

The Missionary Method of Matteo Ricci

Gianni Criveller, PIME

Matteo Ricci and Alessandro Valignano met together for the last time in Macao in early 1593. On that occasion Valignano, the head of the Jesuit East Asia missions, known as the Visitor, ordered Ricci to leave the south and to move further north. In 1597, Valignano was explicit in ordering Ricci to aim for Beijing as his final destination. Valignano urged Ricci to find a way to enter the court of Beijing and have access to the King, because it was evident that the permanence of the Fathers' stay in China could not be considered certain until they had the King's approval.¹

Ricci's strategy in China, was, in fact, aimed at an ascent to Beijing,² which the Macerata-born missionary reached in 1601, completing the seventh and last leg of his journey to the capital of the Ming Empire.

Ricci was a missionary who never gave up elaborating strategies to achieve his objectives. In this very important mission, he was ingenious and as capable of marking an epoch in evangelization as Paul of Tarsus. Paul had used many strategies: he

¹ *Fonti Ricciane: Documenti originali concernenti Matteo Ricci e la storia dell'introduzione del Cristianesimo in Cina*, ed. Pasquale M. D'Elia, SJ, 3 vols. (Rome: Libreria dello Stato, 1942–1949), ii, 4. This collection contains Ricci's account of his mission in China, written in 1609–1610, entitled: *Della entrata della compagnia di Gesù e Christianità nella Cina*. All translations from Italian are my own.

² This expression is borrowed from an article by Jonathan Spence: 'Matteo Ricci and the Ascent to Beijing' in Charles E. Ronan and Bonnie B.C. Oh, eds., *East Meets West* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1988). Spence is best known for *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* (New York: Viking, 1984), an original attempt to describe the psychological itinerary of Ricci based on his Italian Renaissance background.

learned from mistakes and failures, and he altered his approaches without ever losing sight of his goals of preaching the Gospel and founding Christian communities.

Ricci and Paul of Tarsus

There are various points of contact between the missionary strategies of Ricci and Paul of Tarsus. Both had precise objectives, which they sought to achieve with great determination, but they were flexible about the means of accomplishing them, adapting strategies and approaches to their various situations and experiences.

Ricci and Paul did not aim to baptize everyone they happened to meet. Paul even boasted of the fact that he did not baptize many people, (1 Cor 1:14–17), but rather created well-founded Christian communities, which were self-sufficient and able to expand by creating new areas of evangelization. These communities were located in the most important urban centers. The major cities were thus preferred over small towns and the countryside.

On August 14, 1599, Ricci wrote with amazing clarity and openness to his friend, Gerolamo Costa. In this letter, Ricci rejected criticism from those who pointed out that progress in China was much slower than in other missions.

We can be very successful here and can even be considered superior to the other missions that are said to produce wonderful things. Here in China, this is not the time for either reaping or even sowing, but of opening the wild woods [...]. Others will come and they, with the grace of the Lord, will write about conversions and the fervor of the Christians, but you should know that it is first necessary to do what we do. [...] It seems to us that the best result that we can achieve at the present state of this enterprise is to gain, little by little, the respect of the people and to remove any suspicion on their part. Only then, can we hope for conversions. In this matter, by the grace of the Lord, we achieved much more in a few years

than one could have hoped to achieve in many years. After all, China is China.³

This quotation will be especially pertinent when treating the subject of the relationship between Ricci and Niccolò Longobardo, Ricci's successor as superior of the China mission. Once the freedom to preach was granted, Ricci believed that it would be possible to "*convert an infinite multitude of them in a short time*".⁴ In 1608, however, writing to Costa again, Ricci reiterated the notion that "*in these beginning times it is more useful to have few, but good, converts, rather than many, who may be less suited to carrying the Christian name*".⁵ A similar concept was expressed on August 22, 1608, in a letter to Acquaviva: "*Father, please consider that the success of our apostolate here is not to be evaluated from the number of Christians only, but from the foundation we are establishing for a very big enterprise*".⁶

Paul of Tarsus never lost sight of the importance of the connection with Jerusalem, and so it was for Ricci. He never lost contact with Rome, his Jerusalem, spending his nights, as his biographers tell us, writing long and numerous reports and letters. Time and energy were spent translating the cultural, scientific, humanistic, philosophical and religious experiences he acquired at the Roman College into Chinese. This was an exhausting work, which surely shortened his life.

Paul aimed at Rome, the final destination of his mission, to the point that his missionary activity can be interpreted as a progressive move toward Rome. At least Luke offers this interpretation of Paul's mission: a journey, an ideal and material gleaned from his experiences on his way from Jerusalem to Rome.

Ricci made his mission an ascent to the capital, Beijing. In

³ Ricci to Costa, Nanjing 14 August 1599, in Matteo Ricci, *Lettere, (1580–1609)*, ed. Francesco D'Arelli (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2001), 361–362. All translations from Italian are my own.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 362.

⁵ Ricci to Costa, Beijing 6 March 1608, in Ricci, *Lettere*, 455.

⁶ Ricci to Acquaviva, Beijing 22 August 1608, in Ricci, *Lettere*, 496.

1595, following the drowning of his Chinese companion, João Barradas, the impossibility of continuing to travel to Beijing with Minister Shi Lou (identified by the Jesuit sinologist Pasquale d'Elia as Shi Xing 石星) and the failure of his first entrance into Nanjing, caused Ricci to suffer a moment of great despair. As occasionally happened to Paul, Ricci said that he overcame that difficulty through a dream. It took place on June 25 or 26, 1595, and was related in Ricci's biography written in Chinese by Giulio Aleni in 1630. Ricci, himself, recalled the dream on two occasions. The first was in a letter to Gerolamo Costa on October 28, 1595, only 4 months after the dream; the second mention of it was in 1609, in his account *Della entrata*⁷. The narration in the letter to Costa is particularly interesting because when Ricci wrote it, he could not possibly have known whether the prediction would be fulfilled or not. The missionary wrote that an unknown man, who identified himself as the Lord, encouraged him, promising him that he would finally settle in the capital. The dialogue ends with these words:

Then I threw myself at his feet, and weeping bitterly, I said: "So, Lord, since you knew this, why you did not help me until now?" He answered: "You will go to that city — and it seems that he showed me Beijing — and I will help you there."⁸

D'Elia, rightly, has noted that this dream echoes Ignatius of Loyola's vision in La Storta (Rome) in 1537 (Ricci 1942–1949, 356). But it calls to mind also two visions of the Apostle Paul, mentioned by Luke in *Acts*: the 'Macedonian man' (Acts 16:19), and especially, 'Jesus' prediction about Paul going to Rome (Acts 23:11).

In 1597, Valignano appointed Ricci as Superior of the Mission in China, and strongly urged him to "*enter the King's Court in Beijing, because the permanence of the Fathers' residence in China would never be secure until it was approved by the King*".⁹

⁷ *Fonti Ricciane*, i, 355–356.

⁸ Ricci to Costa, Nanchang 28 October 1595, in Ricci, *Lettere*, 290.

⁹ *Fonti Ricciane*, ii, 4.

After the failed attempt of 1599, Ricci completed the seventh and final stage of his journey, reaching the capital, Beijing, in January 1601.

Ricci and Valignano

Ricci's reaching Beijing would also crown Valignano's career. He was the inspiration for the *modo soave*, the missionary method, which is usually given the name of accommodation. Ricci highly anticipated a visit by Valignano to Beijing:

We are now awaiting the Father Visitor, who is to come to visit our residences ... and I hope to God that thereby the door shall open wider for Christianity in China.¹⁰

According to Ricci, it was thanks to Valignano, that the 'door for Christianity' would become broader. The 'door' is an image that recurs several times in Ricci's writings and is also recalled by the early biographers, Sabatino De Ursis and Nicolas Trigault, who narrated the story of Ricci's last days.

The plans for Valignano's trip were already at an advanced stage, when he died in Macao on January 20, 1606. This prevented the visit from ever taking place and ended a life of remarkable achievements. It would have been an event of great importance, and might have made up for the failed project of a papal embassy 18 years earlier.

Michele Ruggieri was dispatched to Rome in 1588 to organize a papal legation to China, with letters in Chinese prepared by Ricci to be approved and certified by the Pope with his own seal. But when Ruggieri reached Rome, the plan had to be postponed because five popes succeeded each other within the span of only two years (1590–92). In 1597, Claudio Acquaviva, the Jesuit general superior, and Valignano decided that it was better to call off a diplomatic mission, since Ricci had become more confident of success for his work in China.

¹⁰ Ricci to Acquaviva, Beijing, 26 July 1605, in Ricci, *Lettere*, 415.

Ricci's method of mission was a blend of many strategies, and it is difficult to offer a satisfactory account without unraveling the many threads that compose it, and giving reasons for each: the journey to Beijing; the imperial permission; the scientific 'apostolate'; accommodation; the distinction between catechism and Christian doctrine and between direct and indirect 'apostolate'; the admission of local candidates to the Society; autonomy from Macao; the 'apostolate' through books; and the interaction between scholars and officials. These were his main objectives.

