

## Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



# Relaying the Epistemic Foundations of a Transcultural Natural Theology: Proving the Existence of God in Valignano's *Catechismus christianae fidei* and Ruggieri's *Tianzhu shilu*

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Volume 44, Number 1, Winter 2021

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1081138ar>  
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v44i1.37041>

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Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)  
2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

### Article abstract

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### Cite this article

Canaris, D. (2021). Relaying the Epistemic Foundations of a Transcultural Natural Theology: Proving the Existence of God in Valignano's *Catechismus christianae fidei* and Ruggieri's *Tianzhu shilu*. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 44(1), 29–58. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v44i1.37041>

# Relaying the Epistemic Foundations of a Transcultural Natural Theology: Proving the Existence of God in Valignano's *Catechismus christianae fidei* and Ruggieri's *Tianzhu shilu*

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*When European missionaries first entered Asia and the New World, they largely transposed to their new contexts European catechisms that assumed the intellectual passivity of the catechumen. The Jesuits, however, soon realized that such textual models would not be appropriate in East Asia which boasted its own sophisticated philosophical traditions. This article explores how Michele Ruggieri (1543–1607) deploys and adapts in his pioneering Chinese catechism, Tianzhu shilu 天主實錄 (The true record of the Lord of Heaven, 1584), innovations in the catechism genre that Jesuit missionaries had originally developed for Japan. By comparing Ruggieri's arguments for the existence of God with those found in the Catechismus christianae fidei (Catechism of the Christian faith, 1586) composed by Alessandro Valignano (1539–1606) for the Japan mission, this article shows that Ruggieri lays the groundwork for a transcultural natural theology that de-emphasizes metaphysics in favour of arguments derived from a shared ethical understanding and political analogies.*

*Quand ils arrivèrent en Asie et dans le Nouveau Monde, le plus souvent, les missionnaires européens transposèrent dans ces nouveaux contextes des catéchismes européens qui supposaient la passivité intellectuelle des catéchumènes. Toutefois, les Jésuites comprirent rapidement que de tels modèles textuels ne conviendraient pas en Asie de l'Est, qui jouissait de traditions philosophiques locales complexes. Cet article explore la façon dont Michele Ruggieri (1543–1607) met en œuvre et adapte, dans son catéchisme chinois novateur Tianzhu shilu 天主實錄 (Le vrai récit du Seigneur du Ciel, 1584), des innovations dans le genre du catéchisme que les missionnaires jésuites avaient mises au point à l'origine pour le Japon. En comparant les arguments de Ruggieri visant à démontrer l'existence de Dieu avec ceux que l'on trouve dans le Catechismus christianae fidei (Catéchisme de la foi chrétienne, 1586), composé par Alessandro Valignano (1539–1606) pour sa mission au Japon, cet article montre que Ruggieri jette les bases d'une théologie naturelle transculturelle qui est moins axée sur la métaphysique que sur des analogies politiques et des arguments fondés dans une compréhension partagée de l'éthique.*

## Introduction

Michele Ruggieri (1543–1607) was one of the most significant figures in the history of Sino-Western cultural exchange. Largely through his

diplomatic manoeuvrings, in late 1582 he was the first Jesuit to obtain official permission to set up a residence in mainland China.<sup>1</sup> He laid the foundation of Western Sinology by becoming one of the first Westerners to gain some command of the Chinese language and by developing in collaboration with Ricci the first Western-language tools for studying Chinese.<sup>2</sup> In 1584, he published with the assistance of local Chinese the *Tianzhu shilu* 天主實錄 (True record of the Lord of Heaven), which not only was the first Chinese-language Catholic catechism but also provided China with the first window into late Renaissance concepts of cosmology, ethics, and natural philosophy. After his return to Europe in 1589, he worked on Spanish and Latin translations of the Confucian classics, as well as composing the first detailed geographic description of China based on Chinese sources.<sup>3</sup>

Despite these remarkable achievements, posterity has not been kind to Ruggieri. Most probably on Ricci's advice, the Jesuit Visitor to the East Indies Alessandro Valignano (1539–1606) questioned Ruggieri's competency in Chinese and his suitability as a missionary.<sup>4</sup> After learning in the mid 1590s that Ruggieri intended to publish his Latin translations of the Confucian classics and his Chinese catechism, Valignano instructed the superior general to suppress

1. For a biography of Ruggieri, see Francesco Antonio Gisondi, *Michele Ruggieri: Missionario in Cina e primo sinologo europeo* (Milan: Jaca Book, 1999); Yu Liu, "The True Pioneer of the Jesuit China Mission: Michele Ruggieri," *History of Religions* 50.4 (2011): 362–83, dx.doi.org/10.1086/658128; Ronnie Po-chia Hsia, *A Jesuit in the Forbidden City: Matteo Ricci 1552–1610* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 97–115, dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199592258.001.0001. All translations in this article are mine unless otherwise noted.

