*bu-ru-yi-fu*) and how, in addition, it involves a way

of investigating things and scrutinizing reason (*ge-wu-qiong-li-zhi-xue*) which may provide an answer to every question both inside and outside this world.”³⁴ “Through the study of this book,” as Li Zhizao similarly remarked in his preface to a Jesuit treatise, “one comes to know heaven so that one can sense the wonder of creation, the necessity of a maker for the made things, and the deliberation of the creator.”³⁵ “Feeling the *li* and grasping the *Dao*,” he went on to point out, “one can then thoroughly understand reason and even destiny.”³⁶ Here for Xu and Li, as elsewhere for Yang, what Ricci taught was not just some practical learning useful only for certain isolated local problems but a new way of totalizing thinking essential for the moral and spiritual renovation of individuals and society.

As sincere followers of Ricci, Xu, Li, and Yang all tirelessly participated in the propaganda campaign for their newly adopted faith, either writing influential prefaces and postscripts for the publications of their Jesuit friends or publishing their own annotations of elementary Christian tenets. Not only did they themselves routinely finance these publication projects, but when politically motivated persecutions caught up with them as they did in Nanjing in 1616, they also risked their own official careers and lives to protect the missionaries and to seek imperial injunction against the persecutors. By opening their hearts and minds to the religious and scientific ideas of Ricci, they found a refreshingly new way of articulating old Confucian concerns about the spiritual cultivation of the self and the moral and material welfare of the family and the nation. By aligning himself with Confucian scholar-officials like Xu, Li, and Yang, Ricci made his evangelical cause a significant minor force in the mainstream Chinese cultural and political life in the early seventeenth century. What he achieved is indeed remarkable, but not so much because it represented what Wolfgang Reinhard calls “one of the few serious alternatives to the otherwise brutal ethno-centrism of the European expansion over the earth,”³⁷ since he did not then have the actual power of doing what Europeans did in America, Africa, and

³⁴ Xu Guangqi, *Collected Works*, vol. 2; quoted in Shuzeng, *Chinese Philosophy of the Ming Dynasty*, p. 1802.

³⁵ Li Zhizao, “Preface to the Translation of *Huan-You-Quan*,” quoted in Shuzeng, *Chinese Philosophy of the Ming Dynasty*, p. 1803.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Wolfgang Reinhard, “Gegenreformation als Modernisierung? Prologomena Zu einer Theorie des Konfessionellen Zeitalters,” *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 68 (1977): 241; quoted in Bonnie B. C. Oh’s “Introduction,” in *East Meets West: The Jesuits in China, 1582–1773*, ed. Charles E. Ronan, S.J. and Bonnie B. C. Oh (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1988), p. xvii.

elsewhere. Instead, what is so remarkable is how his particular use of accommodation as a proselytizing strategy was utterly unworkable on its own terms but actually worked in the very unusual social and political circumstances of the late Ming dynasty.

Impressive though it was, it is important to note that Ricci's success was only to the extent of the Chinese belief in the sincerity of his desire for a complementary relationship between Christianity and Confucianism. "We have received a truly erudite master," as Xu Guangqi said about Ricci not as an agent of a foreign and fundamentally different, if not hostile, religion but as a fellow scholar of Confucianism, "who has recognized the brilliant virtue of our land, and so stayed in our imperial palaces to serve as such a guardian of honor."³⁸ Viewing Ricci and other Jesuit missionaries similarly as "sages from the West [who] are in style like the Confucians from before the Han dynasty (*xi-lai-zhu-xian-you-han-qian-ru-zhe-zhi-feng*)," Yang Tingyun was also firmly convinced that "my Western Teaching of Heaven can be practiced in such a way that [the Teaching of Heaven] and our Confucianism mutually support each other (*wo-xi-fang-tian-xue-ke-yu-wu-ru-xiang-fu-er-xing*)."³⁹ In fact, even people who were not converted to Christianity often felt it inappropriate to suspect any untoward or ulterior motive behind Ricci's teaching. Writing to a friend about Ricci's extraordinary personality, linguistic felicity, and knowledge of Confucian classics, Li Zhi, the well-known independent thinker who met Ricci on several occasions, was puzzled by why the resident of a faraway Western country was in China. "I have already been with him three times," he wrote, "and still do not know why he has come here."⁴⁰ "It would be more than foolish," he went on to comment, "if it were perhaps his wish to alter our doctrine of the Duke of Chou and of Confucius on the basis of his doctrine."⁴¹ "I believe," he concluded, "that this is not [the reason why he is here]."⁴²

Ricci did not have to act the way he did, but if he had Eurocentrically set out to "attack some of the outstanding features of the nation's life and thought and effect their destruction or transformation,"⁴³ as

³⁸ Xu Guangqi, *A Postscript to the Twenty-Five Sayings (Ba er-shi-wu yen)*, quoted in Wang Xiaochao, *Christianity and Imperial Culture: Chinese Christian Apologetics in the Seventeenth Century and their Latin Patristic Equivalent* (Boston: Brill, 1998), p. 132.

