

# THE ACTS OF FR. MATTEO RICCI IN CHINA: A MISSIONARY FRIENDSHIP IN DIALOGUE AND DIALECTIC

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## **ABSTRACT: The Acts of Fr. Matteo Ricci in China: A Missionary Friendship in Dialogue and Dialectic.**

Rather than being a condescending and coercive missionary, as many later Christians did in non-Western countries during the colonial era, Fr. Matteo Ricci, S.J., approached the Chinese with humility and candidness. With humility and openness to learn, Ricci adopted the elegant Chinese classical way of living and became the Chinese people's, or at least Confucian intellectual elites' friends. Ricci also believed that the Chinese could become Chinese Christians in their own way, rather than became like Europeans to be Christians.

In this paper, I divide Ricci's missionary activities in China into three steps: Firstly, Fr. Ricci created a friendship through humility. Secondly, learn from the Chinese to be accepted as a friend or intellectual-cultural "equal." Thirdly, with mutual respect, virtuous common ground and Friendship, Ricci initiated his "missionary dialectic," or a Communication of Christian Truth, with the Chinese people. To provide evidence, I draw from two of Ricci's major works written in classical Chinese, i.e., *Jiao You Lun, Treatise on Friendship* and *Zhen-zhu shi'yi*, i.e., the *True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*. The *Treatise* is Ricci's gift to a Chinese prince introducing the commonality between the Chinese and "Western" concept of friendship, and the other one is a imagined dialogue between a Chinese gentleman and his Western Christian friend.

By making my argument, my paper should demonstrate that conflicts may be solved through mutual respect, and, through dialogues, friendship can be built between those who are very different.

**Keywords:** *Anti-Colonialism, Inculturation, human dignity, Mutual Respect, Cross-Cultural and Cross-Religious Common Grounds, Cultural Dialogue, Philosophical Dialectic, Missionary Friendship.*

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## Introduction:

Fr. Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), known as Li Madou in Chinese, was an Italian Jesuit missionary, who from 1582 to 1610 evangelized the Chinese Confucian intellectuals and Scholar-Officials<sup>2</sup> of Ming Dynasty (1368 – 1644). Ricci's life in China demonstrates a series of exemplary missionary *acts* grounded upon both *friendship* and the dialectic *Communication of Wisdom*.

Many other missionaries that came after Ricci, e.g., Dominican missionaries in China, considered Ricci's missionary *acts* to the Ming Chinese as overly inculturating, even to the point of compromising Catholic rituals, liturgical languages, and certain trinitarian and Christological doctrines. As many biographies and portrays demonstrate, Ricci behaved like a Chinese Confucian scholar by speaking their language and adopting their demeanor and courtesies (Figure 1). Ricci even adopted Confucian, especially Neo-Confucian, intellectual languages and philosophical terminologies to articulate the natural and cosmological concepts of God.

Ricci's *acts* in the late 16<sup>th</sup> Century Chinese empire demonstrate that missionary work for non-European non-Christians ought to start with the establishment of friendship between missionaries and their proselytizing subjects. Then, there should be a patient dialectic communication of the Truth of God. I divided Fr. Ricci's friendly missionary toward the Chinese Confucians into three steps, which I shall address in the three parts of this paper, respectively:

- ✦ **First, with his friendly humility**, Fr. Ricci aimed to build a friendship with the Ming Dynasty Confucian intellectuals in order to start an intellectual dialogue based upon **mutual respect** with them. Hence, he could pave a way for his missionary acts and evangelization *gradually*.
- ✦ **Secondly, after being accepted as a friend or intellectual-cultural "equal," Ricci endeavored to establish common grounds or common pursuits**. This is especially manifested in the fact that both Christians and Confucians pursue a life of virtue or *benevolence*, and friendship is the means for increasing each friend's virtue.

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2 Known as *Shi'da'fu* in Chinese; They are "self-made aristocrats." They were scholars of Confucian Classics. After passing the Imperial Exams which are based upon the question for application of Confucian principles, they become qualified for officer-ship, and many other social prestige.

- ✦ **At last, with mutual respect, virtuous common ground and Friendship, a dialectic, or a Communication of Truth began.** Fr. Ricci debated with the Confucian intellectuals on the concept of God, especially in terms of God as the *origin* of humanity and human virtue.

Especially, Fr. Matteo Ricci appealed to humanistic, cosmological, and philosophical concepts of Confucian intellectuals, with the intent of leading ideologies within Chinese society to be open to the Gospels and concepts of God.)

It is manifest that Fr. Ricci's missionary *acts* not only spread the Truth of God to the Chinese by initiating a dialogue, but his *acts* also followed the tradition of Christian missionaries to the gentiles, which aligned with the *acts* of St. Paul to the Greeks. Therefore, Fr. Ricci's *missionary acts* in the Ming Dynasty of China demonstrate the following rule of cross-cultural evangelization: *Rather than being an act of coercion and assertion, a missionary act is instead grounded upon a friendship in the form of dialogue and dialectic about the Truth of God.*

(A missionary friendship paves the way for evangelization by building ground of mutual respect and dialogue.)

## **I. A Friendship that Initiates with Humility and Mutual Respect**

### **Section 1: A Friendship That is Expressed and Initiated in a Form of Humility**

Friendship initiates *a cultural and intellectual dialogue* between the Jesuit missionaries and the Chinese Confucians that is grounded upon a *mutual respect* of each other's cultural, intellectual, and ethical values. Before initiating his friendship with the Chinese, Fr. Ricci faced two difficulties: *First*, just like Ricci's "arrogant" Christian compatriots in Renaissance Macerate, Chinese Confucian intellectuals thought that besides the Confucian virtues, there was no other truly virtuously beneficial system of thinking. Fr. Ricci was sensitive enough to know that many Chinese Confucian intellectuals felt disdainful toward the Jesuits because they thought the Jesuits did not have too much virtue and were uncultured. *Second*, in contrast to the gigantic population of the Ming Dynasty, the amount of Catholic missionaries was trivial. There was almost no Christian population to support the missionaries. Nevertheless, Fr. Ricci loved the Chinese for their own

benefit as their good friend in a Thomistic-Aristotelian sense, i.e., leading these people to appreciate God in their innate Chinese ways and religious mentality. Hence, Fr. Ricci chose to first evangelize the Confucian intellectuals, who were also smaller in population, yet lived as cultural and moral exemplars in the Ming society.<sup>3</sup>

