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A MATTER OF THE GREATEST IMPORTANCE

Early Modern Jesuit China Mission Encountering Religions and Cultures*

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On August 15, 1695, Jesuit Belgian missionary Antoine Thomas wrote in Beijing a memorandum *On the need of [ordaining] Chinese priests and on the dispensation [for the celebration] of the [Holy] Sacrifice in Chinese*.[1] It was presented to Pope Innocent XII in 1698 and

[1]"De necessitate sacerdotum sinensium et dispensionis pro sacrificio in lingua sinica" (Rome: Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale, *fondo Jesuitico*), 1383, n. 18, f. 332. In margin of *folio* 332, a note in Latin reads as follows: "Beijing August 15 1695. Arrived in Rome through the Portuguese way on December 26, 1697. The handwriting is that of [F]ather Antoine Thomas S. J., Belgian, missioner in China. Sent from Beijing to the Father General on November 9, 1695." Other copies of the manuscript are located in Rome (Jesuit Archives, ARSI Jap. Sin. Vol . 128, f. 103–108; Archives of Propaganda Fide, SCPF, *Miscellanea*, f. 317). See Gianni Criveller, "The "Parable" of Liturgical Inculturation in China from the 17th Century to the Present, with Particular Reference to the Memorial by Antoine Thomas (1695): *De necessitate sacerdotum sinensium, et dispensationis pro sacrificio in sinensi,*" in Ku Weiying & Zhao Xiaoyang, eds., *From Antoine Thomas S.J. to Celso Costantini: Multi-aspect Studies on Christianity in Modern China* (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2011).

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to Clement XI in 1701. Thomas, on behalf his confreres, asked the Pope for two concessions: the promotion of indigenous clergy and the permission for having Chinese as liturgical language. Both submissions went without result and the memoir fell into obscurity.

Thomas argued that China is an entire new world, possibly with more inhabitants than Catholics in the whole world. Even the conversion of neighboring nations depends upon the Chinese. Thomas concludes his inspiring memoir by claiming that "since the beginning of the Church of Christ, there was never a matter of greater importance. We have spared no efforts in promoting such a grave matter."

Indeed, since the very beginning of their mission, the Jesuits spared no efforts at achieving the conversion of China, the "greatest matter since the beginning of the Church." They adopted innovative strategies in responding to the challenges posed by Chinese cultures and religions, and they adopted accommodation as their missionary method.

Dressed as Buddhist Monks

In classic Chinese Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism are called *jiao* 教, i.e., teaching. In the late Ming and early Qing periods, a nationalistic movement called the "Three Teachings," *Sanjiao* 三教 (Matteo Ricci called them sects), aimed at unifying the three in order to save the Chinese nation on the verge of collapse.

When taking up residence in Zhaoqing (September 1583), Michele Ricci and Michele 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.

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Coincidentally, the prefect's requirement matched directives from the Visitor Alessandro 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.

At their Zhaoqing residence, near 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 Jingtu*, "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 Jingtu 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. 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 "Catechetic Conversations," an untitled Chinese manuscript composed in 1585–1588 and discovered in 1934 by Italian sinologist Pasquale 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 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

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was a pragmatic man, partially change this initial method, adapting it to the context in which he lived and to new circumstances. In this text, the Lord of Heaven is also called 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. 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 and religions.

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 supposed disagreement with Ricci's plan to change policy. The facts, however, suggest otherwise—even while in Italy, Ruggieri wrote in defense of the early policy of adaptation to Buddhism that he and Ricci had initiated in China. But 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, or that he 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 what will later be called as the "Republic of Letters." He was a *literatus,* a man belonging to humanism. After years of studying the classics, Ricci was ready for a change, for a new role in society. When in 1595 he dressed 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

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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, as we will see below.

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. 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.

On April 18, 1595, during the journey from Shaozhou to Nanjing, Ricci finally abandoned his Buddhist-like habit and wore the silk robes of the literati. 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 (徐光啟) 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.

The Jesuits must have felt that Buddhism was a direct and dangerous competitor. Buddhism, like Christianity, was a foreign religion coming from the West, but already well adapted to the Chinese world. Buddhism had monastic life, celibacy, fasting, Holy Scriptures, meditation temples, devotions, and an organization somehow similar to the Christian one. The Jesuits needed to distance themselves from the Buddhists, especially since the population so often mistook them as one of the many Buddhist sects.

In his Catechism *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* (天主實義, *Tianzhu shiyi*, 1603), the most important Catholic book in China's history, Ricci included anti-Buddhist arguments that he had elaborated in heated disputes with Buddhist monks. Ricci met various famous Buddhist monks. The most famous discussion was held in Nanjing (1599)

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with the bonze San Hui (三淮), a bonze who professed an idealistic Buddhism. In Beijing, Ricci had discussions with the educated Buddhist scholar Huang Hui (黃輝), who criticized Ricci for not accepting the idea that God and the human mind are but one and the same thing. These discussions led Ricci in composing some of his texts, such as *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* and *Twenty Five Sentences* (*Ershiwu Yan,* 二十五言, 1605). The latter was conceived as a counter to the Buddhist Forty-two Paragraph sutra (*Sishier Zhangjing,* 四十二章經).

Ricci accused Buddhism of borrowing some ideas from Judaism or from Christianity like the doctrine of Heaven and Hell. He felt compelled to explain why Buddhism reached China earlier than Christianity: the ambassadors sent by the Emperor to bring to China the canonical writings "mistakenly took India to be their goal, and returned to China with Buddhist scriptures which were then circulated throughout the nation."[2]

Zhuhong (袾宏), leader of an influential lay Buddhist movement, rebuked Ricci's anti-Buddhist criticism in his Explanation of Heaven (天說, *Tian shuo*, 1608). Zhu Hong aimed at adapting Buddhism to Confucianism, similar to Ricci who attempted to bridge Christianity and Confucianism.

After Ruggieri and Ricci, other Jesuits investigated Buddhism, following Ricci's line: Diego De Pantoja, Martino Martini and Alvaro Semedo. The latter was a little more positive toward Buddhism, distinguishing, for example, between what he called an "exterior way" and an "interior way" that are, respectively, Mahayana and Hinayana Buddhism. The Jesuits working in Tibet (in the 16th century)—Antonio De Andrade (in Tibet in 624) and Francisco Godhino—also had a much more positive attitude. Andrade almost considered Buddhism as a Christian sect.

