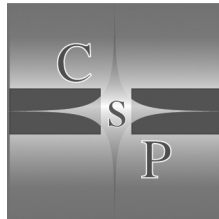


Sino-Christian Studies in China

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Edited by

YANG Huilin and Daniel H. N. YEUNG



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COMMENTS FROM SCHOLARS

“During my different visits to China I witnessed the vigour and creativity of Chinese scholars especially in the field of religious studies. This volume is a splendid example for the high quality of factual information, intellectual penetration and historical and systematic reflection.”

— HANS KÜNG
Professor emeritus and President of the Global Ethic Foundation
Tübingen University, Germany

“The essays in this timely and intellectually rich volume demonstrate, both in their range and in their evident historical, philosophical and cultural attunement, the high level of sophistication of contemporary religious studies in China. Particularly for the scholarly appreciation of the remarkable history and steadily evolving contemporary role of Christian thought in Chinese intellectual life, this volume makes an invaluable, state-of-the-art contribution. No serious student of the subject can afford to overlook this book.”

— DAVID L. JEFFREY
Professor & Vice-President
Baylor University, USA

“The Universe is a ‘Cosmic Dance of Dialogue,’ from the interplay of matter and energy, protons and electrons, body and spirit, man and woman, individual and society.... We humans need to be ‘in sync’ with the Universe by engaging in the *Dialogue of the Head* (seeking to understand the Other), *Dialogue of the Hands* (joining hands with the Other to solve the world’s problems), and *Dialogue of the Heart* (embracing the aesthetic expressions of the Other). It is to the first, the *Dialogue of the Head*, that this new volume of *Sino-Christian Studies in China* makes a major contribution in this new **Age of Global Dialogue.**”

— LEONARD SWIDLER
Professor of Inter-religious Dialogue
Temple University, USA

“*Sino-Christian Studies in China* charts new waters at a time of increased interest in the significance of contemporary Chinese thought. The quality of the authors and the range of the contributions makes this volume indispensable for anyone interested in religious studies, cultural studies, and Chinese studies. It

promises to advance comparative and inter-disciplinary in a stimulating and creative fashion.”

— FRANCIS SCHÜSSLER FIORENZA

Stillman Professor
Harvard University, USA

“*Sino-Christian Studies in China* is a speaking example of the exceptional development of scholarship in the field of religious studies in China through the past twenty years. Renowned Chinese scholars present twenty academic essays introducing the trend of religious studies in China and its growing public role in the country. Some of the authors have been leading this breakthrough in religious studies all through the 1990’s: *Yang Huilin, Zhuo Xinping, Zhao Dunhua, Li Pingye, Liu Xiaofeng, He Guanghu, Li Tiangang, You Xilin*. These Chinese scholars are doing pioneering work to establish the relevance of theological research in Chinese society. *Sino-Christian Studies in China* illustrates that theology is on the way of being recognized as an independent field of research within the academic world of China. That definitely is a breakthrough. It challenges scholars over the world, especially also the ‘faith community’ of the Chinese Christian Church to join this evolution and to pass beyond the technical and scholarly language, to find the language of dialogue with the public and address the people in a meaningful way. The editors state their thesis clearly, saying:

... we believe that

- Theology should become a ‘public discourse,’ providing meaning and interpretation to humankind;
- Theological discourse can receive universal understanding, discussion and respect; and
- The “publics” of theology will finally form a generation of ‘public intellectuals’ who present the value ideals and social justice from theological resources.

The book is to be recommended to anyone who wishes to remain informed on the impressive evolution of academic research in *Sino-Christian Studies in China*.”

— JEROOM HEYNDRICKX

Director, F. Verbiest Institute
Leuven University, Belgium

“Fifteen years ago few experts of modern China would dare to think that theological studies would be recognized as a research field within the academic world and in Chinese society. The ‘discovery’ of theology gives an idea of the tremendous changes done in China in the last times. *Sino-Christian Studies in*

China, whose editors and the authors of contributions are renowned Chinese scholars in the fields of religious and philosophical studies, is an impressive document of such changes, but at the same time it offers a scientific approach to the Christian studies in China, under different perspectives: the historical background, the interrelation between Christianity, hermeneutics, aesthetics and ethics, in the light of contemporary Chinese culture. Whoever deals with modern Chinese history and intellectual life, any researcher on religious studies, as well as observers of academic research in the religious fields in China, find in this book a stimulating and exciting material.

— PAOLO SANTANGELO
Professor of History of China
Rome-Naples, Italy

“In modern China, Christian faith is no longer a controversial choice. Christianity, along with other religions, has gained some public sphere and recognition in recent years. The present volume, written by first-class Chinese scholars of the Christian religion, is a first-class demonstration how Christianity is increasingly becoming a serious topic of public discussion and debate not only in the Chinese academic circles but also in society at large.

“The book at hand shows how the Christian point of view is a relevant factor in the modern debate on the reconstruction of people’s world view in the rapidly changing China. The writers believe that Christian theology could make an important contribution for the development of values, morality, and social justice in this new situation. Christianity is already both a legitimate subject of university studies and a legitimate topic for public debate in China Mainland. The specific aim of the writers of this volume is to further enhance the public role of religion in China.

“This collection of articles is also an excellent introduction to the present state of the academic research of Christianity in China. The volume is especially strong in discussing methodology for creating Christian theology with Chinese characteristics.”

