SEVENTEENTH CENTURY JESUITS IN VIETNAM AND THEIR VIEW ON CONFUCIANISM

十七世紀在越南的耶穌會士與其儒家觀

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Abstract

In the sixteenth century Jesuits in Japan had fashioned the theory of the double-teaching to understand Japanese Buddhism both as atheism and superstition. In the seventeenth century this theory had a great influence on the Jesuit missions in China and later in Vietnam, where it was applied to Confucianism. This paper investigates how the theory became very controversial in China, but how it was mostly adopted in Vietnam, especially by Alexandre de Rhodes in his understanding of Confucianism.

在十六世紀，在日本的耶穌會士塑造了“雙重教導”的學說，把日本佛教理解為無神論，又理解為偶像崇拜。在十七世紀，這個學說對中國及越南的耶穌會傳教區發揮了很深刻的影響，並且它被引用去理解儒家。本文研究這個學說如何在中國導致了爭議，然而在越南被接受，特別是亞歷山大羅德使用它去理解儒家。

Keywords

Vietnam, De Rhodes, Jesuits, Confucianism, Buddhism
越南、羅德、耶穌會、儒家、佛教

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Cultural and religious exchanges between Asia and the West have been generally studied along national boundaries, independently from the other countries of Asia. However, there has been a growing awareness in the last decade that studies circumscribed to one specific country missed the greater picture. As we study the interactions between Christianity and Asian traditions, we need to embrace a pan-Asian view to retrieve the multiple interactions which existed at that time.

I would like here to show how the earliest Jesuit accounts of Confucianism were created, circulated, and transformed across Asia, with a special focus on Vietnam. Jesuits working in Japan, China, and Vietnam, spent time in the Jesuit hub of Macao, exchanging information and views. Ideas circulated through reports and letters, and sometimes obtained a public status through publications in Europe. By retracing those influences of the Jesuit missions in East Asia, we shall be able to reconstruct the Jesuit images of Confucianism.

We shall start with Jesuits in Japan. Their initial focus was on Buddhism which they understood as being esoteric at its core. Next, we shall look at China, and analyzed how Ricci had developed a completely different reading of ancient Confucianism as not esoteric, but his interpretation received its greatest challenge when João Rodrigues of the Japanese mission moved to China, and argued Confucianism to be esoteric, pushing Niccolò Longobardo to voice his opposition to Ricci's adaptation policy. Then, we shall focus at two missionary accounts of the Vietnam mission, by Cristoforo Borri and Alexandre de Rhodes, and we shall trace the conflicting influences they received from Japan and China missions in their understanding of Confucianism. This shall enable us to map out their understanding of the role of Confucianism in Vietnamese culture and society, and the missionary policies they adopted in its regard.

Jesuits in Japan: all teachings as esoteric in their core

Since the coming of Francis-Xavier (1506–1552) in Japan in 1549, Jesuits were engaged mostly in a dialogue with Buddhist monks, who were held in high esteem in the Japanese society. However, for the ten first years, the communication was flawed with gross misunderstandings: on one side, the Japanese monks saw the Jesuits as fellow believers from India, the land of Buddha; on the other side, the Jesuits had started to proclaim the Christian God as Dainichi, which refers in fact to the Buddha Vairocana.

Besides early reports in 1551 by two Spanish Jesuits, Cosme de Torres (1510–1570) and Juan Fernandez (?–1567), it is only in 1556 that those two Jesuits got a better understanding of Buddhism thanks to Paulo Chozen [Kyozen], a Japanese Buddhist who had converted to Christianity in 1554. With the collaboration of the Portuguese Jesuit Baltasar Gago (1515–1583), they composed the *Summary of errors* (*Sumario de los errores*). The Swiss scholar Urs App has underlined the importance of this text from a historical point of view, which for the first time presented the central Mahayana teaching on emptiness. The Jesuits un-

derstood this teaching as nihilistic, meaning that nothing exists except the prime matter of the universe and the cycle of death and birth.[2]

In 1579, Alessandro Valignano 范禮安 (1539–1606), the Jesuit Visitor for East Asia, arrived Japan to reorganize the mission. In 1583 he wrote *Sumario de las cosas de Japón*, a report addressed to the Jesuit Superior General Claudio Acquaviva (1543–1615; r. 1581–1615). In the third chapter, Valignano describes the various sects of Japan, some worshipping the gods (Kami of Shintoism) and others worshipping the Hotoke (especially Sakyamuni Buddha and Amida Buddha).[3] Here Valignano follows the first generation of Jesuits mentioned above, warning against the duplicity of language of Buddha who had apparently talked about an after-life while in fact he believed that everything ends with death. According to Valignano, the Buddhist monks did not dare to proclaim openly nihilism but used words with a double meaning: an exoteric and religious meaning for the common people, and an esoteric and nihilistic meaning for the elite. This theory of a double-teaching allowed the Jesuits to reconcile into one common frame aspects of Buddhism which appeared contradictory, like the worshipping of statues (Pure Land) and the seated meditation (Zen). The theory was not purely a Jesuit invention but could find support in the Buddhist teaching of the Two Truths.

