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«CHINA TOO HAS ITS ARISTOTLE»: THE ZHONGYONG 中庸
(«SINARUM SCIENTIA POLITICO-MORALIS»)
AND THE JESUITS' FASCINATION WITH CONFUCIUS

Originally, the Jesuits began to translate the *Four Books* (*Sishu* 四書) with the intention of teaching the Chinese language and culture to their confreres who arrived in China¹. They transcribed the original texts into Chinese characters, provided a phonetic transcription in the Latin alphabet and a word-for-word translation in Latin. The Chinese characters were numbered with their corresponding Latin word to facilitate the learning process. According to Thierry Meynard S.I., Michele Ruggieri (1543-1607) «was the first to engage in this type of work, preparing a translation of the *Four Books*, until he was recalled back to Rome in 1588. After Ruggieri arrived in Rome in 1590, he did not find support for the diplomatic mission to China that he had hoped for. He came under the suspicion of his superiors and only managed to write a short essay on the missionary method in China, in which half of the preface of the *Daxue*

1. The *Four Books* are four ancient text selected, edited and commented by Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130-1200), the most influential Neo-Confucian thinker of the Song dynasty. Considered the quintessence of Confucian learning and used as textbooks for civil service from 1313 to 1905, these were: *Daxue* 大學 (The Great Learning), a short political treatise linking on government and ethics, the *Zhongyong* 中庸 (The Doctrine of the Mean), a treatise on self cultivation, cosmology and rituals; *Lunyu* 論語 (Analects), a collection of quotations from the Master Confucius (ca. 551-479 BC) and conversations collected by his disciples; finally *Mengzi* 孟子 (Mencius), the longest text of the *Four Books*, containing the teaching of the Master Mencius (ca. 371-289 BC).

was translated into Latin, published in 1593 in the *Biblioteca selecta* of the Jesuit Antonio Possevino»².

The Visitor for Asia Alessandro Valignano S.I. (1539-1606) was convinced that evangelization was attainable only by means of a sound knowledge of the Chinese language, thus decided to send Michele Ruggieri to China to study Chinese, as we learn from the letter that Ruggieri wrote to the *Preaepositus Generalis* on May, 1, 1579³. Michele Ruggieri

2. It was published in the *Biblioteca Selecta* by the Jesuit Antonio Possevino (1559-1611). *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* (1687). *The First Translation of the Confucian Classics*, ed. T. Meynard, Rome 2011, p. 4. K. Lundbaek (*The First Translation from a Confucian Classic in Europe*, in «China Mission Studies Bulletin», 1 [1979], pp. 1-11), following to the discovery of a manuscript of the *Four Books* at the Biblioteca Nazionale V. Emanuele II in Rome by Pasquale D'Elia in 1936, ascribes the translation of the *Four Books* to Michele Ruggieri. D'Elia in 1936 attributed the work to Ricci, but a few years later, in 1942, he changed his mind, attributing the whole manuscript to Ruggieri, on the assumption that Alessandro Valignano S.I. (1539-1606) in a letter to General Claudio Acquaviva (1543-1615) had recommended not to allow the publication of Ruggieri's mediocre work but to wait for a better version by Ricci of the *Four Books*, of which before November 15 or 16, 1594, he had shown to him a good portion. P. D'Elia, *Fonti Ricciane*, Roma 1942, vol. I, p. 43, n. 2. D'Arelli argues that it is highly improbable that M. Ruggieri translated the *Four Books* during his stay in China in the years 1579-1588 and, on the basis of a manuscript found at the Biblioteca Nazionale V. Emanuele II in Rome, he concludes that the author was M. Ricci and M. Ruggieri was the copyist. See F. D'Arelli, *Michele Ruggieri S.I., l'apprendimento della lingua cinese e la traduzione Latina dei "Si shu"* ("Quattro Libri"), in «Annali dell'Istituto Universitario Orientale», 54/4 (1994), pp. 479-87; Id., *Il Codice Fondo Gesuitico (3314) 1185 della Biblioteca Nazionale V. Emanuele II di Roma e la critica storica*, in *Studi in onore di Lionello Lanciotti*, a cura di S. M. Carletti - M. Sacchetti - P. Santangelo, Napoli 1996, vol. I, pp. 473-83. Id., *Matteo Ricci S.I. e la traduzione latina dei "Quattro Libri" ("sishu")*: dalla tradizione storiografica alle nuove ricerche, in *Le Marche e l'Oriente. Una tradizione ininterrotta da Matteo Ricci a Giuseppe Tucci*, Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente, ed. F. D'Arelli, Roma 1988, pp. 163-75. See also L. Paternicò, *Translating the Master. The Contribution of Prospero Intorcetta to the "Confucius Sinarum Philosophus"*, in «Monumenta Serica: Journal of Oriental Studies», 65/1 (2017), pp. 87-121: 95-7. For a refutation of D'Arelli's theory, based on the assumption that Ruggieri's Chinese language was good as testified by the poems in Chinese he wrote, see T. Meynard, SJ, *The Jesuit Reading of Confucius: The First Complete Translation of the Lunyu (1667) Published in the West*, Leiden 2015, pp. 2-9.

3. M. Ruggieri S.I. to E. Mercuriano S.I., Cochín, May 1, 1579, *Documenta Indica*, XI, Edidit I Wicki, S.I., Romae 1970, 1972, 1975, p. 573. See also R. Vicente S.I. to E. Mercuriano, Goa, November 13, 1579. From a letter by A. Monserrato we learn that Michele Ruggieri was chosen for his good memory. A. Monserrato S.I. to E. Mercuriano S.I.; *Littera Annua*, Goa, October 26, 1679, pp. 645-6. For further information see D'Arelli, *Michele Ruggieri S.I., L'apprendimento della lingua cinese cit.*, p. 480 n. 3.

was aware of the difficulty of learning a language so different from ours, void of alphabet, and which such a vast and complex lexis that even the natives require fifteen years to read and understand their books (...)⁴.

The *vexata quaestio* of the conferral of the first translation of the *Sishu* remains unsolved with scholars divided on the translators of the *sishu* (Michele Ruggieri or Matteo Ricci?). Most of them attribute the translation to Michele Ruggieri, but it seems that he had not actually found the time to translate the whole work, neither had he acquired sufficient proficiency in the Chinese language and knowledge of the Chinese classics⁵.

Michele Ruggieri left for Rome and Matteo Ricci (known in China as Li Madou 利瑪竇, 1552-1610) undertook the task of translating the *Four Books* to teach the Chinese language and to learn and understand Chinese thought. In particular he taught the Chinese language to the newly arrived Jesuit Francesco de Petris (1562-1593) using the *Sishu* 四書 (The *Four Books*) as a primer. Ricci was translating the *Sishu* when Alessandro Valignano instructed him to write a new Catechism, which would replace Ruggieri's *Tianzhu shilu* 天主實錄 (The True Records of the Lord of Heaven).