— MIIKKA RUOKANEN
Professor of Systematic Theology
University of Helsinki, Finland

“I am honored to be asked to offer a comment on the new book, *Sino-Christian Studies in China*. It is a remarkable collection of authors and essays. This volume offers an historic set of reflections by leading Chinese scholars who have recognized that religion has a place in the future of China, not only as an object of scientific analysis, like so many animals to be inspected by biologists, or so many plants to be studied by botanists; but as a fundamental way of

understanding both the deepest dynamics of the human spirit and the internal architecture of human societies. Even more, these scholars—a number of whom I have been privileged to meet in my several trips to Chinese conferences—recognize that theology is a science that both penetrates to the depth of those dynamics and articulates decisive ethical realities that are indispensable to every enduring civilization. Warmest congratulations to the editors and contributors in this signal volume.”

— MAX STACKHOUSE
Professor of Reformed Theology and Public Life,
Princeton Theological Seminary, USA

“In Chinese academia, Christian theology has largely been studied and researched in an adjunct capacity. *Sino-Christian Studies in China* is a corpus of inspiring essays on this ‘adjunct theology.’ The authors are respected scholars in their own fields, ranging from philosophy and religion to history and sociology of intercultural relations. The result is a valuable interdisciplinary and intercultural reflection on the potentials of theology from a contemporary Chinese perspective.”

— CARINE DEFOORT
Professor of Sinology & Chief-director of Contemporary Chinese Thought
Leuven University, Belgium

“Religion in China reflects complex and sometimes tumultuous social, political, economic and cultural circumstances for centuries. Similarly, religious studies, the study of Christianity in particular, reflects equal amounts of tension and complexity in the past decades in China on social, cultural and scholarly levels. The twenty-one intellectually stimulating essays included in *Sino-Christian Studies in China* reveal the status of the field in China today. Chinese scholars have come a long way to obtain this extraordinary achievement. The invaluable scholarly contribution is the collective Chinese voice in one publication. It represents the true driving force today behind the development of this innovative discipline in China that touches the minds and hearts of so many more.”

— XIAOXIN WU
Director, Ricci Institute
University of San Francisco, USA

EDITORS' PREFACE

Whether in the West or in China, religious studies is a young discipline. While Max Müller's dictum that "He who knows one, knows none" has become a famous motto of the discipline of religious studies, it has a special significance for the Chinese scholars: in the context of China, religious studies with western Christian theology as its background, must first enter the Chinese experience before it enters the "public" areas of the humanities. Therefore, the "Sino-Christian theology" since the 1990s and the recent question of the "publicity of theology" form a mutually connected realm. They introduce the resources and methods of Christian theology widely into the horizons of Chinese academics. This is a remarkable indication of the recent developments of religious studies in China.

In view of this, this *Collected Works* comprises twenty-one distinguished essays written by twenty renowned scholars, and it concentrates mainly on the related discussions of "Sino-Christian Theology", supplemented by issues such as the dialogical backgrounds of Christianity and Chinese culture, the trend of the development of religious studies in China, and the public role of religion in contemporary China.

Christian theology has been studied and researched within China's academic circles, but largely in an adjunct capacity. Obviously, this is in part because theology has yet to be accepted as an independent field within the academic structure of China. But it may also be true that there is a significant difference between the theological language within the church and that within the academic context. In both cases, we face the issue of theology's publics or publicity. Simply put, exploring the issue can help us to understand (1) the reason for theology's relegation to an adjunct position, and (2) how theology can move from the confines of the church into the larger society and establish its relevance. Only when these two aspects of theology's publics or publicity are understood can the "faith community" of the Christian Church realize its potential as a "community of discourse".

One modern example of "adjunct theology" is C. S. Lewis. We credit him with the popular success of adjunct theology through works such as *Mere Christianity*.¹ "Mere" means "pure" or "only", and his work parallels the more technical and scholarly tradition of Karl Barth. As Cambridge University's Chair of Literature, C. S. Lewis not only discussed Christianity on the BBC radio program, but also was widely accepted by theologians and laity alike. Therefore, an adjunct role need not imply diminution of quality or significance. C. S. Lewis has shown us that theology could dialogue with the public and address society in a

meaningful way. It is therefore deserving of greater appreciation by students and scholars of the humanities, and should not be cloistered within the walls of the church. If this was possible in times past, why not today?

From the standpoint of humanities research, the *raison d'être* of “adjunct theology” or theology, as a resource or reference, is not simply for the sake of “comparative” or “inter-disciplinary” study, or a case of what scholars would call “the crisis of the lost word”. In all honesty, there should be just one basic question: does humanities research or the study of the “self” require the theological perspective, to maintain its breadth and thus the creation of a space for theological studies? If the answer is “no”, theology has no part in the humanities or the inquiry into the “self”. There is no point in forcing an alliance. But if the answer is “yes”, we must offer this as a legitimate reason for its place within the parameters of the humanities.

From Aristotle’s epistemological distinctions between “pure knowledge”, “practical knowledge” and “creative knowledge”, to Kant’s critical framework based on the distinctions of “reason”, “volition” and “emotion”, to Jürgen Habermas’s definitions of the realm of action versus the realm of awareness, of “societal system” versus “the world of daily living” – in all these ideas are three fundamental elements involved: the pursuit of truth, the maintenance of morality, and the expression of human emotion. In the 1960s, the Commission of Humanities, founded by American scholars, defined “Humanities” as “research in the fields of linguistics, philosophy, literature, religion, and art”.² The definition encompasses the older list of fundamental elements. China, understandably, has its own tradition of Humanities. But in recent years, indigenous Chinese thought has increasingly adopted these western conceptual tools and interpretive frameworks. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to choose to describe the entire humanist experience at least along these three fundamental lines. In so doing, we encounter a series of challenging questions.