Valignano received help from Luís Froís (1532–1597) in composing in 1581 some lectures of catechism, which were published in 1586 in Lisbon. In this work, Valignano distinguishes between Buddhists following an exoteric and provisional teaching and those following an esoteric and true teaching. The two teachings are strongly rejected, the exoteric for being idolatrous, and the esoteric for being nihilistic and atheistic, but Jesuits saw the greatest danger in the esoteric teaching because atheism was hidden amid practices which externally appeared religious. This theory of the double-teaching became the central scheme for the Jesuits to understand Asian traditions, and to shape their missionary policies for more than one hundred years, not only in Japan, but also in China and Vietnam. However, the theory was misleading in understanding Buddhism in depth, and Ricci found it was impossible to apply it to ancient Confucianism as we shall see.

Ricci: ancient Confucianism as not esoteric

When Michele Ruggieri 羅明堅 (1543–1607) and Matteo Ricci 利瑪竇 (1552–1610) stayed in Guangdong province, they continued the critical engagement with Buddhism started in Japan. In *Della entrata della Compagnia di Giesù e Christianità nella Cina* (Chapter 7, Book 1), Ricci describes in great details the popular form of Buddhism, with its rituals and temples, rejecting them as idolatrous. He is also very much concerned about the nihilistic doctrine of Buddhism and, in his *True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* (*Tianzhu shiyi* 天主實義, 1603), he draws from the *Japanese Catechism* many argumentations to refute the Buddhist notion of emptiness or *kong* 空.[4]

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2 See App 2012, pp. 43-45.
3 Bésineau 1990, pp. 83-88.
4 See Meynard 2013, p. 309.

Still Ricci brought three important modifications to the Jesuit theory of the double-teaching. First, for the Jesuits in Japan, the esoteric teaching was represented by Zen Buddhism, but for Ricci, the esoteric teaching in China was mostly represented by Neo-Confucianism, which he considered as a development of Buddhism. Second, Ricci inserts the double-teaching within an historical framework which was not so explicit in the accounts of the Jesuits in Japan. In the chapter of *Della entrata* mentioned above, Ricci holds an historical fall from truth to superstition, and then from superstition to atheism: the pure monotheism of ancient Confucianism came to be corrupted into superstition, and then into atheism.

The reframing of the double-teaching within an historical unfolding allows Ricci the third decisive modification, that is, to envision a historical stage before superstition and atheism in which China would have followed an uncontaminated truth. Ricci could support such a claim because he found traces of an early monotheism in the Chinese classics. Unlike in Japan, those classics, recognized by all the schools in China, provided a strong intellectual basis for building an indigenized theology. In his *True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, Ricci describes ancient Confucianism in terms of an authentic monotheism. He does not explicitly mention an historical transmission of the Biblical revelation from the Middle East to China, and instead suggests that it is through rational thinking that the ancient Chinese had deducted the existence of God and offered to Him an adequate worship.

With his discovery of ancient Chinese monotheism, Ricci was downplaying the importance of the theory of the double-teaching. The theory could effectively explain the co-existence in Asia of popular Buddhism and elite Buddhism, but Ricci understood that such a theory could not be the exclusive model for understanding all Asian traditions because ancient Confucianism does not fit in. Ricci started this intellectual shift in Shaozhou 韶州 in 1593, but it took him a couple of years before he discarded the Buddhist garb that he had worn for a decade and adopted the dress of a Chinese scholar while moving in his new residence in Jiangxi province.

Rodrigues and Longobardo: Confucianism as esoteric

Ricci's breakthrough was to restrict the framework of the double-teaching to contemporary China, allowing ancient Confucianism to exist as pure monotheism. By doing this, Ricci challenged the theory of the double-teaching designed by the Jesuits in Japan. This theoretical discussion on Asian cultures and religions has also much to do with an internal conflict because Jesuits in China wanted to affirm the specificity of their mission and gain independence from the Jesuit Japanese province.[5]

The reaction from Japan was not very long to come. In the year Ricci died (1610), the Portuguese Jesuit João Rodrigues (1561–1633) was forced to leave Japan, moved to Macao and promoted for the China mission the theory of the double-teaching.[6] In a letter written from Macao to Acquaviva on 22 January

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[5] The establishment of a Chinese vice-province was granted in 1615, but implemented only in 1623; see Dehergne 1973, p. 326.

[6] Rodrigues went to Japan at the early age of 15 years old and then joined the Jesuits in Japan and was trained in Japan. See Cooper 1974, pp. 20-36.