Failures and criticisms

Not all of Ricci's objectives were crowned with success: the papal embassy; Valignano's visit to Beijing; the admission of young Chinese to the priesthood; the full autonomy of the mission; and the Emperor's formal permission for Christian preaching were not realized. The latter objective, however, was in fact achieved, when, after Ricci's death in Beijing, a place was granted for his burial.

It is a well-known fact that Ricci was censured for concealing the religious nature of his mission and the whole truth about Christianity. According to his critics, Ricci and his companions pretended to be scientists, when, in fact, they were missionaries. They were accused of speaking about God without talking about Christ, especially concealing his crucifixion. The Jesuits, according to their critics, preached Tianzhu-ism, (from *Tianzhu* 天主, the Lord of Heaven), a religion apparently different from Catholicism. For example, "Lord of Heaven" was adopted as the official Catholic name for God in Chinese in 1583. As a consequence, his critics have argued that those Chinese who converted to the Catholic faith were in fact deceived about the true nature of Catholicism, and they reacted against it when they discovered the deception by Ricci and his companions. Critics also point out that even some Jesuits, such as Michele Ruggieri and Niccolò Longobardo objected to Ricci's methods. In fact, the charges of the modern-day critics are not much

different from the opinions put forward in late Ming and early Qing anti-Christian literature, and by critics in the last three centuries.

Ricci and Longobardo

Among the twenty or so men that Valignano assigned to China during Ricci's time, Longobardo, Ricci's successor as the Mission's superior, played an especially important role. Longobardo was a scholar, sinologist and missionary of great value. He lived until his 89th birthday, and the Emperor accorded him great honors at his funeral.

Longobardo is often described as Ricci's opponent on the question of the Chinese Rites, but things are not as black and white on this issue as is often assumed. First of all, although the two men most probably never met, it was Ricci who recommended and actually nominated Longobardo as his successor.¹¹ Ricci held Longobardo in very high esteem. In his letters, Ricci mentioned Longobardo several times, praising him for his long letters, in which details of his work were described. Certainly those letters formed Ricci's positive opinion of the Sicilian missionary. In 1605, writing to Fabio De Fabii, Ricci defines Longobardo as "a great worker here, very devout to You Father, and copious in writing".¹² In 1605, writing to the Superior General Claudio Acquaviva, Ricci said:

Three years ago Fr Niccolò Longobardo made the vows of coadjutor by the order of Fr. Visitor, but it seemed to me that he deserved much more. [...] He does not lack skill, [...] and thanks to his zeal, prudence and humility, it seems to me that nobody else in these residences would be able to govern this enterprise better than he. In the midst of many hardships and difficulties, he has worked in the residence of Shaozhou for twelve years already.¹³

¹¹ *Fonti Ricciane*, i, 386; ii, 546–547.

¹² Ricci to De Fabii, Beijing 9 March 1605, in Ricci, *Lettere*, 381.

¹³ Ricci to Acquaviva, Beijing 26 July 605, in Ricci, *Lettere*, 426.

Regarding liturgical inculturation, the promotion of Chinese clergy, the independence of the China mission from Macao and the scientific apostolate, Longobardo continued and developed the policies inaugurated by Valignano and Ricci. In 1614, Longobardo dispatched Nicolas Trigault to Europe to recruit more missionary-scientists and to obtain more books. Another important task that Longobardo bestowed on Trigault was to get permission from the Pope to use Chinese as a liturgical language. Paul V granted this request in 1615.

There is no evidence of disagreement between Ricci and Longobardo on the question of the Chinese Rites, the controversy about which began long after Ricci's death. What can be established is that Longobardo, together with Alfonso Vagnoni, promoted direct preaching to the population. Ricci, as stated in his writings, especially in a letter he wrote to Girolamo Costa in 1599,¹⁴ thought that influencing Chinese society as a whole was better than establishing small Christian communities at its margins. Obtaining the trust and the approval of the central authorities was a prerequisite leading to mass conversions among the population at large. After securing the toleration of Christianity from the authorities, it would be safe to evangelize the population at large all over China.

Ricci explicitly recognized that in Shaozhou, Longobardo converted many common people. Ricci and Trigault described in detail Longobardo's mission to the general population, including women.¹⁵ Ricci was superior of the mission when Longobardo evangelized in such a fashion, and he must have approved it. Ricci most likely considered Longobardo's method a continuation of his own method. Ricci was not against the mission to the people. Rather he was convinced that the solid foundation of the Christian presence, on which he was working, would naturally lead to the

¹⁴ Ricci to Costa, Nanjing, 14 August 1599, in Ricci, *Lettere*, 361–362. See also Ricci to Acquaviva, Beijing, 22 August 1608, in Ricci, *Lettere*, 496.

¹⁵ *Fonti Ricciane*, ii, 192–244.

evangelization of the people, in accordance with Longobardo's method. I believe that Ricci chose him precisely for his missionary zeal. Longobardo completed what Ricci had necessarily to omit.

Certainly, if they had had the opportunity to discuss the matter, Ricci would not approve of Longobardo's position regarding the names of God and the interpretation of Confucianism that Longobardo expressed after 1615. We will return to this question later.

Dressed like Buddhist monks

When taking up residence in Zhaoqing (September 1583), Ricci and Ruggieri shaved their heads and dressed in Buddhist-style robes. Only under these conditions could the local prefect justify their presence, which was otherwise not admissible under imperial law. In traditional society there was hardly such a thing as casual clothing: everyone's identity had to be identified by his/her dress. The Jesuits did not have a specific religious robe and generally followed local custom in their dress. Wearing Buddhist-like robes was also a sign that theirs was a religious and not a commercial or military mission as people, knowing about the Portuguese outpost of Macao, might otherwise suspect.

Coincidentally, the prefect's requirement matched directives from Valignano, who promoted accommodation (called by him *modo soave*, 'gentle way') as the new missionary policy for East Asia. Valignano's new strategy as applied to the China mission required, in addition to a thorough knowledge of the written and spoken language, dressing in a manner similar to Buddhist monks and adaptation to the Chinese way of life.

On their Zhaoqing residence, near to a famous pagoda, the Italian missionaries hung two dedicatory plaques with the words 僊花寺 *Xianhua Si*, 'Temple of the Immortal's Flower' and 西來淨土 *Xilai Jingtū*, 'Pure Land from the West': these expressions clearly belong to Buddhist and Taoist terminology. In fact, the local population referred to the missionaries as 和尚 *heshang* or 僧 *seng*,

Buddhist monks. The missionaries introduced themselves as 'Buddhist monks from India' (天竺國僧 *Tianzhuguo seng*) or 'monks from the Western Pure Land' (西來淨土和尚 *Xilai Jingtū heshang*).

In the eyes of most people, the missionaries might have appeared as true Buddhists, possibly the initiators of a new Buddhist school, among the dozen already in existence.

Missionaries at work in Zhaoqing

It would be a mistake, however, to think that Ricci and Ruggieri acted as Buddhist monks and did not proclaim their Christian faith. The details of the missionary method practiced in the early years in Zhaoqing are known thanks to the 'Catechetical Conversations', an untitled Chinese manuscript composed in 1585–1588 and discovered in 1934 by d'Elia. The authors of the text are Ricci and Ruggieri, and it contains a memory aid for Ruggieri and Ricci's conversations with their guests. This is the earliest example of how the Jesuit missionaries worked in China, and it is quite important for understanding the development of their missionary method. The text, still almost unknown, is nine pages long and divided into eighteen sections. The first three paragraphs are concerned with the doctrine of the oneness of the Lord of Heaven, the Creation, and the final retribution. The fourth section introduces the Lord of Heaven as Great Father-Mother (大父母 *Da Fumu* — we shall come back to this remarkable expression — as a sovereign to whom children and subjects must pay respect. The fifth paragraph is on the Incarnation. The part devoted to the mystery of Christ is quite long, covering nearly half of the entire manuscript. Emphasis is given to the role of Jesus as savior, his Passion and Resurrection.

The authors state their missionary identity and refer to the dangers of their long journey as evidence of the sincerity of their intentions. The manuscript may be a working draft of Ruggieri's *The True Record of the Lord of Heaven* (天主實錄 *Tianzhu shilu*),

published in Zhaoqing the previous year (1584) and compiled in collaboration with Ricci. From all this, we learn that in the early days, Ricci and Ruggieri were rather traditional in their preaching. Only later did Ricci, who was a pragmatic man, partially change this initial method, adapting it to the context in which he lived and to new circumstances. Obviously Ricci did not initiate his mission with a predefined strategy decided at his desk. He learned from accidents, mistakes and from opponents. He took advice from Chinese friends and associates and continued a systematic study of Chinese culture. His strategy and method changed in accordance with what he learned through experience. In this respect he was a humanist of the Renaissance, an early modern pragmatic man. He was devoted to his cause, tenacious in his objectives, and flexible in his methods.

Ruggieri leaves China

In 1588 Ruggieri left China for Italy, never to return. He was charged with organizing a legation from the Holy See to Beijing. The legation never materialized, and some suggested that Ruggieri's assignment might have been a maneuver by Valignano to get Ruggieri honorably out of the way, due to a disagreement with Ricci's plan to change policy — we will return to this point. The simple facts, however, suggest otherwise. First of all, the plan to organize a legation was a well thought-out project, not just pretence. Both Ricci and Valignano believed it was indispensable for the success of the China mission.