Question One: in the pursuit of truth, one encounters the tension between “truth” and the “narration of truth”. Because there is no seamless match between the two, Kant had to resort to “reductionism”, defining the objective world of reason as the world in which man legislates for nature, distinguishing it from the “world itself”.³ For the same reason, Wittgenstein believed that the awareness of the world necessarily exists outside the world itself⁴, while Hans-Georg Gadamer propounded that language is existence that can be understood.⁵ If “knowledge” has to be redefined time and time again, and can only explain itself by logic, in what sense is this knowledge “true knowledge”?

Question Two: in maintaining morality, we must ultimately deal with the relationship and distinction between ethical conduct and value thinking, “moral oughtness” and “absolute rightness”. Since the time of the early philosophers who believed in natural law, God’s “covenant” with man has been discarded in favor

of mutual contracts between men to ensure self-preservation and mutual benefits, thus explaining the evolution of “morality”, “law” and “nations”.⁶ However, if “morality” is simply the product of an effort to balance benefits, and “rightness”, a mere factor of situations and viewpoints so that it can entertain completely opposite interpretations as situations and viewpoints shift, then would “goodness” not become a highly dubious concept? Any immoral behavior can be justified as moral, depending on the situation and one’s point of view.

Question Three: in expressing emotion, the ultimate purpose is to find the unique visible form that embodies the invisible ideal. Beginning with Plato, beauty lies on the distant shores (Plotinus),⁷ poetry must romanticize the world (Novalis),⁸ and art expresses the inexpressible (Jean-François Lyotard).⁹ Ultimately, they form the mainstream of western literary theory and aesthetics. On occasion, even philosophers would borrow from “poetic narrative” (Heidegger).¹⁰ In modern man’s practice of artistic appreciation, the so-called “poetic wisdom” and “artistic symbolism” have been transformed, having become a theory about symbols or a direct sensory experience or expression. In the former case, the theory of symbols is the perception of what is by nature imperceptible, deriving its meaning from realizing the ultimate meaninglessness of things, and presenting the reality that possibly absolute truth does not exist for humanity.¹¹ In the latter case, sensory expression has become a commodity of public consumption. Meantime, the public is itself consumed by what is “trendy”. Art itself has become a new religion, an object of worship.¹²

Based on the questions above, it is imperative and natural for theology to become part of humanities’ field of vision. Only then will theological hermeneutics, ethics, and aesthetics and their complementary concerns become legitimate and consequential. Here, we must reiterate the following issues: (1) The most common question in theological hermeneutics is how one can confirm “meaning”, given the premise that knowledge, reason, and interpretation are all finite. (2) Recognizing that human values are relative, contradictory, and often reflect limited points of reference, theological ethics asks how man can fulfill the imperative of goodness. (3) Theological aesthetics seeks to transcend the instructional purpose and appreciation of art, so that art communicates with man’s ultimate encounter and self-redemption, in the process of which it expresses the depth of man’s spiritual longing.

At times, the very quintessence of the humanities will be all the more manifested when it encounters the ultimate theological consciousness. Only the logic of theology may break through the prison of language and open up a new vista so that we can cast aside all fantasies of playing the role of God and at the same time find the strength to exercise our responsibility of guarding human consciousness.

The purpose of proposing discussions of “publicity of theology” in the realms of “Sino-Christian Theology” is not to subject all the humanities to the control of theology, and absolutely not to replace theology with the humanities. The “irreducibility” of the “element of the sacred” must be upheld in all research methods of religion, as Mircea Eliade said: “A religious phenomenon will only be recognized *as such* if it is grasped *at its own level*, that is to say, if it is studied *as something religious*. To try to grasp the essence of such a phenomenon by means of physiology, psychology, sociology, economics, linguistics, art, or any other study is false; it misses the one *unique and irreducible* element in it: *the element of the sacred*”.¹³ However, all experience of encounters with the sacred can only be expressed through certain symbolic languages, and only through these languages can personal experience be given their visible existential forms. And the “tension of critique” of the present world is the quality commonly participated in by theology and the humanities.

Therefore, we believe that

1. Theology should become a “public discourse”, providing meaning and interpretation to humankind;
2. Theological discourse can receive universal understanding, discussion and respect; and
3. The “publicity” of theology will finally form a generation of “public intellectuals” who present the value ideals and social justice from theological resources.

YANG Huilin
Daniel H. N. YEUNG

¹ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (Tainan: Southeast Asia Theological Association, 1991).

² Du Weiming said, “Once the questions of the value and meaning of life, the ideals of truth, goodness and beauty...and man’s own self-transcendence are expelled from the mainstream of philosophical discourse, they become...the object of concern for theology”. “Religious Study: from Theology to Humanities”, published in *Times*, vol. 23, (March, 1998), 22-23.

³ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Reason: Preface*, 3:IX, refer to *Selections from Kant’s Three Major Critiques*, trans. & eds. Yang Zhutao and Deng Xiaomang, (Beijing: Renmin University of China Press, 2001).

⁴ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophy of Logic*, trans. Guo Ying, (Beijing: Commercial, 1985), 94.

⁵ H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Garpett Barden & John Cumming, (New York: Crossroad, 1975), 432. See also, *Truth and Method*, trans. Hung Ying, (Shanghai: Shanghai Translations, 1994), 606.

⁶ Refer to Yang Huilin’s *Guide to the Western Literary Theory*, chapter 5, section 2,

(Beijing: Renmin University of China Press, 2003).