There is no doubt that the translation of the Chinese classics into Latin had manifold implications, starting from the first interlocutors, the confreres arriving in China, who were not acquainted with the Chinese language and culture, to their superiors in Rome, who were to approve the Latin version of the Chinese Classics. The study of the Classics and their translation was the keystone to understanding Chinese thought for Matteo Ricci and the Jesuits who followed him in their endeavour to find common features and cross-cultural concepts between two very distant

4. In a letter dated November 8, 1580.

5. Meynard concludes that Ruggieri had been the compiler and copyist of the whole manuscript in the Jesuit fund of the Biblioteca Nazionale V. Emanuele II (BNCR, F.G., 3314, 1185); according to D'Arelli (*Michele Ruggieri S.I., l'apprendimento della lingua cinese* cit.) it is difficult to suggest a simple hypothesis on the book which M. Ruggieri said to have translated in *mal latino*, identified by Lundbaek as the *Daxue*. Moreover, he argues, we cannot find any reference to the translations in Latin of the *Four Books* in his Letters to Europe. Cfr. D'Arelli, *Michele Ruggieri S.I., l'apprendimento della lingua cinese* cit.; see also Lundbaek, *The First Translation* cit., p. 8, n. 19; T. Meynard, *The Jesuit Reading of Confucius. The First Complete Translation of the Lunyu (1687)*, Leiden 2015, pp. 5-8. See *supra*, note 2.

geographical, cultural and social environments. This was indeed a very difficult and challenging task⁶. Michele Ruggieri and Matteo Ricci paved the way for the Jesuits who continued the ambitious task of translating the Chinese Classics. In particular, Matteo Ricci was highly appreciated in China: he was considered an esteemed scholar by Chinese literati of his time, an extraordinarily wise man, likened to the Chinese Sages in the mastery of incredible techniques. The Ming literatus Li Rihua 李日華 (1565–1635) indeed described him as an outstanding man, a master of the Way (*daoren* 道人) or Master of esoteric techniques (*yiren* 異人), as men who had acquired extraordinary techniques were called:

Matteo Ricci, from that country, sailed across the sea with ten fellows, travelling across more than a thousand countries and more than 60,000 *li*; after six years, he arrived in Annam and then he entered in Guangdong. By then all his fellows had died. Matteo Ricci mastered extraordinary techniques, nobody could harm him, he could fend off diseases by his skills of breathing and meditation. As he stayed in Guangdong for more than twenty years, he understood very well the Chinese language, written and spoken. He had a purple moustache and green eyes⁷, his complexion was like peach flowers.

When he met somebody he kowtowed according to the rites, so that the people loved him and trusted him⁸.

Matteo Ricci departed from Lisbon on March 24, 1578; on September 13 of the same year he reached Goa (where he completed his theological studies at the Jesuit College and taught Latin), and in the year 1582 he

6. *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* (1687), ed. Meynard cit., p. 4.

7. The expression *ziran biyan* 紫髯碧眼 (purple moustache and green eyes) was first used to describe Sun Quan 孫權 (181–252), the founder of the Eastern Wu Kingdom, who reigned from 229 to 252 and was considered a successful and moderate ruler, as denoted by his extraordinary physiognomy and body. He was born with square cheeks and a big mouth, green eyes and a purple moustache (孫權生得方頤大口, 碧眼紫髯). Luo Guanzhong 羅貫中, *Sanguo yanyi* 三國演義, Beijing 1979, p. 259.

8. 國人利瑪竇者, 結十伴航海, 漫遊歷千餘國, 經六萬里, 凡六年, 抵安南而入廣東界, 時從者俱死。瑪竇有異術, 人不能害, 又善納氣內觀, 故疾擊不作。居廣二十餘年, 盡通中國語言文字。瑪竇紫髯碧眼, 面色如桃花, 見人膜拜如禮, 人亦愛之, 信其為善人也。(卷一大西國)。Li Rihua 李日華 (1565–1635), *Zitao xuanzazhui* 紫桃軒雜綴 (Assorted Notes Composed at the Purple Peach Veranda), Xueshizhai 1868, vol. I, *Da Xiguo* 大西國, p. 49. See also Zhang Qiong, *Making the New World Their Own: Chinese Encounters with Jesuit Science in the Age of Discovery*, Leiden 2015, pp. 44–5.

was relocated to Macao to assist Ruggieri in the China mission. He settled in Zhaoqing 肇慶 in September 1583⁹. Michele Ruggieri was the first person to formulate a catechism in Chinese during his stay in Macao; entitled *The True Records of the Lord of Heaven*, it was probably «revised» by Matteo Ricci before publication in November 1584. Ruggieri wrote the first draft in 1582-1583, assisted by two Chinese men in Zhaoqing who were baptized Paolo and Giovanni. The book, the first in Chinese published by a European, spread to China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam and the Philippines¹⁰. In a letter from Zhaoqing (20 October 1586) Ricci mentioned that they sent to Father Acquaviva «a Catechism we have printed in Chinese»¹¹.

The Jesuits understood the great value and impact of Confucianism among the *literati* in China although Ruggieri had made frequent use of Buddhist terminology. In the beginning, they would refer to themselves as «bonzes from India», paying little attention to Confucian concepts. According to E. Malatesta, Matteo Ricci's change of attitude began in 1591, when he started to translate the *Four Books* into Latin. In 1592 (October 24) he refrained from using the term «bonze» to refer to himself. Three years later, with the authorization of Father Alessandro Valignano, he abandoned Buddhist dress for Chinese scholar clothing and attempted to engage and dialogue with prominent Chinese scholars. This was an important change in perspective: Matteo Ricci's purpose was to introduce Christianity by demonstrating its compatibility with Confucianism. In

9. See, for instance, R. Po Chia Hsia, *A Jesuit in the Forbidden City: Matteo Ricci 1552-1610*, Oxford-New York 2010.

10. A. Chan, *Chinese Books and Documents in the Jesuit Archives in Rome, a Descriptive Catalogue: Japonica-Sinica I-IV*, Armonk, New York 2002, pp. 92-5; Matteo Ricci (Li Madou), *Le sens réel de "Seigneur du Ciel" 利瑪竇, 天主實義*, ed. T. Meynard, Paris 2013, pp. IX-LXVII (*Introduction*): x.