2. Michele Ruggieri and Matteo Ricci, *Dicionário português-chinês*, ed. John W. Witek and Paul Fu-mien Yang (Macau: Instituto Português do Oriente and Ricci Institute for Chinese-Western Cultural History, 2001).

3. For Ruggieri's translations of the Confucian classics, see Michele Ruggieri, *Confucio: La morale della Cina*, ed. Eugenio Lo Sardo, trans. Isabel Turull (Rome: De Luca Editori d'Arte, 2016); Michele Ruggieri, *La filosofia moral de Confucio, por Michele Ruggieri, SJ: La primera traducción de las obras de Confucio al español en 1590*, ed. Thierry Meynard and Roberto Villasante (Madrid: Mensajero - Sal Terrae - Comillas, 2018); Michele Ruggieri, *Il primo Confucio latino: Il grande studio; La dottrina del giusto mezzo; I dialoghi*, ed. Michele Ferrero (Rome: Libreria Ateneo Salesiano, 2019). For Ruggieri's writings on Chinese geography, see Michele Ruggieri, *Atlante della Cina di Michele Ruggieri, S.I.*, ed. Eugenio Lo Sardo and Lucio Lume (Rome: Istituto poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1993).

4. Valignano, Letter to Claudio Acquaviva (23 November 1588), ARSI Jap-Sin II, fo. 29v. Cited in Pasquale M. D'Elia, *Fonti ricciane: documenti originali concernenti Matteo Ricci e la storia delle prime relazioni tra l'Europa e la Cina (1579–1615)* (Rome: Libreria dello Stato, 1942–49), 1:250n2.

Ruggieri's writings because of his supposedly weak Chinese.<sup>5</sup> Though he went to Europe on the pretext of organizing a papal embassy to Japan, he was not allowed to return to China while his papal embassy project fizzled under the weight of European politics.<sup>6</sup>

Many Jesuit historians took these negative assessments of Ruggieri's career at face value. While unable to eliminate Ruggieri entirely from the story of the mission's beginnings, they reduced him to Ricci's forerunner,<sup>7</sup> or as Pasquale D'Elia put it, Ricci's John the Baptist.<sup>8</sup> Many of Ruggieri's achievements were overlooked or mistakenly attributed to Ricci. The most egregious example of this is Ruggieri's Latin translation of the Confucian classics, which had been mistakenly attributed by some scholars to Ricci (despite mostly being in Ruggieri's hand) because Ricci was considered the superior Sinologist.<sup>9</sup>

Scholars now generally agree that Ruggieri's achievements and Chinese language abilities were greater than once thought,<sup>10</sup> but a *damnatio memoriae* lingers over the *Tianzhu shilu* that has been fossilized since the early stages

5. Valignano, Letter to Claudio Acquaviva (16 December 1596), ARSI, Jap-Sin. 13, 1, fols. 46r–46v. Cfr. D'Elia, *Fonti ricciane*, 1:250n1.

6. For Ruggieri's tribulations in Europe, see António Vasconcelos de Saldanha, "A Man for Two Seasons after China: Michele Ruggieri in Europe," in *Luo Mingjian "Zhongguo ditu ji" xueshu yantaohui lunwen ji* 羅明堅《中國地圖集》學術研討會論文集, ed. Jingming Yao and Yufan Hao (Macau: Aomen Tebie Xingzhengqu Zhengfu Wenhua ju, 2014), 62–77.

7. Daniello Bartoli, *Dell'istoria della Compagnia di Gesù. La Cina. Terza parte dell'Asia* (Rome: Nella Stamperia del Varesse, 1663), 223.