1616, he explained the theory as, on one side, a popular teaching adapted to common people and invented by scholars to maintain political stability, and on the other side, an arcane teaching deeply locked "in various very obscure symbols, which a few understand and profess in the greatest secrecy." Rodrigues continued writing "with a sublime confidence," as remarks his biographer Michael Cooper, saying:

> Until I came into China our Fathers here knew nothing about this and almost nothing about their speculative philosophy, but only about the civil, popular, and fabulous doctrine, for there was nobody to explain it to them in this matter. Father Matteo Ricci himself worked a great deal in this field and did what he could, but for reasons which only our Lord knows he was mistaken on this point.[7]

In fact, Ricci did not ignore the theory of the double-teaching, as we have shown above, but he resisted applying it to China as a whole. Rodrigues brought three new points to the theory. First, he applied systematically the double-teaching to all Chinese schools, including ancient Confucianism: "All three sects of China are totally atheistic because they deny divine providence and claim that matter is eternal."[8]

Second, Rodrigues stressed more forcefully the Machiavellian element: the elite considers that popular religion has no truth, but still useful in controlling uneducated and superstitious people. During European Renaissance, modern states viewed religions more and more as a tool for governance. For Rodrigues, same as modern states in Europe were using Christianity as political tool, Asian rulers were using religions for governance. In both cases, the elite apparently observes religious rules and conventional morality, but by pure hypocrisy. Such ideas were completely unacceptable for the Catholic church which fought against them very harshly in Europe, and Rodrigues was decided to fight against them in Asia, even at the cost of political persecution. The question asked by Rodrigues to the missionaries is precisely the question of the relationship of Christianity to politics: should Christianity comply to politics and accept being an instrument of atheistic rulers, or should it stand on its own right and reject any compromise with atheistic rulers?

Third, Rodrigues inserted the theory within a larger historical framework. While Ricci had asserted the existence of monotheism in ancient China, Rodrigues was the first to assert the existence of heresy in ancient China, and moreover, the first to document a historical transmission from the Middle East. He claimed that all the heresies in the world originated with "Zoroaster, Magician King of Bactria." This was supposed to have happened at the time of the Assyrian king Ninus, identified as king Nimrod, a great-grand-son of Noah in the Bible. Rodrigues claimed further that Zoroaster was "in communication with China and with its first inhabitants."[9] Zoroaster is thus responsible for propagating heresy to China, especially the esoteric teaching which is hidden behind the religious worship.

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7 ARSI Jap.Sin. 16-II: 290; see Cooper, 1974, p. 281.

8 Cooper 1974, pp. 281-282.

9 For the content of this letter of Rodrigues to the Jesuit General, Macao, 22 January 1616 (ARSI Jap.Sin. 16.I, ff. 284r-288v), see Cooper 1981, vol. 2, p. 312.

In China, Rodrigues succeeded in convincing Ricci's successor as head of the mission, Niccolò Longobardo 龍華民 (1559–1654), who wrote in the years 1623–1630 his famous treatise rejecting all the schools in China, especially Confucianism.[10] While Ricci had stressed the genuine monotheism contained in ancient Chinese texts, Longobardo held, on the contrary, that all ancient texts apparently refer to God, but it is only a trick to deceive the people, and that their real and hidden meaning is atheistic. Same as for Rodrigues, Longobardo considered the double-teaching both intellectually wrong and politically dangerous. On the basis of the ideas of Rodrigues, Longobardo made a textual analysis of Confucian texts drawn mostly from the *Summary on Nature and Principle* (*Xingli daquan* 性理大全), concluding that Confucianism, either ancient or modern, is atheistic and materialistic.

Ricci had tried very hard to distinguish ancient Confucianism from Neo-Confucianism, looking at the latter as corrupted under the influence of Buddhism. On the contrary, Longobardo argues that, since its beginning, Confucianism was flawed. He strives to show that ancient Confucianism has always been atheistic and materialistic, and that Neo-Confucianism follows the same premises, without the need of hypothesizing a corrupting influence of Buddhism, as Ricci had suggested.[11]

Longobardo presented his treatise at the Jiading 嘉定 conference between December 1627 and January 1628, but the Jesuits could not reach an agreement. Then, the visitor André Palmeiro (1569–1635) issued a decree allowing *Tianzhu* for God, but forbidding the use of *Shangdi* and *Tian*. Rodriguez and Longobardo were not satisfied with this solution and were pushing for forbidding also *Tianzhu*, but they were ordered to keep quiet.[12]

In brief, Ricci had established a method of evangelization based on Confucianism, but almost immediately after his death, his method came under attack mostly from the Jesuits of Japan province. The Jesuit visitors for Japan and China were usually members of the Japanese province, and from 1611 until 1626, three of them launched successive investigations about the terms used in the China mission. The visitor André Palmeiro, who was sent directly from Rome by the Superior General, attempted to reconcile the two sides, and after the Jiading conference, he decided for a middle-road which did not satisfy either party. Despite the opposition of the Japanese province, the vice-province of China continued using Confucianism for evangelization, and Longobardo's opposition to Confucianism remained marginal and finally suppressed when Francisco Furtado (1589–1653),

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[10] Thierry Meynard and Daniel Canaris (eds.), *A Brief Response on the Controversies over Shangdi, Tianshen and Linghun by Niccolò Longobardo*, Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021.

[11] Even Jesuits who followed the line of Ricci felt compelled to mention the theory of the double-teaching. For example, in the preface of his *Novus Atlas Sinensis* (1655), Martino Martini mentioned briefly the two teachings of metempsychosis, one exterior and one interior; Martini 1655, p. 115. Yet, Martini did not make mention of the deceit of the elite using religion to control people.