11. «Mandassimo anco a V. P. un Catechismo che abbiamo qui stampato in lettera cina, con il *Pater Noster*, *Ave Maria* e *Comandamenti* in sua lettera, acciocché V. P. si consolasse con questo». «Al p. Claudio Acquaviva S.I., Preposito Generale - Roma, Zhaoqing, 20 ottobre 1585», Matteo Ricci, *Lettere*, a cura di F. D'Arelli, Macerata 2001, pp. 97-104: 97. However, Ricci's contribution must have been modest, as he had lived in China only for two years when the *Tianzhu shilu* was written. Meynard argues that Ricci's contribution must have been limited to a final passage of chapter IV, on the creation of the world, on the sun and the planets according to Ptolemaic system. Cfr. Meynard, *Introduction to Matteo Ricci (Li Madou), Le sens réel de "Seigneur du Ciel"* cit., p. XII.

fact, in 1593 Valignano had urged him to write a book on the principles of the intellectuals in China and, on December 10, Matteo Ricci wrote to the Superior General Claudio Acquaviva S. J. to inform him that the Visitor Alessandro Valignano S.I. had asked to translate the *Four Books* into Latin («Translatate in latino») and to compose a new Catechism. He said that he was busy for the whole year with reading and translating *Four Books* written by four excellent philosophers, who dealt with honourable moral *subjects*.

Tutto l'anno fossimo occupato in studiare, e finii di leggere al padre mio compagno come un corso che costumano udire delle cose morali i letterati della Cina, che sono *Quattro libri* di quattro philosophi assai buoni e di buoni documenti morali. Questi anco mi fa il p. visitatore traslatate in latino per agiutarmi di quello in fare un nuovo catechismo, di che habbiamo molta necessità, in sua lingua, per l'altro, che si fece nel principio, non essere riuscito sì buono come avria d'essere. Oltre la traslatione fu necessario anco un breve comento per maggiore dichiaratione delle cose che del resto si trattano; e con agiuto de Iddio stanno già finiti i primi tre libri e solo mi resta il quarto¹².

He translated three books, *Lunyu* 論語, *Zhongyong* 中庸 and *Daxue* 大學, and added a brief commentary to explain their contents; the work of translation helped Ricci to better understand Chinese thought and to write a new Catechism. As Thierry Meynard points out, Ricci most likely felt the need to first translate these books into Latin, «in order to secure their meaning and to avoid introducing any theological errors»¹³. The catechism needed to be approved by his superiors who did not read Chinese, so he was obliged to prepare a Latin version of it. Fr. Matteo Ricci had undoubtedly read both the *Four Books* and the «Six doctrines» (sei dottrine), by which they meant the Six Classics (*Liujing* 六經): *Yijing* 易經 (Classic of Changes), *Shijing* 詩經 (Classic of Poetry), *Shujing* 書經 (Classic of Documents), *Liji* 禮記 (Records of Rites), *Chunqiu* 春秋 (Spring and Autumn Annals), and the lost *Yuejing* 樂經 (Classic of Music). In these texts he found many passages which, in his opinion,

12. Al P. Claudio Acquaviva S.I., Preposito Generale, Shaozhou, 10 Dicembre 1593. Matteo Ricci, *Lettere* cit., p. 184. See also D'Elia, *Fonti Ricciane* cit., vol. I, p. 14.

13. *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*, ed. Meynard cit., p. 4.

proved «the truth of our faith», such as the immortality of the soul, the unity of God, the glory of the blessed, etc. The Chinese scholars were impressed by Ricci's ability to read and immediately memorize a book. He explained that the entrance exams for the recruitment of officers focussed on the *Four Books*, *Tetrabiblio*, so called by the Jesuits; besides, each candidate was to choose one of the «six doctrines» for his exam. The Jesuit admitted that he had also studied the six doctrines, drawing a parallel between the Confucian and the Christian doctrine and taking notes of the passages «which favours the things of our faith». He was able to explain the good principles of Christianity and demonstrate he had a good memory¹⁴.

Negli esami da dar i gradi, che dissi di sopra, sono tutti sopra un *tetrabiblio*, che noi lo chiamavamo, e per oltre questo libro morale vi sono anco sei dottrine antiche. Ciascheduno de' studianti se ne elegge una sola, e in quella si da versato, perché non può essere esaminato né domandato se non di quella che si elesse. Ma come noi vogliamo provar le cose della nostra santa fede per i suoi libri ancora, in questi anni passati mi feci dichiarare da buoni maestri oltre il *tetrabiblio* anco tutte le sei dottrine, e notai molti passi in tutte esse, che favoriscono alle cose della nostra fede, come della unità di Dio, della immortalità dell'anima, della gloria de' beati etc. E quando parlo con questi letterati, gli soglio domandare qual è la sua dottrina, e per essa gli provo quello che gli voglio provare. Con questo non solo diedi buon principio alle cose della fede, ma anco inavvedutamente gli confirmai la loro opinione che pensano che io leggendo un libro mi resta nella memoria, e dicono: «Se noi scarsamente possiamo imparare una dottrina, come uno avrebbe potuto imparare tutte sei senza questa memoria?»¹⁵.

In another letter, dated October 12, 1594 and addressed to F. Girolamo Costa, Ricci mentioned that he had started a new book on the «matters of our faith», to spread in all China when it will be printed¹⁶.

14. That the Chinese literati were impressed by Ricci's good memory is attested by Li Rihua in the passage quoted above. See *supra*, pp. 110-1. Matteo Ricci explained that one day, while he was together with Chinese literati, he had many letters of the alphabet written down and subsequently he recited the letters back and forth to let them memorize the pronunciation. They were so bewildered that they spread the news that he could memorize a book after reading it once! «Al P. Claudio Acquaviva S.I., Preposito Generale», Ricci, *Lettere* cit., pp. 315-6.

15. Nanchang, 4 Novembre 1595, *ibid.*

16. «E così cominciai un libro delle cose della nostra fede, tutto di ragioni naturali, per

Matteo Ricci, who was certainly inspired by the *Tianzhu shilu*, tried to omit the dogmas and to focus on an introduction to Christianity from a philosophical perspective; thus, Ricci's translation of the *Four Books* was fundamental to the understanding of Chinese philosophical concepts.

Matteo Ricci entertained discussions on Confucianism with Zhang Huang 章潢 (1527-1608), a disciple of Wang Yangming 王陽明 (1472-1529). He was introduced to Zhang Huang by Qu Taisu 瞿太素 (1549-1612), the scholar who had advised Ricci to abandon his Buddhist robe and to adopt Confucian attire. Ricci started from Michele Ruggieri's *Tianzhu shilu*, but added some parts such as: «On the goodness of human nature and the description of the orthodox learning of the Christians» (*lun renxing benshan, er shu Tianzhu menshi zhengxue* 論人性本善,而述天主門士正學), showing that he was trying to expound Catholic thought through the medium of China's cultural heritage.