[2]Matteo Ricci, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, ed. Edward Malatesta, trans. Douglas Lancashire & Peter Hu Kuo-chen (Taipei/Paris/Hong Kong: Ricci Institute, 1985), n. 591.

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Accommodation and its Surprises

Accommodation is the term by which Valignano's "gentle way" in China was called in China. Ricci mentioned this expression a few times in his writings.

The accommodation method, central in Jesuit missionary activity, is a concept that has its theological roots in Thomist thought and in the writings of Erasmus of Rotterdam. 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.

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. A key point in Ricci's interpretation of Confucianism is the distinction between the original teaching of the Classics and the later Neo-Confucian commentaries. Ricci asserted that the ancients believed in God the creator, therefore the ancient terms "Sovereign above" (上帝, *Shangdi*) and "Heaven" (天, *Tian*) are not impersonal and immanent, but personal and transcendent. Ricci adopted *Shangdi* and *Tian*, together with the neologism—at least then it was perceived as such—"The Lord of Heaven" (*Tianzhu,* 天主), to translate the name of God. The term "Lord of Heaven" was adopted by Ricci and Ruggieri as the Catholic name for God in Chinese as early as in 1583.

We now know that *Tianzhu* (天主)*,* the Lord of Heaven, was in fact not a neologism. The term *Tianzhu* appears over 100 times in the Buddhist canon. The number is not that high given the great extension of the canon, which amounts to 85 volumes. The term *Tian* is used in Chinese Buddhism to translate the Sanskrit word *Deva.* The latter is a term that indicates the immense number of supernatural beings of the highest excellence, but still subject to the *samsara,* the cycle of rebirth. Therefore *Tianzhu*, in Buddhist terms, can be translated as the "Lord of the Devas." As the various levels of Buddhist heavens are filled with an endless number of spirits (*devas*), *Tianzhu* can be understood as a term that refers to *Devas* that govern other *Devas.* Since there are

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many heavens, there is more than one *Tianzhu*. But the most common use of *Tianzhu* in the Buddhist canon is to translate the spirit of Indra/Sakra, terms that belong to Hinduism and Buddhism, respectively. During the conversation between Indra/Sakra and Shakyamuni, reported in *The Sutra of the Questions by Indra/Sakra, as It Was Said by the Buddha* (*Foshuo dishi suowen jing,* 佛说帝释所问经), Shakyamuni addresses Indra/Sakra as *Tianzhu*.[3]

The late Jesuit sinologist Yves Raguin was, to my best knowledge, the first scholar who brought to the attention of the academic community the fact that the term *Tianzhu* appears in both Buddhist and Taoist literature. In a personal communication to the present author in 1998, Raguin affirmed that over the years, Ricci had accumulated a deep knowledge of Chinese religions, and therefore he could not have failed to be informed about it. Raguin then suggested that Ricci entitled his Catechism *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* exactly to clarify the Catholic meaning of the term *Tianzhu*. It is like Ricci saying: "you have already heard of the Lord of Heaven, however its true meaning is the one I illustrate in this book." I consider this hypothesis entirely credible, even if it cannot be confirmed by any of Ricci's actual texts.

Catechism and Christian Doctrine

One major piece of evidence of accommodation as a hermeneutical device is to be found in Ricci's method, i.e., the distinction between *Catechism* and *Christian Doctrine* which corresponds to the practice of indirect and direct preaching (see below). From Ricci's own account in *Della entrata della compagnia di Giesù e Christianità nella Cina* and in his *Letters*, the *Catechism* is described as a representation 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

[3]I owe the information on the Buddhist Canon to research done by Harrison Adams, a student of mine in Macao, in 2008. It is reported here with his permission.

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Taoists. For the things necessary to salvation, the readers are invited to read other books, i.e., the *Christian Doctrine*. In 1609, in a letter to the Vice Provincial Francesco Pasio in Japan, Ricci gave a Christian interpretation of 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 for his goodness.*[4]

Catechisms were written mainly for the Confucian literati, but Ricci explained that they were aimed at catechumens and converts as well, and even at opponents of the faith; in sum, at anyone interested. Being a book for all and comprehensible to everyone, the Catechism was printed in large numbers and spread across the country. The copies travelled without the missionaries and reached neighboring nations, such as Japan and Vietnam. Particularly noteworthy is the case of Korea, where Christianity entered thanks to Ricci's *Catechism* and other Jesuit books brought back by Korean officials who had taken part in the customary embassies to Beijing. The true origin of all things (萬物真源, *Wanwu zhenyuan*) by Giulio Aleni (1628) belongs to the same genre as well.

The *Christian Doctrine* (*Tianzhu jiaoyao,* 天主教要, literally *The Essential Things of the Doctrine of the Lord of Heaven*) was published in March 1605, and gives a full account of what ought to be believed by catechumens receiving baptism and by believers practicing a Christian life. Being anonymous, this publication is even ignored by some of Ricci's biographers. Ricci kept it anonymous because its content is nothing but traditional Christian teaching: no one could put his name on that teaching.

According to scholastic theology, doctrines such as the existence of one God and the retribution after death belong to the natural revelation and can be accepted with the light of reason, that is, rational arguments. The doctrines proper to positive revelation, that is, those

[4]Matteo Ricci to Francesco Pasio (Beijing: February 15, 1609), in Matteo Ricci, *Lettere (1580–1609)*, ed. Francesco D'Arelli (Macerata, Italy: Quodlibet, 2001), 518.

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which can be accepted only through Christian faith, such as the Trinity of God, Incarnation and Redemption, were instead proposed only to those who desired to enter the Church. Ricci adopted the distinction of scholastic theology between the apologetic presentation (natural revelation) and the dogmatic one (positive revelation). The distinction between natural theology and positive theology is to be found in the traditional scholastic theology that Ricci studied in Rome, Coimbra and India, and was consciously applied in writing religious books and in his oral preaching.

Indirect and Direct Preaching

As he became expert in Chinese socio-cultural dynamics, Ricci 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 toward 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. 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 dispute 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

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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 necessarily speak about the beliefs proper to the Catholic faith. A complete catechetic 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 indirect preaching and written *Catechisms* was to discuss doctrinal matters based on rational arguments acceptable by way of reason, while the purpose of the direct preaching and written *Christian Doctrines* 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, and the circumstances. The direct preaching and the *Christian Doctrine*, on the other hand, could not change: they transmitted the non-changeable essentials, and the texts were normally printed anonymously, as did Ricci in 1605.