[12] Dehergne 1973, p. 154.

Vice-Provincial of South China, ordered in 1645 or 1646 to burn all the copies of Longobardo's treatise.

Jesuit mission in Vietnam and Confucianism

Let us now turn to Vietnam, the third East-Asian country towards which the Jesuit missionaries devoted considerable efforts after Japan and China. Many scholars have seen a strong continuity between the China mission and the Vietnam mission in terms of inculturation. In 1938, the French Jesuit Henri Bernard-Maître (1889–1975) gave a talk at Hanoi, and in the context of the rise of Asian nationalism against the West, he discussed cultural encounter in Asia with the figures of Ricci and De Rhodes. Bernard-Maître argues there is an "unknown aspect of their work," that is, "their partial understanding and compenetrating of Chinese civilization."[13] He mentions that a Vietnamese embassy brought back from Guangdong to Vietnam a catechism written by the Jesuits in China, and some forty years later, Jesuit missionaries discovered it there.[14] According to Bernard-Maître, De Rhodes continued the cultural way of Ricci, which he calls a "methodical adaptation" (*adaptation méthodique*):

> Conforming himself to the tradition of Father Ricci to adopt the Chinese terms, and not transliterated from Latin of Portuguese, to express God, the soul and spiritual realities, he accepted the principle to adapt the current notions of Confucianism, carrying them into a truly philosophical and religious atmosphere.[15]

Bernard-Maître rightly stresses the influence of Ricci over De Rhodes, but this narrative tends to obliterate important differences, especially regarding Confucianism. Not all the Jesuits in Vietnam embraced Ricci's adoption of Confucianism. Indeed, Jesuits sent to Vietnam belonged to the Japanese province, and due to the persecution in Japan, they first received their linguistic and theological training in Macao, being mostly influenced by the ideas and methods of the Japanese mission, and only secondary by the ideas of Ricci.

Cristoforo Borri's positive evaluation of Confucianism

Cristoforo Borri (1583–1632) stayed in Cochinchina for five years, from 1616 to 1621, and after his return to Europe, he published in 1631 his *Relatione della nuova missione [...] Cocincina*. The same year appeared the French version, *Relation de la nouvelle mission*. Borri notices the openness of the Vietnamese toward foreign culture, compared to the Chinese, too proud of their own culture.[16] In all his work, he attempts to impart a strong enthusiasm for this new mission field at a

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13 Bernard 1938, p. 1.

14 Bernard-Maître does not mention his source and mentions that the catechism was brought back in 1583 and discovered by Borri. This is certainly the *True Record of the Lord of Heaven* (*Tianzhu shilu* 天主實錄) by Michele Ruggieri. However, De Rhodes mentions that in 1627 he discovered a catechism which was brought from China by the Vietnamese embassy; see De Rhodes 1651a, p. 181. There may be two different stories, but quite unlikely. Most probably Bernard-Maître had confused the names.

15 Bernard-Maître 1957, vol. 2, p. 69.

16 Borri 1631b, p. 50.

time the Japan mission suffered bloody persecutions (1597, 1617), and the China mission suffered a much milder persecution (1615–1620).

In the chapter "Short presentation of the various sects," Borri borrows from the theory of the double-teaching developed in Japan, especially by Valignano.[17] According to Borri, Xaca (Buddha) preached two teachings, one affirming the immortality of the soul, or transmigration; and the other affirming that everything ends with death, or nihilism.[18] The influence of the Japan mission is attested also by the fact that Borri uses Japanese words for the Zen school. However, Borri reframes the theory of the double-teaching by juxtaposing, in an anachronistic fashion, the teaching of Buddha and its reception in Asia: Buddha had first developed his nihilistic teaching in Japan; then, considering the poor reception of nihilism among the common people in China, he promoted there and in Vietnam popular Buddhism, though he personally still considered the Japanese nihilistic form of Buddhism the best.[19]

Concerning Confucianism, in the chapter "Political and civil government of Cochinchina," Borri makes a very positive presentation of Confucius and his teaching:

> Cochinchina has a good number of universities in which there are lecturers and degrees by which people are promoted through exams, as it is practiced in China. They are teaching the same disciplines, use the same books and read the same authors, that is, Zinfu or Confus, as the Portuguese call him. Being the author of a sublime and profound teaching among them, as Aristotle among us, and in fact he is more ancient. His books are full of erudition, valuable stories, profound sayings and proverbs, all about morality, same as Seneca, Cato and Cicero among us... They value the most moral philosophy which includes ethics, economics and politics.[20]

Here, Borri talks about Confucius as Ricci and Trigault in *Histoire de l'expédition chrétienne au Royaume de la Chine*, with the mention of the moral philosophy of Confucius, that includes the conduct of oneself, family and the country, which is positively evaluated as similar to Roman philosophy.[21] In this early stage of the mission in Vietnam, Borri does not apply the theory of the double-teaching to Confucianism. He may have heard about the ideas of Rodrigues, especially in 1622–1623 when both of them stayed in Macao, but he does not indicate at all Confucianism as esoteric atheism, as Rodrigues had stated in his 1616 letter to the Superior General.