For the sake of initiating a missionary friendship with the Confucian intellectuals, Fr. Ricci perceived the importance of earning the Chinese people's sincere respect for the Jesuit missionaries as well as for himself. Like a friend, Fr. Ricci *at first appreciated the basic human dignity of Confucian intellectuals as rational human beings and a people who had admirable tradition and culture.* Fr. Ricci adopted Chinese, especially Confucian *Official-Scholar*<sup>4</sup>, manifestations and courtesies of friendship. As it is also explicitly written in the Christian Bible, *humility*, or *qian* 謙 in classical Chinese, is an essential virtue for both students and visitors, and even seniors, in Chinese and Confucian culture.<sup>5</sup> Fr. Ricci humbled himself as a student as a preparation to be exalted as a missionary of God. In the prologue of his pamphlet to Prince Jian-An, *Jiao-You-Lun* or *On Friendship*, Fr. Ricci stated his goal to come to Ming empire in elegant, concise, written Chinese. Fr. Ricci says,

I, Matteo, from the Far West, have sailed across the seas and entered China with respect for the learned virtue of the *Son of Heaven*<sup>6</sup> of the Great Ming dynasty as well as for the *teachings bequeathed by the ancient kings*<sup>7</sup>. . . In the spring of this year, I crossed the mountains, sailed down the river, and arrived in Jinling, where I beheld the glo-

3 Cronin, *The Wise Man from the West*, 101.

4 See Footnote 1.

5 For instance, in *The Analects* 5.15, it is said:

Zigong asks: "How come Kong Wenzi is titled with *Wen* [that is literate and refined]?" Confucius says: "He is perceptive and always willing to learn. [Most importantly,] he is even not ashamed of seeking advice and knowledge from those who are inferior to himself. Hence, [Kong Wenzi] is called *Wen*!"

6 Son of Heaven: equivalent to the *European* "Divine Rights of King." Under the concept of the *Mandate of Heaven*, each Chinese emperor is permitted and "adopted" by *Tian* (Heaven) to be the governor of the country. During Fr. Ricci's time in the Ming China, the "Son of Heaven" was emperor Wan-Li, Zhu Yijun (Reign: 1572 – 1620)

7 Yao, Shun, and Yu, King of Wen and Wu, Duke of Zhou: All of them are known for their *benevolent* policy, and education of subjects through *rituals and music*. In a Platonic sense, they are [Confucian] philosopher kings.

ry of the capital of the kingdom, which filled me with happiness, and I thought that it was not in vain that I had made this voyage.<sup>8</sup>

In the entire prologue of *On Friendship*, Fr. Ricci does not explicitly mention that he, as a missionary, was determined to inform the Truth of God to the Chinese. On the contrary, Fr. Ricci *humbly* asserts that he is eager to learn from the Chinese—from their Confucian virtues and civilization. Fr. Ricci decided to be a student of the Confucian intellectuals and then be their friend. He successfully convinced the Confucian intellectuals that he, a Jesuit missionary from the West, shared very similar virtuous pursuits as the Confucians.

## Section 2: A Missionary That is Grounded upon Mutual Respect

In order to make the Chinese people appreciate and respect Christianity, Ricci at first cultivated friendships with them. Ricci aimed to be the Confucian Chinese's "friend" and "intellectual equal" or "classmate" in order to communicate the Truth of God easily with them.<sup>9</sup> In Cronin's opinion, it was possible, that while facing cultural pressures and adversaries, Ricci "returned" to Aquinas's *Summa Theologica* on the rational way of evangelizing the "non-believers" in order to be inspired intellectually and encouraged morally.<sup>10</sup> Regarding preaching to non-Christians, Aquinas says, ". . . it should be induced, not by compulsion but by persuasion, to embrace the faith."<sup>11</sup> An ideal evangelization happened after a missionary's patient theological explanation, as well as his/her own personable and meritorious exemplar. If Ricci really believed that the Chinese deserved the Love of God, he had to "persuade" and guide the Chinese to "embrace the faith" through reason and discussion, rather than condemning and coercing them.

Ricci, as a friend who humbled himself as a student, who was thirsting for Chinese culture and virtuous mode, was *exalted* to be intellectually

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8 Matteo Ricci, *On Friendship : One Hundred Maxims for a Chinese Prince = Jiaoyou Lun*. Translated by Timothy James Billings, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), Prologue. Italics Added.

9 Ambrose Mong, "The Gentle Way," In *Accommodation and Acceptance: An Exploration in Interfaith Relations*, 7-30. James Clarke & Co, (2015): 15.

10 Cronin, *The Wise Man from the West*, 29.

11 S.T. II-II- Qa.10 A.12 Respondo "*Inducendus est infidelis ad fidem non cocatione sed persuasione*"

and “culturally equal” to the Confucian scholars after he humbled himself. Ricci made himself a pupil of Confucian classics at the age of forty.<sup>12</sup> When he addressed a letter to Jesuit Superior General Acquaviva, Fr. Ricci described Confucius as “another Seneca” and *the Analects* as “sound moral documents.”<sup>13</sup> With his impressive linguistic talents and the diligence, Ricci, while still being a Jesuit missionary, became a cultural Confucian. Considering his humanistic aspect, Fr. Ricci had no more alienation from the Chinese intellectuals, just as St. Paul the Apostle, a Hellenistic Pharisee, had no cultural alienation from the Hellenistic Gentiles. A mandarin, and a scholar-official, spoke to Fr. Ricci, stating, “You have become one of us.”<sup>14</sup> In other words, Fr. Ricci made himself an acquaintance and close friend of the Chinese. He even accepted a Chinese courtesy name, Xitai 西泰, i.e., the *Scholar from the Grand and Far West*, besides his Chinese name Li Madou<sup>15</sup>. As Ricci himself became an “Intellectual equal” to Confucian scholars,<sup>16</sup> Ricci, as well as his Chinese friends. Ricci and his Confucian friends discovered their sentiments for friendships being shared within others’ minds.

(Ricci impressed the Chinese with his own determination to spread the Gospels to China which was far from home. Yet, with his inculturation, and willingness to learn their culture and sentiments, Ricci is *remembered as a friend and admired by the Chinese*—and that was the start for his missionary acts in Ming Dynasty China.)

