

A CHRISTIAN NARRATIVE: THE JESUIT (RE)INTERPRETATION OF *TIAN* AND *TIANMING* UNDER A POST-SAIDIAN PRISM

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ABSTRACT

The present article explores the Jesuit interpretation of the Confucian concept of “*tian*” 天 (“heaven”) and “*tianming*” 天命 (“mandate of heaven”) within a few passages from the first Western translation of the *Lunyu* 論語 (*Analects*) to Latin (1687). Thus, it examines how Jesuit missionaries, driven by the goal of evangelization, sought to reconcile Confucius’ philosophy with Christianity. This not only implied interpreting terms such as “*tian*” or “*tianming*” through a Christian’s perspective but also commenting on the original text and adding content to it so as to portray Confucius as a proto-Christian. By using a post-Saidian conceptual framework, anchored on the critiques that had been done to Edward Said’s *Orientalism* by his successors, this article will analyze the construction of a “Christo-Confucianism”; a phenomenon that could be understood as a natural product of the particular material and theological conditions to which the Jesuit Order had to adapt in China.

Keywords: Confucianism; Jesuit Order; Orientalism; Accommodation process; Cultural mediation.

RESUMEN

El presente artículo explora la interpretación jesuita del concepto confuciano de “*tian*” 天 (“cielo”) y “*tianming*” 天命 (“mandato del cielo”) en algunos pasajes de la primera traducción occidental del texto *Lunyu* 論語 (*Analectas*) al latín (1687). De este modo, se examina cómo los misioneros jesuitas, impulsados por el objetivo de la evangelización, trataron de reconciliar la filosofía de Confucio con el cristianismo. Esto no sólo implicaba interpretar términos como “*tian*” o “*tianming*” desde la perspectiva de un cristiano, sino también comentar el texto original y añadirle contenido para presentar a Confucio como un protocristiano. Utilizando un marco conceptual post-saidiano, anclado en las críticas hechas a *Orientalismo* de Edward Said por sus sucesores, este artículo analizará la construcción de un “cristo-confucianismo”; un fenómeno que podría entenderse como un producto natural de las particulares condiciones materiales y teológicas a las que la Orden de los Jesuitas tuvo que adaptarse en China.

Palabras clave: Confucianismo; Orden de los Jesuitas; Orientalismo; Proceso de acomodación; Mediación cultural.

At the end of the first Western biography of Confucius published in 1662 and titled¹: *Vita Confucii, Principis Sapientiae Sinicae* or *Life of Confucius, Prince of the Chinese Wisdom*², the unnamed author, most probably the Jesuit missionary Inácio da Costa (1603-1666), openly declares:

Intelliget ex his omnibus prudens Lector, quam non inutilis futura sit Evangelico praeconi viri huius autoritas, siquidem ea apud hanc gentem quae Magistri sui, atque litterarum suarum usque adeo studiosa est, uti quandoque possit (atque vero potest) ad Christianam veritatem confirmandam; quemadmodum videmus Apostolum Gentium Poetarum Graecorum autoritate olim apud Athenienses fuisse usum.
(Meynard, 2015: 624)

A careful reader will understand from all these things that the authority of this man [Confucius] will be greatly useful to missionaries, since the Chinese are still devoted to their Master and his books. It would be possible to use his authority to confirm the Christian truth, in the same way as in the past we saw the Apostle of the Nations [St Paul], using the authority of the Greek poets among the Athenians.
(Meynard, 2015: 613)³

¹ Throughout this article the reader will notice the utilization of the binarism “East”-“West” or “Orient”-“Occident” which as Clarke remarks have “[...] become devices for reducing endless complexities and diversities into manageable and falsifying unities, a semantic artifice which has encouraged us to think in terms of the contrasting of East and West in some eternal transcendent opposition” (Clarke, 1997: 10). In this same line: *vid.* Lowe, 1991: 7. The reason that motivated the use of these terms, then, is related to the fact that such categories continue to be used within academia and have been fossilized in Humanistic Studies since long ago. The reader will have to take into account, however, that “[...] words such as ‘Orient’ and ‘Occident’ correspond to no stable reality that exists as a natural fact. Moreover, all such geographical designations are an odd combination of the empirical and imaginative” (Said, 1979: 331). Thus, we will take those terms not in a monolithic nor essentialist sense, but they will be used to speak of the specific context in which the Jesuit order greatly influenced the creation of a specific “Orient” throughout their contact with the Confucian tradition in China during the 16th and the 17th century.

² This was the first title assigned, the subsequent editions changed it, first, to *Vita Confucii* or *Life of Confucius* (1667-1669) and, finally, to *Philosophorum Sinensium Principis Confucii Vita* or *The Life of Confucius, Prince of the Chinese Philosophers* (1687).