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17 Forest 1998, vol. 3, p. 227: "S'il fallait chercher la source d'inspiration des relations jésuites sur le bouddhisme, c'est chez Valignano, le visiteur de la Compagnie au Japon puis le supérieur de Ricci, qu'on la trouverait dans sa plus complète élaboration. En particulier les éléments du chapitre III de son *Sumario* (écrit en 1583), relatifs aux sectes religieuses du Japon, seront ensuite continuellement repris, au moins jusqu'à Marini au Tonkin."

18 Borri 1631b, p. 197.

19 Borri 1631b, pp. 200-205.

20 Borri 1631b, pp. 69-70; Borri 1631a, pp. 74-75.

21 Ricci 1616, p. 49.

De Rhodes and his rejection of Confucianism

Alexandre de Rhodes (1591 or 1593–1660) and Ricci are often considered the founders of the modern Catholic church, respectively in Vietnam and in China. De Rhodes first came to Cochinchina in 1624–1626 to learn Vietnamese, then worked in the Tonkin mission in 1627–1630, and finally worked intermittently in Cochinchina in 1640–1645. Same as Borri had published a relation about Cochinchina, De Rhodes published, after his return to Europe, a relation about Tonkin.

Despite Bernard-Maître's assertions, when we look at De Rhodes and Ricci's evaluations of Confucianism, we cannot but be struck by their opposite stances. In fact, De Rhodes never mention Ricci in his works, even though he was using the *Tianzhu shiyi* while composing his own catechism for Tonkin.[22]

De Rhodes recognizes the value of the moral teaching of Confucius, and even concedes that "Confucius does not say anything contrary to Christianity when he talks about law, politics, and justice."[23] Peter Phan sees an "ambivalence" of De Rhodes towards Confucianism, but in fact, there is no ambivalence or conflict in his mind because he points out fundamental flaws in Confucianism which leads him to reject it fully. The only positive claim about the religious belief of Confucius can be found in the first day of De Rhodes's *Catechism*, which I translate here from the Latin text:

> Some, not very skillful in [Chinese] written language and books, affirm that nothing is found in the Chinese books, except the worship of heaven, but they are completely deceived. It is explicitly prescribed in many passages both of Confucius and of others, the worship of the Lord of Above [*Shangdi*], who can be understood beyond any doubt as the supreme king of all things and as the supreme Lord over all kings and masters. The Chinese books do not mention God as the supreme creator of Heaven, but this makes no difference because this truth is stamped in our hearts, so that we need to understand a supreme Father, creating all things and making them exist.[24]

This is the only passage about Confucius's belief in *Shangdi* through natural reason, and its origin certainly points towards Ricci's *True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, where Ricci identifies *Shangdi* to God. However, De Rhodes is more circumspect elsewhere, as we shall show below. As we said above, Ricci and his followers had argued that Confucius and the ancient Chinese had a true knowledge of God, of the immortal soul and of the angels, but this was opposed by Rodrigues and Longobado who considered that the Chinese from ancient times until now are all atheistic and materialistic. De Rhodes was aware of the controversy and seems prudent, avoiding taking side on the issue of what Confucius knew really, like in his *Catechism* where he investigates the two possibilities. First, if Confucius did not know anything about supernatural realities, then he was not a Saint. When De Rhodes opposed the qualification of Saint for Confucius, he stands on the point of

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[22] See the list of fifteen similarities given by Peter Phan; Phan 1998, pp. 119-120.
[23] De Rhodes 1651b, p. 62.
[24] De Rhodes 1651a, p. 21.

view of Christianity (knowledge of the Christian God), and thus he distorts the meaning of *thanh* in Vietnamese, or *sheng* in Chinese, even telling the Vietnamese not to use anymore this word in reference to Confucius. As a proof of the correctness of his argument, De Rhodes told how he succeeded one day in convincing a Confucian scholar, who was baptized under the name of John, even though the other forty literati left unconvinced. This sounds like the result of the speech of Saint Paul in the Agora of Athens, which could be considered according to the rationale of De Rhodes as a success since at least some were convinced. The second possibility is:

> If he [Confucius] knew, he should have told his disciples, since he was a master, so that they might render an appropriate cult. Because he did not do so, he could be neither good nor holy but rather perverse and evil, because he deprived others of a most necessary knowledge.[25]

This passage seemed quite important to De Rhodes who has it again in his history of the mission.[26] Here, De Rhodes suggests an intended silence of Confucius, being guilty of not helping people towards their salvation, and even of being perverse and evil. This idea of an intended silence of Confucius bears some similarities to the theory of the double teaching, suggesting a duplicity of Confucius who appeared to be a good teacher caring for his disciples, but in fact, leads them to damnation. In brief, De Rhodes considers that the ignorance of Confucius, or worst his intended silence on what matters most, makes his whole teaching either irrelevant or evil.