The project of a papal diplomatic mission to Beijing, which Valignano expounded to the Superior General in November 1588, aimed at obtaining official recognition by the imperial court. For a long period of time, the lack of imperial permission was considered the most serious obstacle to evangelization. In fact, Valignano and Ricci were resuming an old project of Francis Xavier's. The Visitor genuinely believed in the policy of diplomatic legations as proven by the arrival, previously, of four Japanese envoys in Rome, a trip

organized by the same Valignano. These four representatives were passing through Macao on their way back to Japan in the same year that Valignano first proposed a diplomatic mission to China.

Ruggieri did not return to China because there was no legation to accompany, and he was also too old for a journey that was really quite dangerous. Moreover, Valignano for some reason expressed strong reservations about Ruggieri's linguistic abilities and the quality of his writings and reports. While in Italy, Ruggieri wrote in defense of the early policy of adaptation that he and Ricci had initiated in China. There is no evidence of actual disagreement while the two were in China, or that the two could not continue to work together, or that Ricci desired Ruggieri's removal from the China mission. There is not any evidence that Ricci was critical of his companion. In fact, Ricci did not decide on a change in policy until six years after Ruggieri's departure.

Ricci's change of policy

What was Ricci's change of policy? It was the passage from the Buddhist-like approach to a Confucian one. Ricci was a man of letters and not a monk or a mystic. He did not act like a Buddhist monk, and he did not feel at ease appearing like one. He felt much more at home as a citizen of the 'Republic of Letters', that is, as a man of humanistic culture, as a *litteratus*. After years of studying the classics, Ricci was ready for a change, for a new role in society. When in the mid 1590s he decided to dress like a Confucian scholar, Ricci not only followed the advice of his friends but also acted in accordance with his philosophical and humanistic training. Ricci not only stopped wearing the Buddhist habit but even adopted a very critical attitude towards Buddhism and Taoism. The conflict became increasingly harsh when Ricci had several disputes with famous Buddhist monks, in particular with Zhuhong 祜宏.

The change in dress was a strategic decision that Ricci could not take alone. He needed the approval of his superior, Valignano. Ricci and Valignano met in Macao in early 1593 for a thorough

review of missionary activity in China. The Visitor was staying in the Portuguese enclave for one of his longest sojourns (October 24, 1592 to late November 1594). During this period Valignano founded the College of St Paul where the missionaries sent to China were to study its language and culture.

Valignano called Ricci back to Macao in order to 'deal with the many serious issues of this mission'.¹⁶ But, it is possible that Ricci himself initiated this meeting, as suggested by the following passage in a letter to Acquaviva: "*It appears to me that if the Visitor is in Macao this year, we shall go through all the questions we need to discuss.*"¹⁷ Valignano also wished to give Ricci an opportunity to get treatment for the severe foot injury he received during an assault on the Jesuit's residence in Shaozhou. Ricci reached Macao in late December 1592 and stayed until the middle of the following February, dealing with 'many matters that were very useful for the promotion of this enterprise in China.'¹⁸ But even Macao's doctors could not heal Ricci's injury.

This was their last meeting. The two missionaries took decisions that would deeply affect the development of the mission in the years to follow. The agenda of their conversations, as described by Ricci himself, was a turning point in the process of accommodation. In late 1594 or early 1595, Valignano allowed Ricci and his companions to grow their beards and hair in preparation for assuming the dress of the literati. Ricci described Valignano's approval with the following words:

All these matters were so reasonably argued and so necessary that Fr Valignano gave the Fathers every right to act, taking it upon himself to write about it to the Father General and to the Pope, all being done for the better service of God.¹⁹

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, i, 323.

¹⁷ Ricci to Acquaviva, Shaozhou, 15 November 1592, in Ricci, *Lettere*, 175.

¹⁸ *Fonti Ricciane*, i, 323.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, i, 337.

On 18 April, 1595, during the journey from Shaozhou to Nanjing, Ricci finally abandoned his Buddhist-like habit and wore the silk robes of the literati with a 'very extravagant cap, as sharp as that of the bishops'.²⁰ From then on, Ricci's attitude toward Chinese religion is best summarized by the four-character sentence: 補儒易佛 *buru yifo*, 'perfect Confucianism and displace Buddhism'. This expression was used by Xu Guangqi 徐光啓 in his 1612 preface to Ricci's 1603 *Catechism* (The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven), in which Ricci launched a stern attack on Buddhism accusing it of being a parody of Christianity. He included anti-Buddhist arguments that he had elaborated in heated disputes with Buddhist monks. Zhuhong rebuked Ricci's anti-Buddhist criticism in his *Explanation of Heaven* (天說 *Tian shuo*, 1608).

Accommodation

The application of Valignano's 'gentle way' in China has been called accommodation, an expression that Ricci mentioned at least twice in his writings. In 1599, writing to Girolamo Costa, Ricci described the criteria he adopted in composing his *On Friendship* (1595):

I will send you the Italian translation, which cannot have the same beauty [gratia] as in the Chinese language. Not only have I adapted [accommodai] myself to them in everything, but I also changed, where it was needed, some of our philosophers' sayings and sentences, and took some from our own Society.²¹

The second reference to accommodation is to be found in 'Della entrata della Compagnia di Giesù e Christianità nella Cina' (On the entrance of the Society of Jesus and Christianity into China), Ricci's own account of his activities in China. Ricci

²⁰ Ricci to Girolamo Benci, Nanchang, 7 October 1595, in Ricci, *Lettere*, 269.

²¹ Ricci to Girolamo Costa, Nanjing, 14 August 1599, in Ricci, *Lettere*, 363.

describes how he ‘emended and adapted [accommodated] to the Christian way’²² the rules of the first Marian congregation written by the converts in Beijing according to Chinese customs.

The accommodation method, central in Jesuit missionary activity, is a concept that has its theological roots in Thomist thought²³ and in the writings of Erasmus of Rotterdam.²⁴ It was, according to Elisabetta Corsi, an instrument or a hermeneutical device, particularly apt to address complex religious and cultural challenges, and their doctrinal implications.²⁵

Ricci noted that many passages in the Chinese classic texts were in harmony with Christian teaching, and he proposed a parallel between the relationship of Christianity with Greco-Roman culture and that of Christianity with Confucianism. The distinction between the original teaching of the Classics and the later Neo-Confucian commentaries is a key point in Ricci’s interpretation of Confucianism. Ricci asserted that the ancients believed in God the creator. The ancient terms 上帝 *Shangdi*, ‘Sovereign above’, and 天 *Tian*, ‘Heaven’, are not impersonal and immanent but personal and transcendent. Therefore Ricci adopted the terms *Shangdi* and *Tian*,

²² *Fonti Ricciane*, ii, 482.

²³ *Summa theologica*, prima pars, quaestio I, articulus 10. I owe this notice to Elisabetta Corsi. See also her ‘El debate actual sobre el relativismo y la producción en las misiones católicas durante la primera edad moderna: Una lección para el presente?’, in Elisabetta Corsi, ed., *Órdenes religiosas entre América y Asia. Ideas para una historia misionera de los espacios coloniales* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 2008), 17–54.

²⁴ In *Ratio Verae Theologiae* (1518), Erasmus of Rotterdam, introduced the concept of *accommodatio Christi* to illustrate his *philosophia Christi*: Christ adapted himself to each person and to each situation, to the Jews and to the Gentiles. See Evangelista Vilanova, *Storia della teologia cristiana* (Roma: Borla, 1994), 2, 68–76.

²⁵ Elisabetta Corsi, ‘La retórica de la imagen visual en la experiencia misional de la Compañía de Jesús en China (siglos XVII–XVIII): una evaluación a partir del estado de los estudios’, in Perla Chinchilla & Antonella Romano, ed., *Escrituras de la modernidad: Los jesuitas entre cultura retórica y cultura científica*, (Mexico City: Universidad Iberoamericana, 2008), 94–95.

together with the neologism, at least then it was perceived as such, and *Tianzhu*, 'Lord of Heaven', to translate the name of God. We will return later to the question of God's names.

The missionary method in Ricci's own words

One major piece of evidence of accommodation as a hermeneutical device is to be found in Ricci's method of preaching and writing religious books. Let us start by analyzing his religious writings.

In his 'On the Entrance of the Society of Jesus and Christianity into China', and in numerous letters, Ricci eloquently illustrates his catechetical method based on the sharp distinction between catechism and Christian doctrine. Ricci's *Catechism* (i.e. *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*), published after years of elaboration, is a presentation of basic concepts such as the existence of God and the retribution of good and evil, in dialogue with Confucian scholars, and in dispute with Buddhists and Taoists. The *Christian Doctrine* (天主教要 *Tianzhu jiaoyao*, literally *Doctrine of the Lord of Heaven*, March 1605) gave a full account of Christian doctrine for catechumens and believers: the doctrine of the Trinity and of Christ, the sacred Scriptures, the sacraments, the precepts of the Church and Christian prayers. These teachings needed the presence of the missionary to explain them and to guide the listener into the church. From Ricci's own account:

Father Matteo printed a new version of the Christian Doctrine, which he did with the help of the other Fathers, adding prayers and other things necessary for the new Christians with some brief explanations, especially for the seven sacraments. This was very necessary ... And while a fuller explanation was made in the form of this new Christian Doctrine, the Father printed the *Catechism*, which he had previously put in order and which all our missionaries were using in hand-written copies. This [book] is not about all the mysteries of our Holy Faith, which must be explained only to catechumens and to Christians. The *Catechism* is rather about the major

mysteries, especially those which, in some way, can be proved by natural reason and understood with the natural enlightenment. In this way, the *Catechism* can serve both the Christians and the Gentiles. And when missionaries will arrive, they can open the way to the mysteries that depend on Faith and on revealed science.