## II. Friendship Proper: Virtuous Friendship and the Common Ground for the Pursuit and Cultivation of Virtue

### Section 1: Mutual Respect and Common ground –The Unfolding of Christian Faith and Expression of Christian Friendship to the Confucian Intellectuals

Fr. Ricci’s *friendship proper* with the Ming Confucian intellectuals, which is grounded upon his “humility” and mutual respect, *prepared* him to discov-

12 Fontana, *Matteo Ricci: A Jesuit in the Ming Court*, 104

13 Ibid.

14 Cronin, *Wise man from the West*, 118

15 Li Madou is a refined Chinese transliteration of the Italian name Matteo Ricci: Mǎdǒu 瑪竇 for Matteo, Lì 利 for Ricci.

16 Mong, “The Gentle Way,” 15.

er the *common ground* and *common vocabularies of virtue and intellect* with the Confucian Intellectuals. Fr. Ricci strove to tell the Chinese Confucian Intellectuals: that despite the fact that he came from the unknown west and believed in the God of Christianity, he had the same humanistic and virtuous pursuits as themselves.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, many Confucian intellectuals accepted him and treated him as a friend with whom they could have *intellectual dialogues and dialectics*. Through this reciprocal intellectual influence, virtuous effects of God, which were manifested by Fr. Ricci's *acts* and *speech*, were gradually unfolded to some Confucian Intellectuals. In Cronin's words,

He [Fr. Ricci] had laid down that the mysteries of faith must be gradually unfolded, otherwise irreparable shock and damage would be done to Chinese sensibility and natural pride. Afterwards, when grace had worked its miracle, the heights and depths of faith could be revealed.<sup>18</sup>

Ricci did not directly address some of the most uncompromising Christian doctrine to avoid doctrinal incompatibility, while emphasizing on developing intellectual common ground and moral friendship with the Chinese.<sup>19 20</sup>

God is the savior for everyone. The missionaries who follow God should also be *friends* with everyone and lead them to the Truth of God

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17 *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, "Ricci's introduction," 9-11.

18 Cronin, *Wise Man from the West*, 279

19 Trinity was not addressed by Fr. Ricci to the Chinese Confucian. For Neo-Confucians, it could be consider as an idolatry to personify *Heaven*. See *Gold Mean XII*

20 Based upon Fr. Ricci's treatise, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, Fr. Ricci did not address a Trinitarian God nor address Christ thoroughly to the Chinese Confucians. For Fr. Ricci, to making the Chinese people to believe in the obscure Trinity is not the first step of their evangelization. On the other hand, Fr. Ricci believes the Chinese ought to *at first believe in the concept of God*, and recognizes that God is the cosmological principle and the origin of their virtues. Thusly, the Chinese would want to know God more themselves through reason and their own philosophical concepts.

However, Fr. Ricci did inform the Chinese that the Christian God (Deus), or *The Lord of Heaven*, is the "Unique Creator" and the "Source of all things." (On the True meaning of the Lord of Heaven, Chapter 1, passage 40 and 42). Christian God is even identified and translated as the "efficient cause" (作者 Zuo-Zhe) and the "final causes" (为者 wei-zhe) by Fr. Ricci. (On the True meaning of the Lord of Heaven, Chapter 1, passage 46) Also, Fr. Ricci says that God transcends all the categories (Chapter 1, passage 55)



with patience and goodwill. In Fr. Ricci's own journal in the Ming Empire, he says,

At times some of the more learned Chinese, who were interested in the religious customs of the Christian world, requested that we discuss the whole question [about the nature and God of Christianity] more *openly and freely* and also the question of Chinese idols.<sup>21</sup>

If God is both the *natural* and *divine* Truth, as the Gospel of John indicates, He *can be learned substantially but not thoroughly* through naturalistic inquiries and rational dialectics (John 1: 1-3). Then, further questions of God's Divine mystery, that arise naturally, will be answered by the Scripture with the *help and correction* of missionaries and virtuous clergymen. In this missionary way rooted in common ground, Confucian scholars could appreciate Christianity deeply, naturally, and may contemplate of and believe in God sincerely.

## **Section 2: Friendship as the means for both the Chinese and Christians to practice virtue: Fu-Ren. i.e., To Help One's Friends to Practice Benevolence or Humanity (Ren)**

Thus, rather than choosing a condescending or didactic way to evangelize the Confucian intellectuals, Fr. Ricci, as a friend who was *equally* versed in Chinese classics and acquainted with Confucian courtesy, demonstrated that he himself came to have dialogues and dialectics for the Truth and the way of cultivating each person's virtue with him/her. It is an *equal and reciprocal intellectual* exchange but not an indoctrination from an authoritarian master to his ignorant students. For both the Chinese and Catholics, a *virtuous friendship* is the *basis* for the dialectic friendship for the sake of the communication of Truth. For the Confucians, a major function of friendship is called *fu-ren* (輔仁), or to be *auxiliary assistants of each other's benevolence* (Ren). Likewise, for the Catholics, an essential role of virtuous friendship is the *communication of truth* and the *fraternal correction*, under the common pursuit of *Charity in the same God*. Therefore, a common ground for the virtuous friendship between the Confucians and Catholics is *the reciprocal aid for the cultivation and perfection of virtue*. For the

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21 Ricci, Matteo, and Nicolas Trigault. (1953. *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Matthew Ricci, 1583-1610*. New York: Random House.), 156. *Italics Added*.



Confucians, the cultivation or “self-improvement” of virtue, by means of practicing benevolence (*Ren*) and social propriety and righteousness (*Yi*) in moral and appropriate actions, is the foundation for all the philosophical principles.<sup>22 23</sup> The Confucian practice of virtue is parallel to the humanistic duties of Christians before they were evaluated by the mystical power of Christ and Holy Spirit.

Fr. Ricci discovered that despite the theological distinction between the Christian and Confucian systems, both Christianity and Confucianism value friendship as a means for an individual to cultivate virtue, share insight, and make corrections to each other’s intellectual and moral mistakes.<sup>24</sup> Hence, each one needs help from others, especially from his or her virtuous friends. Ricci humbly suggests that he himself needs the Chinese scholars’ help to learn the advanced culture and civilization of the Ming empire. Reciprocally, the Chinese intellectuals would also need his help to know God.<sup>25</sup> There are two passages from Fr. Ricci’s *Treatise on Friendship* that expresses the cruciality of friends and friendship for moral correction in both the Confucian and Catholic systems.<sup>26</sup> Fr. Ricci says,

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22 See the Confucian and Neo-Confucian synopsis for each Confucian from the classics *the Great Learning*: (Tu Wei-ming, “Wang Yang-Ming’s Four Sentence Teaching, p. 33-34)

(1) Investigation of things ; (2) extension of knowledge; (3) sincerity of the will; (4) rectification of the mind; (5) Self-Cultivation; (6) regulating family; (7) ordering the state; (8) bringing peace throughout the world.

23 Michael Loewe, “Imperial China’s Reactions to the Catholic Missions.” *Numen* 35, no. 2 (1988): 193.

24 *The Analects* 12:24

25 For missionaries like Fr. Ricci, to inform people the existence of the Christian God is to tell or to share *the Truth*,

26 **Nature of Jiao-You-Lun, or On Friendship:**

1) To the Prince of Jian-An, answering him “what Westerners thought of friendship” with “all that he could remember from European philosophers and saints.” (*Wise Man from the West*, 128)

2) composed in a style similar to the *Analects*, or axioms of Confucius and his students.