³⁹ Yang Tingyun, *Daiyi xupian*, quoted in Nicolas Standaert, *Yang Tingyun, Confucian and Christian in late Ming China* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), p. 208.

⁴⁰ Jung Chao-tsu, *Li Cho-wu P'ing chuan* (Shanghai, 1937), p. 40.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ Latourette, *History of Christian Missions*, p. 24.

one mission historian believed that Christianity had to do in China and as the military power of Europe eventually enabled the soldiers of the Christian God to do from the Opium War period of the 1840s to the early twentieth century, he could not and would not have won the confidence and discipleship of Confucian scholar-officials such as Xu Guangqi, Li Zhizao, and Yang Tingyun. Precisely because he instinctively kept hidden his ultimate goal of religious conquest, he was able to infiltrate deeply into the cultural and political life of the middle kingdom in the late Ming dynasty. However, precisely because he carefully pushed his evangelical agenda through a tactical alliance with Confucianism, whatever success he achieved had serious, if not fatal, limitations. Since his Christian reading of Chinese classics for the purpose of his claim of Confucian theism was not persuasive, in particular, he had to fall back on Aristotle's notion of the efficient cause (i.e., nothing comes from nothing) or the logically needed presumption of a personal deity in a mechanistically conceptualized universe to present European theism as what was allowed theoretically or figuratively in the Chinese philosophical frame of reference.⁴⁴ Since he took care not to dwell too much on any Christian mysteries or revelations that he knew beforehand that the well-educated and rationally minded Confucian scholar-officials would dismiss as superstitious, he made it difficult, if not impossible, for himself to overcome the central tenet of Confucianism about divinity and humanity as being distinguishable from each other in theory while being united with one another in practice (*tian-ren-he-yi*).

Impressed by Ricci's personality, ethical behavior, and knowledge, and his use of the Aristotelian efficient cause or logical argument, Confucian scholar-officials such as Xu Guangqi, Li Zhizao, and Yang Tingyun accepted European theism. Insofar as they did so, they may be seen as having been converted. However, since Ricci said little about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, Xu, Li, and Yang only had a superficial and largely inaccurate understanding of Christianity. Xu, for

⁴⁴ In spite of Ricci's strong criticism of neo-Confucianism, it is the metaphysical readings of Chinese classics by thinkers such as Cheng Yi and Zhu Xi that probably lend the most explicit support to his claim of theistic tendencies in Confucianism. When asked once about which exists first, principle (*li*) or material-force (*qi*), for instance, Zhu Xi mentioned how the former could be thought of as being before the latter (*Zhuxi quanshu* 49:1a-b, in *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, comp. Wm. Theodore de Bary and Irene Bloom, 2nd ed. [New York: Columbia University Press, 1999], 1:699-700). "Fundamentally," he said, "principle and material-force cannot be spoken of as prior or posterior" (1:699). "But if we must trace their origin," he quickly went on to point out, "we are obliged to say that principle is prior" (1:699-700).

instance, may have written thirteen or fourteen tracts for the Christian propaganda, but, aside from a simple, if not simplistic, recapitulation of Ricci's theistic argument, these were mostly variations of moralistic teaching centered on the hope of rewards and the fear of punishments in the afterlife. "[Simple] in forms without actual content" or "mere formalities or . . . playing with words," as one Chinese scholar characterizes them,⁴⁵ they were what Xu used to talk to people who were intellectually inferior rather than equal to him. Just as Kant toward the end of the eighteenth century did not think that any consideration of personal advantage or disadvantage had anything to do with the categorical imperative but nevertheless believed that it could be utilized profitably in ethical education via ideas of divine punishments or rewards, so Xu filled his Christian propaganda writing with similar material incentives or disincentives of morality that, as a Confucian scholar believing firmly in the idea of a self-existent moral law, he very likely did not endorse but that he must have found useful in a theistically oriented educational program for the philosophically uninitiated. "To preach the truth, of course," Li Zhizao said in a preface to Ricci's *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, "one need not raise the question of reward and punishment, but if it serves to frighten fools and alarm the lazy, then it is right and proper that the good should be praised and rewarded while the wicked are berated and punished."⁴⁶