In this passage of the *Catechism*, De Rhodes apparently showed an indetermination about what Confucius truly knew. However, the two possibilities are purely rhetorical because, in a passage of his history of the mission, De Rhodes affirms clearly that Confucius had no knowledge of God since he was materialistic and atheistic:

> but when he discusses in one of his books about the first principle of all things, he falls into an unimaginable disorder and blindness in his reasoning and speech, because he holds the first principle to be corporeal, without sensation, knowledge, reason and soul, and thus unworthy of worship and adoration.[27]

It is not clear to which book of Confucius De Rhodes refers. It may be the Commentary to the *Book of Change*, the *Yizhuan* 易傳, which has one mention of the concept *taiji*. In the *True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, Ricci holds that this concept is found in a book of Confucius, but this does not lead Ricci to shake his stance that Confucius was a theistic thinker.[28] In fact, De Rhodes follows here Rodrigues and Longobardo in rejecting the thought of Confucius as being duplicitous: Confucius is atheistic, and consequently he holds that no worship should ever be given to *taiji*, and yet wants the worship to be addressed to heaven (i.e.

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[25] De Rhodes, *Catechism*, in Phan 1998, p. 252; De Rhodes 1651b, p. 113.

[26] De Rhodes 1651a, p. 62.

[27] De Rhodes 1651a, p. 63. The Italian original expresses very forcefully the rejection; De Rhodes 1650, p. 61.

[28] Ricci 2016, p. 81.

tian), not by everyone but by the emperor alone. Concerning the thought of Confucius on the human soul, De Rhodes makes a reference to the Chinese theory of the *hun* and *po* elements, and thus the soul for Confucius is only material. De Rhodes concludes that this teaching of Confucius tends towards atheism and opens the gate to all moral evils, because it only upholds the "appearance of virtues" (*species virtutum* according to the Latin manuscript, or *virtutum externa species* according to the printed Latin).[29] With this judgment, De Rhodes has destroyed the moral value which he had initially conceded to the teaching of Confucius.

Peter Phan explains the so-called ambivalence of De Rhodes towards Confucianism in terms of his lack of deep understanding of Confucianism in comparison to the China Jesuits.[30] However, in the 1630s, he had already some indirect knowledge about Confucianism through *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, which he partly used as a source for his own catechism. De Rhodes rejected Confucianism not because of a lack of understanding, but because of the influence of Rodriguez and Longobardo, who are not mentioned even once in Phan's work (Japan itself is mentioned only twice).

The influence of Rodrigues and Longobardo on De Rhodes

In 1998, Alain Forest had already indicated that Longobardo's negative appreciations of Confucianism had won over a strong minority with the Jesuit order, and that De Rhodes could certainly be counted in this minority.[31] However, Forest does not show in any detail in what way Longobardo's ideas shaped de Rhode's negative perception of Confucianism, and nor does he say anything about Rodrigues, in fact the key personage in the Japanese province.

In the fourth day of his *Catechism*, De Rhodes explains how truth was lost after the Babel Tower, and how false teachings spread to China, giving rise to three false teachings (Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism) which were transmitted to Vietnam:

> After the confusion of the languages came the kingdom of the Chinese, from whom the Vietnamese received their religious sects. Because the Chinese, after the confusion of languages, lost the language in which the true way was found, and because they had no books in which the true way was contained, they were divided into different false ways, just like those who have lost the true way are dispersed in many ways that are all false. The Chinese were divided into three main false ways, without counting many other less important but equally false ones. The first religion is that of the literati called *Nho*; the second is that of those who worship demons and performs sorcery, called *Dao*; the third is that of idolaters, called *But*.[32]

Here the teaching of the literati (Confucianism) is clearly rejected as false, same as Buddhism and Taoism. In his note, Phan comments that "De Rhodes cannot be

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[29] De Rhodes 1651a, p. 64.
[30] Phan 1998, p. 92.
[31] Forest 1998, vol. 1, p. 40.
[32] De Rhodes, *Catechism*, in Phan 1998, p. 249.

expected to present an objective and accurate account of these three religions and their philosophical doctrines, but rather he is describing these religions as he saw them practiced at the popular level."[33] But if De Rhodes was describing what he saw, how could his presentation not have a certain degree of objectivity and accurateness? In his introduction to the *Catechism*, Phan quotes the passage above in full, and he sees no point in enumerating the numerous inaccuracies in De Rhodes's presentation on the three religions, affirming that De Rhodes did not intentionally distort the facts, and "did not have at his disposal all the tools of modern scholarship to verify the historical accuracy of his information."[34] In fact, De Rhodes is not here describing what he saw on the ground, but he is applying the theory of the double-teaching that he received from João Rodrigues and Longobardo.

Phan's English translation from the Vietnamese of the first sentence above is not easy to understand, but when we check the Latin, it becomes crystal clear: "After the confusion of the languages, the kingdom of the Chinese started (*incepit*)."[35] This is exactly the theory of Rodrigues mentioned above: almost immediately after the Babel Tower, great-grand-sons of Noah migrated to China, bringing with them heresies. De Rhodes narrates here the genesis of oriental religions under the frame of the double teaching (*doctrina duplex*), being external (*externa*) and internal (*interioris*).[36]

In the fourth day of the *Catechism*, De Rhodes refutes Buddhism, stating that the esoteric teaching "is much worse and consists in denying a deity, the creator of this world, removing the brake against all kinds of sin," according to Phan's English translation from the Vietnamese.[37] The Latin text describes further the esoteric teaching as *atheismus*.[38] Here again De Rhodes follows the theory of the double-teaching, and reduces the elite tradition of China to materialism or atheism.