In particular, that there is a Lord and Creator of the universe ... And all this is proved, not only through many reasons and arguments made by our theologians, but also by many statements in their ancient books, that the Father had recorded while reading them. ... He was very committed to bringing Confucius, who is the foremost scholar of the Chinese, to our doctrine, interpreting some doubtful points from his writings in our own favour. In fact, in these writings he reveals the coming of Christ, our Redeemer, to the world to save and to teach. For this reason, the Fathers urge the Chinese to inquire about the true doctrine, which is more particularly taught in other books.²⁶

The light of reason

The *Catechism* was a representation of the cultural and religious context, based on a Christian interpretation of the Chinese classics. In 1609, in a letter to the Vice Provincial Francesco Pasio in Japan, Ricci gave the following theological interpretation of the Confucian texts:

By carefully examining all these books, we shall find very few matters against the light of reason and very many conformable to it. ... And we can very much hope in the divine mercy that many of their ancestors have been saved by observing the natural law with the help that God shall grant from his goodness.²⁷

According to scholastic theology, doctrines such as the

²⁶ *Fonti Ricciane*, ii, 289–298.

²⁷ Ricci to Francesco Pasio, Beijing, 15 February 1609, in Ricci, *Lettere*, 518.

existence of one God and the retribution after death belong to natural revelation and can be accepted with the light of reason, that is, rational arguments. The doctrines proper to positive revelation, that is, those which can be accepted only through Christian faith, such as the Trinity in God, the Incarnation and Redemption were, instead, proposed only to those who showed a desire to enter the Church. Ricci adopted the distinction of scholastic theology between the apologetic presentation (natural revelation) and the dogmatic one (positive revelation). In the vast literature of scholastic theology, natural revelation was dealt with under the theme of *demonstratio Christiana* (Christian apologetics). Positive revelation was treated under the topics of *Verbum incarnatum* (Incarnation of the Word) and *Christus redemptor* (Christ the Redeemer). The distinction between natural theology and positive theology is to be found in the traditional scholastic theology that Ricci studied in Rome. It was consciously applied in Ricci's oral preaching (as we will see soon) and in writing religious books in China. By understanding this essentially theological distinction, clearly illustrated by Ricci himself, we avoid an inaccurate evaluation of Ricci's missionary method.

Jesus the Master

In his *Catechism*, Ricci introduced Jesus only in the eighth and last chapter, presenting him as a master and a worker of miracles sent by God. However, he did not explicitly describe Jesus as Son of God and savior of humankind. Arguably, Confucian literati could have found Jesus of interest if he had been seen as a Western equivalent of the 'masters' in the Chinese philosophical tradition. His teaching, according to Ricci, was the basis of Western civilization, and since the coming of Jesus, 'many Western nations have made great progress on the way to civilization'.²⁸ However, Ricci refrained from proposing a direct comparison between Jesus

²⁸ Matteo Ricci, SJ, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, ed. Edward Malatesta (Taipei, Paris, Hong Kong: Ricci Institute, 1985), 453.

and Confucius, each the master of a civilization. Indeed, Jesus was presented as superior to all masters, saints and kings. As much as he tried to approach his Confucian interlocutor in a balanced way, Ricci did assert the superiority of Christ.

Ricci's critics, whom we named above, read Ricci's *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* and saw that Christ was mentioned only at the end, briefly, and in an incomplete fashion. They concluded that Ricci spoke only of the Lord of Heaven and left out the crucifixion. They obviously ignored Ricci's method and the justification for it found in his writings.

Inspired by contemporary European models, the Jesuit missionaries engaged in the production of religious material that had a dual purpose: the catechisms were written so as to make the reader think in Christian terms, that is, to show a Christian interpretation of the cultural reality in which they lived. 萬物真源 *Wanwu zhenyuan* (The true origin of all things) by Giulio Aleni (1628) belongs to the same genre as well. On the other hand, the *Christian Doctrine*, as we shall see, aimed at providing the readers with the Church's teaching and rules.

The Christian Doctrine

The *Christian Doctrine* contains the teachings of the positive revelation, essential for receiving baptism and for practicing a Christian life. It was anonymous because its content is nothing but traditional Christian teaching: no one could put his name to that teaching. This publication is ignored by some of Ricci's biographers. How do we know that in 1605 Ricci published the *Christian Doctrine*? He, himself, mentioned this in his letters and in 'On the Entrance of the Society of Jesus and Christianity into China'. In a letter to Fabio De Fabii, Ricci presents the content of the *Christian Doctrine* in detail:

I shall send with this letter a copy of the *Christian Doctrine*, which we are about to print; it will serve for you to understand our hard work. We had a great need for this Doctrine; there have been many difficulties in

translating it into Chinese. Since it has been emended many times in the past few years, it was different in each of our four residences. I have made this edition with great diligence and added a few things as well. We have ordered this new version to be printed and used in all the residences in China, and no one will use the old editions. It was necessary to invent many new ecclesiastical words in Chinese. We have also given brief explanations in small characters of all the terms where they occurred for the first time. In the first place there is the Lord's Prayer, in the second the Hail Mary, in the third the Commandments, in the fourth the Creed, in the fifth the Sign of the Cross, in the sixth the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, in the seventh the eight Beatitudes, in the eighth the seven deadly sins, in the ninth the seven contrary virtues or remedies, in the tenth the five senses of the body, in the eleventh the three faculties of the soul, in the twelfth the three theological virtues, and finally the names of the seven sacraments in our language. We have added a brief and concise explanation in small characters to throw light on the essentials of the sacraments.²⁹

The only thing lacking in the first edition was the five precepts of the Church. At that time, there were only about 500 baptized Christians, scattered in various cities with no ecclesiastical organization. Ricci probably thought that introducing the five precepts of the Church in China was premature and unfeasible.

The first edition of the *Christian Doctrine* is described by d'Elia in *Fonti Ricciani*.³⁰ Ricci had a high opinion of the importance of this work. In 1605, Ricci answered those from Europe who asked for a translation of the *Antwerp Polyglot Bible*, stating that the essential meaning of the biblical books is contained

²⁹ Ricci to de Fabii, Beijing, 9 May 1605, in Ricci, *Lettere*, 385–386.

³⁰ *Fonti Ricciane*, ii, 289–91, note 2. D'Elia found this copy, signed by Ricci himself, in Propaganda Fide's archive in Rome in 1934, but he does not give a catalogue number for Ricci's work. The copy studied by D'Elia must have been withdrawn from the archives or been misplaced, because presently it is not to be found. I am thankful to Elisabetta Corsi and to Adrian Dudink who have confirmed this information.

in the “*Christian Doctrine*, which we have retranslated, printed and sent to be used in all our residences in China.”³¹

Indirect and direct preaching

Ricci was not only a good theologian; he also became an expert in Chinese socio-cultural dynamics. He thus applied the distinction between catechism and Christian doctrine to his oral preaching by adopting *indirect preaching* and *direct preaching* according to whether his interlocutors were literati (practice of indirect preaching) or catechumens and neophytes (practice of direct preaching).

When practicing indirect preaching in his meetings with the literati, Ricci employed dialogue and disputation in a manner similar to the style of argumentation found in both Chinese and Western classical texts. His conversations initially dealt with scientific, ethical and philosophical topics, elaborating on similar points in Chinese and Western classical texts in support of his arguments. Ricci would then turn the conversations towards a discussion of religious and ethical beliefs, such as the existence of God, the immortality of the soul, and the reward of good and evil in heaven and hell. The outline of *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* gives a good idea of how those conversations developed: 1. God the Creator; 2. The human search for God; 3. The immortality of the soul; 4. The substantial difference between humans and the rest of the universe, where Ricci, in polemics with Neo-Confucianism, would argue that humans and the universe do not derive from one and the same substance; 5. Confutation of re-incarnation and other Buddhist doctrines; 6. Reward for the virtuous in heaven and punishment for evildoers in hell; 7. Human nature as distinct from the rest of the universe; 8. The religion of the missionaries, their celibacy, and the mission of Jesus, master and worker of miracles.

In his conversations with visitors and literati, Ricci did not

³¹ Ricci to João Alvares, Beijing, 12 May 1605, in Ricci, *Lettere*, 406.

necessarily speak about the beliefs proper to the Catholic faith. A complete catechetical instruction was given only to those who desired to embrace the Catholic religion. Ricci's policy was that specific religious teaching was to be offered only upon request. In this way, consciously or not, Ricci followed the style of Buddhist masters, especially those trained in the Zen school, who offered their teaching only after their disciples proved able to appreciate it.