Ricci completed the first draft of *Tianzhu shiyi* 天主實義 (The True Meaning of «Lord of Heaven») in 1596. Later on, he predicated the *Tianzhu shiyi* in Zhaoqing and then in Shaozhou 韶州. The work, published in Peking in 1603-1604, partially incorporated the dialogues with Chinese scholars, distinctly published in a work entitled «Ten Chapters by a non-conformist» (*Jiren shipian* 畸人十篇).

Chapter seven includes a conversation with a Chinese scholar on ethical principles and on moral cultivation. It contains part of a discussion held with the Buddhist monk Hong'en 洪恩 in 1599 in Nanking, namely the discussion on the goodness of human nature.

In the above mentioned letter (Shaozhou December 10, 1593) to General Claudio Acquaviva S.I., Ricci reported that the Visitor (1587-1596) Alessandro Valignano S.I., had requested him to translate the *Four Books* into Latin («traslatate in latino») for the new Catechism. From the letter to Girolamo Costa S.I., dated November 12, 1594, we learn that the composition of the *Tianzhu shiyi* had already commenced. Ricci worked on the translation of the *Four Books* from February 1593 to November 1594. His translations were mainly addressed to the confreres who had arrived in China and were attempting to learn the Chinese language and culture.

distribuirlo per tutta la Cina quando si stamperà». M. Ricci, «Al P. Claudio Acquaviva, S.I. Proposito Generale - Roma, Shaozhou, 10 dicembre 1593», ivi, p. 184.

This is clear, for instance, from a letter to P. Lelio Passionei S.I. written in Nanchang on September 9, 1597, Ricci said that they devoted much of their efforts to the *Four Books* and some years before he translated them into Latin and added some statements that were extremely useful to the confreres who came to study this work, which he believed would be appreciated in Europe. But he admitted to having had no time to transcribe it and send it to the Father General as he had planned:

A questo libro, che io chiamo *Tesserabiblio* per essere dei quattro libri, ci dessimo molto, et alcuni anni sono lo voltai in latino e gli feci alcune dichiarazioni che sono assai utili ai nostri che vengono di nuovo ad impararsi questo libro, e non dubito che in Europa sarà stimato, ma non ho tempo di trascriverlo e [mandarlo] al P. Generale come avevo determinato»¹⁷.

In another letter, Shaozhou, November 15, 1594, to Father Fabio de Fabii S.I., he wrote that he had translated «the most important moral book of this kingdom which can be read, as it consists of *sententie morali* assai acute e buone»¹⁸. Ricci intended to write out and send a fair copy to the General in Rome. But he bitterly considered that they were so far away that they had to wait six or seven years before receiving an answer to the letters they sent to Europe, «nel qual tempo si mutano non solo gli offiti et altre cose, ma anco ci mutiamo da una vita all'altra...»¹⁹.

The Four Books after Matteo Ricci

More than half a century would pass before seeing new translations of the *Four Books* by the Jesuits. In 1624, the Jesuit Vice-Province of China,

17. «Al P. Lelio Passionei S.I.», *ivi*, p. 349.

18. «Gli anni addietro voltai in latino il principale libro morale di questi regni, cosa che si può leggere, per esser tutto fatto di *sententie morali* assai acute e buone. Può essere che l'anno che vien lo ponghi in buona forma e mandi al P. Generale, dove V. R. ancora ne sarà partecipe. Stiamo tanto lontani che bisogna che passino sei anni et alle volte sette per tener risposta delle lettere che scriviamo a Europa, nel qual tempo si mutano non solo gli offitii et altre cose, ma anco ci mutiamo da una vita ad altra...». Al P. Fabio de Fabii S.I. - Roma, Shaozhou, 15 novembre 1595, *ivi*, p. 192.

19. D'Arelli, *Matteo Ricci S.I. e la traduzione latina* cit.

under the direction of Manuel Dias the Elder, adopted an ambitious plan of study lasting four years (*ratio studiorum*) whereby the training of the missionaries in the Chinese language and culture was based essentially on the *Four Books* and on the *Classic of Documents*. Inácio Da Costa (1603–1666), was then teaching the *Four Books* to the Jesuit students, who copied the Chinese text and wrote the Latin translation alongside the Chinese text.

Andrea Ferrão (1625–1661) transcribed the *Daxue* 大學 (*Sapientia Sinica*) under the guidance of Ignatius Da Costa, and completed it in October 1660. The *Sapientia Sinica* includes a preface written by Ferrão. Da Costa then moved to Jianchang 建昌, in Jiangxi province, where Prospero Intorcetta (1626–1696) started to learn the *Four Books* under his guidance. On April 13, 1662, the *Sapientia Sinica* was published in Jianchang: it consisted of a biography of Confucius in 4 pages (2 folio), the complete translation of the *Daxue* in 28 pages (14 folio) and the translation of the first five chapters of the *Lunyu*, 76 pages (38 folio). The book was approved by Jacques Le Faure (1613–1675) and revised by five Jesuits, P. Canevari, A. de Gouvea, F. Brancati, F. Couplet and F. De Rougemont²⁰.

In his introductory note (October 25, 1660) to the *Sapientia Sinica* preserved at the Trivulziana Library in Milan, addressed to the missionaries on their way to China and to the author, Andrea Ferrão emphasised the importance of the study of the *Four Books*, claiming that they contained the culture of these people. «You should accept the contents and the nucleus of the *Eloquentiae Sinicae*», he said. «You should be aware that without this knowledge», he admonished, «you cannot acquire any authority with these people (and maybe not even in Japan): China too has its Aristotle and in no other country people pledge on the words of the Master. Therefore it is necessary that the missionaries of our Society read these books, which are written according to the law of the ancients»²¹. He stressed that the author of the translation was indeed new but certainly not to be underestimated, supported besides by an outstanding Master

20. ARSI, Jap. Sin. III, 3a. *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*, ed. Meynard cit., p. 5.

21. A. Ferrão della Società di Gesù, Fuchow-fu, 25 ottobre 1660; P. B. Brocchieri, *Confucio e il Cristianesimo*, Milano 2017, p. 6.

who would serve, if ever, to slight the envy of others. The Master was Father Ignatius da Costa²².

An introduction by Prospero Intorcetta S.I. (1625–1696) clarified that he had translated the volume for the *Reverendi Patribus Extremi Orientis in Domini vinea cultovibus*²³. Intorcetta dedicated his translation to the Fathers who prepared for their adventure to China. He was adamant about the importance of knowing Confucius in Europe given the relevance of this ancient author who predated Plato and Aristotle and, moreover, transmitted the wisdom of the ancient Emperors Yao, Shun and the Sages.