3) Words of Latin, Greek authors, and some Christian fathers’, e.g., St. Augustine’s, sayings, are included in the *treatise*. For example, St. Augustine’s saying, “He to whom I can show my heart completely becomes my intimate friend,” is included in the *treatise On Friendship (A Jesuit in the Ming Court, 127)*.

*On Friendship*, a collection of ideographs in 1595, gift to Prince Kang Yi (*A Jesuit in the Ming Court, 127*)

“Mutual need and mutual support are the reasons to make friends.”<sup>27</sup>

Each person cannot fully complete every task, for which reason *the Lord on High* commanded that there be friendship in order that we might render aid to one another. If this Way were eradicated from the world, humankind would surely disintegrate into ruin.<sup>28</sup>

Ricci wrote these two passages to introduce the Western humanistic approaches to *virtuous friendship*, which encompasses equality, reciprocity, and mutual or reciprocal aid for the *practice and cultivation of virtue*. Also, those Western concepts of friendship are expressed in equivalent Chinese terminologies. However, Ricci moderately suggests the existence of a *Lord on High* to the Chinese intellectual elites, by deliberately suggesting that God, or *the Lord on High*, is the creator of Friendship.

For Confucians, to become sages, *sheng ren*, is one's highest achievement.<sup>29</sup> These two passages from Ricci echo a Confucian maxim from *The Analects*:

Master Zeng said: “The noble-minded [Jun-zi] use cultivation to assemble their friends, and friends to sustain their *Humanity* [or, *Ren, Benevolence*].”<sup>30</sup>

Through practicing arts and skills that are virtuously beneficial to each other's characters, e.g., correcting each other, playing Go, and doing *competition of ritual archery*, friends help each other to cultivate their *Ren*, or *benevolence*, which is a major Confucian principle and goal for a sage. As a matter of fact, the relationship between friends is one of the five major ethical, social, and ritual relationships; which are known also *Wu-Lun*, which include: 1) subject and objects, 2) fathers and sons, 3) older brothers and young brothers, 4) wives and husbands, 5) friend and friend.<sup>31</sup> Furthermore, both the Confucians and Christians adopt *benevolence*, or *charity*

27 *The Treatise on Friendship*, axiom 2.

28 *The Treatise on Friendship*, Axiom 16/ Location 1553, Italics added.

29 *Shengren*: In an Aristotelian sense, it is person who fulfills his or her excellence of virtue and character. He or she actualized the excellence of benevolence and righteousness with proper and good actions.

30 *The Analects* 12:24 君子以文会友，以友辅仁。

31 *Golden Mean* 20.

which have similar essence but different manifestation, as the principle of their ethics respectively. Hence, Confucianism is compatible with Aristotelian and Thomistic concepts of friendship—both the interpretation of friendship argue that the major function of friendship is to help each other to practice his or her virtue out of *benevolence* or *charity* to the other for his or her own sake.

The Confucian intellectuals at the moment did not necessarily understand Fr. Ricci's ultimate goal for spreading the good news of the Christian God. However, Fr. Ricci surely communicated a fundamental principle of Christian Charity to the Ming Confucian Intellectuals in a least polemical way. The two passages by Fr. Ricci from *the Treatise on Friendship* cited above suggested that a crucial intention for friendship is to supplement each other, just as St. Paul suggested multiple times in his Epistles, "bear each other's burden." Likewise, the cited passage from *The Analects* suggests: just as the Catholic friendship is a virtuous friendship that is grounded in the desire and cultivation of virtuous life, the Chinese essence of Friendship is also to cultivate each other's *Ren*, *humanity/benevolence*, and, *Yi*, *righteousness/justice*. The Confucians principles of *Ren* and *Yi* are compatible with the Western concepts of *charity* and *justice*, respectively.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, for both Chinese and Christians, friendship is the means for the cultivation of virtue. Therefore, Fr. Ricci found a common ground with Chinese scholars, that both the Chinese and Christians pursue *virtue* and *benevolence*, and friendship ought to be virtuous in order to improve each other's virtue. Thusly, Fr. Ricci discovered a common ground between his own Christian tradition and the Confucian intellectual tradition.<sup>33</sup> Henceforth, Fr. Ricci discovered the *humanistic and virtuous basis*, namely the pursuit of virtue and virtuous friendship, for the dialogues and dialectics between the Jesuit missionaries and the Chinese Confucian intellectuals.

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32 There are two translations for the Confucian Principle *Ren*: *Humanity and Benevolence*, and two for *Yi*, *justice and righteousness*.

33 Michela Fontana, *Matteo Ricci: A Jesuit in the Ming Court*, 105

### III. The Dialectic for the Notion of God — The Communication of Truth

#### Section 1: A Discussion or Dialectic on the Origin of Human Virtue

By means of friendship, Fr. Ricci paved the way for the communication and dialectic of the Truth of God. A meaningful Dialectic is grounded upon the mutual-respect and the common pursuit of virtue. After these two conditions are fulfilled, the dialectic for Truth is ready to begin.

In his treatise, *On the True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, Fr. Ricci said,

He who is called the *Lord of Heaven* in my humble country [Macerate. Papal State] is He who called *Shang-di* (Sovereign on High)<sup>34</sup> in Chinese.<sup>35</sup>

Ricci jettisoned many of his fellow countrymen's sense of superiority as monotheist Christians, and did not despise the Chinese as "heart-hardened pagans." On the contrary, he acknowledges the "cultural nobleness and heritage" of the Chinese. Nevertheless, Fr. Ricci insists to tell the Confucian intellectuals the Truth of God, or of *Shang-di who is known as the Sovereign on High* to them,<sup>36</sup> like a charitable and virtuous friend who is so eager to tell his friends the Truth for happiness, perfect virtue, and the Salvation.

The Chinese people have their own sophisticated natural theology and cosmology which are a product of two thousand years of syncretism

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34 The *Sovereign on High* (*Shang-Di*): before Fr. Ricci adopted this term to render Christian God, the Chinese *Lord Sovereign on High* (*Shang-Di*): was used by some Chinese to address to the highest "Daoist god," Yu-Huang-Shang-Di, or Jade Emperor.

35 Matteo Ricci, S.J., *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* [*T'ien-chu Shib-i*], trans. Douglas Lacashire and Peter Hu Kuo-chen, S.J. (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1985), p.121.

36 Fr. Ricci selected the Chinese words, *Shang-di* (Sovereign on High) and *Tian-Zhu* (Lord of Heaven), which are both loan words from Confucian classics, as equivalent of *Deus* in Chinese.