In other words, the purpose of the written catechisms and of the indirect preaching was to discuss matters of faith; while the purpose of the written Christian doctrines and direct preaching was to teach and practice the faith. The content of the catechisms and indirect preaching could change, according to the writer and speaker, the readership and audience, the circumstances, the culture, and so on. The Christian doctrines and the direct preaching, on the other hand, did not change: they transmitted the non-changeable essentials and the texts were normally printed anonymously, as Ricci did in 1605.

Reaction to Ricci's preaching and writings

The printing of the *Catechism* and the *Christian Doctrine* are mentioned many times in Ricci's letters. He also described the reception of his publications:

Last year we printed the *Catechism*, which is an explanation and proof of our faith, and I confuted the Chinese sects, as I had been doing for many years. I think I succeeded very well, for even if the followers of the sects were angered, the Christians were still strongly confirmed in their faith, while others, for this reason, have decided to become Christians. We understand that these works of ours, especially the *Catechism*, have arrived in Japan, where they have been welcomed and are indeed much sought after as those people hold the letters from China in high esteem. Along with this letter, I am sending you a version of the prayers and matters concerning the Christian doctrine in Chinese; it will serve

to show the vast number of characters that need to be learned.³²

Ricci wrote to Acquaviva in 1608:

I can say that this *Catechism* was much welcomed by those who want to know the truth; but others, who are very content and satisfied in their falsehood, were very unhappy and they are speaking ill of the author. ... Another great and erudite writer in the province of Zhejiang, which is very far from here, wrote me a letter of several sheets urging me not to speak badly about the idols and to read their books carefully. But I wrote in reply in such a way that I think he will not write anything like that again. We shall probably print both letters, because, thanks to them, many matters of our doctrine can be clarified. With all these attacks, this book is much read and of much help.³³

Catechisms were written not only for the literati, converts and catechumens, but also for opponents of the faith, and for anyone interested. Ricci's *Catechism* (The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven) was a book for all and comprehensible to everyone. As such it was printed in large numbers, and distributed across the country. The books traveled without the missionaries and reached neighboring nations, like Korea, Japan and Vietnam. Christianity entered Korea thanks to Ricci's *Catechism* and other Jesuit books brought back by Korean officials who had taken part in the customary embassies to Beijing. Ricci wrote in one of his letters:

The same Li Zhizao 李之藻, who is not yet a Christian but who shall be one soon, reprinted my *Catechism*, making sure it would serve both for Christians and Gentiles in this land, to better broaden the knowledge of matters of our holy faith. This *Catechism* was not only accepted in this kingdom, but also in Japan. Father Francesco Pasio wrote us that it was very useful for its

³² Ricci to Giovanni Battista Ricci, Beijing, 10 May 1605, in Ricci, *Lettere*, 391–392.

³³ Ricci to Acquaviva, Beijing, 22 August 1608, in Ricci, *Lettere*, 488.

authoritative information on Chinese matters: and Father Alessandro Valignano therefore had it reprinted in the province of Guangdong.³⁴

In a letter dated 1605, Ricci wrote a surprising sentence about the distribution of the *Christian Doctrine* booklets.

We voluntarily gave these doctrines not only to the Christians but also to the literati in whom we have great hope.³⁵

These words confirm that the *Christian Doctrine* was not distributed to just anyone but was addressed to Christians and catechumens; however, the booklets were occasionally also given to non-Christians for whom the missionaries had well-founded hopes of conversion. The dynamics of the mission in China were more complex than any simple schematization.

There are striking similarities between Ricci's method and the Christian catechesis of the early Christian centuries when the catechumens were introduced to the mysteries of faith (*arcana*) only gradually. Ricci, proposing a gradual introduction to the faith, did the same. The church founded by Ricci was, in an important sense, a 'primitive' church.

Black magic?

In the first Christian centuries, crucifixes were not fashioned or displayed. Interestingly, after nearly twenty years in China, Ricci also adopted a policy of no public display of the crucifix. One incident was particularly important in shaping his attitude in this respect. It occurred in Tianjin when the eunuch Ma Tang 馬堂 inspected Ricci's luggage en route to Beijing in 1600. Ricci narrated the episode as follows:

There was one thing that caused great surprise among them, and which also caused the greatest trouble to us:

³⁴ Ricci to Costa, Beijing, 6 March 1608, in Ricci, *Lettere*, 459–460.

³⁵ Ricci to de Fabii, Beijing, 9 May 1605, in Ricci, *Lettere*, 386.

the discovery among our possessions of a beautiful crucifix, engraved in wood and in vivid red color that seemed like real blood. At that point, the cruel eunuch started denouncing us: "You have made this object for casting a spell on our King to kill him. People who carry such objects cannot be good." He really thought that there was something evil about it.³⁶

A six month-long detention followed this worrisome incident, and Ricci became convinced that the crucifix should not be displayed without explaining its true meaning.

Most Franciscan and Dominican friars, active in China since 1632, adopted street preaching, which was common in New Spain (now Mexico), South America and the Philippines. The street preaching consisted of the open and direct proclamation of Jesus as the savior of humanity by a preacher holding a crucifix in his hand and standing in a public space such as a square, a crossroads or a market. Such a preaching style was a replica of European 'internal missions'.

Ricci did not suppress the event of the crucifixion in his preaching. He, following the practice of the Christians of the early centuries, was prudent in displaying the crucifix in order not to provoke the contempt and the confusion of those who would not understand it without an adequate explanation of its meaning for salvation.

The Terms Controversy

The second point over which Longobardo disagreed with Ricci had far-reaching consequences. It goes under the name of the 'terms controversy'. As we already mentioned above, Ricci's view was that the terms *Shangdi* 上帝 and *Tian* 天 were compatible with Christian doctrine, and he employed them to name God.

Longobardo's opinion was, however, very different. He found it necessary to reject not only *Shangdi*, *Tian* and all the terms

³⁶ *Fonti Ricciane*, ii, 115.

deriving from the Chinese Classics, but even the commonly accepted term, *Tianzhu* 天主, Lord of Heaven.

The person who convinced him to embrace this extremely conservative opinion was João Rodriguez, a Jesuit based in Japan who visited Beijing in 1615. Rodriguez was against using Japanese terms to name God, and persuaded Longobardo to apply the same policy in China. Missionaries in Japan were against using the local language to name God because of a bad experience that Francis Xavier had in translating the word God into Japanese.³⁷ Jesuit missions in Japan and China were intimately linked and influenced each other. The web of their connections and reciprocal influences was vast and intricate.

Longobardo and Rodriguez argued that terms such as *Shangdi* were not compatible with Christianity because their contemporary use had been strongly influenced by materialistic Neo-Confucianism. They advocated the introduction of a new term in the form of 陡斯 *dousi*, a Chinese phonetic rendering of the Latin word *Deus* even though Ricci had argued that it is impossible to pronounce correctly the letter 'd' in Chinese.³⁸ The term *dousi* was employed only occasionally in late Ming Christian writings.

Longobardo's position was opposed by the majority of Jesuits in China, particularly by Giulio Aleni and Nicolas Trigault, who was in Europe when Rodriguez visited Beijing. The Jesuits met in Jiading in southern Jiangsu in late 1627 and early 1628 to discuss the matter. On that occasion, Longobardo wrote a memorandum stating his position. After the negative result (for Longobardo) of the meeting, the document giving his position should have been destroyed. However, one copy survived, and years later was given

³⁷ On the advice of his guide Anjirō, Xavier adopted the term 大日 *Dainichi* (The Great Sun) to translate the word God. However, when he learned that the term belonged to the esoteric Buddhist 真言 Shingon school and implied religious meanings incompatible with Christian doctrine, he rejected the term in disgust and created the Japanese neologism *Deusu*.

³⁸ *Fonti Ricciane*, i, 193.

by a dissenting Jesuit to Domingo Navarette, the Dominican who devoted his life to advocating against the Chinese Rites. Navarette published Longobardo's memorandum in Europe in 1676, bringing the Chinese controversies into the European universities. Only in the early 18th century did the disagreement about the terms for God and the one about the Rites become two aspects of the same controversy. In 1704, Rome ruled that that the term *Tianzhu* should be used for God, but not *Shangdi* or *Tian*.

The Great Father-Mother

As a consequence of the controversy, several other expressions employed by the missionaries and Chinese Christians to name God were also dropped, putting to a stop a promising process of inculturation. Among the expressions rejected or abandoned were *Da Fumu* 大父母 (Great Father-Mother), *Wanwu Zhenyuan* 萬物真原 (The True Origin of All Things), *Tian* 天 (Heaven), *Da Zhu* 大主 (Great Lord), *Zhu* 主 (Lord), *Zhuzai* 主宰 (Supreme Lord), *Da Zhuzai* 大主宰 (Great and Supreme Lord), *Taigao Tian* 太高天 (Highest Heaven), *Da Li* 大理 (Great Principle).