³ Cf. this attitude with the earliest considerations of Duarte de Sande (1547-1599), a Jesuit priest who participated in the evangelization process both in China and Japan, and who wrote in his latin

This paragraph, then, shows a clear intention of utilizing the authority of the so-called “Confucius” and his teachings to spread Christianity among the Chinese⁴. This went hand in hand with the primary objective of the Jesuit Order, which was, of course, evangelization: “[t]he Jesuits did not go abroad [...] primarily to teach mathematics or learn foreign languages, but to preach, baptise, confess and administer the other sacraments which made the grace of God available to all men according to the Roman Christian tradition” (Rubiés, 2007: 243). This peculiar agenda of evangelization was, then, the *raison d’être* of the Jesuit Order in itself. This can be seen especially in the papal bull of 1540 by Paul III titled *Regimini Militantis Ecclesiae* or *To the Government of the Church Militant*:

Whosoever desires to become God’s soldier under the banner of the Cross, and to serve the Lord alone, and his representative upon earth the Roman Pontiff, in our Society, which we wish to designate by the name of Jesus, after a solemn vow of perpetual Chastity, shall determine in his own mind to form a part of this Society instituted to this special end, namely, to offer spiritual consolation for the advancement of souls in Christian life and doctrine, for the propagation of the faith, by public preaching, and the

translation of *De Missione Legatorum Iaponensium ad Romanam Curiam*: “This teaching [Confucianism] is, in sum, to take the light of nature as guide and zealously to cultivate the virtues I mentioned before, and to strive for the right ordering of family and kingdom. All of these are praiseworthy precepts, or would be if only Confucius had made some mention of God, the best and the greatest, and of the future life, and had not ascribed so much to the heavens and to fate and necessity, and if he had not treated in such detail of the veneration to be offered to the images of their forefathers. In this regard he can barely be acquitted, or cannot be acquitted at all, of the crime of idolatry. It has to be conceded, however, that there is no other teaching among the Chinese which approaches so close to the truth” (Duarte de Sande, 2012: 432). Latin text in: Duarte de Sande, 1590: 395. These documents show a clear reevaluation of the figure of Confucius throughout the development of the mission in China as the Jesuits (especially Matteo Ricci) saw that Confucianism could be used as the perfect acculturation matrix; one can also notice in the critiques made by de Sande the seeds of what later became known as the “Chinese Rites Controversy” and which we could date here to as early as 1590.

⁴ This is the latinized name of *Kongfuzi* (孔夫子) or simply *Kongzi* (孔子) as he is commonly called.

ministration of the word of God, spiritual exercises, and works of charity, and expressly, for the instruction of boys and ignorant people in Christianity, and above all for the spiritual consolation of the faithful in Christ, by hearing confessions.
(Societas Iesu, 1838: 102)⁵

Within this logic of evangelization, then, operated an “apostolic pattern” that encouraged missionary labor:

For them “apostolic” of course meant ministry, but not just any ministry. After Jesus himself, Paul was their ultimate model. As [Jerónimo] Nadal (1964: 414) said, “Paul [the Apostle] signifies for us our ministry”. Suggested in that identification was the intense zeal of Paul that knew no limits in the hardship and suffering it was willing to undergo, but there was more to it than that. It also meant going forth and seeking the lost sheep, not waiting for them on the doorsteps of the church. It meant being missionaries. Nothing was more fundamental to the original inspiration of the Society of Jesus.
(O’Malley, 2013: 220)

The reader will understand, then, that the mention of Paul of Tarsus in the cited *Vita Confucii*’s fragment was not arbitrary, it followed this “apostolic pattern”. Such a pattern can also be seen within the *Constitutiones cum Decarationibus* (The [Jesuit] Constitutions with Expositions), another one of the foundational documents of the Order; specifically, in *Pars VII: De iis quae pertinent ad admissos in corpus Societatis ad proximorum utilitatem pervineam Domini distribuendos* (Part VII: The Relations to Their Neighbor of Those Already Incorporated into the Society When They Are Dispersed into the Vineyard of Our Lord), where the importance of the fourth vow of the Order (obedience to the Vicar of Christ) in relation to the distribution of the Order throughout the world is addressed:

⁵ Latin text in: Societas Iesu, 1962: 8-9.

[605] B. ¹The intention of the fourth vow pertaining to the pope was not for a particular place but for having the members dispersed throughout the various parts of the world. ²For those who first united to form the Society were from different provinces and realms and did not know into which regions they were to go, whether among the faithful or the unbelievers; ³and therefore, to avoid erring in the path of the Lord, they made the promise or vow in order that His Holiness might distribute them for the greater glory of God, in conformity with their intention to travel throughout the world ⁴and, when they could not find the desired spiritual fruit in one place, to pass on to another and another, ever seeking the greater glory of God our Lord and the greater aid of souls.

(Padberg, 1996: 281-282)⁶

Following the directives of this “apostolic pattern”, then, the Jesuits will come to create a new current of thought within the *Rujia* (儒家)⁷. This process will take place through the selection and use of the figure of Confucius for evangelical objectives. Said new current will be considered in the Order’s narrative as a return to the forgotten origins of Confucianism, to a kind of “pure” teaching unpolluted by Buddhism, which the Jesuits considered at the time to be their greatest enemy and main perverter of the “original” Confucian philosophy (Cervera, 2002: 212, 234; Laven, 2011: 161; Fontana, 2011: 62, 220-221). In this sense, Michele Ruggieri affirmed regarding Buddhist religion: “While the Devil inhabits many kinds of idols and shrines in China, Buddhism is particularly pernicious [...]” (Hsia, 2010: 94). Following this same interpretation, Duarte de Sande says: “There is some mention among them [Buddhists] of the future life, and of rewards

⁶ Latin text in: Societas Iesu, 1962: 226.