There are striking similarities between Ricci's method and 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 he founded was indeed a church in its beginnings.

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,

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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." However, Ricci refrained from proposing a direct comparison between Jesus 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 an accommodate way, Ricci did assert the superiority of Christ.

Ricci's critics noticed that in *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, Christ was mentioned only briefly and at the end. They concluded that Ricci spoke only of the Lord of Heaven and left out the mysteries of Christ and his crucifixion. They obviously ignored Ricci's method and the justification for it found in his writings.

Ricci and Longobardo

Ricci was also censured under the charge of concealing the religious nature of his mission in order to accommodate to Confucianism. According to critical remarks that were, however, expressed only after his death, Ricci pretended to be a scientist rather than a missionary, preaching *Tianzhu-ism* (from Tianzhu, 天主, the Lord of Heaven) as if it was a Confucian-like religion different from Catholicism. 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. Critics also point out that even some Jesuits, such as Michele Ruggieri, as we have seen, and Ricci's own successor, Nicolò Longobardo, objected to Ricci's methods. These charges, resumed recently by critics contemporary to us, were put forward in late Ming and early Qing anti-Christian literature and by Jesuits' opponents belonging to other religious orders.

Longobardo, Ricci's successor as the Mission's superior, 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 never met, it was Ricci who recommended and actually nominated Longobardo as his successor. Ricci, who read

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the reports submitted by Longobardo from the southern residences, held him in very high esteem.

When he became Superior, Longobardo continued and developed the policies inaugurated by Valignano and Ricci regarding liturgical inculturation, the promotion of Chinese clergy, the independence of the China mission from Macao, and the scientific apostolate. 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, but it was never implemented in China.

There is no evidence of disagreement between Ricci and Longobardo on the controversy regarding the Chinese Rites, 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 he stated in his letters, 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, while he was superior of the mission when Longobardo evangelized in the southern residence of Shaozhou, was happy to acknowledge that Longobardo converted many common people. Ricci must have approved it and 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 evangelization of the people in accordance with Longobardo's method. Ricci had to open the way to allow Longobardo and other missionaries to openly evangelize.

Certainly, if they had had the opportunity to discuss the matter, Ricci would not approve of Longobardo's position regarding

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the names of God and the interpretation of Confucianism that Longobardo expressed after 1615.

The Terms Controversy

The point of disagreement between Longobardo and Ricci goes under the name of the "terms controversy," as we have seen above. For Ricci, the Confucian 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 deriving from the Chinese Classics, but even the commonly accepted *Tianzhu* (天主), Lord of Heaven.

The person who convinced Longobardo to embrace this extremely conservative standpoint 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 supposed unhappy choice by Francis Xavier in translating the word God into Japanese. 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, a revised form of Confucianism profoundly influenced by Taoism and Buddhism. 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. The term *dousi* was employed only occasionally in late Ming Christian writings and was later completely abandoned.

Longobardo's position was opposed by the majority of Jesuits in China, particularly by Giulio Aleni and Nicolas Trigault. The Jesuits met in Jiading in southern Jiangsu in late 1627 and early 1628 to discuss

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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 it was given 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), and *Da Li* (大理, Great Principle).

Naming God as Great Father-Mother (*Da Fumu*) was one of the most remarkable choices made by Ricci and Ruggieri from the early days of their mission. 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, centered on the concept of yang (陽), male element, and yin (陰), female element. In Confucianism, Great Father-Mother designated both the emperor and the local authorities. Yang Tingyun, one of the pillars of the early Chinese Catholic Church, developed a Christian interpretation: regarding God as one's own Father and Mother implies

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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.

On Taoism and Figurism

Differently from what is occasionally asserted, Ricci and the Jesuits did come into contact with and studied Taoism. Ricci offered long descriptions of Taoist doctrine and practices in his Catechism. Most probably, Ricci personally met the 50th Master, Zhang Guoxiang (張嗣祥), who died in 1611, as the latter lived in Beijing for almost 13 years, in the same period when Ricci was there. Ricci wrote of Taoism after careful observation: for example, Ricci reported a Taoist tale that has no corresponding version in traditional Chinese literature. Ricci's might be the only written version of an existing oral tale. According to sinologist Giuliano Bertuccioli, Ricci could have learned about this tale during his visit to the city of Jurong (局容), not far from Nanjing and very near to Maoshan (茅山), a mountain with many Taoist temples, and an important place in the history of Taoism.

Ricci and the other Jesuits indeed condemned Taoism as tainted with "superstition." His judgment on Taoism became harsh, and he certainly adopted many of the Confucian critical viewpoints. He strictly demanded of the converts to destroy all the "superstitious" articles such as books and images, statues and relics. The scholastic formation of Ricci, based on the principle of "being," could not but refuse a philosophy which employed concepts such as *wu* (無) that Ricci understood as meaning "not being," or "nothingness."

Ricci rejected "philosophical" concepts such as Taoist *wu* (無), the Buddhist *kong* (空; Ricci defined it as "void"), and the neo-Confucian *Taiji* (太極, "Supreme Ultimate"). All these terms refer to "principles" which have no beginning and no end, which have no appearance, and are the source of the universe and all within it.

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Some scholars, such as Julia Ching, have suggested that concepts such as *wu* (not being) and *kong* (void) can be appreciated by Christians as a *via negativa* of speaking of God. Modern Chinese Christian intellectuals, such as John Wu Jingxiong, have compared, in a fascinating way, the way of *Dao* (道) with the spirituality of Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus.

The so-called Figurists were a group of 18th century French Jesuits that proposed a most radical and fascinating approach to inculturation and alliance between Chinese culture and Christianity. The Figurists saw in the Chinese classical writings, especially in the Yijing (易經), the Book of Changes, more than a mere natural religion, but real vestiges of the original revelation that we have received through the Bible and the Messianic prophecies. Joachim Bouvet, one of the famous "Mathematicians of the King" dispatched by French King Louis XIV to the Court of Chinese Emperor Kang Xi in 1687, was the leader of the Figurists. Other active Figurists were Joseph de Prèmare and Jean Francois Foucquet. Their method, opposed by other Jesuits and by the superiors, was short-lived, but very fascinating and far-reaching in terms of the history of the inculturation of the Christian message.