During De Rhodes's stay in the college Saint Paul of Macao between 1623 and 1627, he may have known from Rodrigues and other Jesuits of the Japanese mission their criticism about Confucius. But more certainly, during his longer stay of ten years in Macao from 1630 to 1640 when he wrote his catechism, he could not fail to hear about the investigations on the Chinese terms launched by four successive Visitors in Macao. Most of his contacts in Tonkin up to 1630 were not with litterati, so his views on Confucianism came essentially from his exposure in Macao to the ideas of Rodrigues and Longobardo.

De Rhodes's limit to inculturation in the translation of terms

Bernard-Maître claimed that De Rhodes followed Ricci in the question of translation of terms. There is a certain degree of truth in this because, same as Ricci,

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33 De Rhodes, *Catechism*, in Phan 1998, p. 249, note 7.

34 Phan 1998, p. 83.

35 De Rhodes 1651b, p. 104. The French translation by Henri Chappoulie is quite clear: "Après la confusion des langues, commença le royaume des Chinois"; De Rhodes 1993, p.104.

36 De Rhodes 1651b, pp. 107-108.

37 De Rhodes, *Catechism*, in Phan 1998, p. 250.

38 De Rhodes 1651b, p. 108.

De Rhodes promoted meaningful translations for God, spirit and soul, instead of phonetic transliterations as used in Japan. For God, De Rhodes rejected the phonetic transliteration of *Chua Deu* as meaningless in Vietnamese, and instead fashioned the expression *Duc Chua Troi Dat* (Noble Lord of Heaven and Earth).[39] To solve the ambiguity of *troi*, or heaven, De Rhodes emphasized the need to address God as Lord Heaven, and this is similar with the term *Tianzhu* used in China since Ruggieri. Similarly, De Rhodes constructs for angels the word *Thien than* (heaven-spirits), and for soul, the word *Linh hon* (spirit-vital principle). The terms used by De Rhodes are in fact neologisms, but all the Vietnamese immediately understand the expression *Duc Chua Troi Dat* because its component carries a clear meaning in Vietnamese language.[40]

In terms of inculturation, Ricci's method went far beyond De Rhodes, because Ricci allowed using the pre-existing Chinese word *Shangdi*, which is found in the Chinese classics, so that Ricci could pronounce his famous axiom: "He who is called the Lord of Heaven in my humble country is he who is called Shangdi [Sovereign on High] in Chinese."[41] As we saw above, De Rhodes alludes to this once, but unlike Ricci, he did not make further efforts to draw from the Chinese classics.

De Rhodes was perfectly aware that the heart of the controversy was not so much about *Tianzhu*, but *Shangdi* and De Rhodes consciously avoids using the Vietnamese equivalent (*Thuong de*). Peter Phan praised de Rhode's early adaptation of *Duc Chua Troi Dat* for God, because "Vietnamese Christianity was spared the painful controversies that wrought havoc with the Chinese Church and severely impeded the preaching of the Gospel in that land."[42] By using neologism, the Vietnam mission may have avoided a Terms Controversy, but this also prevented the creation of a theological language more rooted in Vietnamese thought.

Rejecting rituals to Confucius but allowing ancestor rituals

Concerning the rituals to Confucius, De Rhodes states in his *Catechism* some conciliant principles: if the rituals are done to obtain something, they should be rejected, because "all things should be asked and received from the Sovereign Lord of all things alone;" but if they express only "homage and reverence due to teachers during their lifetime," without going beyond the norms of politeness, they can be tolerated.[43] As Peter Phan mentions, the expression used in the Latin text of the *Catechism* is *cultum politicum*, an expression used by the China Jesuits to describe the Chinese rituals as political or civil.

Despite those conciliant principles, De Rhodes makes it in practice very difficult for Vietnamese Catholics to attend rituals to Confucius, because he requests that before the rituals the Catholics should explain to the non-Catholics that their "reverence is not done to Confucius as to a god but only as a teacher from whom

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[39] De Rhodes, *Catechism*, in Phan 1998, pp. 217, 227.
[40] Tran Van Thuc 2010, p. 238.
[41] Ricci 2016, p. 95.
[42] Phan 1998, p. 137.
[43] De Rhodes, *Catechism*, in Phan 1998, p. 252.

one has received writings and political guidance; otherwise it would be a sin to show reverence to Confucius in front of someone without this explanation."[44] De Rhodes is very much aware about the practical consequence of such a stringent condition: "There is, however, almost no one who dares to make this protestation in public so as to avert the pagans from their error. Hence, we urge most vigorously that such reverence to Confucius be omitted, lest it become a trap for someone."[45]

His rejection of the rituals to Confucius is reaffirmed in his history of the mission, where he condemns the rituals paid by the Tonkinese to Confucius as if he was a god, praying to him for good results in the exams; De Rhodes sees this as "a foolish superstition."[46] He substitutes the ritual to Confucius with a new Christian ritual: recognizing that Christ is the Supreme Wisdom (or the *Supremum Magistrum*, according to the Latin manuscript), the Vietnamese Christians should make three prostrations in front of the statue of Christ, attributing to him the success in their studies. De Rhodes had clearly embraced Rodrigues and Longobardo's view that, while Confucianism in its core amounted to atheism, the external rituals to heaven or Confucius were in fact superstitious. Unlike Ricci in China, De Rhodes did not win over many literati, and his converts came mostly from the lower class.