⁷ In this article we will use the term “*Rujia*” (usually translated as “Confucianism” or, maybe more correctly, as “Ruism”) and the Jesuit denominations “*Litteratorum Secta*” (Sect of the Literati) and “*Litteratorum Lex*” (Law of the Literati) as synonyms to define the Confucianist philosophical tradition.

for the good and punishment for the wicked, but everything they say is replete with errors” (2012: 433)⁸.

At the center of the Jesuit interpretation of Confucianism was Matteo Ricci, who thought that the union between the teachings of Kongzi and Christianity was possible (Cervera, 2002: 231, 236). Even though there were oppositions to Ricci’s understanding of the *Litteratorum Lex*’s tradition (both within the Church and within China), his was the interpretation that predominated among the Jesuits; especially after the forced exile in 1617 which was brought as a consequence of Ricci’s successor Nicolò Longobardi’s approach to the mission (Cervera, 2002: 236-238; Standaert, 2008: 172).

In this article, it will be our objective to demonstrate how the inherent ambiguity that the Jesuits found in the term *tian* 天, usually translated as “heaven”, and *tianming* 天命 or “heaven’s mandate” was used to promote the construction of a new Christian interpretation of these concepts. To do so, we will analyze a few passages from the *Lunyu* 論語 (*Analects*), where these terms appear and are resignified under a Christian prism. To this end, we will use the edition published by the Order in 1687 with their own translation and commentaries in Latin⁹. This, in turn, will serve to evidence the means by which the Jesuits constructed an orientalist interpretation of the *Rujia* based on their readings of these concepts¹⁰.

⁸ Latin text in: Duarte de Sande, 1590: 395.

⁹ The translation from 1687, titled *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* (literally translated as *Confucius, the Philosopher among the Chinese*) edited by Philippe Couplet (1623-1693) included the *Daxue* 大學 (*Great Learning*), the *Zhongyong* 中庸 (*Doctrine of the Mean*), the *Lunyu* 論語 (*Analects*) and the *Life of Confucius*. In this paper, we will only concern ourselves with the *Scientia Sinicae Liber Tertius* (*Third Book of the Chinese Science*), which was the Latin name by which the *Lunyu* was known among the Jesuits.

¹⁰ These, of course, are not the only concepts with an inherent ambiguity, whose particular Christian reading contributed to the creation of an orientalist interpretation of the *Litteratorum Secta*. Still, they will be the only ones which we will analyze in this paper so as to make evident the creation of this new Christian narrative.

TIAN 天 THROUGHOUT TIME AND THE CONCEPTION OF TIANMING 天命:

In the most ancient records that we possess nowadays and which can be dated back to the Shang 商 dynasty (*circa* 1600-1046 BCE) we can find an entity denominated as *shangdi* 上帝, where “*shang*” stands for “high” and “*di*” stands for “deified ancestor”. In this context, then, *shangdi* was the supreme deity who “[...] presided over the world and was the source of the human ruler’s power and authority. *Di* was regarded as the ultimate power over all natural and human affairs, from which issued commandments for human behavior concerning right and wrong” (Yao & Zhao, 2010: 54). Competing with this entity as the chief authority, we have *tian* 天, which seems to have been transmitted by a different tradition. Both were understood as “[...] celestial gods who had ultimate control over all human affairs and all-natural events” (Bilsky, 1975: 37), but eventually, these concepts started to overlap and compete with each other. In the context of this competence, *tian* gradually comes to displace *shangdi* (Bauer, 2009: 47):

Epigraphic documentation reveals the almost systematic nature of the lexical shift from *di* (supreme divinity) to *tian* (Heaven) [...]. While continuing to manifest itself as an active will, Heaven is increasingly perceived as the source and guarantor of ritual order and pre-established harmony. (Cheng, 2002: 55)¹¹

This displacement is significant, for, after it occurs, *tian* will occupy the center of Chinese cultic life. Heaven will come to be the main principle that legitimizes the king’s authority to govern. As such, the king will have obtained from heaven the *tianming* 天命 or the “mandate of heaven”, which guarantees his right to rulership. This conception will appear for the first time at the beginning of the Zhou 周 dynasty (1046-256 BCE) and will

¹¹ The translations to English for every text cited from a Spanish source are my own. For the quotations that use capital letters to refer to “heaven”, “mandate of heaven” or other terms, we decided to leave them as they appear in their respective texts.

serve as the tool to justify their own right to rule after the revolution which they orchestrated against the Shang dynasty (Cheng, 2002: 51; Bauer, 2009: 48; Eno, 1990: 21-22). Within this discourse, the Shang lost the mandate of heaven thanks to their corruption and this, in turn, was given by heaven itself to the later king Wu 周武王, the founder of the Zhou dynasty, and his descendants. In this way, *tian* becomes one of the most important concepts within Chinese political philosophy, since “[t]he people of the Zhou believed that *Tian* determined their fate, that the Mandate of Heaven (*Tianming*) provided justification for their dynasty, and that *Tian* would bless the good and punish the evil” (Yao & Zhao, 2010: 55). After this point, every new dynasty in Chinese History will make the claim of having received the tianming from heaven to legitimize its rule.