Epilogue: A Tale of Two Cemeteries in Beijing

In October 2001, I was in Beijing to celebrate the 400th anniversary of the arrival of Jesuit Matteo Ricci in Beijing (1601). The participants of the symposium were invited to visit two "Christian Cemeteries" in Beijing.

Zhalan, the first cemetery, is located in the northwestern part of Beijing, on the grounds of the Beijing Administrative College (formerly called the Party School). It lies in a quiet and secluded area shaded in the green foliage of cypresses and pines and the majestic beauty of yellow poplars. With almost 400 years of history, it is Beijing's oldest Christian cemetery. The cemetery includes the tombstones of Italian Matteo Ricci, German John Adam Schall Von Bell, and Belgian Ferdinand Verbiest, three men that brought about a mutually enriching exchange between China and the West. The sixty remaining tombstones

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remember prominent Chinese and foreign missionaries, including Antoine Thomas, mentioned at the beginning of this article.

The second cemetery is much less well-known. It is not really an independent cemetery, but a series of 36 tombstones of Jesuit missionaries, including the Figurists mentioned above, originally from *Zhenfuxi* (镇府西) where the French Jesuits had set up a cemetery in 1710. This cemetery was completely destroyed during the Cultural Revolution. The Beijing Cultural Bureau managed to preserve 36 of these tombstones. Today, they occupy a section of the Beijing Art Museum of Stone Carvings located in the western part of Beijing, at the beautiful Indian-style Five Pagodas Buddhist Temple (*Zhenjue* in Sanskrit, *Wutasi* [五塔寺] in Chinese). The location offers an unusual and remarkable panoramic sight. One can visit old Indian-style Buddhist pagodas, learn about numerous folk religions and Taoist symbols, and see many Confucian and Chinese-classic related inscriptions and poems. In this unique mixture of Chinese history, culture, religions and art, the visitor comes upon an area devoted to the memory of the presence of the Christian mission during the Qing era.

Christian symbols are placed side by side in the company of traditional Chinese Buddhist, Taoist, folk-religions' and Confucian motifs and symbols. It seems that this is a witness, a sign that Christianity is indeed part of China yesterday, today and tomorrow. The results of the Catholic mission in Late Ming and Qing China appeared to some commentators as so insignificant that they spoke of it as a failure. While the results were certainly modest and controversial, they were, nevertheless, well grounded and enduring.

The "Christian" cemeteries in today's Beijing are a clear sign, an eloquent witness, that from an evangelical perspective, even a modest result can have great significance. The Christian tombstones at the Beijing Art Museum of Stone Carvings seem also to be a prophetic symbol, a sign of hope, an indication of a path on which all Chinese and other world religions should walk: a path of respect, dialogue, mutual understanding and appreciation, collaboration and unity. Religions, cultures and art can and should contribute, in China as anywhere else, to

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the elevation of the human spirit, to the promotion of human aspirations, to the dignity of human life in all its complexities and expressions.

These cemeteries, whether in the nostalgic shade of the old Indian-style Buddhist pagodas or shaded among cypresses and pines, with their fascinating tombstones of people of different religions, nationalities and epochs, provide visitors with an exceptional and unique setting for deep and creative reflection on the encounter of Christianity with cultures and religions in China.

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AN UNDERSTANDING OF ORIGINAL SIN FROM THE PERSPECTIVES OF *DAO* AND *DE* IN THE LIGHT OF PAUL RICOEUR'S *SYMBOLISM OF EVIL*

Linyi Zhai, S.J.

The Christian doctrine of original sin has been challenged and many people today question whether such a doctrine is still sustainable in light of evolution. In the *Symbolism of Evil*,[1] Paul Ricoeur reinterprets this doctrine in the contemporary culture by retrieving symbols of evil and analyzing myths of its genesis. He offers a phenomenological appreciation of the meaning of symbols, and shows not just how primal myths speak to humanity then and now, but also how they once spoke for men and women. Ricoeur has thus shed light on the interpretation of original sin by examining symbols of evil and analyzing myths in which those symbols and their dramatic narrative (myth) give rise to thought.

If that is the case, then a different culture born of different symbols and mythical traditions concerning evil would engender a different view of the problem of evil and create a different understanding of sin. The uniqueness of Chinese culture could then be traced to its own primal thought. It is on this assumption and

[1]Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbol of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (New York, Evanston, and London: Harper & Row Publishers, 1967).

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in the light of Ricoeur's working framework that this author seeks to understand the notion of evil in Chinese tradition by detecting some possible symbols of evil and analyzing the anthropogenic myth of the so-called "fall"—with the complementary addition of some early philosophical thoughts on evil—in order to elucidate the Christian doctrine of original sin in this context, particularly from the perspectives of the notion of *Dao* and *De*.

In so doing, this author intends to emulate Ricoeur's phenomenology, extend his observations, and apply the hermeneutical principle proper to the Chinese context in order to draw light on the understanding of original sin in a Chinese context. This is both possible and desirable because, although Ricoeur himself was working primarily with Judeo-Christian materials, he has drawn and cast light on a broad range of symbols and myths which have implications for the study of China. However, before unfolding Chinese symbols, myths and thoughts about evil, there is the important task of crystallizing Ricoeur's framework so that, on the one hand, it unfolds Ricoeur's approach and insights on the problem of evil and original sin and, on the other hand, offers some meaningful comparisons which may be drawn between the two.