For more Classical Chinese and Fr. Ricci's reference on the Chinese term *Shang-Di*, see on the *True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, Chapter 2, passage 103 and 104; And *Golden Mean*, XIX, 3.

among Confucianism<sup>37</sup>, Daoism<sup>38</sup>, Buddhism<sup>39</sup>, and School of Yin and Yang<sup>40</sup>. Likewise, in that cultural milieu, the Confucian intellectuals had their unique philosophical, and cosmological system, that does not need a transcendent God, but still equips the concept of universal order, justice, and life after death. Most Confucians during the Ming era believed that virtues have to be cultivated and practiced through virtuous actions and virtuous actions are initiated by themselves as human beings who diligently apply the teaching of Confucian classics in their moral life. Consequently, Christian God as well as Heaven or their philosopher's "god," which are a Being that is external to human nature, irrelevant to virtuous self-cultivation, and not up to human control, ought not to be the primary intellectual inquiry. The prologue of the *Golden Mean*, that summarizes the Neo-Confucian cosmological-anthropological relationship, says,

What *Heaven* (*Tian*, Nature) imparts to man is called human nature. To follow our nature is called the Way (*Dao*). Cultivating the Way is called education. The Way cannot be separated from us for a moment. What can be separated from us is not the Way. Therefore the superior man is cautious over what he does not see and apprehensive over what he does not hear. There is nothing more visible than what is hidden and nothing more manifest than what is subtle. Therefore the superior man is watchful over himself when he is alone.<sup>41</sup>

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37 **(Neo-)Confucianism** emphasizes on *humanity* and human virtue more than the cosmos and natural theology. Although the cosmological order still transcends humans, **virtuous and civilized ethical and societal orders are the inference to the order of Cosmos**. See Confucian classics *Great Learning* and *Golden Mean*.

38 **Daoism** is an antithesis to Confucianism: according to the Daoist interpretation, *the Nature* favors those who purify themselves from artificial conventions, concepts, and selfish desires. Daoism prioritizes the *nature* to the humanity. Nature is *good and harmonious* in itself, but human interpretations of nature and human actions are contrived and dragged people from seeing the original nature. See Daoist classics *Dao-De-Jing*, and *Zhuang-Zi*.

39 **Buddhism**, as a religion of Hindu civilization, facilitated the Chinese to adopt certain Hindu cosmologies: 1) the immortality of soul and reincarnation, 2) the multiplicity of the cosmoses. See Buddhist Sutra *Shorter Sukhāvativyūha Sūtra*.

40 **The School of Ying and Yang** donates the Chinese concept that the cosmos is *sustained* by two harmonizing cosmological dynamisms of Yin (active) and Yang (passive), and five mechanistic elements or cosmological ingredients: metal, wood, water, fire, and earth. (The five elements are equivalent to the Ionian four elements.)

41 *Golden Mean*, Prologue, Trans. Wing-Tsit Chan.

What is the *origin* of the human virtue and its relationship to *Heaven* are not the most crucial concern for many (Neo-)Confucian intellectuals during the Ming Dynasty. On the other hand, all the teachings and wisdom, or *Way (Dao)*, must serve as a guide for each person to practice and cultivate his or her *virtue* in the actual life. Nevertheless, in the Neo-Confucian cosmological system and spirituality, *the Heaven (Tian)*, namely the “organismic”<sup>42</sup> and cosmological nature, and human have a mystical moral or virtuous *kinship*. Although most Confucian intellectuals were disdainful of worshipping *heaven* or *nature* for the sake of peace and blessings, they believed that human *virtues*, namely *benevolence (ren)*, *righteousness (yi)*, *propriety (li)*, *intellect (zhi)*, and *sincerity (xin)*, ought to be practiced in correspondence to the *virtue of Heaven*. Therefore, besides their primary emphasis on the practice of virtue, the Confucians does have a sort of vague *philosophical reverence* for Heaven, just as some Neo-Platonists have a deep respect for the impersonal *One* and the *ordered cosmos*. In religious scholar Paul Chung’s opinion, Fr. Ricci did not view Confucian scholars’ nebulous interpretation and speculative reverence of the impersonal *Heaven a form of idolatry*.<sup>43</sup> On the contrary, Fr. Ricci chose to *adopt* and *develop* the Chinese cosmological terms and concepts to make a cosmological *dialectic* with the Confucian intellectuals in the *light of Christian natural theology*.

Fr. Ricci discovered: for the Chinese, the proper practice of individual virtue and proper social orders are human being’s limited but self-transcending imitation of the unknowable yet admirable Heavenly order and power. Fr. Ricci has recorded his observation of the Chinese traditional concept of Heaven in his journal in China:

From the very beginning of their history, it is recorded in *their writings* that they [the Chinese] recognized and worshipped *one*

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42 “Organismic:” term by comparative philosopher scholar Lee H. Yearly. The Chinese believe that *Heaven* does have life, and it is beyond and more noble than human life. However, it is ultimately *unknowable*. Nevertheless, *Heaven* should be reenergized by means of practicing virtues, because human virtue has kinship with the virtue of *Heaven*. In contrast, The Christian Trinitarian God is *transcendent yet personal, omnipresent yet One*. See article, “Yearley, Lee H. “A Comparison between Classical Chinese Thought and Thomistic Christian Thought.” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 51, no. 3 (1983): 427-58.

43 Paul S. Chung, “Mission and Inculturation in the Thought of Matteo Ricci.” *Asian Contextual Theology for the Third Millennium: Theology of Minjung in Fourth-Eye Formation*, James Clarke & Co Ltd, Cambridge, (2007): 307.

*supreme being* whom they called the King of Heaven, or designated by some other name indicating his rule over heaven and earth.<sup>44</sup>

For the Chinese, *Heaven is cosmological, moral, "organismic," and imitable*, but ultimately *unknowable*. Furthermore, it shares many cosmological essences with the Christian God, who is not only *cosmological but also personal*. Following scholar Yu Liu's interpretation of Fr. Ricci's words, Neo-Confucianism during Fr. Ricci's era does not need a concretely *personal God, or a Christ who is both the beginning and end*, while still has a solid moral and cosmological coherence and foundation.<sup>45</sup> However, most of the transcendent, theistic, and cosmological, characteristics and inferences, which are *attributed to God the First Principle* in the Christian tradition, are found in the Chinese cosmological systems for the indefinite description of *Heaven*. To wit, the Thomistic five cosmological proofs exist more or less in the Chinese philosophical tradition, however, the concept of the *personal and transcendent God does not exist explicitly* in their system. By means of those Chinese languages of virtues and cosmological concepts, e.g., *Tian-Zhu (The Lord of Heaven)*, *Ren (Benevolence)*, *Shang-di (The Sovereign on High)*, Fr. Ricci initiated a new dialectic, or a communication of Truth, on the nature of the Christian God, human virtue, and the human-God relationship, with the Chinese Confucians. In Liu's words, "By claiming a *monotheist impulse [that is arisen from the concept of Heaven]* for Confucianism, Ricci made it possible for the dominant Chinese philosophical traditional to have a point of conceptual contact with Christianity."<sup>46</sup> Fr. Ricci found the cosmological principles that are often called *effects of God by Christians, especially Scholastic philosophers like Aquinas*, are elaboratively developed and systemized in the (Neo-) Confucian tradition.<sup>47</sup> Fr. Ricci strove to adapt them as his dialectic process to introduce the existence and the Divine essence of God to the Chinese.