Confucius (551-479 BCE), who lived in what he considered a period of decadence within the Zhou dynasty, took this concept of *tian* and made it an important part of his philosophy. In fact, to speak about *tian* is to speak about one of the central concepts within the *Rujia*. And Kongzi greatly elaborated on the concept:

To be sure, his Heaven is purposive and is the master of all things. He repeatedly referred to the *Tian-ming*, the Mandate, will, or order of Heaven. However, with him Heaven is no longer the greatest of all spiritual beings who rules in a personal manner but a Supreme Being who only reigns, leaving his Moral Law to operate by itself. This is the Way [*dao* 道] according to which civilization should develop and men should behave. It is the Way of Heaven (*Tiandao* [天道]), later called the Principle of Heaven or Nature (*Tian-li* [天理]).

(Chan, 1969: 16)

We can see, then, that *tian* is a central concept within Kongzi’s philosophy, for in his perspective heaven is also responsible “[...] for revealing to human beings the set of cultural practices and texts collectively known as ‘the Way’ [*dao* 道]” (Slingerland, 2003: 239). In this sense, then, *tian* constitutes Confucianism’s metaphysical principle *par excellence*. It is the

guarantor of a cosmological order (while the world in itself is left to humans to handle) but it is also responsible for leaving humanity with the necessary tools to rule and ordain said material existence or, in Chan and Slingerland's words, for leaving a certain *dao* 道 or way which people can follow to have an upright existence. This panoramic view of the concept of *tian* is, of course, general, for as Yao has already noted: "[i]mportant as Heaven is for Confucianism, there seldom seems to be a consensus concerning what Heaven is" (Yao, 2000: 141)¹². Indeed, what we have reviewed here is only one of the many interpretations within the *Rujia*. But it is important to remark that it is exactly this lack of consensus regarding the meaning of "heaven" which constitutes one of the causes that allowed Confucianism to develop in many different ways throughout the ages. The Jesuits will also make their own interpretation of *tian* to support their evangelization enterprise. In this sense, they will develop their own view of Confucianism as a whole. The fact that this process of evangelization was carried out in such a way responds to the particular situation that the Jesuits found when they arrived in China:

The early missionaries [...] soon realized on arriving in China that they were dealing not with a primitive culture, but with a civilisation as old as, indeed perhaps even older than, that of Europe, and whose people inherited a language, a literature, and a belief system that were as complex and as sophisticated as those of Western Christendom. It was pointless therefore to seek simply to strip away the old Confucian beliefs and terminology, and to replace them with those of the Christian faith. Some sort of accommodation was necessary, some compromise, at least in terms of the exterior rituals. What Ricci and his successors sought to do, therefore, was 'to interpret this cult rather than to suppress it' (Guy 1963: 45), to act not as outsiders seeking to impose on the native Chinese a totally alien set of doctrines and practices, but to infiltrate the very heart and soul of China by first adopting

¹² For a deeper range of variations in meaning regarding *tian* in Confucianism as a whole *vid.*: Yao, 2003: 606-607.

the learning and the habits of a scholar-bureaucrat, or mandarin, and then subtly adapting the Catholic rituals to Confucian customs and practices. (Clarke, 1997: 41)¹³

Taking this particular approach to the evangelization process, then, the Jesuits will read “[...] early Confucian canon [...] seeing Confucius as a monotheist who believed in *Shang Di* and *tian* as two names for God” (Perkins, 2004: 19). Thus, under this Christian perspective, *tian* will come to be regarded as one of the ways to refer to the Christian God, making Confucius a pre-Christian thinker¹⁴; even going so far as to make him a “[...] precursor of the Christian religion [itself]” (Frainais-Maitre, 2013: 46). Thus: “[...] the Jesuits argued that in ancient times *Tian*, Heaven, was not material, but God. Confucianism was thus constructed as the opposite to Buddhism: one was theistic, the other both atheistic and idolatrous” (Rubiés, 2020: 507).

***TIAN* 天 AND *TIANMING* 天命 IN THE JESUIT TRANSLATION OF THE *LUNYU*:**

In this section, we will analyze a short selection from the complete Latin translation of the *Analects* from 1687, the first to be published in Europe.

¹³ Even though these policies were put into practice by Ricci and those who came after him, they were first designed by Alessandro Valignano (1539-1606), especially on his *Advertimentos e avisos acerca dos costumes e catangues de Jappáo*. These consisted on four main points: 1) Accommodation and adaptation to Chinese culture; 2) Evangelization from the top down, addressing the literate elite, even the emperor if possible; 3) Indirect evangelism by means of science and technology to convince the elite of the high level of European civilization; 4) Openness to and tolerance of Chinese moral values and some ritual practices (Bays, 2011: 21-22). For a more detailed account on the policies adopted and the conflicts which this approach to evangelization generated (especially after Ricci's death) refer to Bays' source: Standaert, 2001: 310-311.