⁷ Plotinus, *Enneads*, trans. Miao Langshan, see Zhang Anqi ed., *The Collection of Aesthetical Translations by Miao Langshan*, Vol. 1, (Beijing: Renmin University of China Press, 1998).

⁸ Liu Xiaofeng, ed., *The Reader of Western Religious & Philosophical Studies in 20th Century*, (Shanghai: Shanghai Sanlian, 1994), 1293-1294.

⁹ Jean-François Lyotard, *Sublimity: to express what is inexpressible*, see *Postmodernism*, 2nd issue, (Beijing: Social Sciences Documental, 1993).

¹⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Phenomenology and Theology*, trans. Sun Zhouxing; see Liu Xiaofeng eds., *Heidegger and Theology*, (Hong Kong: Logos & Pnuema, 2003), 36.

¹¹ Karl-Josef Kuschel, *Laughter*, trans. Zhou Hui, (Hong Kong: Logos & Pnuema, 2003), 36.

¹² Daniel Bell, *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1976), 35.

¹³ Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, trans. Rosemary Sheed, (New York: Sheed & Ward, 1963), xiii.

1. History

CHAPTER ONE

MISREADING AND ITS CREATIVITY IN SINO-WESTERN CULTURAL COMMUNICATION AT THE END OF THE MING DYNASTY

SUN Shangyang

The contemporary American literary critic Harold Bloom holds that the history of poetry is the “history of misreading each other’s poetry by the strong poets for the purpose of broadening their imaginary horizon”, and that this kind of “misreading” more or less involves a certain creativity.¹ Yet, his discussion is still largely limited to misreading within one linguistic background. If we accept the philosophical idea that “language is the home of existence”, we can safely say that there are as many manners of existence as there are languages and this will necessarily lead to cultural diversity. The essence of cultural communication is exactly the encounter of various languages and the manners of existence they encounter. The two parties involved in the communication are already prepossessed by the languages, the manners of existence or the cultural traditions, into which they are born. Human historical existence determines that its understanding cannot possibly be isolated from history or tradition. Consequently, no interpretation, either of “the other” or of cultural canons, can really start from scratch. Instead, pre-conception, or pre-understanding, is an inescapable historical fact, which constitutes the premise for all new interpretations. When the subject carries his/her “pre-understanding” into the home of existence of “the other”, the first thing he might do, probably, is to misread “the other” by presuming a common ground between them. The ways of misreading may vary from person to person. Yet, it is almost certain that the depth and width of communication is in direct proportion to the extent of misreading.

A signal illustration is the Chinese misreading of Indian Buddhism and the resultant Zenism, or Chinese Buddhism, and the profound influence they exert on the native culture. Nevertheless, in this article, I limit my discussion to the misreading taking place in Chinese-Western Cultural communication during the 16th and the 17th centuries. Hopefully, this study can shed some light on this issue.

Western Missionaries' Misinterpretation of Confucianism

The first substantial dialogue between Chinese and Western cultures took place at the end of the Ming Dynasty. Mediated by western missionaries and Chinese scholar-officials, it yielded admirable results. The single work by Matteo Ricci, entitled *History of the Introduction of Christianity in China*, or *The Journal of Matteo Ricci*, “exerted a stronger influence than any other 17th century historical work in such fields as literature, science, philosophy and religion. It introduced Confucius to Europe... It opened up a new world and revealed a new people...”² Similarly, according to Liang Qichao, the famous Chinese reformist, the benefits that the Chinese derived from the dialogue could not be over-stressed. When tracing the causes of these positive effects, we cannot leave unmentioned the policy of approaching Confucianism adopted by missionaries like Ricci.

From their experiences in China at the end of the Ming Dynasty, the missionaries came to see that military forces could not help in their “domesticating” of China. Instead, they could achieve their “spiritual hunting” only by inculcating Christian doctrines in a peaceful manner. More than this, Ricci came to the recognition that, only by enlisting the sympathy of the domineering scholar-officials, in other words, by adopting the upper-class strategy, could they “domesticate” China. For this purpose, he made friends with a large number of scholars, dressed like them, saluted in their manner, and pored over Confucian canons. Meanwhile, he sought a reconciliation between Christian and Confucian doctrines, and strove to formulate a system of Christian teaching and a missionary policy, which would be accepted by Chinese scholar-officials without incurring objections from Europe.

Ancestor-worship had long been a practice in Confucian culture. To facilitate his preaching, Ricci deliberately misinterpreted this custom. According to him, this rite was not a religious ritual. He introduced and commented on it this way:

For all Chinese people, whether an emperor or a subject, the single most important event, according to Confucian teaching, is to offer sacrifice to ancestors at a certain time in the year... They believe the ancestors would eat the offerings, or have any use for them. They just do not know other ways they can show their love and gratitude to the ancestors. We were told that the rules were laid down not for the sake of the dead, but for the living. In other words, they set up a good example to encourage descendants and ignorant people to show filial piety to their parents... Anyway, they do not deify the dead, nor plead or pray for anything. Therefore, their practice has nothing to do with idol worship. Nor can it be called superstition.³

The meaning of Ricci's comments on ancestor-worship could be interpreted on two levels. First, ancestor-worship helped to sustain the moral principle of

filial piety. Second, from the Christian point of view, ancestor-worship was not the same as idol-worship, hence did not need to be rejected as a heretic ritual.

From the historical point of view, the tradition of ancestor-worship in China cannot be simplified in the way Ricci did. As a rite, it has undergone a gradual development and a series of changes. It is proven by archeological discoveries that ancestor-worship played an important role in the Yin dynasty and that its gradual approximating of and merging with the previous deity-worship practices helped to set up the paradigm for later Chinese religion, in which ancestor-worship overweighed deity-worship.