One of the most remarkable terms employed by Ricci and Ruggieri from the early days of their mission was *Da Fumu* or 'Great Father-Mother'. This expression then occurred frequently in Chinese Christian literature used both by the missionaries, especially Giulio Aleni, and by the converts, particularly Yang Tingyun 楊廷筠 and Wang Zheng 王徵. The term's recondite origin is in Chinese cosmogony, where the concept of *yang* 陽, male element, and *yin* 陰, female element, are quite central. Great Father-Mother is a term that designated both the emperor and the local authorities. Yang Tingyun, one of the pillars of the early Chinese Catholic Church, developed a Christian interpretation of this typical Chinese expression. To regard the universe as one's own Father and Mother implies that all human beings should be regarded as one's own brothers and sisters. The term also refers to the relationship between parent and child, which reflects the close

relationship between God and humankind. The abandonment of the term Great Father-Mother is particularly regrettable in view of the search for inclusive language in contemporary theology, a language that wishes to avoid any masculine connotation of God.

Autonomy from Macao

Ricci understood that the Chinese were suspicious of the relations between the missionaries and the Portuguese. Valignano consented to Ricci's request to have legal (achieved in 1604) and financial autonomy from Macao.³⁹ For this reason, Valignano intended to give each residence in China a yearly income. This would have been possible thanks to the income generated from the commerce of the East India carracks sailing to Macao and Nagasaki. The capture of a Portuguese ship by the Dutch in July 1603 was a severe blow to Valignano's plans for the financial support of the residences in China and the dispatching of new personnel.⁴⁰ The financial investment, regulated and confirmed by Valignano, in the silk and silver trade between China and Japan was a vital source and means of support. However, this practice, while legal, raised a debate about missionary activity and evangelical poverty, both inside and outside of the Society.

Promotion of Chinese clergy

Ricci supported the admission of Chinese candidates to the religious and priestly life, and for this purpose he trained eight Chinese Jesuits. Even though their preparation included the study of Latin, which only candidates for the priesthood were required to learn, none of them was ever admitted to the priesthood. This was because the Superior General Acquaviva maintained that the Chinese Church was too young for such a step. In 1603, Valignano had intended to open a seminary for young Chinese in a city within

³⁹ *Fonti Ricciane*, ii, 273–275; Ricci to Acquaviva, Beijing, 15 August 1606, in Ricci, *Lettere*, 424.

⁴⁰ *Fonti Ricciane*, ii, 275–276.

China. The financial difficulties caused by the loss of the carrack, mentioned above, obliged Valignano to postpone the project, which was never resumed by his successors.

Among the eight brothers was Huang Mingsha 黃明沙 (Francisco Martines) who died in 1605 from the mistreatment he suffered while imprisoned in Guangzhou. He was the first Catholic to die from persecution for his faith in China in the modern era. He had been detained in Guangzhou on his way to Macao from where he was supposed to accompany Valignano on his visit to China.

In April 1595, João Barradas (we do not know his Chinese name), a Chinese companion of Ricci, drowned in the Gan River 贛江, where Ricci also risked his life. Ricci mentioned the unfortunate young man many times in his letters, describing the grief he felt after his death, and the sense of discouragement over the loss of his valuable assistant during that difficult journey. The following passage is from a letter to Acquaviva:

I greatly felt the loss of this good young man, both for his death and for the lack of his presence during this journey, as well as for his good nature and qualities, which were of great help to me. What consoled me was that we can believe that he has been rewarded for the many troubles suffered, with much valor and edification to all, during the three years he stayed with us in Shaozhou.⁴¹

Another Chinese brother that should not be forgotten in a biography of Ricci is You Wenhui 游文輝, better known by his Portuguese name of Manuel Pereira. He is the creator of the most famous portrait of Matteo Ricci, painted in Beijing in 1610.

‘Scientific apostolate’

In other places we examined Ricci’s training in the innovative scientific curriculum offered at the Roman College. The charge against him that he manipulated science as a trick to get conversions has no ground. Science was much more than a tool; it

⁴¹ Ricci to Acquaviva, Nanchang, 4 November 1595, in Ricci, *Lettere*, 303.

was part of the Jesuit humanistic and theological vision of the world.

The presentation of Western knowledge was meant to elevate Ricci's and his companions' personal prestige and to show the value of Western culture and, consequently, the value of the missionaries' religious doctrine. Introducing themselves as scholars of material heaven, they hoped to be trusted as scholars of the metaphysical Heaven as well.

The same theological approach applies to the activity of mapping. Ricci called the map "*the best and most useful work that could have been done at this time to enable China to give credit to the things of our Holy Faith*".⁴² Ricci produced six editions of his famous map. This experience was cultural, scientific and religious. Drawing maps of the Earth was not only a tool of missionary strategy, but involved a religious worldview. For the Jesuit cartographer, maps were not only a visual representation of geography, but they were a way to know and understand the work of creation. Understanding the universe with scientific accuracy meant knowing God and creation. Knowing the Earth and drawing it on a map meant participating in the work of creation.

In his map, Ricci did not put China at the center of the world, nor did he represent it as larger than other countries. The central meridian falls in eastern Japan, leaving Europe, Africa and Asia in the west (i.e. to the left of the observer) and North and South America in the east (i.e. to the right of the observer). In his *Fonti Ricciane*, Pasquale d'Elia expressed the hope that this 'tenacious legend' be abandoned forever, and he went on to explain how this story got started. In 1651, the Jesuit, Giovanni Battista Riccioli, wrote that Ricci put China at the center of world and drew it larger than other countries, not to offend the Chinese. Riccioli had misinterpreted Trigault's Latin translation of Ricci's *Della entrata*. But in the Ricci's writings there is no trace of anything like that.⁴³

The 'scientific apostolate', promoted by Valignano, Ricci and

⁴² *Fonti Ricciane*, i, 208.

⁴³ *Fonti Ricciane*, i, 210–211.

Longobardo, did not go unquestioned in Jesuit circles. After the persecution of Christians in Japan, a number of Jesuits returned to Macao in 1614. Some of them had second thoughts about the involvement of Jesuit missionaries in 'scientific activities'. Valentino Carvalho, the Provincial of Japan, of which China was a part, proscribed scientific activities which did not have direct relations with the *puro Evangelio*, 'pure Gospel'. Longobardo did not turn against Ricci's policy in this respect, but rather, strenuously resisted the new course. Consequently Carvalho's prohibition was not implemented in China. This method of evangelization was indeed an object of debate and scrutiny, even inside the Society. In this respect, Longobardo followed in the footsteps of his predecessor.

Ricci's scientific activity is well known and thoroughly illustrated in many publications. He introduced various European scientific notions into China from disciplines such as mathematics, astronomy, calendrical calculation, geography, cartography, medicine, physics, architecture, linguistics, phonetics, philosophy, morals, fine arts, music, and, of course, theology. Ricci is seen by many as an agent of cultural and scientific exchange only. However, he was, of course, much more than that. Some studies on Ricci are contaminated, although this is not always plainly stated, with an underlying somewhat odd ideology: Ricci was a great man of science and culture not because he was a missionary but in spite of being a missionary. I hope, with this presentation, to have shown that Ricci was indeed a missionary, and a good one.

The Door of Friendship

If one word could summarize Ricci's approach to China, that word would be friendship, a humanistic value that Ricci greatly appreciated and cherished with a wide circle of friends, both European and Chinese. He always kept in contact with them, as is manifested by his extensive correspondence. According to the contemporary Jesuit sinologist, Edward Malatesta, Ricci was even a

martyr of friendship. His early death, on May 11, 1610 at the age of 57, was due to overwork in receiving friends and guests and reciprocating their visits. In those days many *literati* (a term Ricci coined for the scholar-official class) from all over the country would go to Beijing for the imperial examinations. Many of them desired to visit the learned man from the West, famous for his writings.

Ricci was generous enough to point to his friend, Visitor Valignano, as ‘the first author of this mission’,⁴⁴ ‘the first founder of the enterprise in China’,⁴⁵ and then again, ‘father of this mission’.⁴⁶ Valignano’s death in Macao in January 1606 was an emotional blow to Ricci. In a letter to the Superior General Claudio Acquaviva, Ricci wrote the following moving words:

This year, besides other trials, which are never lacking, we had this huge one of the death of Fr Valignano, the father of the mission. His loss leaves us as orphans, and I don’t know how, Holy Father, you can ever replace him.⁴⁷

Matteo Ricci associated Alessandro Valignano with Francis Xavier, who was already widely venerated among the Jesuits. Both Valignano and Xavier had died on the threshold of China and on the eve of their entry into the country:

God did not allow this kingdom to receive the beneficent help of these two great servants: blessed Fr Francis Xavier and Fr Alessandro Valignano. They, for the goodness of many souls, much desired to enter this kingdom, but both died at its doorstep without being able to carry out their desire.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, i, 221.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, ii, 362.

⁴⁶ Ricci to Claudio Acquaviva, Beijing, 15 August 1606, in Matteo Ricci, *Lettere (1580–1609)*, ed. Francesco D’Arelli (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2001), 423.

⁴⁷ Ricci to Acquaviva, Beijing, 15 August 1606, in Ricci, *Lettere*, 423.

⁴⁸ See *Fonti Ricciane*, ii, 364–366.

The collaboration between the two missionaries was so successful that it is almost impossible to distinguish the choices made by Ricci from the instructions given by Valignano. Such unity of vision and action is rarely to be found among other missionaries. The reciprocal esteem, friendship and solidarity, together with the identity of views and projects, make the human, religious and intellectual venture of Ricci and Valignano something not at all common in the modern missionary history of China and beyond, and it still commands our respect.