¹⁴ Since the Jesuits (and the Catholic Church) see a continuation between the God from the *Old Testament* and the *New Testament*, the term “Christian God” is used here to define what the Jesuits interpreted as one and the same god.

We intend to evidence through this process the particular interpretation which the Jesuit Order made of the term *tian*. The first selected example is taken from the famous passage 2.4, where Kongzi relates his spiritual autobiography:

2.4 The Master said, “At fifteen, I set my mind upon learning; at thirty, I took my place in society; at forty, I became free of doubts; at fifty, I understood Heaven’s Mandate; at sixty, my ear was attuned; and at seventy, I could follow my heart’s desires without overstepping the bounds of propriety”. (Slingerland, 2003: 9).

The sentence that interests us here is “at fifty, I understood Heaven’s Mandate”, for in the Jesuit version of the text it is translated as:

五¹十²而³知⁴天⁵命⁶。

Q¹uinquagenarius² protinus³ cognovi⁴ coeli⁵ providentiam⁶ atque mandatum⁶, & suam rerum singulis a coelo inditam esse naturam, vim, rationem; cuius adeo naturae perscrutabar ipse perfectionem ac subtilitatem; indagabam quoque originem, & quae tandem illius esset causa, intelligebam.

At fifty, I immediately knew the providence of heaven and its decree, that there was a nature, a force, and a reason imparted by heaven for each thing. I myself investigated the perfection and fineness of its nature. I also investigated its origin to understand its cause. (Meynard, 2015: 119)

The concordance between the characters and the Latin terms selected as their equivalents in the translation can be understood by looking at the correspondence between numbers. The first obvious thing one notices when analyzing the passage is that the translation was greatly enlarged. The other thing that can be seen is that *ming* 命 was translated twice: first as “*providentia*” and immediately after as “*mandatum*”. In this way, the term *tianming* 天命

was rendered as “*coeli providentia atque mandatum*” or “heaven’s providence and mandate” in a more literal translation to English. As Meynard notes, “[t]he notion of providence is more theological and strongly suggests the notion of a personal God” (2015: 119); the Western reader, effectively, could very easily make the connection between this “*coeli providentia*” and the Christian god. The fact that the “*providentia*” was added in the rendering of *ming* supports the reading that the Jesuit interpreted *tian* as a way of saying “God”, since providence, a central theological doctrine, was considered as the “[...] unifying theme that integrated Christian convictions about creation, redemption, and eschatology” (McFarland et al., 2012: 417); this conviction could be summarized in the statement that “[...] there is a benevolent and purposeful ordering of all events of history. [...] [T]hough not always perceptible to human understanding, there is a divine or cosmic plan to the universe, a reason for everything” (Achtemeier, 1996: 890); or, in simpler terms: it “denotes the care of God for his creatures” (Freedman, 1992: 520; Butler, 1991: 1147). We can say then that the rendering of “*ming*” as “*providentia*” was of vital importance to understand *tian* in Christian theological terms within the selected passage; for the word, as we have seen, had clear connotations within the Christian tradition. If this was not enough to prove our point, we could add that the extra content in the Jesuit translation orients the text from the *Litteratorum Secta* in exactly the theological interpretation that we have already reviewed; for the added content states “[...] that there was a nature, a force, and a reason imparted by heaven for each thing”, which is a perfect definition of the term “*providentia*”. With this statement there could be no doubts for the reader of the 1687 translation: what Confucius discovered at fifty was Christian providence. But the Jesuits go further in this process and add an extra sentence: “I myself investigated the perfection and fineness of its nature. I also investigated its origin to understand its cause”. Thus, in the Jesuits’ rendering, Confucius becomes a person deeply concerned with the *coeli providentia*, who goes far enough to the point of investigating (as an Aristotelian philosopher) its origins, so that he can get to know its cause or, in Aristotle’s own words: “[...] a prerequisite for knowing anything is understanding why it is as it is—in other words, grasping its primary cause” (1996:

38-39)¹⁵. Thus we see from this brief example, that the Jesuits' Confucius was a man well-versed in Christian theology and in Classical philosophy.

The next passage that we would like to analyze is *Analects* 7.22 (or 7.23 in Slingerland's edition): "The Master said, 'It is Heaven itself that has endowed me with virtue. What have I to fear from the likes of Huan Tui?'" (Slingerland, 2003: 71).

子曰：“天生德於予，桓魋其如予何？”。

Transiverat Confucius a Regno Guei in Regnum Sum: Ubi discipulos in umbra praegrandidis arboris quotidie exercebat. Porro loci praefectus Von tui nomine, quia Confucium eiusque doctrinam oderat, arborem illam succidi iussit. Perculit ea res discipulorum animos, verentium, ne de tollendo etiam e vivis ipsomet Magistro cogitaret. At Confucius cognito suorum metu sic ait: Caelum siquidem procreavit virtutem, dotesque naturae in me, cum vita mea a caelo tota pendeat, Von tui itaque praefectus iste quorsum me sic exagitet? An pugnare cum caelo tentat mortalis!