During the Yin dynasty, ancestor-worship was still more or less a religious ritual. This resulted from the Yin people's deep conviction that their tribe was consigned by the Celestial Emperor to rule the human world, and the earthly kingdom was exactly the manifestation of the will of the Celestial Emperor. In their view, the Celestial Emperor had no direct contact with the lowly masses; thus, the latter's pleading could not reach the former. Therefore, it was only through their representative, the royal family and with the help of its ancestors, that the entreaties of the ordinary people could be heard. The ancestors were worshipped because it was believed that they had the power either to bless or to curse.

Owing to the stress on secular moral teaching, or, "the impact of the humanistic spirit", the end of the Zhou dynasty witnessed a change in worship practices. They began to shift toward secularized ethical ideas, such as "tracing to the source, returning to the seed" and "taking care to keep in mind the origin, and the people will stick to their virtuous nature". A signal illustration is a work entitled *On Rites* by Xun Zi, an ancient philosopher. Fundamentally an atheist, Xun Zi rejected the theological connotation of the concept of "heaven", and denied that "rite" was a "heaven-ordained order". As an alternative, he proposed "rite used to nurture affection" and "rite used to encourage gentility" as an explanation of the origin and function of "rite". Xun Zi commented on the rite of sacrifice this way:

To sacrifice is to express the feeling of missing and love.

...

To be thoroughly faithful and respectful, impeccably polite and polished – who is capable of these except sages? Sages understand it, scholars practice it; officials reinforce it; and then masses will adopt it as a custom. To the learned, it is the human way. To the unlettered, it is a religious practice.⁴

This quotation shows the moral orientation of Xun Zi's interpretation of rite and ritual (including ancestor-worship). The religious sense was superseded by the secular moral concepts, such as loyalty and piety. It was proved by reliable evidence that Ricci's sound knowledge of Confucian canons, especially Xun Zi's

work, enabled him to draw upon Confucian ideas in explaining the rite of ancestor-worship. As a result, there were remarkable similarities between Ricci's and Xun Zi's interpretations. Yet, even in his adoption of Xun Zi's ideas, misinterpretation was not totally absent. Xun Zi still recognized the rite of sacrifice as representing the human way to the learned and a religious practice to the unlettered, two strains of rite and custom in ancestor-worship, which characterized the different practices of the upper class and the people. Xun Zi noticed the religious, or superstitious, coloring of ancestor-worship among the folk people. Ricci, however, paid no attention to the original religious meaning of ancestor-worship, neither did he try to differentiate ancestor-worship as a rite and as a religious practice; perhaps he even deliberately ignored it. Instead, his reading of ancestor-worship in Confucian culture was exclusively moral-oriented. This strategy, frequently employed by Ricci, included two aspects. On the one hand, he started from the presumption of a common ground, and tried to reconcile the elements in Confucianism and cardinal Christian doctrines, which were seemingly similar, yet fundamentally different. On the other hand, he took great pains to dissolve the religious or heretical meaning of Confucian thoughts, concepts, customs and rites, which were incompatible with Christianity and undoubtedly religious or superstitious. Ricci intended to convince the Europeans that the Chinese rite was acceptable to Christianity. Only through this strategy could Ricci win support and sympathy from the religious headquarters of the European Catholic Church. The same strategy also enabled him to appeal to the Chinese mentality, and to avoid a complete rejection of western learning, which could have stemmed from the cultural clash.

The ancient Roman philosopher Lucretius held that nothing could come into being if atoms made no deviation, hence no collision, while traversing across vast space according to the gravity principle. In his *The Anxiety of Influence*, Bloom used this idea as a metaphor for his theory and treated deviation as a type of misreading. What I want to point out here is that if Ricci's misinterpretation of ancestor-worship in China stems from his lack of pertinent knowledge, his version of the Confucian "heaven" and the "Sovereign on High" is none other than a deliberate distortion of the original meaning. Ricci quoted profusely the *Five Canons* about the Celestial Emperor to support his notions, such as: "Our God is exactly the same as the Celestial Emperor in the ancient canons" and "God and the Celestial Emperor differ only in their names". In order to prove the supremacy of God, or "the Celestial Emperor", he even criticized Zhu Xi's authoritative work *The Annotated Version of the Four Books*. In the *Golden Mean*, one of the *Four Books*, Confucius was cited as saying, "we offer sacrifice to heaven and earth in order to serve the Celestial Emperor". Zhu Xi noted, "The Celestial Empress was omitted for the sake of brevity". Ricci argued against him, saying, "In my opinion, Confucius undoubtedly meant the Celestial Emperor as

an inseparable unity. Brevity was not the reason". Yet, according to Ricci, Zhu's note did not make any sense. He also interpreted "Heaven" in Confucian canons as God, because "heaven is the greatest", implying the one and only supreme Lord.⁵

By voluntarily appealing to the scholar-officials' adoration for antiquity, and by extolling and christianizing "the Celestial Emperor" in Confucian canons, Ricci hoped to lead them to God. Nevertheless, the Confucian "Celestial Emperor" is essentially different from God. It is true that deity-worship is the oldest religion in China. "This supreme deity was named 'heaven' in the Xia dynasty and the 'Celestial Emperor' in the Yin dynasty. The highly civilized Zhou people started to combine the two into the 'Heavenly Celestial Emperor'". As recorded in the explication of the cracks in the oracle bones, the deity, whom the Yin people named the "Celestial Emperor" or "Emperor", was in charge of natural phenomena, and the dispensation of bliss and punishment in the human world. The religious overtone of deity-worship is remarkable. Nevertheless, essential differences exist between the Celestial Emperor, or deity, and the supreme Christian God. The Celestial Emperor was neither hypostasized as a creator of the world nor personified as a flesh-and-blood savior.⁶ Ricci had no interest in discerning these original differences, but simply borrowed the title of "Celestial Emperor" (which was familiar to the scholar-officials), and wished to waken the scholars' fancy for their old religion. By establishing the affinities between the scholars and the ancients, Ricci hoped to promote their understanding of and belief in Catholicism, which was "just the same" (in fact, only superficially similar) as the old religion.