8. D'Elia, *Fonti ricciane*, 1:c.

9. For the attribution of the manuscripts to Ricci, see Francesco D'Arelli, "Matteo Ricci S.I. e la traduzione latina dei *Quattro libri* (*Si shu*): dalla tradizione storiografica alle nuove ricerche," in *Le marche e l'oriente: una tradizione ininterrotta da Matteo Ricci a Giuseppe Tucci*, ed. Francesco D'Arelli (Rome: Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente, 1998), 163–75. For a more convincing attribution of authorship to Ruggieri, see Ruggieri, *Il primo Confucio latino*, and Thierry Meynard, *The Jesuit Reading of Confucius: The First Complete Translation of the Lunyu (1687) Published in the West* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 2–6, dx.doi.org/10.1163/9789004289789.

10. For a reassessment of Ruggieri's Chinese abilities based upon Chinese poems by Ruggieri, see Albert Chan, "Michele Ruggieri, S.J. (1543–1607) and His Chinese Poems," *Monumenta Serica* 41 (1993): 129–79, dx.doi.org/10.1080/02549948.1993.11731241. However, some questions remain about Ruggieri's facility with spoken Chinese, given his reliance upon interpreters until his departure from China. See Hsia, *A Jesuit in the Forbidden City*, 101.

of the Jesuit China mission.<sup>11</sup> Though the work is frequently acknowledged in scholarship as the first work published in Chinese by a European, scholars tend to compare it unfavourably to Ricci's later and more sophisticated *Tianzhu shiyi* 天主實義 (The true meaning of the Lord of Heaven, 1603).<sup>12</sup> Scholars endlessly criticize Ruggieri's awkward mix of colloquial and classicizing styles, the perceived incoherency of Ruggieri's presentation of Catholic teaching, and even the inferiority of Ruggieri's supposed Buddhist sympathies to Ricci's accommodation of Confucianism.<sup>13</sup> In a damning recent assessment, Chloë Starr concludes that the *Tianzhu shilu* is logically incoherent and essentially unreadable.<sup>14</sup>

Some of these stylistic criticisms of the *Tianzhu shilu* are not unfounded, though they are manifestly unfair. Ricci's catechism was published some two decades after his arrival in Macau whereas Ruggieri's was published after less than five years of language study. It is unsurprising that Ricci's catechism evinces more sophisticated expression and a more refined approach. However, to evaluate Ruggieri's catechism by comparing it to Ricci's is methodologically anachronistic. Such a comparison can tell us much about Ricci's intellectual

11. Trigault's Latin translation of Ricci's memoirs suggests that the Buddhist language in the *Tianzhu shilu* made the Chinese confuse Christianity with one of their idolatrous sects. Nicolas Trigault and Matteo Ricci, *De Christiana expeditione apud Sinas suscepta ab Societate Iesu* (Augsburg: Apud Christophorum Mangium, 1615), 314.

12. For a recent edition and English translation, see Matteo Ricci, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, ed. Thierry Meynard, trans. Douglas Lancashire and Hu Guozhen (Chestnut Hill, MA: Institute of Jesuit Sources, Boston College, 2016).

13. Léon Wieger, "Notes sur la première catéchèse écrite en chinois 1582–1584," *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu* 1 (1932): 72–84; Pasquale M. D'Elia, "Quadro storico-sinologico del primo libro di dottrina cristiana in cinese," *Archivum Historicum Societatis Iesu* 3 (1934): 193–222; Joseph Shih, *Le père Ruggieri et le problème de l'évangélisation en Chine* (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University, 1964); Jacques Gernet, "Sur les différentes versions du premier catéchisme en Chinois de 1584," in *Studia Sino-Mongolica*, ed. Wolfgang Bauer (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag GMBH, 1979), 407–16; Paul Rule, *K'ung-Tzu or Confucius?: The Jesuit Interpretation of Confucius* (Sydney and Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1986), 3–10; Gianni Criveller, *Preaching Christ in Late Ming China* (Taipei: Ricci Institute, 1997), 91, 101–02; Ronnie Po-chia Hsia, "The Jesuit Encounter with Buddhism in Ming China," in *Christianity and Cultures: Japan & China in Comparison, 1543–1644*, ed. M. Antoni J. Üçerler (Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 2009), 19–43; Hsia, *A Jesuit in the Forbidden City*; Liu, "The True Pioneer of the Jesuit China Mission"; Chloë Starr, *Chinese Theology: Text and Context* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 18–21, dx.doi.org/10.12987/yale/9780300204216.001.0001.

14. Starr, 20–21.

agenda but obscures the significant innovations that Ruggieri introduced to the catechism genre. Hence, scholarship has failed to appreciate that the *Tianzhu shilu* was the first printed catechism to implement the rationalist strategy devised by the Jesuit missionaries in Japan and featured unprecedented overtures to Confucian ethics in the articulation and justification of its missionary strategy.