Ricoeur's Symbolization of Evil and Interpretation of Original Sin

Implied in Ricoeur's presentation, or at least in its structure, is an evolution in the symbolization of evil from evil primarily conceived as defilement to evil conceived as sin, and finally as guilt. Firstly, according to Ricoeur, defilement is the first primary symbol of evil because involvement in evil is commonly described as becoming dirty or defiled. Defilement, as a symbol of evil, is widespread and primitive enough to be considered universal. However, in the Judeo-Christian tradition, defilement was superseded by sin as an indication of evil. Secondly, for Riceour, sin as a violation of divine interdicts is a necessary transition from defilement to describe evil. Here, humans are set up against God or, more accurately, "before God." In the fundamental experience of Israel in covenantal relationship with God, human culpability is redefined in terms of human violation of the

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Covenant or overstepping a sacred boundary that defined the human-divine difference or relationship. "Thus, sin is a religious dimension before being ethical; it is not the transgression of an abstract rule—of a value—but the violation of a personal bond."[2] Moreover, sin is also seen as captivity by the evil power: "it is a power that binds man, hardens him, and holds him captive."[3] The captivity also suggests a social and intersubjective situation from which humans need to be liberated. Thirdly, according to Ricoeur, this problem of evil, in the Judeo-Christian tradition, is understood in terms of guilt, that is, in acute and personal consciousness of radical evil. Guilt is the interiorization of sin. Because what is demanded of the human is beyond what the law requires, it appears that the human bears responsibility for her/his actions and motivations, even to the extent of having to choose between God or nothingness. Finally, Ricoeur uses the concept of the "servile will," i.e., "the unavailability of freedom to itself,"[4] to sum up human experience relating with the symbols of evil in the scheme of defilement-sin-guilt, but it does not deal with the origin and end of such experience. Ricoeur thus moves on to examine mythical symbols.

Ricoeur examines the Adamic myth thoroughly to illumine the understanding of evil and reinterpretation of original sin. In the Adamic myth, the human is seen as created as good, although with limited freedom that may be misused to incline toward evil whose nature is revealed as contingent, historical, and irrational. Turning away from God, the human must face the consequences of suffering and death, but the story does not end in Genesis; rather, it is a symbolic representation oriented toward the future, toward the coming of Christ. Paul identifies Christ as the Second Adam who justifies creation and sets things aright with God's will once again.

Drawing new insights from his analysis of the symbolisms of evil, Ricoeur reflects further on the meaning of the theological work

[2]Ricoeur, *The Symbol of Evil*, 52.

[3]Ricoeur, *The Symbol of Evil*, 93.

[4]Ricoeur, *The Symbol of Evil*, 151–157.

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crystallized in the concept of original sin. His method, which works from images and mythical symbols to rational symbols (original sin), is a hermeneutic one within the framework of symbolism, retrieving the intentions of the concept by way of deconstruction which recovers its meaning.

Original sin was a theological explanation that was conceived in order to explain the universality of sin and the necessity of salvation by Christ. Reading the story of Genesis literally, Augustine regards Adam and Eve as specific historical figures. Augustine explains original sin by referring to Adam's sin which destroyed the created human state of original blessedness, along with its gifts of immortality, integrity, and knowledge. This resulted in death, concupiscence, a hostile disposition toward God, and consequently, the need for God's forgiveness. Moreover, Augustine explains the universality of sin through the biological mode of transmission by which humans inherit Adam's sin. Thus, even an infant needs baptism in order to remove the condition of original sin, but concupiscence remains. Only by the grace of Christ are all saved. Augustine intends to emphasize here the solidarity of all humankind in sin and the universal need of all for Christ.

This traditional concept of original sin, however, must be deconstructed in order to recover its religious meaning in our contemporary time, for we can no longer read the Adamic story literally, as if it happened in history. Ricoeur sees the symbolic function of original sin as a rational symbol: "In tracing back the origin of evil to a distant ancestor, the myth discovers the situation of every man: evil has already taken place. I do not begin evil; I continue it. I am implicated in evil. Evil has a past; it is its past; it is its own tradition."[5] Thus, by retrieving the intentions of the concept by way of deconstruction, Ricoeur notices that the centre of the scene is occupied not so much by Adam and the consequences of sin on humanity, but by Jesus Christ and the grace which, through Him, was abundantly poured upon

[5]Paul Ricoeur, "Original Sin: A Study in Meaning," in Don Ihde, ed., *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974), 282.

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humanity. Nevertheless, the power of evil in the heart and history of humankind is undeniable.

In general, some contemporary views of original sin are in line with Ricoeur's triple description: "[1] the reality of sin anterior to every awakening of conscience, [2] the communal dimension of sin, which is irreducible to individual responsibility, [3] the impotence of will that surrounds every actual fault."[6] Looking at human history and the human situation as a whole, the meaning of sin in "original sin" may refer to a situation or state of being in which humans are sunk, or it may mean the actual turning away of humans, as individuals or as a collective whole, from God. Perceiving human experience inwardly, sin may also refer to the broken interiority of the person which is characterized by the absence of integrity and the conflict of different forces in the human. The term original in "original sin" also has many possible meanings: it may refer to the historical inauguration of sin by our first ancestors, whoever they may be, or the bad influence of humans on others. Sin is thus passed on through social structures and cultural institutions. It points to the ontological solidarity of humankind as sinners before God or the existential fact that all humans sin, thus pointing to a global or cosmic sinfulness. Such is our experience as humans in the world, which desperately needs God's saving grace through the coming of Jesus Christ whose death and resurrection brought new creation and set things aright with God's will once again

Symbols of Evil in China

Having briefly surveyed Ricoeur's symbolization of evil and interpretation of the meaning of original sin, can these be applied, as is, to a study of China's symbols and myths of evil in order to make sense of the Christian doctrine of original sin in the context of China? The easy but simplistic response is merely to impose the Western defilement-sin-guilt scheme on this non-Western culture. One may

[6]Ricoeur, "Original Sin: A Study in Meaning," 282.

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easily come to the conclusion that it would not make sense, at least not as much as it does in Western culture.

This is not to say that evil as defilement-sin-guilt has not survived in the Chinese consciousness, but this conception does not constitute the standard for understanding evil or morality in China. Fighting against evil is not manifested through sin or divine law but through *Dao* (道). One who does not act in accordance with *Dao* is said to have lost the *De* (德) which is given to human nature. However, these philosophical characterizations are already post-mythic developments. What were the more primeval symbols of evil?

A simple and direct way to discover the symbols of evil in Chinese culture is to trace the roots of the composition of ideographs or characters which themselves are symbols in Chinese language. Chinese writing is special in that it does not employ an alphabet, but rather characters or ideograms that were originally pictures or conventional signs manifesting the "thoughts" behind the language.