Ricci's affirmation and praise of Confucianism were based on his misreading. In his view, no other peoples made fewer mistakes in ancient times than the Chinese; there was no essential difference between Confucianism and Christianity. Although they had lost the ancient religious tradition, the Chinese led an honest, faithful life, guided by Confucian teachings and the natural law, or reason. Chinese ancestor-worship was not idol-worship. On the contrary, it contributed a lot to the ethical life. Ricci's conception of Confucianism had two consequences. Firstly, it sowed the seed for the later "Disputation on Rite and Ritual", the central issue of which was the two terms ("the Celestial Emperor" and "God") and the Western attitude toward the Chinese rite. The quarrel between the European Catholic Church and the missionaries lasted more than a century. Secondly, Ricci's conception paved the way for creative misreading and the adoption of Chinese thought during the European Enlightenment.

According to the interpretation of missionaries like Ricci, the Chinese people never had a share in the bliss of the Gospels. In other words, they had not the least idea about Christian Revelation. Yet, they formulated a healthy moral system, which contributed to their matchless statecraft and advanced culture. The fact

proved that “it is not impossible to create a society made up of atheists exclusively”. In other words, society could develop without religion. This conclusion was drawn by Pierre Bayle (1647-1706), the last metaphysicist of the 17th century and the first philosopher of the 18th century, in his renowned work *Historical and Critical Dictionary*. Obviously, he had used China as an example, and drawn on the information introduced to the West by the missionaries, in order to debase religion and to extol reason. By so doing, he pioneered the Enlightenment movement.

The German philosopher, Leibniz (1646-1716) took the side of Longobardi, another missionary whose conception of Confucianism was essentially different from that of Ricci’s, and believed that all Chinese were atheists. Later, owing to his close contact with missionaries, such as Joachim Bouvet and C. F. Grimaldi, he shifted to Ricci’s side, accepted his theory of Chinese culture, and became a Chinese culture champion who enjoyed the most profound knowledge of Confucianism among his European contemporaries. He praised Confucius as the king of Chinese philosophy, and was convinced that the Chinese people worshipped reason, hence were deists, and that their deism enabled them to become the most virtuous people. Compared to the Chinese, what the Europeans had achieved in practical philosophy, including their life ethics and statecraft, was too piteously insignificant. In his opinion, the reason-oriented moral system of the Chinese was a prescription for man’s sin. He even proposed “to have missionaries sent from China to teach us (Europeans) the application and practice of deism”.⁷

Leibniz’s theory of Chinese culture was further developed by his disciple Woolf. He replaced Leibniz’s “the good” with “the true” as the criterion in evaluating and extolling Chinese culture. He observed, “the real foundation of philosophy is what agrees with the natural human reason. Anything against it is falsehood, and cannot be regarded as the real foundation” and “what contains the basis is true. Otherwise, it is false. This touchstone testifies the greatest truth in Chinese philosophy”. Woolf sang high praise for the Chinese people’s dependence on their own reason, rather than a deity’s revelation. This attitude, he said, enabled the Chinese people to “act not out of habitude, or fear of the master, but completely out of their free will”, therefore, “the action of the Chinese people implies an absolute power, which is drastically diminished in the action of us Europeans!”⁸

Objectively speaking, Leibniz, Woolf and some other Enlightenment thinkers exaggerated and imagined a lot in their eulogizing of Chinese culture and social conditions. Their picture of China was undoubtedly shaped by people like Ricci, who provided them with an inaccurate description of the reality of Chinese life through their misreading of Chinese cultural canons. The Enlightener’s affirmation and evaluation of Chinese philosophy and culture may not be accurate,

it may even be completely wrong. Yet it was through misreading and idealizing China that they extolled human nature, reason, and human rights. It is proven by historical facts that Confucius was once adopted by the Enlighteners as their patron god, and his ideas as a powerful weapon against Medieval religion. From this, we can conclude that, no matter what the original intention of the mediators might be, the communication between two essentially different cultures will inevitably transcend that intention and lead to their own constructive transmission, interpretation and application on a larger scale. What the Jesuit missionaries introduced to the Westerners were undoubtedly ideological bits and pieces from Chinese feudal culture. Yet, for the rising bourgeoisie and their Enlightenment movement, these bits and pieces became their reason-charged spiritual support. This fact demonstrates that the objective result of mutual interpretation and adoption of two qualitatively different cultures is unpredictable, so long as the two parties start with their respective needs and carry it on with sensitive creativity. More often than not, it can help the birth of a new age and accelerate the development of a new ideology.