Ricci also had many Chinese friends, among whom certainly were Leon Li Zhizao and Paul Xu Guangqi, the pillars and the fathers of the Chinese Church. But from Ricci's writings, we see that he was perhaps even more emotionally attached to other people, including Ignatius Qu Taisu 瞿太素, 'my old and great friend'. Qu was a character greater than life, and was baptized only after a dozen years of waiting. He was very close to Ricci in so many difficult ways, and it was he who advised Ricci to wear clothes similar to that of literati. Another person for whom Ricci felt strong feelings of friendship and solidarity was Feng Yingjing 馮應京, an important collaborator of Ricci, who suffered the injustice of prison. He died without baptism, and Ricci had moving words of hope for Feng's salvation. These words describe Ricci's confidence in the eternal destiny of righteous persons, against the prevailing pessimism of most of European theology:

May God count as baptism and grant him the salvation of his soul for the good he did to us, the great desire he showed to participate in the propagation of our Holy Faith, and to actually follow it.⁴⁹

"Books speak better than the mouth"

In the kingdom of China, where 'letters are very precious' (Ricci 2001, 517), Ricci considered writing and printing books as an essential element in the success of his mission. This was stated

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, ii, 168.

plainly in one of his last letters to the General Acquaviva, written in Beijing on March 8, 1608:

For this purpose, I do everything possible so that all our fathers diligently study the Chinese books and strive to learn to write in Chinese. Because, indeed, although it seems incredible [to many Europeans], in China one can do more with books than with speech.⁵⁰

This conviction was affirmed and articulated in an important letter to Pasio (1609). Ricci said that it was necessary that the missionaries really know the Chinese books, because, for a fruitful apostolate “*knowing our own things but not knowing theirs does not help much, and You, Father, will clearly see how important this point is.*”⁵¹ Ricci emphasized the importance of books, using an evocative picture:

The third point is about how easy it will be to propagate our holy Christian religion through books. They reach everywhere without impediment. They talk to more people, and continuously say things in a fashion more considerate and accurate than one can say orally.⁵²

APPENDIX

A (possibly) complete list of Matteo Ricci's writings

Ricci's writings and printed works in Chinese

1. 祖傳天主十誡 *Zuchuan Tianzhu shijie* (The Ten Commandments of the Lord of Heaven, as transmitted by our ancestors), written with Michele Ruggieri and published in Zhaoqing in 1584. In the same year Ricci and Ruggieri also translated and printed the Hail Mary, the Creed and the Lord's

⁵⁰ Ricci to Acquaviva, Beijing, 8 March 1608, in Ricci, *Lettere*, 470.

⁵¹ Ricci to Pasio, Beijing 15 February 1609, in Ricci, *Lettere*, 419.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 417.

Prayer.⁵³

2. 輿地山海全圖 *Yudi shanghai quantu* (Complete map of the world's mountains and seas), the first edition of Ricci's world map, was published in Zhaoqing in 1584 (no copies of this version are extant). Ricci produced revised editions in Nanjing in 1600, and in Beijing in 1602 (two authentic copies of this edition are still in existence), 1603, 1608 and 1609. The third edition (1602), compiled in collaboration with Li Zhizao, had a new title: 坤輿萬國全圖 *Kunyu wanguo quantu* (Complete map of the myriad countries in the world). The quality of this edition is much superior to the previous ones. The fourth edition was entitled 兩儀玄覽圖 *Liangyi xuanlan tu* (Chart revealing the profound nature of the world [two forms]). Subsequently the map had a total of sixteen editions. Ricci's map was centered on the Pacific Ocean. Unfortunately a 'tenacious legend' (in D'Elia's words) alleged that Ricci placed China at the centre of the world map to please his scholar friends.⁵⁴

3. 交友論 *Jiaoyou lun* (On friendship). Published in Nanchang in 1595 and also had subsequent editions; in 1598 Ricci provided a translation into Italian.

4. 西國記法 *Xiguo jifa* (The Western method of memorization), composed and printed in Nanchang in 1595–96, but not distributed until 1625.

5. 四元行論 *Siyuan xinglun* (Treatise on the four elements), composed and published in Nanjing in 1599–1600 and again in 1614.

6. 西琴曲意八章 *Xiqin quyī ba zhang* (Eight songs for harpsichord), written in 1601, published in Beijing in 1608 and later included in

⁵³ Copies of the documents were sent to Rome, but so far no reprints have yet surfaced: see *Fonti Ricciane*, i, 194.

⁵⁴ *Fonti Ricciane*, i, 211–212. D'Elia also described the origin and development of such commonplace but false views.

collections of literary works.⁵⁵

7. Memorial to the Emperor (Beijing, 1601).⁵⁶

8. 天主實義 *Tianzhu shiyi* (The true meaning of the Lord of Heaven). Ricci's most important work was published in Beijing in 1603, after many years of revision. Later editions appeared in 1605 in Guangzhou and in 1607 in Hangzhou. From the 19th century numerous editions were printed in Shanghai, Fujian, Hebei, Shandong and Hong Kong. The book was also translated into Manchu, Korean, Vietnamese, Japanese, French, English and Italian.

9. 天主教要 *Tianzhu jiaoyao* (The Christian doctrine), published in Beijing in 1605.

10. 西字奇蹟 *Xizi qiji* (Remarkable examples of Western writing), published in Beijing in 1605. The text contained Chinese characters followed by their Romanization. The following year it was included by 程大約 Cheng Dayue and 程土方 Cheng Shifang in their 程氏墨苑 Chengshi Moyuan (The Ink Garden of the Cheng family).

11. 二十五言 *Ershiwu yan* (Twenty-five sayings), composed in Nanjing in 1599–1600. This work is a translation of Epictetus's

⁵⁵ Among the gifts Ricci presented in 1601 to the Wanli emperor (r. 1572–1620) was a harpsichord. At the request of the court Ricci wrote eight songs in Chinese set to Western tunes for the court musicians to play. See Pasquale D'Elia, 'Sonate e canzoni italiane alla corte di Pechino nel 1601', in *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 3 (1945), 158–165.

⁵⁶ The original document has not yet surfaced, but we are informed of its content by Ricci himself and by his biographer Giulio Aleni. See *Fonti Ricciane*, ii, 617; Giulio Aleni, 大西西泰利先生行跡 *Daxi xitai Li xiansheng xingji* (The deeds of Mr Matteo Ricci of the Great West), (1630) reprinted in *Chinese Christian Texts from the Roman Archives of the Society of Jesus*, ed. Nicolas Standaert & Adrian Dudink (Taipei: Taipei Ricci Institute, 2002), xii, 212. Ricci did not receive a formal answer to his petition, and he was not even sure that the Emperor actually received it. See Ricci to Francesco Pasio, Beijing, 15 February 1609, in Ricci, *Lettere*, 509–511.

Encheiridion and was published in Beijing in 1605.

12. 畸人十篇 *Jiren shipian* (Ten discourses by an extraordinary man). This successful book on moral teaching was published in Beijing in 1608 and included quotations from six of Aesop's fables.

13. 辯學遺牘 *Bianxue yidu* (Posthumous polemics against the idolatrous sects), written after 1607 and published in 1629 by Li Zhizao. With this book Ricci refuted the criticism expressed by the lay Buddhist 虞淳熙 Yu Chunxi and the monk Zhuhong.

14. 15. 16. 復虞淳熙 *Fu Yu Chunxi* (An answer to Yu Chunxi), 理法器撮要 *Lifaqi cuoyao* (Resumé of the use of astronomical instruments), 上大明皇帝貢獻土物奏 *Shang Da Ming Huangdi gongxian tuwu zou* (A memorial to the throne on the gifts presented to the Emperor of the Great Ming): these texts, which usually do not appear in other lists of Ricci's writings, are included in the collection published by 朱維錚 Zhu Weizheng, 利瑪竇中文著譯集 *Li Madou Zhongwen zhu yi ji* (Collected Chinese writings and translations by Matteo Ricci) (Hong Kong: Xianggang Chengshi Daxue chubanshe, 2001; Shanghai: Fudan Daxue chubanshe, 2001).

Works in Chinese written in collaboration with others

17. A Portuguese-Chinese dictionary compiled by Matteo Ricci and Michele Ruggieri in Zhaoqing in 1583–88.⁵⁷

18. 天主實錄 *Tianzhu shilu* (The True Exposition of the Lord of Heaven), published in Zhaoqing in 1584 by Ruggieri. Ricci collaborated in the compilation and editing of the book.

⁵⁷ The original manuscript has no title. D'Elia, who discovered it in 1934 called it a Portuguese-Chinese dictionary, and this title was subsequently adopted by John W. Witek, who published it as: Michele Ruggieri & Matteo Ricci, *Dicionário Português-Chinês: 葡漢辭典: Portuguese-Chinese Dictionary*, ed. John W. Witek, SJ, (Lisbon: Biblioteca Nacional Portugal; Macao: Instituto Português do Oriente; San Francisco: Ricci Institute for Chinese-Western Cultural History, University of San Francisco, 2001).