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44 Ricci, *China in the Sixteenth Century*, p. 93, quoted in Yu Liu, "The Intricacies of Accommodation: The Proselytizing Strategy of Matteo Ricci," 472.

45 Yu Liu, "The Intricacies of Accommodation: The Proselytizing Strategy of Matteo Ricci." *Journal of World History* 19, no. 4 (2008): 472.

46 Yu Liu, "The Intricacies of Accommodation," 472.

47 S.T. 1.2.2.; 1.2.3.



## Section 2: God, or the Lord of Heaven, is the Origin of Human Virtue

In order to present the nature of God, especially considering that He is the origin of humanity and human virtue, Fr. Ricci composed the treatise *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, which conveys a dialectic between the Christian and Chinese cosmologies, natural theologies, and theisms. *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*<sup>48</sup> was a semi-Catechism to the Confucian scholars which Fr. Ricci wrote under the advice of Fr. Alessandro Valignano.<sup>49</sup> The title Lord of Heaven, was a Chinese theist or cosmological term adopted by Fr. Ricci to render the Christian God.<sup>50</sup> The text is composed by a series of imagined dialogues and dialectics between a Chinese scholar (Zhong-Shi), or a Chinese “interlocutor” and a western scholar (Xi-Shi) with equality, mutual-respect, and elegance.<sup>51</sup> The dialogues and the dialectics have two central themes: **first**, the *origin*, nature, and practice of human virtue; **second**, the relationship between the Lord of Heaven, namely God, and man especially in terms of human virtue and excellence. There is a Chinese-Christian dialogue of virtue and charitable order in this work by Fr. Ricci. In chapter seven “the Cultivation of Virtue,” Fr. Ricci writes:

455, [*The Western Scholar says*]: . . .

Thus, I would say that the highest aim of learning is the perfection of oneself, so that one can accord with the holy will of the Lord of Heaven. This is to return to one’s origin.

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48 Nature of *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*:

1) “A treatise of natural theology, the culmination if over a decade’s reflection and experience by Ricci in China” (“Understanding the Chinese,” John D. Witek, 69)

2) A Friendly Dialogue, Dialectic between a Chinese and a “Western” scholar. The Chinese scholar makes inquiries that are contradictory to certain Christian doctrines. And the Western scholar corrects him kindly.

3) The Communication of Truth, and Dialogue between Friends as Dr. John Cuddeback addresses. → For the 3<sup>rd</sup> part of the essay.

4) The first draft is finished by Ricci in 1596 (1593)

49 Ambrose Mong, “The Gentle Way,” 22.

50 Michael Loewe, “Imperial China’s Reactions to the Catholic Missions,” 188.

51 Yu Liu, “The Preparation for Proselytizing: Matteo Ricci’s Treatise “Jiao-You-Lun (On Friendship)”” *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 43, no. 3 (2010): 170.

456, *The Chinese scholar says*: In the case, the perfection of oneself is for the Lord of Heaven and not for oneself<sup>52</sup>. Does this not mean that one is concentrating on externals?<sup>53</sup>

457, *The Western scholar says*: How can a man perfect himself without doing it for himself? The act for the Lord of Heaven is to perfect himself! When Confucius talked of humanity [Ren] he simply spoke of loving others, yet Confucians do not regard this as a form of learning which concentrates only on externals.<sup>54</sup> When I speak of a humane person I am speaking of one who loves both the Lord of Heaven and man; who emphasizes the root, but is not neglectful of the branches. How can one call this “concentrating on externals”?<sup>55</sup>

...

Moreover, the Lord of Heaven is constantly within things, and should therefore not be regarded as something external. The higher our aims, the nobler will be our learning.<sup>56</sup>

The Chinese and the Western Scholars were discussing the *origin and source of humanity and human virtue*, whose terminologies are elaborated in the Chinese classic *Golden Mean*.<sup>57</sup> Within the dialogues between the

52 The practice of virtue for the sake being benevolent, beneficial to other people, is the *principle of Confucian philosophy*. This is immanent, and inner to human nature. Other actions that are not for the sake of cultivating virtue and *benevolence* are external.

53 Hereby, the “Chinese scholar,” who firmly believes that authentic knowledge should be used for the cultivation of *virtue*, wonder that the Christian God is a material object, whose existence is not related to the perfection of *virtue*.

54 According to Fontana’s interpretation, the Chinese cosmological and anthropological systems do not have explicit distinguish between the *transcendence and the immanent*. Hence, the notion that a transcendent God is metaphysically sustaining the existence of human beings and virtues are irrational. Hence, Fr. Ricci, with his Christian and Greco-Roman concepts, is introducing that the *transcendent God* is not “external” to human beings’ immanent virtue.

55 Fr. Ricci stretches or enriches the Chinese concept of *humane (Ren)*, and grants it new meaning by indicating that the authentic *humane* or *love*, is rooted in the Love of God, who is the origin of the humanity, and flourished in the *love of humanity toward* other people. Hence with the Chinese, Fr. Ricci even reviewed the Christian notion on the relationship between the love of God and love of neighbor.

56 Ricci, *On the Truth Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, Chapter 7 “The Cultivation of Virtue,” passage 455-457.

57 On cannot be considered as a cultural Confucian without reading *the Golden Mean*. Fr. Ricci is well versed in Confucian classics. Therefore, Fr. Ricci know those cosmological principles from the *Golden Mean* well.

Chinese and Western scholars, a rudimentary yet fundamental treatise was initiated addressing the Chinese concern for the connection between *Tian-zhu*, namely the Lord of Heaven or God, and human virtue or excellence. The debate addresses the cosmological nature of the Christian God, Christian natural theology, and Christian anthropology. In the passage, the *Western Scholar* identifies that the Christian God is the *origin* of humanity and morality (455).<sup>58</sup> Also the Christian God engages in an on-going creation and involvement of human virtue, and He is omnipresent.<sup>59</sup> However, the passage from the *Western Scholar* is worded in Confucian terminologies, e.g., *humanity, and origin*, and philosophized in Neo-Confucian concepts, especially the isomorphism between the *origin of the universe*, and the *natural virtue* of the human person (457). With his philosophical reliance on God as his *first principle*, the “Western Scholar” respectfully discusses the Confucian concepts with the “Chinese Scholar,” e.g., meaning of learning, the cultivation of virtue, and the origin and fulfillment of human beings.