According to Phan, De Rhodes wrote his *Catechimus* during the years 1636–1645,[47] and was not influenced by the Chinese Rites Controversy "since the dispute really started only later, in 1643 when Juan Baptista Morales submitted his seventeen *dubii* to the Propaganda Fide."[48] In fact, the Rites Controversy started ten years earlier, when the Dominicans and Franciscans arrived Fujian province in 1633. There was a first confrontation between the friars and Francisco Furtado in 1635 in Fuzhou. De Rhodes's rejection of the rituals to Confucius indicates that he was aware of the controversy unfolding already in China. His rejection of the rituals to Confucius is very much aligned on the policy of the Dominicans and Franciscans, but since Confucian temples and rituals in Vietnam were not as pervasive as China, his alignment to the friars can be seen mostly as theoretical or ideological.

De Rhodes's rejection of the rituals to Confucius should be understood from the standpoint of the double-teaching. For him, the Confucian teaching in its core amounts to atheism, but the Confucian elite allows people practicing rituals to Confucius for some supernatural benefits (like good results in the exam). However, he continued the policy of the China Jesuits towards the rituals to the ancestors, a choice which was also dictated by the importance of those rituals among the general population of Tonkin to whom he was preaching.

Concerning the ancestor rituals, De Rhodes stresses in his *Catechism* that after the soul is separated from the body, there is no need for food, clothing, or other material thing, therefore, "the Vietnamese err grievously when they offer meals to

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[44] De Rhodes, *Catechism*, in Phan 1998, pp. 252-253.
[45] De Rhodes, *Catechism*, in Phan 1998, p. 253.
[46] De Rhodes 1651a, p. 64.
[47] Phan 1998, p. 123.
[48] Phan 1998, p. 136.

the souls of the dead; our souls are too noble to use this sort of food."[49] He considers also paper offerings as disrespectful towards the deceased parents, because "no man in his right mind would offer these things to a living person, even the poorest, for his or her use."[50] In his history of the mission, De Rhodes also expresses his strong rejection of the Vietnamese celebrations for the death anniversary.[51]

However, he does not support abolishing all the traditional ceremonies to the ancestors, stating: "[While] truly there are some customs that Christians cannot practice without sin, for the most part, they are innocent and we have judged that they can retain them without interfering with the Holy Religion."[52] De Rhodes forbade the prostrations, and he transformed food offerings, not to be consumed anymore but distributed among the poor, as it was done in the China mission.

Conclusion

The Jesuit theory of the double-teaching was designed in Japan to explain Buddhism as being both a superstitious religion and an atheistic philosophy. As we have shown, the theory was very much influential among the Jesuits in China and Vietnam, but the theory kept transforming because of a different focus according to the local situation. In Japan, Jesuits were engaged into a dialogue with Zen monks and their teaching on emptiness, which they considered as nihilistic. In China, they were engaged mostly with the literati and Confucianism, and Ricci did not apply the theory of the double-teaching to ancient Confucianism which he considered as neither superstitious nor atheistic. Rodrigues and Longobardo were opposed to Ricci's interpretation, and they attempted to prove that the Confucian teaching was atheistic in its core. Despite intense debates, the China mission continued developing along the lines of Ricci's missionary policy during the seventeenth century, until the process came to a halt when the rituals to Confucius and ancestors were officially condemned as superstitious.

In contrast, Jesuits in Vietnam did not reach out to learned monks or literati, and there was not the same engagement with texts, but their approach was more geared toward the common people who were more receptive to Christianity. Despite Borri initial appreciation of Confucianism, De Rhodes was strongly influenced by the theory of the double-teaching of Rodrigues and Longobardo, and this led him to reject the Confucian teaching upheld by the elite as atheistic and the rituals to Confucius as superstitious. Unlike the Jesuits in China, De Rhodes did not feel the need to engage with the elite culture, and in his works, he rarely mentions the Chinese classics, but instead illustrates his points with local proverbs and sayings. The crucial element for De Rhodes's rejection of Confucianism was certainly the question of the rites to Confucius. This indicates that the Japan, China, and Vietnam missions took different paths, the first of martyrdom, the second of engagement with Confucian elite, and the third of engagement with the common people.

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[49] De Rhodes, *Catechism*, in Phan 1998, p. 255.

[50] De Rhodes, *Catechism*, in Phan 1998, p. 255.

[51] De Rhodes 1651a, pp. 80-89.

[52] De Rhodes, *Divers voyages et missions*, Première partie, p. 77; quoted from Anh Q. Tran 2017, p. 44.

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