This article explores how the *Tianzhu shilu* builds upon the Jesuits' experiences in Japan, where they sought to adopt a rational approach to catechesis that established their Japanese interlocutors as their intellectual equals. By comparing Ruggieri's catechism with that which Valignano composed for Japan, it analyzes how Ruggieri adapts Valignano's innovations in catechetical genre to the Chinese context. The analysis reveals that while the *Tianzhu shilu* must be considered the first printed catechism to incorporate Valignano's missionary strategy, Ruggieri downplays significantly the metaphysical arguments stressed by Valignano and instead constructs an innovative transcultural theology that is based on a shared ethical understanding and political analogies.

### Transposing European catechisms to the East Asian context

The transition from the fifteenth to the sixteenth century brought about unprecedented changes in European understandings of confessional identity and the relationship between Christianity and other religions. Whereas the discovery of the Americas and the Portuguese circumnavigation of Africa brought Europeans in contact with peoples who seemed blissfully unaware of Christianity, the Reformation undermined a unified conception of Christendom. Martin Luther (1483–1546) first recognized the need to publish catechetical texts to restore doctrinal stability. In the wake of Luther's catechisms, countless catechisms were published throughout the sixteenth century by reformers and Catholics alike, leading some historians to label the sixteenth century as the "age of catechisms."<sup>15</sup>

Unlike in the early church, baptized Christians who already accepted the tenets of the Christian faith were the primary intended audience of medieval and

15. Charlotte Appel, "Asking, Counting, and Memorizing: Strategies in Religious Writing and Publishing for the Common Man in 17th Century Denmark," in *Scripta volant, verba manent: Schriftkulturen in Europa zwischen 1500 und 1900*, ed. Roger Chartier and Alfred Messerli (Basel: Schwabe, 2007), 191–214. Cited in Antje Flüchter, "Translating Catechisms, Translating Cultures: An Introduction," in *Translating Catechisms, Translating Cultures*, ed. Antje Flüchter and Rouven Wirbser (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 19, [dx.doi.org/10.1163/9789004353060\\_002](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004353060_002).

early modern European catechisms. Hence formal catechesis was not so much about conversion but about consolidating and correcting knowledge of Christian doctrine.<sup>16</sup> Despite the denominational instability during the Reformation, there was still a consensus over the essentials of Christianity: everybody believed in God; the authority of Jesus was not in question; and scripture was still authoritative. Hence catechisms published at the time rarely sought to argue for the truth of doctrinal precepts on the basis of natural reason alone. Even the theologically-rich *Catechismus ex decreto Concilii Tridentini* (Roman catechism, 1567), which was published in the wake of the Council of Trent (1545–63) for the education of priests, did not attempt to prove with rational means commonly held beliefs like the existence of God, souls, and angels; rational argumentation was primarily employed to respond to Protestant challenges to traditional beliefs, such as the adoration of saints and the sacraments.<sup>17</sup>

As Europeans began to engage with non-Christian religions, for the most part they transposed to their mission field catechetical models that presumed the intellectual passivity of the catechumen. The first attempt of Francis Xavier (1506–52) at a catechism for India, published in Goa in May 1542, was the *Doctrina christiana* (Christian doctrine) or *Breve catecismo* (Short catechism). It was largely based on the *Grammática da língua portuguesa com os mandamentos da Santa Madre Igreja* (Grammar of the Portuguese language with the commandments of Holy Mother Church) by the famous Portuguese historian and administrator of India, João de Barros (1496–1570), published in Lisbon in 1539–40. In terms of its contents, it was utterly conventional: it contained the sign of the cross, the creed, prayers, the decalogue, and other aspects of Catholic theology.<sup>18</sup> Catechisms employed in the New World, such as the *Doctrina christiana y catecismo para instruccion de los Indios* (Christian doctrine and catechism for the instruction of the Indians, 1584) published in Peru, similarly focused on the memorization of doctrine.

16. Flüchter, “Translating Catechisms”; Lee Palmer Wandel, *Reading Catechisms, Teaching Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), dx.doi.org/10.1163/9789004305205. See also Thomas Aquinas, *The Catechetical Instructions of Saint Thomas Aquinas*, trans. Joseph B. Collins (New York: Wagner, 1939).

17. *Catechismus ex decreto Concilii Tridentini* (Lyons: Apud Guliel. Rovillium, 1567).