As the dialogic passage cited above from *the True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* suggests, the *Chinese and Western Scholars* do have an agreement on that a virtuous person ought to not only practice virtue, but also appreciate his origin of both his humanity and virtue. However, the passage also highlights the significant distinction between Confucianism and Catholicism on the *meaning and value* of virtue. Unlike Confucianism which attributes the *origin* of human virtue to the immanent human nature and its mystical kinship with the unknowable Heaven, Catholicism explicitly tracks the origin of humanity and virtue back to the transcendent God. For Confucians, the practice of virtue ultimately makes one a *sage*, or a *Sheng-re* whose immanent human nature is perfected and is beneficial for his or her society.<sup>60</sup> In contrast, for Catholics, the practice of virtue leads

58 Also see *On the True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, Chapter 1, passage 58

59 Chung, “Mission and Inculturation in the Thought of Matteo Ricci,” 326.

60 According to the Chinese classics Great learning, Sagehood, is reached by oneself through life-long practice of virtue. Many Confucians scholar do not think people need the salvation and Grace of God in order to be virtuous. See the Confucian and Neo-Confucian synopsis for each Confucian from the classics *the Great Learning*: (Tu Wei-ming, “Wang Yang-Ming’s Four Sentence Teaching, p. 33-34)

(1) Investigation of things; (2) extension of knowledge; (3) sincerity of the will; (4) rectification of the mind; (5) Self-Cultivation; (6) regulating family; (7) ordering the state; (8) bringing peace throughout the world.

one toward the love of neighbors, but *ultimately* to the charity of God. The Chinese scholar within the dialogue believes that a person ought to focus on cultivating his or her immanent virtue with efforts and practice of virtuous principles without “other” or “external power,” while *shunning the unknowability of the transcendent human origin and destiny*.<sup>61</sup> Many Confucian scholars during the Late Ming Dynasty thought that transcendent knowledge, including the knowledge of God, was useless for the practice of virtue.<sup>62</sup> If a knowledge does not help a person to practice his or her virtue, that intellectual knowledge is valueless.<sup>63</sup> Yet, as the passage indicates, the epitome of Confucian scholars still intellectually venerate the concept of the *cosmological and intellectual origin* of humanity and human virtue.

With the Chinese cosmological evaluation of the *origin* and through the speech of the western scholar or friend, Fr. Ricci introduced the Christian God, who is the *origin* and the *destiny* of each human person, to the Confucian intellectuals. In addition, Fr. Ricci presented them with the *omnipresence, omnipotence*, and on-going Creation of the Christian God. Hence, within their own concepts and vocabularies, the Confucian intellectuals would know that God ought to be *loved* before themselves, their virtues, and other human beings, since He is the *Origin of Charity, Benevolence (Ren)* and all the virtues. Furthermore, God sustains the existence of everything. Fr. Ricci’s argument echoes the Augustinian and Thomistic order of charity (Q 26, A. 4, A. 5), especially in terms of the order between one’s own soul and God, *who is the origin of each human soul and the ultimate good of human virtue*.<sup>64</sup> For both the *Chinese* and the *Western Scholars*, the soul ought to be cultivated with virtue. Hence, the dialectic is on the topic of whether or not *God is the Origin and the destiny* of human soul or fulfillment, as well as the possibility of the knowledge of the origin in the light of the Christian revelation. Therefore, through this dialogue, Fr.

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61 Chung, “Mission and Inculturation in the Thought of Matteo Ricci,” 316.

62 In other words, many Neo-Confucians during the Ming era would not consider *intellectual virtue* as a virtue that is as important as “moral virtue.” Some of the Ming Neo-Confucians were even suspicious of the intellectual virtue. They believe that if people spend too much time on contemplating intellectual virtue, they would ignore the moral virtue, which requires *diligent practice*.

63 Wang Yang-Ming, *Chuan-Xi-Lu*, Part I, No. 5.

64 1<sup>st</sup> The Love of God; 2<sup>nd</sup> The Love of oneself [i.e. one’s own soul]; 3<sup>rd</sup> The Love of Neighbors; 4<sup>th</sup> The Love of One’s Own body.

Ricci conveyed the notion of the Lord of Heaven, or the Christian God, to the Confucian Intellectuals through their languages and concepts. Just as the debate indicates: the Chinese and the Western Scholars are arguing about *whether to love God is to love something besides the Love of one's own soul, which can also be understood as one's virtue and moral excellence*. As Fr. Ricci's dialogue suggests, there is a possible "point of contact" between the humanistic Confucian ideal on the practice of virtue and the Christian God's ongoing creative actions in the human world, which were previously incompatible concepts between the Chinese Confucian intellectuals and the Jesuit missionaries.

### **Section 3: The Communication of Truth of God makes Fr. Ricci's Missionary Acts of Friendship in China Christian**

It is worth criticizing Fr. Ricci for both his overly enculturating *evangelic* process that aimed to avoid all the cultural incompatibilities and unhurried dialectic missionary approach to inform the Confucian scholars the nature of God. However, Fr. Ricci's missionary *art of friendship and* dialectic made a deeper communication between Confucianism and Christianity, as well as Confucian intellectuals' rational approach to God, possible. As a missionary, friend, student, and a questioner of the Chinese intellectual tradition, Fr. Ricci ultimately became a missionary in the truest sense. In the dialectic cited above, the two embodiments, namely the *Chinese* and the *Western Scholars*, share the insights on practicing virtue and theologies. Moreover, the two *Scholars* challenge each other in a sense of "fraternal correction" in order to help each other to attain Wisdom and become closer to the Truth.<sup>65</sup> In the dialogue, the western scholar helps the Chinese scholar to attain the knowledge of the nature of God, who is the origin of *humanity* and *benevolence*.

Fr. Ricci's missionary act is no doubt Christian and missionary: it is rooted in the Charity for the others and service for others and God, especially it demonstrates the Truth of God. Fr. Ricci's friendly missionary act triggers the intellectual dialogue or dialectics between Christianity and (Neo-) Confucianism during the Ming era. Just as a converted Chinese mandarin and Confucian Scholar, Yang Tingyun (1562 – 1627) said:

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65 Ricci, *On the Truth Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, Chapter 7 "The Cultivation of Virtue," passage 455-457.

my Western Teaching of Heaven [Christianity] can be practiced in such a way that the Teaching of Heaven and Confucianism and our Confucianism mutually support each other.<sup>66</sup>

The Chinese would never understand God in the same as Fr. Ricci's compatriots in Macerate, as people in Macerate would not understand God the same way as those in Cologne. However, the belief of God per se invites more people into the union of God, dialectic, and the communication of the Truth of God. In John Young's opinion, Ricci's primary goal to introduce the concept of God to the Chinese Confucians, make them accept the notion of God.<sup>67</sup> Hence, they would likely develop the natural and theological inquiry of the nature of God as their counterparts in the Mediterranean world and Europe.