Having passed through the Wei Kingdom to the Song Kingdom, Confucius was instructing the disciples everyday under the shadow of a big tree. Huan Tui, the prefect of the place, hated Confucius and his teachings. He ordered the tree to be cut down. This frightened the disciples, who feared that Huan Tui might attempt to kill the Master. Aware of their fear, Confucius said: "Heaven itself has given me virtue and natural talents. Since my whole life relies on heaven, why would the prefect Huan Tui attack me? Could a human being fight against heaven?"

(Meynard, 2015: 259-260)

¹⁵ This step was also given previously by Ruggieri in his translation of the "four books" (*Daxue* 大學, *Zhongyong* 中庸, *Lunyu* 論語 and *Mengzi* 孟子). For in his translation of the *Analects* "[...] Confucius, [...] became (not unlike the medieval Aristotle) 'the philosopher', one capable of recognizing rationally a universal cause called *Tian*, 'Heaven', that was equivalent to God" (Rubiés, 2020: 525).

This particular passage includes a few commentaries taken from classical Chinese tradition, so as to give the Western reader some context regarding which episode of Confucius' life is being narrated (for the Chinese original starts on "*Confucius ait...*" or "Confucius said..."). But what we would like to remark here are the phrases "*cum vita mea a caelo tota pendeat*" ([s]ince my whole life relies on heaven) and "*[a]n pugnare cum caelo tentat mortalibus!*" ([c]ould a human being fight against heaven), which are not included in the original text. These two phrases characterize and delineate the philosopher as a monotheistic thinker, for he states that his whole existence depends on heaven (God) or the primary cause; and we could add, based on what we have seen, that he depends also on its providence. This dependence is understood as a barrier against potential enemies as in the case of the prefect Huan Tui; the Jesuits' Confucius is not afraid for he knows and believes in God's *providentia*. Trying to harm him would be the same as trying to go against God since he follows his Way or *dao* 道 (which here becomes a Christian path of proto-evangelization)¹⁶. We can see a great difference with the interpretation derived from the Chinese passage stated by Slingerland: "Confucius is on a mission from Heaven [...], and is therefore subject only to Heaven's command (*ming*). Human beings do not have the power to alter fate, and Confucius, therefore, accepts whatever may befall him with equanimity, viewing it as Heaven's will" (Slingerland, 2003: 71-72). Thus, while the original text emphasizes the fact that Kongzi will accept whatever *tian*'s will decrees for him (even death), the Christian translation changes the focus to evidence that heaven will not let anything happen to the philosopher, since he follows its path. Within the frame of this interpretation, Huan Tui cannot do anything against Confucius, for he is protected by divine providence. In this way, thanks to the rendering of *tian* and the added commentaries from the Jesuits, a new Confucius, understood as a precursor and announcer of the Christian revelation, appears on the scene of the 17th century in Europe.

¹⁶ In this sense, the Jesuits' Confucius could also be said to follow a sort of "(proto) apostolic pattern" that we have previously described as a inherent quality to the Order.

THE ORIENTALIST CONSTRUCTION OF CONFUCIANISM

Within this section, it will be our objective to discuss how orientalism as a theory could be used to develop further the study of the *Analects* and particularly the way in which the Jesuit Order constructed the above-mentioned Christian interpretation of the *Rujia* for its Western audience. In this sense, it must be said that a discussion regarding Orientalism cannot begin without first reviewing some of Edward Said's arguments in *Orientalism* (1978) and the main critiques that he received *a posteriori*, especially by postcolonialist scholars.

As it has been remarked, Said doesn't give a specific definition of the term "orientalism", but he designates it from a variety of standpoints (Clifford, 1988: 259). Having remarked this fact, we will concentrate on the "second definition" which the author explores within his Introduction; there, he defines orientalism as a "[...] style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident'" (Said, 1979: 2). Thus, under this perspective, orientalism is understood "[...] as a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient" (Said, 1979: 3). The problem that these assertions arise is that the category of "orientalism" is seen as something monolithic and uniformly constructed (Lowe, 1991: 4; Rocher, 1993: 215; Clarke, 1997: 10; Young, 1990: 127-128); this leads us to an essentialist conception of the concept, which would seem to exist as something transhistorical. Another implication that can be found within the analyzed fragments is that Said's discourse on orientalism becomes an oversimplification and a reductionist approach for it tends to qualify a great range of heterogeneous attitudes towards the East throughout History under the totalizing term "orientalism". This point was also problematized by Bhabha, who perceived the implications of such a definition:

There is always, in Said, the suggestion that colonial power and discourse is possessed entirely by the coloniser, which is a historical and theoretical simplification. The terms in which Said's *Orientalism* is unified -the intentionality and unidirectionality of colonial power- also unify the subject of colonial enunciation.