The Chinese term expressing the notion of "evil" is *e* (恶). The composite ideograph *e* (恶) consists of two components—inferior or second-rate (亚) and heart (心). Thus, the ideograph *e* indicates that the cause for evil, *e*, originates from an "inferior heart." In other words, people are considered to be evil if they do not act whole-good-heartedly. Thus, in the traditional Chinese context, "evil refers less to ontological imperfections in the universe—'inequality' in things—or even to the evils connected with human suffering and death, than to the problem of evil in the human heart: moral perversion in its individual or collective manifestations, which bring about so much suffering and havoc, usually to the innocent."[7]

The Chinese word heart 心, which can be equally taken as "mind" in a western sense, or more precisely as "mind-and-heart," derived originally from an image of fire. "It refers to intentions, feelings, as

[7]Julia Ching, *Confucianism and Christianity: A Comparative Study* (Tokyo, New York & San Francisco: Kodansha International, 1977), 73.

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well as the activity of knowing and judging. The mind-and-heart is that which discerns between right and wrong, as well as that which commands conformance with its judgments."[8] What is remarkable about heart in Confucian understanding is that it is the *locus* of humanity's meeting with Heaven. Mencius says: "He who gives full realization to his heart understands his own nature, and he who understands his own nature knows Heaven."[9] In addition, the well-known Confucian philosopher Wang Yang-ming, of the 15th century BC, affirms: "the heart is the Way (*Dao*), and the Way is Heaven. If one knows [his own] heart, he would also know the Way and Heaven."[10] Clearly, for Confucianism the heart comes to us from Heaven; it also leads us back to Heaven. In Julia Ching's words, "it represents both the symbol and reality of man's oneness with Heaven … the heart is also the reason for man's oneness with himself."[11]

If one fails to hold a whole-good-heart, s/he loses her/his nature and breaks her/his oneness with Heaven and oneness with her/himself. That is where the "inferior or second-rate heart"—the Chinese word for evil *e* (惡) comes in. In other words, *e* (惡, "evil") is the result of one's misuse of her/his gifted integrity of heart, i.e., of breaking the oneness with Heaven as well as with oneself.

Yuet Keung Lo, who uses "*Shuowen jiezi*," a second-century lexicon that explains the etymology of ancient Chinese ideographs, in his article "*The Idea of Evil in Early China*,"[12] studies some terms of transgression

[8]Ching, *Confucianism and Christianity*, 91.

[9]*The Book of Mencius*, 7:1, Readings in Chinese Philosophy (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Philosophy Department, 1993).

[10]Cited by Ching, *Confucianism and Christianity*, 91.

[11]Ching, *Confucianism and Christianity*, 92.

[12]Yuet Keung Lo, *The Idea of Evil in Early China* (National University of Singapore), http://www.interdiscipinary.net/ati/Evil/Evil%208/Lo%20paper.pdf, 2007), 1–9.

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which are the symbols of evil or are closely related to the idea of evil. Lo's study adds more evidences for the effort to trace back to the "thoughts" behind the symbols of evil.

> *e* is glossed with *guo* 过, which means transgression or error. *e* can also function in a verbal sense, which means "to loathe" or "to despise." The two senses of *e* are actually cognate—when a person commits a transgression, it will be despised by others. Clearly, evil is considered man-made. Indeed *guo* is the most common term for transgression; it literally means "to pass by" or "pass over." From this basic meaning, *guo* also connotes the sense of overshooting. In this derived meaning, *guo* is often used in connection with *bu ji* 不及 (undershooting), both refer to the act of missing the mark and are considered human error alike. A common synonym for *guo* is *qian* 愆. The composite graph *qian* consists of three components—a path (行), water (水), and heart (心). The water graph is placed in the middle of the path graph indicating that the path is flooded. Evidently and graphically, something goes amiss. It is crucial that the heart graph, which is placed beneath the path graph and the water graph, is integral to the composite graph *qian*. Its presence connotes that the cause for the trouble originates with the human heart.[13]

Thus, Lo concludes that "the cognate relationship among the terms of transgression suggests that 'evil' (*e*) was considered to be man-made and thus not perceived to have its own ontology. It was unequivocally understood as the result of man's own errors in judgment."[14] To some extent, this understanding of evil, illumined by tracing back to the roots of the composition of ideographs related with evil, is in line with what Ricoeur discovered about the meaning of evil: "that evil is not something that exists, that evil has no being, no nature, because it comes from us, because it is the work of freedom."[15] Expressing Ricoeur's words in Chinese understanding: "evil is not being but doing, because it comes from us, because it is the work of misuse of the heart."

[13]Lo, *The Idea of Evil in Early China*, 8.

[14]Lo, *The Idea of Evil in Early China*, 9.

[15]Ricoeur, "Original Sin: A Study in Meaning," 272.

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Chinese Myth of Evil

Is there a Chinese story of a Fall? According to Whalen Lai, who presents a thorough study on the possible Chinese myths of fall in the light of Ricoeur's study on symbolism of myth in his article "Symbolism of Evil in China: The Kung-Chia Myth Analyzed,"[16] there is no one central myth comparable to that in Genesis. There have been enormous attempts to group the oriental mythical thoughts under the "cosmic egg" variety, coming up with mythical oneness and human-divine continuity thinking.[17] Nonetheless, it is difficult to locate a primeval myth of fall/evil in China given the major source of myth in the Confucian classic, the *Book of History*.

After examining some existing myths, Lai determines: "Emperor Kung-chia of the Xia dynasty, the first ruler to lose his *de* 德 (virtue) and the Mandate of Heaven (the rule), is the first evil man and that embedded in three myths about him is the Chinese myth of the Fall."[18] There is clearly a judgmental account of this evil king given in the *Book of History*: "Emperor Kung-chia was enthroned. He liked to serve the spirits. He also was licentious and unruly. The *de* of the Xia clan declined and the feudal lords showed discontent."[19] This king Kung-chia, who lost his *de* and the mandate to rule, could well represent fallible humanity uprooted from the original (heavenly) good. Where did he go wrong? Lai finds a surviving myth about him indicating a clue:

> When emperor Kung-chia was enthroned, Heaven sent down two dragons. Kung-chia was unable to feed them; this is because he could

[16]Whalen Lai, "Symbolism of Evil in China: The Kung-Chia Myth Analyzed," in *History of Religions* Vol. 23, No. 4 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 316–343.

[17]Lai, "Symbolism of Evil in China," 320.

[18]Lai, "Symbolism of Evil in China," 321.

[19]The *Book of History*, as cited by Lai, "Symbolism of Evil in China," 333.