Prospero Intorcetta entitled this work *Sapientia Sinica* as its content was appropriate to the natural law (*naturali lege*) and the Christian doctrine (*sapientia Christiana*). In his note to the Readers (*Ad Lectorem*) he describes the *Sishu* according to elucidations of approximately twenty Chinese Interpreters, among whom was the Colai Ch'ang, i.e. Zhang Juzheng 張居正 (1525–1582), tutor of the young emperor Wanli 萬曆 (r. 1572–1616), as he himself wrote (張 chām Colai, qui fuit Imperii Primas, et Praeceptor Imperatoris)²⁴. Zhang Juzheng was Chief Grand Secretary, he was a powerful Minister who exerted his power from his accession to the throne of Wanli in the year 1572 until 1582. He was considered a great statesman of the Ming dynasty, and wrote a simple commentary of the *Four Books* for the Emperor who doted on him. In his commentary, entitled *Sishu zhijie* 四書直解 (Colloquial Commentary on the *Four Books*), Zhang provided a simple and clear explanation of the meaning of the classics and of the single characters. The missionaries adopted Zhang Juzheng's commentary for the plain language and for its authority among the Chinese scholars. Although Zhang Juzheng followed the interpretations of Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1120–1200) and generally of the Song Interpreters, he avoided metaphysical speculations as also demonstrated by the terse style and simple explanations of the *Sapientia Sinica*²⁵.

22. A. Ferrão, "Missionariis ad Sinas pergentibus et Authori", P. B. Brocchieri, *Confucio e il Cristianesimo* cit., pp. 6–9.

23. Ivi, p. 11.

24. Ivi, p. 13.

25. The Jesuits had a copy of Zhang's commentary in their library in Nanjing and started to use it from at least 1624 to train the Jesuit missionaries in China. See Ad

Luo Ying argues that Intorcetta in his second translation added, in italics, a substantial commentary, «primarily to express subjective viewpoints from a Jesuit perspective». And declared that Zhang Juzheng's *Sishu zhiyi* was his main reference for the translation. In fact there was no substantial difference between Zhu Xi's and Zhang Juzheng's interpretation²⁶.

Zhang Juzheng died in 1582, but after his death he was accused of abuse of power, corruption, and obstruction of governmental policy. His family fell into disgrace and all his properties were confiscated²⁷. In spite of this posthumous disgrace, most likely due to struggles between factions at the court, Zhang's commentaries on the classics were reprinted in 1651.

The Sinarum Scientia Politico-Moralis (The Moral and Political Science of China)

The *Four Books* were influential in China and within Catholic circles insomuch as to earn commentaries from first generation converts – Xu Guangqi 徐光启 (1562-1633), Li Zhicao 李之藻 (1565-1630) and Yang

Dudink, *The Inventories of the Jesuit House at Nanking, made up during the persecutions of 1616-1617*, in *Western Humanistic Culture presented in China by the Jesuit Missionaries (XVII-XVIII centuries)*, ed. F. Masini, Roma 1996, p. 147; On Emperor Wanli and Zhang Juzheng see Ray Huang, *1587, A Year of No Significance*, New Haven 1981, pp. 1-41; *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*, ed. Meynard cit., pp. 34-6.

26. Luo Ying, *The Jesuits' Latin Translations of the Zhongyong 中庸 during the 17th and 18th Centuries*, in «Journal of Confucian Philosophy and Culture», 26 (2016), pp. 1-24: 11; see also D. E. Mungello, *The Jesuits' Use of Chang Chü-cheng's Commentary in their Translation of the Confucian Four Books (1687)*, in «China Mission Studies Bulletin», 3 (1981), pp. 12-22; K. Lundbaek, *China Grand Secretary Chang Chü-cheng and Early China Jesuits*, in «China Mission Studies Bulletin», 3 (1981), pp. 2-11. Zhang Xiping 张西平, *Ruxue xichuan Ouzhou yanjiu daolun 儒学西传欧洲研究导论*, Beijing daxue chubanshe, Beijing 2016, pp. 140-2.

27. See *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*, ed. Meynard cit., p. 36. See also D. Mungello, who supposed that the *Sinarum Philosophus* had adopted the edition of 1651 bearing the title *Sishu Zhangqelao zhijie 四书张闳老直解* (The True Explanation of the *Sishu* by the Chief Grand Secretary Zhang). Mungello, *The Jesuits' use of Chang Chü-Cheng's commentary* cit., p. 16; Id., *The First Complete Translation of the Four Books in the West*, in *International Symposium on Chinese-Western Cultural Interchange*, Taipei 1983, p. 524. *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*, ed. Meynard cit., p. 36, note 14. See also T. Meynard, *The Jesuit Reading of Confucius: the First Complete Translation of the Lunyu (1687) published in the West*, Leiden 2015, p. 28.

Tingyun 楊廷筠 (1557-1628). Moreover, Nicolas Trigault affirmed that Jesuit missionaries adopted Ricci's translation, handed down from generation to generation, refined and strengthened to become the cornerstone translation of the Books²⁸.

Two of the translations of the *Zhongyong* (*Medium Constantem Tenendum, Medium Sempiternum, Immutabile Medium*) received in Europe are by Prospero Intorcetta and one is by François Noël SJ (1651-1729):

- The first translation, *Scientiae Sinicae, Liber Secundus, Medium Constantem Tenendum* 中庸, *Chum Yūm*, was published in Goa between 1667 and 1669 in the *Sinarum Scientia Politico-Moralis*;
- The second, *Scientiae Sinicae, Liber Secundus, Chun Yūm, Medium Sempiternum*, appeared in the collection *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus sive Scientia sinensis Latīna exposita*, Paris 1687 (by Prospero Intorcetta, Christian Herdricht, François de Rougemont, François Louvemont, Philippe Couplet)²⁹;
- The third, entitled *Immutabile Medium*, is part of the *Sinensis imperii libri classici sex*, translated by the Flemish François Noël (1651-1729)³⁰.

The *Sinarum Scientia Politico-Moralis* contains one of the earliest translations of the *Zhongyong* brought to Europe. The translator's name appears on the title page, P. Prospero Intorcetta (Yin Duoze 殷鐸澤), Siculo Societatis Iesu, Yesuhui 耶穌會. The *Doctrine of the Mean* and its rare

28. See D. E. Mungello, *The Seventeenth Century Translation Project of the Confucian Four Books*, in *East Meets West*, eds. C. Ronan - B. Oh, Chicago-Loyola 1988, pp. 257-60. N. Standaert, *The Study of the Classics by Late Ming Christian Converts*, in *Cheng - In All Sincerity: Festschrift in Honour of Monica Übelhor*, eds. D. Gimpel - M. Hanz, Hamburg 2001, pp. 19-40; Meynard, *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* cit., p. 5.