(Bhabha, 1983: 25; 1994: 103)

Thus, the natural consequences of these argumentations are that “[...] in many cases Said finds himself repeating the very structures that he censures” (Young, 1990: 127; Clifford, 1988: 262) since *Orientalism* oversimplifies a great number of attitudes towards the Orient and its subjects (which are understood as homogeneous categories).

What could appear at first as an insoluble dilemma has been dealt with by many critics who came after Said, valued his theoretical insights, and sought to develop his postulates into a theoretical framework (with varying and different objectives)¹⁷. In this paper, we wish to remark on Clarke’s perspective, since it is the one that deals more closely with our object of study while answering the problematizations mentioned above¹⁸. This is why against the objection of orientalism as a monolithic construction, Clarke proposes to “[...] employ the word ‘orientalism’ to refer to the range of attitudes that have been evinced in the West towards the traditional religious and philosophical ideas and systems of South and East Asia” (Clarke 1997: 7). Such a perspective implies a response to the critique of totalizing orientalism since the author admits that there were various attitudes towards the East, thus not reproducing the reductionist Saidian postulate. This perspective, then, portrays orientalism as:

[...] tending to confront the structures of Western knowledge and power and to engage with Eastern ideas in ways which are more creative, more open-textured, and more reciprocal than are allowed for in Said’s critique. This does not by any means imply a total rejection of Said’s attitude of

¹⁷ See, for example, Baumann (2004), Lowe (1991) and Clarke (1997).

¹⁸ It must be remembered that Said did not deal specifically within his book with orientalism regarding China (even though he mentions it in some parts of *Orientalism*); his main interest led him to analyze the orientalist construction of the Islamic Orient within Great Britain and France, from the 18th century onwards and, finally, the US during the 20th century (even though he sometimes cites examples from Antiquity and the Middle Ages). Nonetheless, the category of “orientalism” has been considered an ideal tool to analyze certain phenomena related to the representations of the “East,” as in the case of India (*vid.* King, 2001) or, as in the present case, China with Clarke’s contributions.

suspicion towards orientalism or his attempts to politicise it. [...] However, while recognising that orientalism can only be understood adequately within the framework of colonialism and the imperialist expansion of the West, I wish to avoid seeing it as simply a mask for racism or as a purely Western construct which serves as a rationalisation of colonial domination. (Clarke, 1997: 8)

Under this view, orientalism as a monolithic discourse falls apart, giving rise to another kind of discourse (or discourses) that is able to include not only a heterogenous panorama but also can account for different attitudes within Occident towards the Orient. While avoiding the unification of orientalism, one can also avoid unifying “[...] the subject of colonial enunciation” (Bhabha, 1983: 25; 1994: 103). As such, depending on the analyzed context, the discourses related to orientalism (and to its related terms, such as the dichotomy “East”-“West”) will vary and will have to be adapted to consider each particular context or text.

Considering all this, we can now return to the case of the translation of the *Analecets* by the Jesuit Order. We must mention, however, one important remark made by Gu regarding using orientalism’s conceptual framework in the case of China: said country was never actually a colony (Gu, 2013: 3). This fact, nonetheless, does not invalidate an orientalist conceptual framework as a valid tool for the analysis of a text like the Latin translation of the *Analecets*, since when Gu criticizes orientalism, he is referring specifically to Said’s postulates in his book *Orientalism*, which, as we have seen, have already been widely revised by many authors. But the fact remains that at the time that we are addressing, there were no more than forty missionaries within the Middle Country. In fact, Bays reports that around 1630, when the Jesuit monopoly over China ended, “[...] Spanish Franciscans, Dominicans, and Augustinians began arriving and the average number of missionaries went up to a range of 30–40. It remained at that level for about another half-century, to 1680” (Bays, 2011: 22). Before that, and only counting the Jesuit Order, the number of missionaries oscillated between 5 and 15 persons (*Id.*). This means that the members of the Order at the time did not have any backup

(certainly not military) apart from the economic backing of the Church and some European countries. For we must not forget that imperialism and colonialism are always related to the process of Christian evangelization, since where the Church goes, the empire follows¹⁹. This situation creates a distinguishing feature in the Jesuits' expeditions to the Far East, since they had to accommodate to the receiving cultures in contexts that could be hostile in many cases. Among these expeditions, China, then, represents one of the cases where orientalism considered in purely Saidian terms is not enough to account for it. The processes which he describes in his book are widely different from the ones adopted by the Jesuits in the present case (especially in the Order's accommodation to Chinese culture and concepts). For even though the Jesuits "[...] had their own agenda which was, of course, the conversion of the Chinese, [...] they recognized the necessity to understand the world view of the Chinese and to engage in some sort of dialogue with it" (Clarke, 1997: 40). But it must also be noted that this "dialogue" finds its origin in "[...] an act of political prudence, a negotiation of difference for apologetic purposes [...]" (Rubiés, 2012: 63). On this basis, and "[d]espite the enormous successes in the practice of cultural learning, literary production and civil conversation, the ultimate limit of cultural dialogue was not marked by a linguistic or conceptual inability, but by the will to never cross the boundaries of idolatry, atheism or heresy" (*id.*). Even if we do not take into account the "apostolic pattern" (*vid. supra* pages 221-222) inherent to the Order, we must not forget that the Christian framework was the only one possessed by the missionaries and thus the only starting point which they possessed when trying to apprehend the *Litteratorum Secta's* philosophical framework. According to this, "[...] a perspective religious pluralism clashes with the universalist aspirations of the Christian tradition" (Rubiés, 2012:

¹⁹ Regarding the economic backing, "[...] the Jesuits felt the need to justify these missions to Rome, and they did so by presenting China in a positive light [...]" (Frainais-Maitre, 2013: 44) throughout their writings. They did so, certainly, "[...] to show an image of a positive enterprise which European sponsors would continue to support" (Frainais-Maitre, 2013: 47). The production of the analyzed translation could be said to be a part of this promoting enterprise.