18. Francis Xavier, *The Letters and Instructions of Francis Xavier*, ed. M. Joseph Costelloe (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992), 41–45. Francis Xavier, *Monumenta xaveriana ex autographis vel ex antiquioribus exemplis collecta* (Madrid: Typis Augustini Avrial, 1899/1900–12), 1:828–31.



But after landing in Japan on 15 August 1549, Francis Xavier (1506–52) quickly discovered that simple proclamation of Christian doctrine would not suffice for the Japanese missionary context.<sup>19</sup> Xavier's letters reveal interactions with a highly argumentative people who refused to accept the tenets of the Christian faith without sufficient proof. Accordingly, Xavier would use dialectic to prove the existence of a Creator God, explain the concept of natural law, and rebut the errors of the bonzes. Fragments of a catechism composed by Luís Fróis (1532–97),<sup>20</sup> along with his description of how catechesis was conducted in the early stages of the Japanese mission, reveal that the Jesuits strove to implement the principles of the catechetical methods devised by Xavier.<sup>21</sup>

The most systematic statement of this approach was the *Catechismus christianae fidei* (Catechism of the Christian faith, 1586), which was drafted by Valignano in collaboration with Jesuits stationed in Japan and local Japanese during his tour of Japan between 1579 and 1582. The only extant versions of this text are a two-volume edition, which was published by Cosme de Magalhaens (1551–1624) at Lisbon in 1586,<sup>22</sup> and a slightly revised text printed in the *Bibliotheca selecta* (Selected library, 1593) by the Jesuit encyclopedist Antonio Possevino (1533–1611).<sup>23</sup>

19. Xavier, *The Letters and Instructions of Francis Xavier*, 334; Georg Schurhammer and Josef Wicki, eds., *Epistolae S. Francisci Xaverii aliaque eius scripta* (Rome: Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu, 1944–45), 2:265.

20. Luis Frois, "Fragmentos dum catecismo para os catecúmenos japoneses da segunda metade do século XVI," in *Historia de Japam*, ed. Josef Wicki, 5 vols. (Lisbon: Biblioteca Nacional de Lisboa, 1976–84), 4:541–64. For an overview of catechetical texts in Japan, see Minako Debergh, "La première évangélisation du Japon au XVIe siècle: catéchismes sommaires, prédications, catéchèse graduée," in *Transmettre la foi: XVIe–XXe siècles. 2. Pastorale de la mer et missions extérieures* (Paris: C.T.H.S., 1984), 175–209.

21. Luis Frois, *Historia de Japam*, ed. Josef Wicki, 2:16–17. See also Herbert Cieslik, "Father Louis Frois, Historian of the Mission," *Missionary Bulletin* 8 (1954): 153–57, 176–83.

22. Alessandro Valignano, *Catechismus christianae fidei, in quo veritas nostrae religionis ostenditur et sectae Iaponenses confutantur* (Lisbon: Antonius Riberius, 1586); Pierre Humbertclaude, "Cosme de Magalhaens et le catechisme latin de Valignano," *Monumenta Nipponica* 5.1 (1942): 244–45, dx.doi.org/10.2307/2382715.

23. Antonio Possevino, *Bibliotheca selecta qua agitur de ratione studiorum in historia, in disciplinis, in salute omnium procuranda* (Rome: Ex Typographia Apostolica Vaticana, 1593), 588–663.



The influence of Valignano's catechetical methods on Ricci's *Tianzhu shiyi* has been much studied.<sup>24</sup> What has been largely ignored is that Ruggieri's *Tianzhu shilu* had already evinced a sophisticated attempt to adapt Valignano's missionary methods to the Chinese cultural context. However, unlike Valignano's catechism, which was based upon lectures delivered to Western and Japanese novices held in January 1581, Ruggieri's catechism was aimed at the general Chinese reader, who had not yet necessarily been convinced by the claims of Christianity.<sup>25</sup> In light of this change of audience, the aggressively polemical approach to Buddhism employed in Valignano's catechism yields to a more accommodating engagement with Confucian ethics in the *Tianzhu shilu*. While Valignano's missionary strategy in Japan promoted sensitivity to Japanese cultural practices, his Japanese catechism vehemently resists Japan's intellectual traditions as monist or atheist philosophies cloaked under the veneer of idolatry.