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> not avail himself of the service of the clan of Dragon-Nurturers that once served the Sage Yu at the founding of Xia.
>
> So the reign declined. Later there was a man called Liu Lu who had acquired somewhat the art of nurturing dragons from the old Dragon-Nurturing clan. He came to serve the emperor. Kung-chia made him the Master of Dragons.
>
> *But somehow the female of the dragons died and it was made by the caretaker into food for the emperor. Later when the King asked for it, Liu Lu fled.*[20]

In order to understand this myth, first of all, the notion of dragon needs some explanations in this context. The classic definition of dragon (龍, *long*) can be found in *Shuo-wen chieh-tzu*: "*Long*, Dragon: most superior of all scaled beings; can be dark or light [i.e. yin or yang], small [like the *chiu* dragon] or gigantic [like the leviathan], short or long [i.e. capable of infinite transformations]; in the spring equinox, it rises to the sky [like a bird] while in the autumn equinox, it descends to the deep [like a fish]."[21] According to the mythical tradition, the dragon is believed to be the sum of all beings; it is bird, beast, and reptile all in one. Moreover, Lai points out that "the dragon is in fact a composite animal which contains archetypes of all water, land, and air beings, from which the birds of the air, the beasts of the forest, and the fishes of the water may evolve."[22] Thus, the dragon is the being of all beings and the latent dynamics of life itself. All Chinese emperors were believed to be living dragons.

Lai analyzes the myth further: as a descendant of *Yu*, *Kung-chia* was himself a son of a dragon and should entertain such kin. That he failed to keep them alive is an indication that he did not "know himself," that is to say that he lost his Heavenly gift—the two dragons, in demythologized

[20]Yüan Ko, *Ancient Chinese Myths* (Shanghai: Shang-wu, 1957), as cited by Lai, "Symbolism of Evil in China," 334.

[21]Shang Wu, *Shuo-wen chieh-tzu ku-lin* (Taipei: Kuo-min, 1964), as cited by Lai, "Symbolism of Evil in China," 332.

[22]Lai, "Symbolism of Evil in China," 332.

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language, were his *de* (virtue)—enough to lose his life, the *Xia* throne, and the mandate to rule. In forgetting his dragonic essence, in failing to nurture the dragonic essence in him, this first human died a human and came down in Chinese history as an evil emperor.[23]

Kung-chia's dilemma is the dilemma of all Chinese politically, morally, and religiously. Politically, he is the emperor who, inheriting the Mandate of Heaven (two dragons), brought his house down because he failed to live up to his charge. Morally, he failed to nurture his inner *de*. Mencius would charge him with failure to realize his nature. Religiously, Taoists would lament his inability to "chase" and to "catch the dragon," namely his going away from the "*Dao*."

Kung-chia acted out of ignorance of his true nature, and this was his "sin," the fall. It is not sin in the sense of violating a divine interdict. The fault lies in humanity's inability to make full use of the gift. "Men who lose their *de* simply cannot live long, for *de* is the essence of life."[24] In terms of Neo-Confucianism, there is the notion of the two sides of human nature: "the heavenly, 'essential' nature which is good, and the physical 'existential' nature which may be good or bad, depending upon the quality of the *qi* 气 (vital force, material principle) with which it is endowed."[25] Kung-chia's state of sin represents the transition from "essence" to "existence," i.e., from the created good (dragonic gift) to existential estrangement (inability to know himself and act accordingly).

The "infinite demand of law" is unknown to the Chinese, but the dictum of moderation remains in the Chinese mind. This is precisely why later Confucian philosophy has developed, not a theory of sin as offense against God, but a theory of moral evil and its relationship to human nature. According to *Zhong Yong* (中庸), a Chinese literary

[23]Lai, "Symbolism of Evil in China," 333–343.

[24]Lai, "Symbolism of Evil in China," 340.

[25]Ching, *Confucianism and Christianity*, 77.

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classic, heaven proposes *ming* (命, mandates), and humankind disposes (*cheng,* 承; humankind completes what nature has already set into motion). If humankind disposes wrongly, not according to the *ming*, then evil arises. "The goal is to reach a man-heaven unity, to bring the dragonic gift in man in line once more with its source in heaven for the well-being of oneself, heaven, and all beings under heaven."[26]

Early Chinese Views of Human Nature with Regard to the Notion of Good and Evil

"Instead of ascribing evil to a super-human principle, or of relegating it to a basically unreal phenomenal world, the Chinese Confucian theory of evil is inseparable from its theory of human nature."[27] The human nature was not a central theme of Confucius' teaching. "We can hear our Master's (Confucius) views on culture and its manifestation, but we cannot hear his views on human nature and the Way of Heaven [because these subjects are beyond the comprehension of most people.]"[28] Nevertheless, Confucius said: "By nature men are alike. Through practice they have become far apart."[29] Apparently, Confucius was more concerned about the power and influence of cultivation on the shaping of humanity rather than about the comprehension of human nature. Nevertheless, a more articulated notion of human nature was developed by Mencius, a third-generation follower of Confucius. Mencius was known in his time for his doctrine that human nature is good (*xing-shan*, 性善). His classic explanation is based on the "four-germ" theory of human nature:

> The heart of compassion is the germ of benevolence; the heart of shame, of dutifulness; the heart of courtesy and modesty, of observance

[26]Lai, "Symbolism of Evil in China," 340.

[27]Ching, *Confucianism and Christianity*, 74.

[28]*Analects* 5:12, Readings in Chinese Philosophy (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Philosophy Department, 1993).

[29]*Analects* 17:2.

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> of rites; and the heart of right and wrong, of wisdom. Man has these four germs just as he had four limbs. For a man possessing these four germs to deny his own potentialities is for him to cripple himself …. If a man is able to develop all these four germs that he possesses, it will be like a fire starting up or a spring coming through.[30]

This is what Mencius meant by the four germs—the germs of *De*, the heart of compassion, the heart of shame, the heart of courtesy and modesty, and the heart of right and wrong. The four germs must be cultivated so that the four hearts will be able to come to fruition and blossom into benevolence, dutifulness, propriety, and wisdom. In Arthur Waley's words, "goodness meant conformity to the way of Heaven … it meant the possession of 'power' (*De*) that this conformity brings."[31] Evidently, as Lo points out, "the Mencian theory of human nature is preoccupied with the positive potentialities in human nature and how they can materialize into moral conduct. The question of 'evil' thus was never the focus of Mencian philosophy. At most, it lies only in the background."[32] Thus, Lo concludes: "To Mencius, it would seem that 'evil' is not the result of one's own making; rather, it is the natural consequence of one's failure to do goodness …. 'Evil' can materialize itself only when human goodness leaves a void."[33]

Coming from the same school of Confucianism, Xunzi took a different approach. He was known for his doctrine that human nature is "evil" (*xing-e*, 性恶) and that goodness is the result of conscious activity. Xunzi said:

> The nature of man is such that he is born with a fondness for profit. If he indulges this fondness, it will lead him into wrangling and strife, and all sense of courtesy and humility will disappear. He is born with feelings of envy and hate, and if he indulges these, they will lead him into violence and crime, and all sense of loyalty and good faith will

[30]*The Book of Mencius*, 3.6.