If Xu, Li, and Yang had nothing more than a skewed understanding of Christianity, they had an even worse knowledge of European history. "Now there are more than thirty countries in the West," as Xu Guangqi wrote in his important 1616 memorial to the Wanli emperor in defense of Western religion and learning, "and they have accepted and practiced this teaching for a thousand and several hundred years, right up to the present time, great and small living together in harmony, superior and inferior at peace with each other."⁴⁷ "The borders are not guarded," he claimed, "and the rulers of the states are all of the same family."⁴⁸ "Throughout all the countries there are no swindlers

⁴⁵ Wu Deyi, "A Tentative Interpretation of Xu Guangqi's Religious Faith and His Ideal as an Introducer of Western Learning," in *Collected Essays on Xu Guangqi*, ed. Xi Zezhong and Wu Deyi (Shanghai: Xuelin Press, 1986), pp. 151–159, 153.

⁴⁶ Li Zhizao, "Preface to the *True Meaning of God*," in *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, compiled by Wm. Theodore de Bary, Wing-tsit Chan, and Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), pp. 626–629, 629.

⁴⁷ Xu Guangqi, "A Memorial in Defense of the [Western] Teaching," in *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, compiled by Wm. Theodore de Bary et al., 2nd ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 2:147–149, 149.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

and liars,” he went on to say, “and they have never had the custom of licentiousness or theft.”⁴⁹ “On the roads they do not pick up things that are dropped,” he further asserted, “and at night they do not lock their doors.”⁵⁰ Here, in the then still relatively recent context of the cataclysmic disintegration of Christendom and the attendant wars of swords and words between the Catholic and Protestant states that followed the reformation, what is so revealing is not only how Xu was idealizing Europe in complete ignorance of any reality but also how he was depicting his imaginary Europe in Confucian terms of an ideal state. The idea of things dropped but not picked up on the public roads or of doors not locked at night in private homes (*lu-bu-shi-yi, ye-bu-bi-hu*), for instance, may sound like some quaint praises to a European, but they can conjure up a great deal to any speaker of the Chinese language and they go a long way to explain the special attraction of Ricci and his Jesuit confreres to Confucian scholar-officials such as Xu, living as they did in a society tormented in that period of time by internal turmoil and external threat.

Knowing little of European history or of the supernatural aspects of Christianity and persuaded mainly by Ricci’s exceptional personality, scientific knowledge, ethical teaching, and Aristotelian logic, it is no wonder that Confucian scholar-officials such as Xu Guangqi, Li Zhizao, and Yang Tingyun should have embraced European theism while retaining their belief in the actual or potential harmony between divinity and humanity (*tian-ren-he-yi*). In his major proselytizing work, Ricci structured his discussion as a dialogue between a Western savant and a Chinese scholar, and he had the latter concede the necessity of conceptualizing divinity as an anthropomorphic being clearly separated from any human being. Since Ricci received crucial assistance from his Chinese friends in the Chinese rendition of his ideas, Confucian scholar-officials such as Xu, Li, and Yang were obviously comfortable with the way his real or fictional debate went. However, since this only confirmed in their minds the truth of what Ricci told them about the commensurability of Confucianism and Christianity, they very likely did not see why they could not at the same time think about the divine in the Chinese way as what Tu Wei-Ming calls “that which is most refined in the creative process of the universe”⁵¹ and envision

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Tu Wei-Ming, *Confucian Thought: Selfhood as Creative Transformation* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985), p. 158.

it as what is already in each human being in its potential but needs to be consciously activated.

“Being afterwards in the imperial city [Beijing],” as Niccolo Longobardo recalled an incident involving Yang Tingyun, “he shew’d us several Treatises he had compos’d of things relating to our Religion, with an Exposition of the *Ten Commandments*; in which tho he treats of many things he has heard from our Fathers, yet every foot he flies out into other things taken from his *Chinese Doctrine*, which more fully makes out the true opinion of the Learned.”⁵² The most egregious idea that Longobardo found is the relationship of humanity with nature or heaven (*tian-ren-he-yi*). “[In] the introduction to the *Commandments*,” as he said while summarizing Yang’s ideas, “. . . all things are one and the same Substance, which is their *Li*, not differing from one another, any otherwise than the outward shape, and accidental qualities; whence follow all the absurdities our *Europeans* deduce from the Principle, *Omnia sunt unum*, or all things are the same, till at last they come downright Atheism.”⁵³ In his report about Yang Tingyun’s belief in the actual or potential union of humanity with heaven (*tian-ren-he-yi*), Longobardo was understandably scandalized. Following Longobardo’s reading of the situation, even scholars who are not biased against the Jesuits feel compelled to cast doubt on Ricci’s achievement.

