

The Jesuit Reading of Confucius: The First Complete Translation of the "Lunyu" (1687) Published in the West. Thierry Meynard, SJ.

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During the seventeenth century an increased interest in Chinese philosophies spread across Europe, and the information flowing from the East to the West was mostly transmitted through the mediation of Jesuit missionaries. The *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* was published and widely spread in this particular context of cultural exchange. It is a book published by Jesuits in Paris in 1687 that obtained instant success and was translated into many Western languages. It included a Latin translation of the first three of the Four Books (中庸 *Si Shu*) traditionally attributed to Confucius: *The Great Learning* (大學 *Daxue*), *The Doctrine of the Mean* (中庸 *Zhongyong*), and the *Analects* (論語 *Lunyu*). Thierry Meynard has been concentrating his research on this book since 2003 and in this recent publication he focuses on the third volume of the classics, the *Lunyu*, which contains "sententias atque apophthegmata moralia tum à Confucio, tum ab hujus discipulis non uno tempore vel loco prolata" ("the moral sayings and apothegms of Confucius, or on a few occasions, those of his disciples") (93). After a brief philological reconstruction of the text, the author mainly highlights the reinterpretation of *Lunyu* given by the Jesuits. Meynard translates into English not from the original Chinese text but from the Latin version, allowing non-Latinist readers to understand the particular Jesuit reading of the *Lunyu*.

The book is divided into three sections: an introduction, a translation of *Lunyu*, and a biography of Confucius as it appeared in the *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*. The accurate introduction provides the reader with a textual history of the book, describing the genesis and the actors of this translation process, how and why the project of translating Confucian classics was started and carried on by Jesuits, and the final reception of the *Lunyu*. Meynard focuses on how the *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* differed from previous translations and "made changes, in order to get a better accuracy with the original text, or to make a point in the context of the growing controversy among missionaries" (90).

Special attention is given to the different Chinese sources that were used for the translation, analyzing the strategic choice of some Chinese commentaries considered more useful and nearest to a Christian reinterpretation. The author then underlines the

particular reading that Jesuits made of some important themes, such as the figure of Confucius and his concept of *ren* 仁 (which means—simplifying—“humanity”), the hierarchical political order, and the question of the legitimacy of hatred.

The central part of the book consists of the Jesuit translation and commentary of the *Lunyu*: it is a trilingual edition in which the original Chinese text is followed by the Latin one and its English translation. The text is accompanied by footnotes to help the reader identify the different Chinese sources used in the original or to underline the peculiar Christian reading behind the translation choices. The last part of the book presents the translation of *Confucii Vita*, and is followed by a brief and helpful vocabulary of a few Chinese characters that represent the most important philosophical concepts or words that appeared in the text, providing the Latin equivalent and its English translation.

This is a well-written work that offers a complete analysis of a particular case of translation, in accordance with the specific meaning of the Latin etymology of the word: *trans-ducto*, or lead across. The Chinese classic *Lunyu* is in fact *tractum*—transferred into a different Western culture—due to the Jesuit reading of Confucius. Perhaps this work could be considered too specialized for common readers. But it can be of great use to those scholars who have an interest in the work of Jesuit missionaries in China during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, in Confucian classics, or, more generally, in translation or Chinese studies. Although the Jesuit publications and the *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* have received considerable scholarly attention and are well known in the field of Oriental and Jesuit studies, the purpose of Thierry Meynard’s book is to offer the first systematic study completely focused on the Jesuit reading of the *Lunyu*, thus providing an immediate support for the understanding of the Jesuit interpretation of this famous Confucian work.

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