Scholar-Officials' Interpretation and Adoption of Catholicism

It was not until the early 17th century, that is, nearly twenty years after the arrival of Western missionaries, that some influential scholar-officials became receptive to Catholicism, apart from engaging in adopting, studying and spreading Western science. It was recorded in "An Introduction to Italy" in *The History of the Ming Dynasty* that the missionaries in China "were esteemed and solicited by officials of all ranks. Nevertheless, as Ye Xianggao, the head of the Cabinet, observed, "Those who had a real belief in Catholicism and could really see through the business of life counted no more than a handful".⁹ Among them were Xu Guangqi, Li Zhizao, Sun Yuanhua, Wang Zheng and Yang Tingjun. Owing to their decisive influence, Xu, Li and Yang were known among the Jesuits and Chinese converts as "Three Pillars in Catholicism". In this article, I want to use Xu Guangqi as an example to illustrate how their prepossession by the Chinese traditional culture influenced the scholar-officials' misreading and adopting of Catholicism.

By the time of the 16th and the 17th centuries, it was not easy to find in Chinese ideological tradition an equivalent for the Western "religion". Scholar-officials often cherished the cultural legacy created and handed down by saints and philosophers as "teachings" and "codes". These concepts were extremely inclusive. Xu Guangqi was no exception in adopting and employing them. In his view, "teaching" and "codes" included the usually ignored physics as well as metaphysics. In his *Ke Tong Wen Suan Zhi Xu* (1614), he wrote: "In our country,

the Yellow Emperor started the subject of arithmetic, in order to cooperate with Rong Cheng, the calendarist. The subject was already full-fledged by the Zhou dynasty. Scholars had to sit in a test in this subject before they were able to obtain official posts. Those who mastered the Confucian Six Arts could enter the hall and take the high seat. If arithmetic were omitted, the Confucian teaching would be destroyed". Obviously, the Six Arts in the Confucian teaching did not exclude arithmetic. The inclusive nature of "teachings" and "codes" rendered them comparable to what we call "nature" today. Xu Guangqi made great efforts to restore arithmetic to its position in the "holy learning and orthodox strain". By exalting science, which was very much neglected in the Ming dynasty, he hoped to advance the transmission and application of the fruits of western science, which he believed and loved deeply. Yet, when he and some other scholar-officials identified Catholicism with the Western religion, which was introduced into China by people like Ricci, along with western science, they offered a misinterpretation based on the common-ground-presumption. Because of this, a French scholar criticized the belief of Xu and his followers as a "hodgepodge" of religion and science and technology, rather than pure Catholicism. Nevertheless, if we recognise the influence exerted by the traditional concept of "teachings" on the mental habit of the scholars, we will see this criticism is totally unreasonable. Because of his misinterpretation, Xu Guangqi went on to divide Catholicism into three categories: "Roughly speaking, his (Ricci's) theory falls into three categories. The foremost includes self-refinement and devotion to God. The next involves tracing the internal workings of every phenomenon to the utmost. Following this is the treatment of concrete objects".¹⁰ In other words, Catholicism included morals and religion, which are concerned with self-refinement and devotion to God, and philosophy and science, which deal with the internal workings of the Chinese scholars to assimilate and adopt Western learning on the basis of their native concepts, such as "teachings" and "codes". This misinterpretation spared Xu the trouble of coining new terms, such as "pure religion". The common-ground- presumption was also responsible for his misinterpreting the Catholic doctrine, "serving God through self-abnegation". "We (Xu and Ricci) used to peruse the miscellaneous as well as significant points. Surprisingly, however, among such a large number of remarks, we did not find a single one which went against the principle of loyalty and piety, or did harm to moral life". His interpreting Catholicism in terms of Confucian teachings was immediately attacked as a corrupt reading and also an abuse of the religion. At the same time, his interpretation struck one as an apology for Catholicism.

In addition, Xu Guangqi voluntarily adopted Ricci's misreading of the "Celestial Emperor" in Chinese canons. According to Longobardi, Xu was clearly aware of the difference between God and the Celestial Emperor. "He

believed firmly that neither the ancient nor the contemporary Chinese people had any idea about God. Yet, since the priests identified God with the Celestial Emperor out of good intention, the ordinary people had no right to object. What's more, since the title had survived, he concluded that it was rewarding for us to transfer the attributes of God to the 'Celestial Emperor'. As for the soul, he believed that the Chinese people's knowledge of it was far from enough".¹¹ Xu's voluntary misreading was meaningful in two ways. To say the least, it reflected his intellectual and spiritual need for Catholicism. Besides, it signified his prudence in selecting an appropriate approach to Catholicism, which was later so frequently attacked by orthodox scholar-officials.

As a self-claimed skeptic, Xu directed his doubts and criticism against traditional Chinese culture, for two reasons. Firstly, he was deeply convinced that Catholicism could settle his ultimate concern, help him "see through the business of life", and to reassure him of "the salvation of his body and soul". Secondly, Ricci had given an exaggerated depiction of "the thirty-odd Western Catholic countries" as "an Elysium" ruled by universal sympathy, consideration and peace for thousands of years. Xu sought to find or to establish a universally valid moral system that could encourage people "to pursue the good to the perfect, to eliminate the evil to the last". According to him, the Catholic moral system enjoyed a universal validity because Westerners believed in a creator-savior God, who dispensed reward and retribution with so much justice that his power "overwhelmed people", whose religious emotion of awe could not but "flow from the bottom of their hearts". Contrary to Catholicism, Chinese traditional moral philosophy lacked universal validity. Xu Guangqi argued as follows:

Emperors and kings since the ancient time have practiced rewarding and retribution. Saints have engaged themselves in evaluation. They spare no efforts in regularizing people with the good and keeping them from the evil. Yet punishment and rewards can change only the external, and not the internal. As Sima Qian observed, the untimely death of Yan Hui the good man, and the longevity of Dao Du the evil man made people doubt the inevitability of justice. Therefore, the more the rulers keep on guard, the wilder deception runs. Once one law is laid down, a hundred evils find loopholes. The ruler aspires to rule wisely, but his resources fail him... How can all people be led to do good? The only remedy lies in Catholicism brought in by Western missionaries.¹²