29. On the *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* see the exhaustive study by Meynard, *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus (1687)* cit.; N. Golvers, *The Development of the "Confucius Sinarum Philosophus" Reconsidered in the Light of New Material*, in *Western Learning and Christianity in China: the Contribution and Impact of Adam Schall von Bell*, ed. R. Malek, Nettetal 1998, vol. II, pp. 1141-64. N. Golvers, *An Unobserved Letter of Prospero Intorcetta, S. J., to Godfridus Henshens, S. J., and the Printing of the Jesuit Translations of the Confucian Classics (Rome-Antwerp, 2 June 1672)*, in *Syntagma, Essays on Neo-Latin Literature in Honour of Monique Mund-Dopchie and Gilbert Tournoy*, ed. D. Sacré - J. Papy, Leuven 2009, pp. 679-98.

30. For a description of these three Latin versions of the *Zhongyong* see Luo Ying, *The Jesuits' Translations of the Zhongyong* cit.; Paternicò, *Translating the Master* cit.; M. Lackner, *Le prime traduzioni latine del 'Giusto mezzo' (Zhongyong 中庸)*, in «Annali di Ca' Foscari», Serie Orientale, 55 (2019), pp. 341-62.

17th century edition is kept in the Central Library of the Sicilian Region. It was printed in part in China with Chinese techniques and materials, and in part in India, 1669.

The second page provides the names of the four Jesuits who approved the translation: Inácio da Costa (Guo Najue 郭納爵, 1603-1675), Jacques Le Faure (Liu Diwo 劉迪我 1613-1675), Matias da Maia (Li Madi 利瑪弟, 1616-1667), Feliciano Pacheco (Cheng Jili 成際理, 1622-1687). Twelve Jesuits revised the translation, among them were A. de Gouvea (He Dahua 何大化, 1592-1677), P. Canevari (Nie Baiduo 聶佰多, 1595-1675), F. Brancati (Pan Guoguang 潘國光, 1607-1671), and G. F. De Ferrari (Li Fangxi 李方西, 1609-1671). The Jesuit Superior Vice-Provincial of China, Feliciano Pacheco, consented to the publication of the work, which also gained acknowledgement and approval by twelve priests belonging to the Society in China. The first authorized printed edition was published on July 31, 1667.

Father Feliciano Pacheco served as Superior of the Jesuit mission from 1666 to 1669 in Nanjing. At the end of 1664 (following the «Calendar Case», *liyu* 歷獄), Pacheco was sent to Beijing with other missionaries for trial and then exiled to Guangzhou (Canton). It was during the Guangzhou exile that the missionaries discussed the Chinese rites and, on this occasion, the twelve Jesuits participated in the revision of Intorcetta's translation³¹. The work was published in Goa on October 1, 1669, as reported in the last page of the copy followed by the *Confucii Vita*, kept in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (Rossiana 3482). This copy was edited and partially translated into Italian by Beonio Brocchieri (1934-1991) and published in the years 1972-1973³². The copy kept at the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana corresponds to the same transcript found in the Bibliothèque Nationale and the one kept by the Jesuits in Palermo, currently residing in the National Library of Palermo.

31. Luo Ying, *The Jesuits' Latin Translations of the Zhongyong* cit., p. 8.

32. Paolo Beonio Brocchieri translated and edited two works by Prospero Intorcetta: 1. *Sapientia Sinica* (*Daxue* 大學) kept at the Biblioteca Trivulziana in Milan (B.752/9), which includes sections 1-5 of the *Lunyu*, the *Daxue* and a biography of Confucius, *Vita Confucii Principis Sapientiae Sinicae* (1662); 2. *Sinarum Scientiae Politico-Moralis Liber secundus, Medium Constantem Tenendum* 中庸 *Chūmyūm*, kept at the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (Ross. 3482) followed by a *Confucii vita*. Brocchieri, *Confucio e il Cristianesimo* cit.

Beonio Brocchieri reports that the *Sinarum Scientia Politico-Moralis* (hereafter SSPM) was engraved and printed in China with an initial 25 Chinese double *folios* printed on one side, according to the traditional style. The remaining pages and the «Note to the Reader» (*Ad lectorem*) by Father Intorcetta, were printed in Goa with typeface according to Western tradition³³. The vicissitudes of the *Zhongyong* are discernible with the change of dynasty and the trying experiences of the Jesuits. The complete text was laid down, first in Beijing-Canton (1664) and then in Goa, as we learn from two other sources: a letter sent to Leibniz by Ludolf on April 1698 and the catalogue by Rémusat (n. 1597)³⁴.

The singularity of this work is evident in the chronicles of those years. After the compilation between 1660 and 1662, Father Intorcetta and other missionaries were indicted and exiled to Beijing and then to Canton. The translation of the *Zhongyong* was completed in those years whilst the engraving of the tablets were under way, but Intorcetta was compelled to return to Rome to describe the difficult situation encountered during the dynastic change from the Ming (1368-1644) to the Manchu Qing dynasty (1644-1911).

There is no doubt regarding the author of the SSPM, Prospero Intorcetta, and the manuscript, which was certainly published in Goa on October 1, 1669, as we read in the last page. Beonio Brocchieri on studying and translating the work into Italian from the Latin version, observed that the *Daxue* kept in the Trivulziana Library, Milan, was preceded by a foreword on behalf of Father Ferrão, who indeed confirmed P. Intorcetta as the author of the translation albeit under the strict supervision of the Portuguese F. Da Costa, his master, who arrived in China in 1634 (he died in Canton in the year 1666, during the persecutions). Da Costa was his superior and had lived in East Asia for more than twenty years, longer than Intorcetta, therefore Brocchieri concludes that In-

33. Ivi, p. XXXIV.

34. «L'exemplaire complet, seul connu en Europe, des ouvrages de Confucius publiés en chinois et en latin par le P. Intorcetta, édition de Goa, existe à la Bibliothèque impériale de Vienne (the work in Vienna appeared to have gone missing during the war)». Rémusat (n. 1597), H. Cordier, *Bibliotheca Sinica*, Paris 1904, n. 1597; Paolo Beonio Brocchieri, *Confucio e il Cristianesimo*, Luni Editrice, Milano 2017, p. XXXIV.

torcetta may have been the executor of the first work under the guidance of F. Da Costa³⁵.

The *Sinarum Scientia Politico-Moralis* (second of the *Four Books*), translated into Italian by Beonio Brocchieri, is based upon the copy residing in the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana. The publication of this work in Chinese and in Latin was authorized on July 31, 1667, by the Reverendo Padre Provinciale (R. P. Viceprovincialis) Feliciano Pacheco, who officially expressed his approval in the «authorization» page, endorsed by Ignazio da Costa, F. Giacomo Le Faure and Mattia di Maia, his predecessors.