Although primarily attributed to Ruggieri, the *Tianzhu shilu* was in fact a collaborative work composed over the course of four years. The Latin text of the catechism, entitled "Vera et brevis divinarum rerum expositio" (True and short exposition of divine things), was composed by Ruggieri towards the end of 1581 and 1582 with the assistance of Pedro Gómez (1535–1600), then rector of the College of Macau.<sup>26</sup> Already by the end of 1581, Ruggieri had a draft

24. Thierry Meynard, "The Overlooked Connection between Ricci's: 'Tianzhu Shiyi' and Valignano's 'Catechismus Japonensis,'" *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 40.2 (2013): 303–22, dx.doi.org/10.18874/jjrs.40.2.2013.303-322.

25. Urs App, *The Cult of Emptiness: The Western Discovery of Buddhist Thought and the Invention of Oriental Philosophy* (Kyoto: UniversityMedia, 2012), 54.

26. Gómez, Letter to Acquaviva (25 October 1581), "El p. Ruggerio y yo, estos meses que aqui està, nos ocupamos en hazer huna breve historia del principio del mundo, que serve juntamente de doctrina christiana por modo de dialogo para tresladarla em lengua de China" (During these months that Fr Ruggieri and I have been here, we have been working on writing a brief history of the beginning of the world, which can be used at the same time as a Christian doctrine in the form of a dialogue and is to be translated into Chinese). Cited in Pietro Tacchi Venturi, ed., *Opere storiche del P. Matteo Ricci, S.I.* (Macerata: F. Giorgetti, 1911–13), 2:35n3. The Latin manuscript, entitled "Vera et brevis divinarum rerum expositio" is held in the Biblioteca Nazionale di Roma, Fondo Gesuitico 1276. Though the manuscript itself is not dated, in chapter 4 the creation of the world is dated as "5,547 years ago" ("ante annos quinque millia quingentos quadraginta septem") whereas the corresponding passage in the Chinese text dates the creation of the world to 5,500 years ago, suggesting that the Latin text was composed three years before the Chinese text. In chapter 8 of the Latin text, the current year is indicated as 1582 ("agitur igitur nunc

Chinese translation of the *Tianzhu shilu* that he presented to civil authorities on his third trip to Guangzhou.<sup>27</sup> Although Ruggieri implausibly claimed to have mastered some fifteen thousand Chinese characters by the end of 1581,<sup>28</sup> he relied heavily on Chinese interpreters and scribes who living in Macau at the time to prepare this translation. The identity of these Chinese assistants cannot be known with certainty, though D’Elia has suggested possible candidates from the Chinese Christian community in Macau: the boys Balthazar and Gonzalo, Diego, who apparently read and wrote Chinese, and Manuel Antonio “who could speak the Mandarin language very well” (“parla molto bene la lingua mandarina”).<sup>29</sup> These Chinese assistants undoubtedly played a significant role in finding analogues for European concepts in the Chinese intellectual tradition, but Ruggieri nonetheless understood and approved these accommodations, because many of them can be found in the Latin text which his Chinese-speaking assistants most probably could not understand. Notably, Ruggieri had already started studying Chinese moral philosophy when he made the first drafts of the *Tianzhu shilu*. In a letter dated 12 November 1581, he informed the superior general that he had finished translating into “bad Latin” (“mal latino”) a short Chinese text on morality (possibly the *Daxue* 大學 or Great learning).<sup>30</sup> The Latin text of the *Tianzhu shilu* also incidentally reveals that Ruggieri’s Chinese interlocutor strove but failed to find parallels for the Christian God

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annus octogesimus secundus supra millesimum quingentesimum cum Deus, humana carne tectus, inter homines natus est”). In the Chinese text, the current year is given as 1584 (彼時至今，有一千五百八十四年矣). Given these dates, this is most likely the very text that Ruggieri worked on with Gómez. For the published version of the manuscript, see Tacchi Venturi, 2:498–540. Some scholars, notably Liu, have maintained that Ruggieri started the composition of the catechism in 1582, but Yu Liu does not cite any source to support this view. However, the Latin text of the catechism and other evidence (especially Ruggieri and Gomez’s letters at the time) unequivocally point to an earlier commencement date. See Yu Liu, “Adapting Catholicism to Confucianism: Matteo Ricci’s *Tianzhu Shiyi*,” in *The European Legacy* 19.1 (2014): 43–59, dx.doi.org/10.1080/10848770.2013.860718.