In Xu's opinion, Chinese moral reason was no longer satisfactory or self-sufficient. The optimistic belief in the moral inclination to the good gave place to the reverence of an absolutely just God. The moral-oriented "royal dispensation of justice and the saintly engagement in evaluation" was no longer unconditionally effective. According to him, "sincere belief, faithful action", or the absolutely unfeigned moral intention and action, could only come from an

external, supreme deity (God) who could inspire the religious awe. This notion represented Xu's voluntary shift from the secular to the religious moral, and from the internal transcending to the external transcending. Xu believed that this shift could "redeem Confucianism and repel Buddhism", or "improve the human reign" and "recuperate Buddhism".

Xu Guangqi's bold critique of Chinese traditional culture blended with the wave of critical thinking at the end of the Ming dynasty. He started his criticism by comparing and reflecting on the tripartite Chinese traditional culture (including Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism) and the Western medieval religious moral, together with its function and effects as advocated by missionaries. He believed that he had found a satisfactory moral system in Catholicism. Yet all this was based on his personal experience. He based his examination of the Catholic influences and function on Ricci's imagined Western Elysium. The approach determined that his argument about the universal validity of Catholicism was nothing but a misinterpretation. Yet, this very misinterpretation deepened his comparative research of Chinese and Western philosophies, broadened his imaginary horizon, and separated him from the orthodox scholar-officials who inclined to the illusion that the Cathayan civilization was the best, and that what applied to China also applied to the world. The misinterpretation led him to imagine that there was a western world which enjoyed a more advanced culture and stronger power, and that the Middle Empire of China, which was deteriorating both economically and culturally, must modestly learn from the Western world, or "consult with them in modesty", so that "their achievements accumulated through three thousand years will fall into our hands instantly".¹³ Only in this way could China catch up with the West. For this purpose, Xu advocated the strategy of "overtaking through communication", which meant that China must communicate with the West both in culture and science, in order to overtake the latter. This competitive sense was very valuable. Le Wenshen once observed, "The old-fashioned Chinese culturalists have no sense of competition", because "competition is the essence of nationalism".¹⁴ Indeed, only when people gave up the illusion of an all-inclusive Cathayan civilization, could the competition sense be introduced into the scientific or ideological-cultural creative activities, and on the basis of differentiation, that is. In this aspect, Xu Guangqi was a worthy forerunner. Nevertheless, his competitive sense, as well as some concrete strategies, did not arouse particular interest in the ideological world in the Ming and Qing dynasties. Only when the Middle Empire was brought to face an even more powerful Western world, which posed a threat to its very existence, did Xu's idea resurface and assert its life force in various ways in modern patriotic movements.

Differentiating and the Resultant Interruption in Creation

The misreading of Chinese and Western cultures by Ricci and Xu Guangqi undoubtedly provided a chance for the creative communication between China and the West. In this sense, “misreading is healthy from the historical point of view”. In a particular historical period, however, misreading, to an individual, could be “a violation against continuity, because it contradicts the sole authority which recognizes nothing but itself”.¹⁵ In the case of Ricci and Xu Guangqi, this authority was Catholicism of the “holy learning and orthodox strain” of Chinese Confucianism. Consequently, we should not be surprised when their misreading met with criticism from the Jesuits and the Chinese scholars and monks.

During Ricci’s activity in China, some Jesuits were already showing their dissatisfaction with his preaching strategy. After his death, missionaries were continually sent to China from the Dominican order, the Franciscan order and the Capuchin order. More and more people took issue with the “Riccian Rules”, accusing Ricci of identifying the Celestial Emperor with God, humoring ancestor-worship and adoring Confucius. His most radical opponents included Longobardi and Didaco de Pantoja. They stressed the qualitative differences between God and the Celestial Emperor in Confucian canons, and warned against confusion. The Chinese people’s “sacrificing to ancestors is a heretic ritual. The converts must not practice it, lest our holy religion should be contaminated”.¹⁶ The missionaries’ discriminatory insistence and uncompromising attitude gave rise to a disputation of rite and ritual, which lasted a whole century, until even the Roman Pope and the Emperor Kang Xi of the Qing dynasty became involved. Pope Clemens VI decreed in 1704 that Chinese believers must not adore Confucius or worship their ancestors. In 1705, the Pope’s special missionary, Carlo de Tournon, was dispatched to China and was granted an interview with the Emperor. Upon realizing that de Tournon’s mission was to get rid of “Riccian rules”, the Emperor promptly announced, “From now on, anybody who disobeys the Riccian rules shall be expelled from China”. Those who abided by the rules and received a certificate for doing so were allowed to stay in China. In 1720, another missionary, Jean Ambroise Mezzabarba, was sent to China to demand again the suspension of the Riccian Rules. As a reaction against the Pope’s uncompromising attitude, the Emperor Kang Xi ordered a complete ban of Western religion. The peaceful communication between China and the West met with a man-made interruption.

Prior to this, at the end of the Ming dynasty, an anti-West wave was already brewing among the orthodox scholar-officials and Buddhist monks. In 1616, Shen Que, a second-rate official of the Department of Rites in Nanjing, pleaded to the Emperor Wan Li thrice, suggesting that churches be pulled down and that missionaries be expelled. He also alluded to Xu Guangqi and others who helped