In his note to the Reader (*Ad lectorem*) Prospero Intorcetta introduces the contents and origin of the work, ascribed to Confucius, the «Prince of Chinese Philosophy» (*Principe Philosophiae*), as he wrote. He admitted completing the work in Goa, then considered the source and mother of the Oriental missions. He drew attention to the «spiritual advantage» and the «prestige» gained on reading this and other works by Confucius. According to him, it was necessary that the relevance of this work be acknowledged by those European scholars who studied the language, the literature and the books of the Ancients as well as by those who used the sayings, the opinions and the teachings with the aim to spread the knowledge of God. And he commented: «Had our forerunners not understood the value and the fruits which could engender the reading of this work, how could one think that they would bear such a heavy burden without an advantage for the souls?»³⁶.

Its main work was entitled *Chong Yung, Aurea Mediocritas Constantia*, that is the Constancy of the *Aurea Mediocritas* (*Aurea*, the golden mean, from the *Carmina* by Oratio). Intorcetta explains that it was Zisi, grandson of Confucius, who had edited and added his comments to this book.

35. The *Sapientia Sinica* was not well-known in Europe until its inclusion in the *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*, published in Paris in 1687 and signed by Intorcetta, Rougemont and Couplet. Philippe Couplet was the *socius major* of the work, he presented it to Luis XIV with a letter (*Epistola dedicatoria*) and with a long *Proemialis declaratio*, as it were, a summa and an endeavour to read the Confucian message from a Christian perspective. Brocchieri, *Confucio e il Cristianesimo* cit., pp. xxxv-xxxvi. For a translation and transcription of the *Proemialis Declaratio* see *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*, ed. Meynard cit., pp. 83-327.

36. Brocchieri, *Confucio e il Cristianesimo* cit., pp. 90-1.

However, Intorcetta goes on to explain, it was incomplete, with many missing parts bearing resemblance to a collection of fragments rather than a text. «This book is sublime», he adds, «it transcends the human limits; Chinese teachers read and explain this book to their students – a text so difficult to understand – as the fourth and not the second book. It is a master of life which illuminates the way of darkness and vice, it is the light of truth that opens the doors onto evangelicalism. The missionary will find comfort in a book which will «shed light on the darkness of vice and provides the light of truth which forecast the evagelic sun and opens the way»³⁷.

Intorcetta then provides a literal translation to the title – *Medium* (zhong 中) *Constantem tenendum* (yong 庸). As regards the title, it is noteworthy that Intorcetta followed the interpretation of Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033-1107) and Zhu Xi. The 1711 edition by Noël attributed the title *Immutabile Medium* (as part of the *Sinensis imperii libri classici sex*, published in Prague). In fact, the «medium» was not to be taken as unchanging, immutable but rather as a changing point, dictated by the circumstances, to be constantly attained. The manuscript (of the *Four Books*) attributed to Michele Ruggieri preserved in the Biblioteca Vittorio Emanuele II in Rome holds the title of *Semper in medium*, which is more faithful to the Chinese interpretation³⁸.

Intorcetta claims that he did not intend to compare Confucius to Seneca or Plutarch, but wished to give the Chinese philosopher the attention he deserved.

In an introductory note, *Ad lectorem*, he discloses his intentions to translate the Confucian classics into Latin: to encourage an intercultural dialogue in Europe towards an evangelization in China and to promote this *summa* of philosophical ethics.

37. Ivi, pp. 90-3.

38. On the meaning of *Zhongyong*, see A. Plaks, *The Mean, Nature, and the Self-Realization. European Translations of the Zhongyong*, in *De l'un au multiple. Traduction du chinois vers les langues européennes. Translation from Chinese into European Languages*, eds. V. Alleton - M. Lackner, Paris 2013, pp. 311-31; M. Lackner, *Le traduzioni latine del 'Giusto mezzo' (Zhongyong 中庸)*, in «Annali di Ca' Foscari», Serie orientale, 55 (2019), pp. 341-61; *La costante pratica del giusto mezzo*, a cura di T. Lippiello, Venezia 2010, p. 20.

As for the organization of the work, he presented the Chinese text in vertical sequence with its pronunciation. The Chinese characters and their translation are numbered, except for the characters which have no semantic value i.e. particles, interjections, prepositions and so on. Intorcetta explains that the Chinese characters are placed in the second column of each page with the corresponding numbers and should be read from top to bottom according to the Chinese order. They are followed in the other column by Latin words, with the same numbers. The interpolations introduced in the text for clarification of the meaning of the Chinese characters are written in smaller characters. Intorcetta adopts the subdivision of the *Sishu jizhu* 四書集注 by Zhu Xi 朱熹, as he himself discloses: he elucidates the subdivision of the *Zhongyong* in 33 chapters following the edition of Zhu Xi. It is evident that Intorcetta accomplished an accurate philological work and that his main concern, in this phase, was to explain the meaning of each single character.

As before mentioned, the *Sinarum Scientia Politico-Moralis* provides a literal translation of the original Chinese text, whereas in the *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* the translations of the characters are often more than one word translations, to render the multiple meanings of the Chinese characters. Moreover, the *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* includes interpretative commentary (after the translation, in italics), and the editors' paraphrases which did not emerge in the *Sinarum Scientia Politico Moralis*³⁹.

In fact, in the *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* Intorcetta and Couplet placed more emphasis on the philosophical meaning of the text although

39. He and the editors added a number of words and interpretations, as we can see, for instance, from the following passage from *Zhongyong*: 君子中庸, 小人反中庸, translated in SSPM as “*Confucius ait: perfectus vir tenet medium: improbus praevaricatur medium*”. (SSPM) In CSP the text reads: “*Confucius ait: perfectus vir tenet medium semper & ubique: improbus vero praevaricatur vel excessu, vel defectu*. (*Scientiae Sinicae, liber secundus, f. 3, p. 2, § 1*). L. Paternicò (*Translating the Master* cit.) has analysed some key words in the translation of the *Sishu* in the *Sinarum Scientiae* version and in the *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*. More recently Michael Lackner has compared some passages from the *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* and from the 1711 *Immutable medium* (in *Sinensis imperii libri classici sex*) by François Noël demonstrating that both translators use paraphrases to help the reader to thoroughly understand the Chinese message: Intorcetta insists on the rational approach whereas Noël reveals the mystical nature of the *Zhongyong*. Lackner, *Le prime traduzioni latine del ‘Giusto mezzo’ (Zhongyong 中庸)* cit.

they did not deviate from the *Sinarum Scientia Politico-Moralis*. On the one hand they adopted an exhaustive paraphrase of the passages translated – a practice which was continued by Noël – on the other, they tried to convey the Christian message by introducing translations such as «Deus» for Shangdi 上帝, first rendered as «Supremus Imperator» in *Scientia Politico-Moralis*. Moreover, by adding the paraphrase based on Zhang Juzheng's commentary, they could prove that their translation was supported by Chinese interpretations. Conversely, by declaring to follow the «early Confucians» commentaries, they intended to show that Confucianism was a rational philosophy, free from superstitions.