19. Catechetical Conversations (the title is by Pasquale D'Elia), an untitled manuscript in Chinese, compiled in collaboration with Ruggieri in Zhaoqing in 1585–88.⁵⁸

20. Letter from Pope Sixtus V to the Chinese Emperor. It was a draft by Ricci in collaboration with an anonymous literatus, and prepared for a planned papal letter (1588).⁵⁹

21. Translation and adaptation of the Gregorian calendar, compiled by Ricci in 1589. It was published around 1625 by Trigault with the following title: 推定歷年瞻禮日單 *Tuiding linian zhanli ridan* (Liturgical feast days transposed to the Chinese calendar).

22. 經天該 *Jingtian gai* (Treatise on constellations), a rhymed star catalogue adapted from the Tang dynasty 步天歌 *Bu tian ge* (Song for pacing the heavens), which inserts Western names for the stars.⁶⁰ Compiled by Ricci and Li Zhizao in Beijing as early as 1601 (it was their first work in collaboration), the date of publication remains uncertain.

23. 幾何原本 *Jihe yuanben* (Elements of geometry). A translation, published in Beijing in 1607, by Ricci and Xu Guangqi of the first six books of Euclid as included in *Euclidis elementorum libri XV* by Christophorus Clavius.

24. 測量法義 *Celiang fayi* (Theory and method of measurements), written in Beijing in 1607 by Xu Guangqi and Ricci and published

⁵⁸ The document was found by D'Elia in 1934 together with the Portuguese-Chinese dictionary mentioned in the previous note. Pasquale D'Elia, 'Il domma cattolico integralmente presentato da Matteo Ricci ai letterati della Cina', in *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 3 (1935), 35–53.

⁵⁹ A copy of this document is kept in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris and is mentioned by Henri Cordier, *Bibliographie des ouvrages publiés en Chine par les européens au XVIIe et au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Leroux, 1901), 67.

⁶⁰ Mark Stephen Mir, 'The mechanics of Heaven: Jesuit Astronomers at the Qing Court', *The Ricci Institute for Chinese-Western Cultural History* [website] <<http://www.usfca.edu/ricci/research/lectures/mechanics.htm>> accessed 24 December, 2009.

by Xu in 1617; also 勾股義 *Gougu yi* (Explanation of the triangle), written by Xu Guangqi in 1607 and published after 1617, on the basis of Ricci's lessons.

25. 渾蓋通憲圖說 *Hungai tongxian tushuo* (Astrolabe and spheres: charts and commentary), composed and published by Li Zhizao in Hangzhou in 1607, on the basis of Ricci's lessons on the *Astrolabium* by Clavius.

26. 乾坤體義 *Qiankun tiyi*, (Explanation of the structure of Heaven and Earth), writings based on Clavius's *In Sphaeram Joannis de Sacrobosco* commentaries, composed by Ricci and Li Zhizao between 1607 and 1608, and possibly published in Beijing in 1614 by Li. This work includes also 日球大於地球，地球大於月球 *Riqiu da yu diqiu, diqiu da yu yueqiu* (The sun is larger than the earth, the earth is larger than the moon) by Ricci and Li Zhizao, which originally was an independent text. Some scholars list it as a separate work by Matteo Ricci.⁶¹

27. 同文算指 *Tongwen suanzhi* (Treatise on arithmetic), based on the *Aritmetica practica* by Clavius taught by Ricci to Li Zhizao. The volume was published in Beijing in 1613 with original contributions by Li.

28. 圓容較義 *Huanrong jiaoyi* (Treatise on isoperimetric figures), a translation of Clavius's *De figuris isoperimetris* done by Ricci and Li Zhizao in Beijing in 1609 and published by the latter in 1614.

29. 程氏墨苑 *Chengshi Moyuan* (The Ink Garden of the Cheng family). Matteo Ricci gave four images to the artist brothers Cheng Dayue and Cheng Shifang who included them in the work *Chengshi Moyuan*, published in Beijing in 1606. The four images portray: Jesus and Peter on the occasion of the miraculous draught of fishes, Jesus and the disciples of Emmaus, the city of Sodom, Our Lady of Seville. In 1983 the sinologist Jonathan Spence included them in his book *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci*. *Chengshi Moyuan* also

⁶¹ See, for example, *Fonti Ricciane*, iii, 240.

included Ricci's *Xizi qiji* (see above, no. 10).

Letters (1580–1609)

Fifty-four letters by Matteo Ricci have survived to the present day. Six of them were written from India, two from Macao, and the rest from China. They are very important for understanding Ricci's personality and work. Forty-eight of his letters are written in Italian and six in Portuguese and none has, as yet, been translated into any other language. Ricci's letters are available in two publications. The first one is edited by the early 20th century Jesuit historian, Pietro Tacchi Venturi, in the second volume of *Opere storiche del Padre Matteo Ricci, S.I.* (Macerata: Giorgetti, 1913). The second edition is by Francesco D'Arelli: *Lettere (1580–1609)* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2001).

Ricci's account of his enterprise

'On the Entrance of the Society of Jesus and Christianity into China' was written in Italian by Ricci in the last two years of his life, 1608–10. The manuscript was brought to Europe by Nicolas Trigault. During his journey (1613–15), Trigault translated it into Latin and published it in Augsburg in 1615 under the title *De Christiana expeditione apud Sinas suscepta ab Societate Jesu* (About the Christian expeditions to China undertaken by the Society of Jesus). Trigault occasionally changed the original. For example, he omitted the names of Chinese people, and added substantial material from the 'Annual Letters' of 1610 and 1611 and information about Ricci's death and funeral, for a total of one fourth of the entire text.⁶² The book was a great success. The second edition was published the following year (1616), and it was soon available in various translations: French (1616, 1617, 1618, 1908), German (1617), Spanish (1621), Italian (1622), and English (1625).

⁶² Before translating Ricci's manuscript into Latin, Trigault added two thirds of chapter XVII, chapter XVIII of Book IV and chapters XVIII–XX of Book V in Portuguese; chapters XVI–XXII of Book V in Latin.

Incredibly enough, Ricci's original manuscript text was completely forgotten and was found only in 1909 in the Jesuit Roman archives by Pietro Tacchi Venturi and published by the same Jesuit historian in 1911. It was published again, with sumptuous commentary and annotations, by the Jesuit sinologist Pasquale D'Elia in 1942–49 under the title *Fonti Ricciane*, a masterpiece of erudition.

In Macerata, in 2000, Ricci's account was published again, and this time with its original title: *Della entrata della compagnia di Giesù e Christianità nella Cina* (On the Entrance of the Society of Jesus and Christianity into China), edited by Piero Corradini, (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2000).

Surprisingly, other recent editions in Italian (1983), French (1978), English (Gallagher; 1942, 1953, 1970), and Chinese (1983; a translation from Gallagher's English version) were based on Trigault's version rather than on the original. Even today, some writers quote from Trigault's version, seemingly ignorant of the existence of Ricci's original. This is truly a case where 'there is nothing more unknown than what has been already published'.

Lost writings

Ricci noted on various occasions that in the mid 1590s he made an annotated transposition into Latin of the *Four Books*, as mentioned above. He did so for the benefit of the newly arrived missionaries studying Chinese language and culture. He also stated that he intended to send a copy to Rome, but no such text has so far been found.⁶³ However, existing manuscripts by others containing Latin translations and paraphrases from the *Four Books* may possibly be based on Ricci's work.⁶⁴

⁶³ *Fonti Ricciane*, ii, 33.

⁶⁴ For this complex and unsolved question see Francesco D'Arelli, 'Matteo Ricci 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*, ed. Francesco D'Arelli (Rome: Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente, 1998), 163–175.

A significant number of Ricci's letters have been lost. While only two letters to Valignano have survived, their contents clearly indicate that the correspondence between the two missionaries was frequent. It is fair to assume that Ricci might have written a letter every month to Valignano for a period of about twenty years.

Even more regrettably, Ricci's entire Chinese correspondence has been lost. In 1608, Ricci wrote to Superior General Claudio Acquaviva as follows:

One of the major occupations of mine in this land is to answer, in Chinese, the letters I continuously receive from various places and from important people. People I have met long ago or even people I have never met, who nevertheless write to us because of our good reputation.⁶⁵

Unfortunately, not even one of these letters (there must have been a few hundred) has surfaced so far.

Another lost text is Ricci's 'Description of China'. We have information about an account of China that Ricci sent to Acquaviva in 1590. It seems likely that the description contained in Ricci's 'On the Entrance of the Society of Jesus and Christianity into China' is close to the account sent to Acquaviva. We have already mentioned above the lost Chinese translation of the Our Father, Hail Mary and Creed printed in Zhaoqing in 1584.

Also lost are Ricci's spiritual notebooks. Giulio Aleni, author of the first biography of Ricci in Chinese, *大西西泰利先生行跡 Daxi xitai Li xiansheng xingji* (The deeds of Mr Matteo Ricci of the Great West), published in 1630, referred to the existence of Ricci's notebooks containing personal and spiritual annotations. Aleni had these notebooks in his hands and used them in writing about Ricci's spiritual and moral qualities. We have Ricci's biography by Aleni, but unfortunately we do not know anything more about his spiritual notebooks.

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⁶⁵ Ricci to Acquaviva, Beijing, 8 March 1608, in Ricci, *Lettere*, 473.