[31]Arthur Waley, *The Way and Its Power: A Study of the Tao Te Ching and Its Place in Chinese Thought* (New York: Crove Press, Inc., 1958), 21.

[32]Lo, *The Idea of Evil in Early China*, 4.

[33]Lo, *The Idea of Evil in Early China*, 4.

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> disappear. Man is born with the desires of the eyes and ears, with a fondness for beautiful sights and sounds. If he indulges these, they will lead him into license and wantonness, and all ritual principles and correct forms will be lost… Therefore, man must first be transformed by the instructions of a teacher and guided by ritual principles, and only then will he be able to observe the dictates of courtesy and humility, obey the forms and rules of society, and achieve order. It is obvious from this, then, that man's nature is evil, and that his goodness is the result of conscious activity.[34]

Xunzi acknowledges fondness for profit or gain, feelings of envy and hate, and sensual desires as inborn or natural in human nature, and he identifies them as the primary causes of evil. Based on Xunzi's understanding of human nature, Lo remarks,

> Xunzi does not consider evil itself to be innate. Evil is constituted and only occurs when human beings give free rein to their inborn fondness for profit, natural feelings of envy and hate and instinctual sensual desires. Evil does not have its own ontology; it does not come into being when goodness reigns as a result of human conscious activity. Conscious activity as such is the efficient cause of good, and its lack will lead to evil.[35]

As discussed above, while Mencius argues for an innate moral sense in human nature, he emphasizes human agency in turning innate germs of goodness into actuality. Xunzi does not believe in an innate moral sense but he never questions the ability of human beings to hold in check their natural self-serving propensities in the interests of personal good and community welfare. Xunzi and Mencius are not quite opposed to one other in these regards; both exhort people to moral goodness. They both identify a fundamental dualism present in humans, who are attracted, at the same time, both to good and also to evil—the pull of flesh to fondness for profit or gain, feelings of envy and hate, sensual desires and the call of the human heart to

[34]Burton Watson, *Hsün Tzu: Basic Writings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 157, as cited by Lo, *The Idea of Evil in Early China*, 5.

[35]Lo, *The Idea of Evil in Early China*, 5.

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compassion, shame, courtesy and modesty, and the heart of right and wrong within us. This is exactly what Paul and each of us have experienced: "I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do" (Romans 7:19).

Taoism generally prioritized the natural over the artificial. Taoism does not seek to understand human nature in terms of good and evil, which are understood to be merely conceptions of human valuation. Laozi said: "When the people of the world all know beauty as beauty, there arises the recognition of ugliness. When they all know the good as good, there arises the recognition of evil."[36] If good and evil were indeed inevitable in understanding and describing human nature, the Taoist would recognize them as a pair of bipolar opposites, with good corresponding to the operation of *Dao* and evil violating it. Simply put, for Taoism, good and evil are not inherent in nature; they are entirely artificial.

In conclusion, neither the Confucian nor the Taoist theories of human nature admit of the essential existence of evil in the universe. From the Confucian point of view, evil is the natural consequence of one's failure to do goodness, namely, the consequence of the loss of *De*, which is the essence of life and the power to do goodness. From the Taoist point of view, evil is described as not acting in accordance with *Dao*, i.e., when one, in wrongly using one's free will, departs from *Dao* and corrupts his/her gifted holism and becomes fragmented.

Interpretation of "Original Sin" from the Perspectives of *Dao* and *De*

In the light of Ricoeur's presentation on original sin, derived from thoroughly examining and analyzing the symbols of evil, and having examined some symbols and thoughts of evil in the Chinese tradition,

[36] *Dao De Jing*, chap. 2, Readings in Chinese Philosophy (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University Philosophy Department, 1993).

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we concluded that the two key symbolisms of evil, i.e., the departure from *Dao* and the loss of *De*, play a prominent role in Chinese culture. Next, we proceed to unravel the meaning of *Dao* and *De* in order to shed light on the understanding of original sin.

Dao (道), a symbol basic to Chinese thought, commonly means "way," but *Dao* is overflowing with meaning. The Chinese character is composed of the head of a human combined with a primitive depiction of walking. Its simplest sense is a road, path, or way, and hence, the way in which one does something—method, principle, doctrine. However, to Laozi and Chinese mystics, it refers to "the Way" as "the eternal pattern and model of the universe: the Way it operates."[37] Laozi describes this in the *Dao De Jing*:

> There was something undifferentiated and yet complete, which existed before heaven and earth. Soundless and formless, it depends on nothing and does not change. It operates everywhere and is free from danger. It may be considered the mother of the universe. I do not know its name; I call it *Dao.* (ch. 25) The Great *Dao* overflows everything. All things depend upon it for their existence …. It loves and nourishes all beings and does not make itself the owner. (ch. 34)

In Hieromonk Damascene's words describing Laozi and his notion of *Dao*:

> For Laozi, the Way was precisely what its adopted name signified, in its full metaphysical sense: the Way, Path or Pattern of Heaven, the Course that all things follow. The Way is the Uncreated Cause of all things. It is the Way that creates, and it is the Way that nourishes, develops, cares for, shelters, comforts, and protects the creation, balancing the strife of opposites by itself not contending.[38]

If one is familiar with Greek philosophy, one may immediately conclude that what Laozi calls the *Dao* corresponds to the notion of *Logos* which

[37]Joseph Petulla, *The Tao Te Ching and the Christian Way* (New York: Orbis Books, 1998), 127.

[38]Hieromonk Damascene, *Christ the Eternal Tao* (Platina: Valaam Books, 1999), 31.

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