But *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* was not only the result of Intorcetta's work. In fact, as Noël Golvers explains, after the death of da Costa in 1665 and Intorcetta's departure from Canton in 1668, Couplet, De Rougemont and Herdtrich remained in Canton and continued to work on the translation and transcription of the *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*, with *six censores* who compared the *versio nostra literalis cum texto* with the *paraphrasis nostra Latina cum paraphrase sinica ipsius Colai*⁴⁰. Meanwhile Intorcetta, who had arrived in Rome via Lisboa in 1671 (14 April), was promoting the diffusion of the Confucian work in Europe by sending copies of his translations to scholars and librarians (for instance in Vienna and Paris). The paraphrasing of the work was in progress in south China in the years 1670–1672, when, in 1672, Athanasius Kircher (1602–1680), the author of *China Illustrata* (1667), a milestone in modern sinology, after manifesting enthusiasm for Intorcetta's arrival in Rome and for the rare books he brought from China, was entrusted with editing the final edition of the Confucius and Mencius commentaries, implying therein that the manuscripts would be concentrated and edited in Rome⁴¹.

Intorcetta underlined the adoption of the original Confucians' interpretation rather than the Neoconfucians', who were considered «atheist politicians», referring to China as a monarchy, and not, as they believed, the reign of «the natural law» (*Lex naturae*). They wanted to prove that

40. H. Bosman, *Lettres inédites de François de Rougemont*, in «Analectes pour servir à l'histoire ecclésiastique de la Belgique», 39 (1913), p. 43 ff.; Golvers, *The Development of the Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* cit., pp. 1141–64, 1143–5.

41. Ivi, p. 1147.

there was a common truth shared by the Classics, a sort of *Prisca theologia*, in the words of Michael Lackner, who argues that Intorcetta adopted a rationalist hermeneutic, as we can infer, for instance by Intorcetta's translation of the characters *xing* 性 (human nature) and *dao* 道 (the way): *xing* is translated as *natura naturalis* by P. Intorcetta, *ipsa natura* by Noël. *Dao* is translated as *regula*,⁴² whereas Noël opts for the translation *recta agenda via* in the same passage. In another passage (13, 38) Intorcetta translates *dao* as *regularationis*, while Noël prefers *recta Immutabilis Medii via*⁴³.

It is evident that the first translation by Intorcetta served to teach the Chinese language to the newly arrived Jesuit missionaries and therefore resembled a primer, with one or two philological addenda. This laconic and brief text should be appreciated by «all those Europeans who were engaged in the study of the language and literature of the Ancients, and by all those who started from the maxims from the past to introduce the knowledge of the True Lord»⁴⁴.

T. Meynard argues that «the Jesuits favoured early Confucianism because it expressed a radical transcendence with the figure of a Celestial Emperor (*Shangdi*). They believed that this transcendence had to a large extent disappeared in Neo-Confucianism and thus judged this system of thought to be atheist»⁴⁵. It is important to contextualize the work of the Jesuits: in the second half of the Ming dynasty and during the Qing dynasty in China we witness a rise in the study of the original classics with their Han commentaries (*jingxue* 經學, Study of the Classics), while the Song commentaries fell into decline. Matteo Ricci had already insisted that it was necessary to return to the «original» meaning of the Chinese texts, by which he meant the original meaning before the introduction of Buddhism. He used this argumentation to explain that the concepts of *Tian* 天 and *Shangdi* should be equated with the Christian God (and not with the Neo-Confucian *li* 理). Ultimately, the Jesuits and the Chinese converts were divided regarding the interpretations of the Classics and

42. However in other passages Intorcetta also adopts other translations as «via, viam», «ratio, via et ratio», «principium» etc.

43. Lackner, *Le prime traduzioni latine del 'Giusto Mezzo'* cit., p. 349.

44. *Ad Lectorem, Sinarum Scientiae Politico-moralis*, Brocchieri, *Confucio e il Cristianesimo* cit., pp. 90-1.

45. *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus (1687)*, ed. Meynard cit., pp. 74-5.

their different positions implied religious, political and personal motivations⁴⁶. Intorcetta adds a commentary, as remarked by Luo Ying, who said that he had not mentioned that his translation was based on Zhu Xi's *Sishu jizhu*, but claimed that Zhang Juzheng's *Sishu zhijie* served as the main reference to his translation (*Nos hic eam verbis Chom-colai, sed in compendium redactis explicabimus*)⁴⁷. Zhang's work was a simple rewriting of Zhu Xi's *Sishujijie*, as previously mentioned, it did not differ substantially, and therefore we can conclude that the Jesuits' adoption of this commentary was instrumental to their attempt to address the religious contents of the *Four Books* and their congruity with the Christian message.

46. Standaert, *The Study of the Classics by Late Ming Christian Converts* cit.

47. See Zhang Juzheng 張居正, *Zhongyong, Daxue* 中庸, 大學, Shanghai 2007, p. 59. See also Luo Ying, "The Jesuits' Latin Translations of the *Zhongyong* during the 17th and 18th centuries, pp. 10-2. Zhang Xiping 张西平, *Ruxue xichuan Ouzhou yanjiu daolun* 儒学西传欧洲研究导论, pp. 140-2.

ABSTRACT

«China too has its Aristotle»: The *Zhongyong* 中庸 («*Sinarum Scientia Politico-Moralis*») and the Jesuits' Fascination with Confucius

The translation of the Chinese *Four Books* served to learn and teach the Chinese language but above all, to fully understand the culture of the Chinese intellectuals. On December 10, 1593, Matteo Ricci wrote that he was asked to translate the *Four Books* into Latin so as to formulate a new catechism. The reading of the *Four Books* was fundamental to capture Chinese thought and to address the common features and the cross cultural concepts between two distant geographical, cultural and social environments. In the *Four Books*, and, as a whole in the Five Classics, Matteo Ricci uncovered numerous passages that support "the truth of our faith".

The paper provides an excursus of the Jesuits' translation of the *Four Books*, from Matteo Ricci to Prospero Intorcetta, with particular emphasis on the *Sinarum Scientia Politico-Moralis*.

KEYWORDS: Jesuits; China; Four Books; *Sishu*; *Zhongyong*.

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