“When, to make his religion proof against Chinese ethnocentrism—to make it, in short, essential—the westerner sees his western culture as fleeting and superficial,” as Joseph R. Levenson points out, “the Chinese notes the sacrifice, and accepts it, and stands pat.”⁵⁴ “There is no conversion,” he goes on to say, “no outward turning.”⁵⁵ In relation to Longobardo’s report about Yang, what Levenson says is no doubt correct, since Yang apparently did not read the relationship of humanity with heaven the way his newly adopted Christian faith required him to do, but to contend therefore that Ricci achieved nothing seems to have vastly overstated the case. If Ricci could have his way, he undoubtedly would have liked his Chinese converts to distinguish between divinity and humanity and view their entire relationship in the European way. By freely choosing to be converted, Confucian scholar-officials such as Yang must have accepted the European notion of theism insofar as

⁵² Longobardo, “Short Answer,” 1:221.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Joseph R. Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate: A Trilogy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 1:119.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* In *China and the Christian Impact*, Jacques Gernet voices the same opinion.

it was explained in terms of the Aristotelian efficient cause, but they apparently did so on their own terms and therefore retained the old Confucian idea of divinity, which did not involve anything like the Aristotelian first principle but which nevertheless allowed it theoretically or heuristically.⁵⁶ Since this is the case, what happened between Ricci and those converted Confucian scholar-officials could be “[a] dialogue of misapprehension.”⁵⁷ However, it is very important to realize that the supposed misapprehension was to a very large extent deliberate and the same on both sides.

From 1583 to his death in 1610, Ricci spent twenty-seven years in China. Being as familiar with the Chinese language and classics as Longobardo, he must have known that neo-Confucianism was not different doctrinally from classical Confucianism. When he nevertheless set the former apart from the latter, he must have disagreed consciously with his Chinese scholar-official friends. Similarly, through their long association with Ricci and others, the converted Chinese scholar-officials must have learned enough about European theism to know that the European *Zhu* or *Tian Zhu* (Deus) and the Chinese *Tian* (Heaven) were not the same.⁵⁸ When they nevertheless talked about the one as if it were the other, they must also have disagreed consciously with Ricci and others. Even though his equation of the Chinese *Tian* with the European *Zhu* and his actual criticism of neo-Confucian cosmology were extremely idiosyncratic, if not downright erroneous in Chinese terms, Ricci presented them as in conformity with classical Confucianism so as to win the friendship of the scholar-officials he wished to convert. Even though the converted scholar-officials could not have taken seriously Ricci's Christian reading of Chinese classics, the ambiguous fact of China being simultaneously similar to and different from Europe in metaphysics allowed them to accept enough European theism so as to mark their respect. On both sides, it seemed a case of friends deliber-

⁵⁶ See n. 44 above.

⁵⁷ Erik Zürcher, *Dialog der Misverstanden* (Leiden, 1962), pp. 6–7.

⁵⁸ As shown in *Sheng-chao-po-xie-ji* [Collection of Writings of the Sacred Dynasty for the Countering of Heterodoxy], published by Xu Changzhi in 1639, much of the anti-Christian propaganda in the early seventeenth century was about the differences between the Chinese *Tian* (Heaven) and the European *Zhu* or *Tian Zhu* (Deus). Being good Confucian scholars, Xu, Li, and Yang would have accepted the validity of these arguments. The fact that this was indeed the case was one of the main reasons for Longobardo's opposition to Ricci's dubious interpretations of Chinese classics and to his particular use of accommodation as a proselytizing policy.

ately choosing for their own purposes to agree, wherever possible, while overlooking quietly all disagreement. Just as Ricci accommodated himself to his Chinese friends, so they accommodated themselves to him. Ricci may very well have foreseen the problem. In fact, it may well have been implied right in his last words to his Jesuit confreres about leaving them “before an open door which leads to great merits, but not without great effort and many dangers.”⁵⁹