27. D’Elia, “Quadro storico-sinologico,” 200.

28. Ruggieri, Letter to Mercurian (12 November 1581), in Tacchi Venturi, 2:401.

29. D’Elia, “Quadro storico-sinologico,” 198. The scanty information we have of the Chinese people who collaborated with Ruggieri on the composition of the *Tianzhu shilu* contrasts strikingly with our relatively rich understanding of the contribution of Ricci’s social networks to the *Tianzhu shiyi*. This is evidently a topic that needs further exploration. See Yu Liu, *Harmonious Disagreement: Matteo Ricci and His Closest Chinese Friends* (New York: Peter Lang, 2015), dx.doi.org/10.3726/978-1-4539-1731-2.

30. Ruggieri, Letter to Mercurian (12 November 1581), in Tacchi Venturi, 2:401.

in the “books of our Confucius” (“Confusij nostri libris”).<sup>31</sup> Such a remark insinuates that Ruggieri had been ploughing through the Confucian classics with his Chinese tutors from the earliest stages of his Chinese education. These preliminary studies of Confucianism were reflected in the emphasis on ethical concerns that reverberate throughout the *Tianzhu shilu* and would culminate in Ruggieri’s more systematic translations of the Confucian corpus that he would prepare after his return to Europe.

Finally, the Chinese text of the *Tianzhu shilu* underwent another round of revision after Ruggieri’s return to Zhaoqing with Ricci in September 1583. In 1584, the Jesuit fathers invited a scholar from Fujian to teach them Chinese. The scholar was then asked by Ruggieri to improve the style of the *Tianzhu shilu*; during his editorial work, he converted to Christianity, assuming the baptismal name Paul in November 1584.<sup>32</sup> Hence it is no accident that the full name of the first work published by a European in China is in fact *Xin bian xizhuguo Tianzhu shilu* 新編西竺國天主實錄 (The newly revised true record of the Lord of Heaven from Western India).<sup>33</sup>

Valignano’s influence over Ruggieri while writing the *Tianzhu shilu* must have been considerable. It cannot be forgotten that Valignano was the mastermind behind the establishment of the Jesuit China mission.<sup>34</sup> Though Valignano had originally asked the Jesuit provincial of India, Rui Vicente (1523–87), to send Bernardino de Ferraris to Macau to establish the mission, the provincial opted to send Ruggieri in his place because of Ruggieri’s tremendous progress in learning Tamil.<sup>35</sup> While Valignano’s directions for Ruggieri are not extant, at least judging by the chapter on China in Valignano’s *Sumario de la India* (Summary of India), composed in 1580 while in Japan, Valignano had

31. Tacchi Venturi, 2:520.

32. D’Elia, “Quadro storico-sinologico,” 202.

33. Some useful insights on the dating of the Chinese editions can be found in Xie Hui, “Luo Mingjian *Tianzhu shilu* kanyin liuchuan kao 羅明堅《天主實錄》刊印流傳考,” *Hanji yu hanxue* 漢籍與漢學 1 (2017): 102–10.

34. Edward Malatesta, “Alessandro Valignano Fan Li-An (1539–1609): Strategist of the Jesuit Mission in China,” in *Portrait of a Jesuit: Alessandro Valignano*, ed. Macau Ricci Institute (Macau: Macau Ricci Institute, 2013), 121–43.

35. Rui Vicente, Letter to Mercurian (13 November 1579), in *Documenta indica (1583–1585)*, ed. Josef Wicki, vol. 13 (Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 1975), 695–96. See also Paul Rule, “K’ung-Tzu or Confucius? The Jesuit Interpretation of Confucianism” (PhD thesis, Australian National University, 1972), 64, doi: 10.25911/5d74e4e965ac2; Pasquale M. D’Elia, *Fonti ricciane*, 1:148–49n1.

already laid the groundwork of his method for evangelizing China,<sup>36</sup> eloquently summarized by Alvarez-Taladriz as “a method of authentic infiltration, spiritual and intellectual, with perseverance rather than arms, mastery of the language and adaptation to the customs of the land.”<sup>37</sup> Ricci remarks in his diaries that during Valignano’s sojourn in Macau between 9 March and 31 December 1582, after his first tour of Japan, the Visitor was primarily engaged in the organization of the Jesuit China mission.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, Valignano evidently believed that his experiences in Japan were of such relevance for China that in the summer of 1582 he made Ricci transcribe in full the “Risolutioni” (“Conclusions”) that he made of his trip.<sup>39</sup> It would be farfetched to suggest that Valignano had no input in the publication of the *Tianzhu shilu* since Ruggieri tells us that in 1582 Valignano had closely examined a draft of the catechism and had approved its publication.<sup>40</sup>