37). That is the reason why this movement of translation evidences the limits to which Christianity was willing to arrive in the persecution of that universalistic aspiration. And even this was not without internal conflicts, as we have already mentioned.

Thus, the Confucian concepts of *tian* and *tianming* which we have reviewed only acquire reality for the Jesuits (and, therefore, for the West, since this whole process of translation implies creating a particular narrative about China and its customs for a Western audience) when these terms are redefined and understood in the light of Christian revelation, which “completes them” and gives them its “true” meaning. In this sense, Confucius and his philosophy become intellectually subordinated in relation to Western truths, since Christianity cannot recognize the *Rujia* without either chaining it to its universalistic aspirations or rejecting it as it did with Buddhism. In this way, Chinese philosophy as a whole (which in the framework of the present perspective is reduced only to the so-called “primitive Confucianism”) is positioned as a predecessor of the Christian revelation. It is thus recognized as having an intrinsic value, but only insofar as it forms a “primitive” stage and predecessor to Christianity, which completes and surpasses the teachings of Kongzi. Through this process, then, the West looks at itself in the reflection of the East that it builds based on a limited dialogue with other cultures, and what it finds there is its own reflection through the reaffirmation of its values²⁰.

SOME FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Throughout this paper we have analyzed a few selected passages from the Latin translation of the *Analects* putting a major emphasis on the terms *tian* and

²⁰ But this approach, it must be noted, is only valid when speaking about texts such as the one discussed within this paper and which was destined specifically for a Western audience. If we consider the Jesuit labor within China and the interpretation of the *Rujia* which they promoted, we must also take into account the responses and the positions which the Confucian scholars adopted when dealing with the Jesuit’s process of evangelization.

tianming; we have also considered the use of orientalism as a theoretical matrix that can be used to better understand said particular text and the Christian construction that the Jesuit Order proposed based on their new acquired knowledge of the Chinese culture. Within a process such as this, notwithstanding the evangelical agenda that the Jesuits had in their dealing with the Chinese, we must consider that the production of a text such as the translation of 1687 should be evaluated under the light of Gutas' comment:

Translation is always a culturally creative activity, equally so as the composition of "original" books. Everything that has to do with translation has a relevance and meaning for the recipient culture that are different from those of the donating. The decision to translate something and the time when, the decisions what and how to translate, and the reception of the translated piece, are all determined by and hence meaningful for, the receiving culture.

(Gutas, 1998: 187)

Taking this into account, we believe that the study of a text such as the *Scientia Sinicae Liber Tertius* and Ricci's interpretation of the *Litteratorum Secta* which later Jesuits followed shouldn't be totally evaluated as a deformation or distortion of the *Rujia* as Frainais-Maitre does (2013: 60). Of course, the Jesuits did have the specific intention of converting the Chinese by utilizing Confucius, but what the Order concocted from their particular situation in China was another discourse or interpretation of Confucianism, not a deformation of some "primordial essence", which could palpably be found in China²¹. And it is not as if the *literatti* passively accepted this reading of their own philosophical tradition either; as Liu remarks: "[the Chinese *literatti*] never quite received his works [Ricci's] in the way he wanted them to do and they never quite divided Confucianism as he did into the early part of

²¹ Since we have already mentioned that even within the *Rujia* there is no consensus regarding the meaning of the term *tian*.

pristine monotheism and the later part of degenerated contamination from Buddhism and Daoism” (Liu, 2015: 194). This particular rendering of the *Rujia*, could only be understood through a Christian prism and constitutes an example of a process of contact between Christianity and a philosophical tradition unknown until then, where the religion of Christ was faced with many theological problems, such as what to do in regards to the salvation of the souls of the Chinese. This is why the reinterpretation of key philosophical concepts such as *tian* and *tianming* had deep importance within the framework of Christianity as a whole, for it forced Christianity to readapt and redefine its own boundaries under circumstances in which it could not completely qualify the other as a “heathen” nor as a “practitioner of idolatry”. This was personally understood by the Jesuits when they were expelled in 1617 after Longobardi rejected Ricci’s rendering of the *Rujia* and his decision to categorize the *Litteratorum Lex* as a kind of idolatry. In this political context, then, the Jesuits were forced to adapt and create an orientalist product: their own Christo-Confucian narrative, which served to incorporate China among the people who had also heard about the coming revelation of Christ. Thus saving Christian theological universalistic aspirations.

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