When Ricci’s theistic claim for Confucianism and his attack on neo-Confucian cosmology had their most important impact in Europe in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, those European thinkers who made the most use of his ideas were profoundly dissatisfied with their own European conceptual framework. The undeniable and unpleasant problem of evil, in particular, led them to question the old mechanistic worldview that they inherited from Judeo-Christianity and mainstream European humanism. In their search for a new way of thinking that would allow them to avoid being caught between the Scylla of theism and the Charybdis of atheism, they became attracted to the organic perspective of Asia that showed the possibility of a world that was free but not chaotic and that was regular but not mechanical.⁶⁰ When Ricci’s evangelical enterprise in China had its greatest success in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, those Confucian scholar-officials who were drawn to him were also profoundly dissatisfied with their own situation. However, neither they nor the famous social rebel Li Zhi were fundamentally critical of their philosophical and religious heritage. Even though Confucian scholar-officials such as Xu Guangqi, Li Zhizao, and Yang Tingyun welcomed Ricci’s alliance with Confucianism, they never accepted more of his European theism than was allowed theoretically by their own philosophical tradition. Because they accepted Ricci as one of them, they tolerated his dubious Christian reading of Chinese classics, but because Ricci was unable to explain what was wrong with their conceptual framework on its own terms, they never endorsed his European criticism of Confucian or neo-Confucian cosmology (*tian-ren-he-yi*). More than anything else, this intricate state of things seems to have limited the success of Ricci’s evangelical enterprise.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Vincent Cronin, *The Wise Man from the West* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1955), p. 272.

⁶⁰ Among other places, this can be seen in Pierre Bayle’s *Dictionary Historical and Critical*, which began publication in 1696, and in G. W. Leibniz’s *Theodicy*, which was published in 1710.

Unable to impose his views by force, Ricci just had to conduct his proselytizing work indirectly in the middle kingdom. Since he never did or could have all things his way completely, it was probably no wonder that there were so many intricacies not only before and during but also long after the event. One of Ricci's conspicuously cultivated adaptations to the Confucian scholar-officials was his vocal antagonism against Buddhism. He dismissed Buddhism, not so much because he lacked any Christian love for the followers of that religion as because he foresaw the benefits of the posture for his evangelism. In spite of his hostile attitude toward Buddhism, however, he was, long after his death, willy-nilly venerated in Shanghai in the nineteenth century as "Li-Ma-tou-pu-sa" or "Bodhisattva Ricci" by Chinese clock makers who appreciated his part in the introduction of certain European mechanical curiosities to China, including clock making, and who therefore claimed him as their tutelary deity. Similarly, to take advantage of the fact that China was at the same time similar to and different from Europe in metaphysics, he carefully calibrated his relationship with Confucianism. Attacking it while befriending it, he was trying "[to] change China," as Jonathan Spence says in the eye-catching title of one of his books.⁶¹ In spite of his effort, however, Ricci may have unwittingly paved the way for far more change ideologically in Europe than in China.

After all, the notion of God in Europe is arguably no longer that of a divine tyrant, as Ricci inherited from medieval theology and took to China. Furthermore, the view of every human being as Godlike in his or her self-sufficiency or autonomy is now indisputably the single most important principle of internal Western democracy rather than liable any longer for condemnation as a variation of Satanism, or Pelagianism, or, in relation to the Jesuit order, Molinism. Insofar as the Western idea of divinity is nowadays closely associated with moral justice rather than power or arbitrary will (so that the divine is still identified with the good but what is good is so, not so much because God commands it as because it is so in itself) and insofar as the Western notion of human self-sufficiency is similarly connected intimately with ethical values or a certain innate sense of the morally good or bad, the largely secularized West is already very similar in some crucial ways to China in its thoughts about the relationship of divinity and humanity

⁶¹ Jonathan Spence, *To Change China: Western Advisers in China 1620–1960* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1969).

(*tian-ren-he-yi*) that Ricci saw and combated in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Since this is the case, it seems very important to remember the many intricacies that either led to or resulted from Ricci's particular use of accommodation as a proselytizing policy, which made it inevitable for his evangelical cause to work out as "one of history's magnificent failures,"⁶² but which nevertheless may have thereby prepared the crucial though inadvertent participation of Chinese philosophical and religious ideas in the formulation of European or Western modernity.

⁶² John S. Gregory, *The West and China since 1500* (New York: Palgrave, 2003), p. 38.