Fr. Ricci's missionary *acts* renewed the missionary friendship that was already demonstrated by the *Acts* of St. Paul (Acts 17) in the Scripture: evangelization is *not* a collision between a *culture of human* and the *teaching of God*. On the contrary, missionary *act* is a preparation for the free and rational transformation from a *humanistic discourse of Wisdom* to the *divine Truth*. St. Paul the Apostle did not tell everything theological concept to the Corinthians, Galatians, and Romans. On the other hand, St. Paul, introduced the most fundamental Christian concepts of Christ, Grace, and God to the Gentiles through Greek and Hellenistic discourse. Then, it took centuries for the Christians around the Mediterranean world to solve theological questions of the Trinitarian God through ecumenical councils with Biblical exegesis, apostolic tradition, and philosophical inquiries. Like Paul the Apostle, Ricci made an *evangelic start* in the Ming Dynasty China in the format of a friendly dialogue that is comparable to Acts of the Apostle 17. Fr. Ricci speaks the Truth of God in Chinese expressions and philosophy, just as the Apostles spoke to their own European ancestors in Greco-Roman *Paideia*. Aquinas also says, "it is praiseworthy to dispute about the faith in order to confute errors, or for practice."<sup>68</sup> Aquinas argues that is good to dispute with unbelievers in public, because

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66 Yang Tingyun, *Daiyi xupian*, quoted in Nicholas Standaert, *Yang Tingyun, Confucian and Christian in Late Ming China* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), p. 208, quoted in Yu Liu, "The Intricacies of Accommodation: The Proselytizing Strategy of Matteo Ricci," 479

67 Young, "Matteo Ricci's "Original Confucianism,"" 38.

68 S.T. II-II Q. 10 A.7 I answer that



it will not only opens the “unbelievers” mind for the Truth of God, but also *clarifies* the nature of God to them in their own modes of thinking. Hence, the friendly communication of Truth not only benefited the Confucian intellectuals by leading them towards the truth of God, but also the Jesuit missionaries themselves by deepening their own inquiry and knowledge of God by means of preaching. People could find the vestige of Fr. Ricci’s influence even today in the Chinese culture. Chinese Catholics throughout the world still use the term *Shang-di*, or *Sovereign on High*, that was chosen by Fr. Ricci to refer to Jehovah or God the Father; also, they still use *Tian-Zhu-Jiao*, the *Religion and Teaching of the Lord of Heaven*, to render Catholicism.<sup>69</sup> Fr. Ricci Missionary *acts* of friendship overcomes not only the distinction of cultural and philosophical concepts but also the linguistic barrier, which even St. Paul the Apostle did not confront. Fr. Ricci’s missionary *acts* in China demonstrates a virtuous missionary friendship in the Christian tradition, just as they are certainly a form of Christian friendship.

### Conclusion:

Fr. Ricci, as a Jesuit missionary, approached to the Chinese in a *respectful, friendly, enculturating, and dialectical* way. Fr. Ricci’s *missionary acts* in the Ming China are divided into three parts: **Firstly**, Fr. Ricci paved the way for his missionary *acts* by establishing a mutually respectful friendship with the Confucian intellectuals. Fr. Ricci humbled himself as a student of the Confucian intellectual culture as well as the Chinese civilization. Therefore, while still being a Jesuit missionary, Fr. Ricci became a cultural Chinese, or an “intellectual-equal” to the Confucian intellectual and earned their deep respect. Fr. Ricci’s acts mirrored the Johannine Gospel, and demonstrate that it is the duty of missionary, who are spiritual descendants of the Apostles, to humble themselves as the servants of the gentiles and the Truth of God. **Secondly**, with the “friendship-proper” that is rooted in the mutual respect, Fr. Ricci strove to manifest the common virtuous pursuits between the Jesuit missionaries and the Chinese intellectuals. With his diligent studies of Chinese classics and culture, Fr. Ricci discovered the common

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69 Michael Loewe, “Imperial China’s Reactions to the Catholic Missions,” 188 & Ricci, *On the True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, Chapter 3, Passage 130.



intellectual vocabularies with the Chinese. Just as his treatise *On Friendship* demonstrates that: for both Chinese and Christians, friendship is needed to help each friend to cultivate their virtue, benevolence, and charity. **Finally**, with the *pre-established* mutual respect and common ground for the pursuit of virtue, Fr. Ricci initiated his dialectic communication of Truth with the Confucian intellectuals. Fr. Ricci shared his insight of the Truth of God with the Chinese, especially in terms of the *origin of humanity*, and the “order of charity.” The Confucian intellectuals believed that cultivation one’s immanent virtue according to Confucian teaching is the *primary* concern of a virtuous person. Also, *Heaven is unknowable*, although it has kinship to human virtue. In a dialectic response, Fr. Ricci made the explicit “correction” that transcendent Christian God is the origin of humanity and virtue.

Fr. Ricci did not asserts the *revealed* doctrines of God upon the Confucian intellectuals, nor coerced them to follow and believe his assertions blindly. On the contrary, Fr. Ricci established a friendship with them that was grounded upon equality, mutual respect, and dialectic of the cosmological Truth of God. By mean of his missionary friendship and *acts*, which were manifested in, rational persuasion, sharing of insight, and dialectic communication of Truth, Fr. Ricci initiated the friendship between the Confucian intellectuals and the Jesuit Missionaries, as well the friendship between the Chinese and God.

Thusly, the Chinese will know God through reason and firmly believe in God through their free will. In recapitulation, experience told Fr. Ricci that *charity*, rather than coercion or condemnation is the means to spread the gospels and articulate the concepts of God to the Ming Chinese. Friendship is the way that leads the Chinese, who are finely versed with ethics and cultured with their sophisticated interpretation of friendship, to the effect of God and Church in the human world. Friendship resolves pride, self-centeredness of the Ming Chinese and their bias against the Jesuit missionaries and helps each other to quench the fear and suspicion. Friendship, in its manifest of mutual respect, common pursuit of virtue, and intellectual dialects, make the Chinese and Christians bearing of each other’s burden and convincing each other with words, Truth, and communication, as a true example of said relationship.

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## Illustrations



By an anonymous Chinese painter, who learned the Western painting skill. Father Matteo Ricci is dressed in a Confucian robe that was popular during the Ming era, and folds his hands in a courteous Chinese Confucian way.