### Epistemic assumptions of a transcultural natural theology

The approach adopted by Valignano in his catechism hearkened to the innovative missionary approach pioneered by Xavier and developed by Fróis. However, Valignano’s catechism was much more sophisticated than what emerges from Fróis’s fragments, and through its republication in Possevino’s *Bibliotheca selecta*, which was itself reprinted in the early 1600s, came to serve as the most conspicuous statement of the Jesuits’ missionary methods in the East at the time. As Possevino remarks in his subtitle to Valignano’s work, Valignano was proposing a method not simply for evangelizing Japan but for other Oriental peoples (“*aliorum Orientalium gentium*”).<sup>41</sup>

36. Wicki, *Documenta indica*, 13:195–201.

37. Alessandro Valignano, *Sumario de las cosas de Japon, 1583. Adiciones del sumario de Japon, 1592*, ed. José Luis Alvarez-Taladriz (Tokyo: Sophia University, 1954), 35. Cited in Rule, “K’ung-Tzu or Confucius?,” 65.

38. “Nel anno 1582 venne il P. Valignano di Giappone a maccao menando seco i quattro signori, che erano mandati d’alcuni re e signori christiani a Roma, a visitare e dar obediencia al Papa, come loro Ambasciatori come di poi forno. E nel tempo che stette in Maccao una delle sue maggiori occupationi fu questa dell’impresa della Cina.” D’Elia, *Fonti ricciane*, 1:159.

39. Josef F. Schütte, *Valignanos Missionsgrundsätze für Japan* (Rome: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1951–58), 2:63.

40. Ruggieri, Letter to Acquaviva (25 January 1584) in Tacchi Venturi, 2:421.

41. Possevino, 639.

Strikingly, the introduction (*proœmium*) of the *Catechismus christianae fidei* opens with an anthropological statement about the human capacity for rational discourse. Thus, before Valignano elaborates a natural theology, he seeks to establish the epistemic assumptions upon which such a transcultural natural theology can be constructed. Rather than create a hierarchy of human races as Valignano had done elsewhere,<sup>42</sup> Valignano predicates his discourse upon a unitary conception of humans (*homo*) that is defined in relation to animals. What differentiates humans from animals is their possession of mind and intelligence whereby they can inquire into reasons, articulate arguments, and make moral choices:

The only distinction by which humans are chiefly separated from other animals is that other animals are bestowed only with life and senses, through which they are drawn to what is beneficial for their life and protect themselves. They lack reason and do not possess mind or intelligence by which they can discern what is true in things and what is false, what ought to be pursued as upright and good, and what ought to be avoided as vile and bad. Humans, however, in addition to the life and senses which God had gifted them for their benefit, have a certain power and faculty that is far more excellent, which they call mind and intelligence. With this faculty humans seek the truth of things through reasons and arguments and know the difference between upright and vile behaviour.

(Discrimen, quo uno potissimum à caeteris animantibus homo secernitur, est, quod reliquae animantes vita tantum, et sensibus praeditae sunt, quorum ministerio ad propria vitae suae comoda trahuntur, et sese tumentur, et servant: ratione vacant, mente, & intelligentia carent, qua quid in rebus verum sit, quid falsum, & quid prosequendum ut honestum, & bonum quid fugiendum ut turpe, & malum, discernere queant: homo verò praeter vitam & sensus, quibus eum Deus suo beneficio donavit, vi quadam, & facultate longè praestantiore constat, quam mentem, & intelligentiam vocant, qua per rationes, & argumenta confecta rerum veritatem inquirat, & quid differat inter honestum, & turpe, cognoscit.)<sup>43</sup>

42. M. Antoni J. Üçerler, "Alessandro Valignano: Man, Missionary, and Writer," *Renaissance Studies* 17.3 (2003): 353–59.

43. Alessandro Valignano, *Catechismus christianae fidei*, 2.

At least in this introduction, Valignano seems to betray no conception of the cultural contingencies that can affect the efficacy of arguments. For Valignano, persuasion is simply a matter of rational demonstration. If plain reason has shown that a certain proposition is false, the intellect is compelled to accept the verdict. The same applies for moral judgments: we cannot pursue a good if our intellect has shown that it is evil. On this basis, Valignano endeavours to present firm reasons to confute the errors of the Japanese sects and affirm the truth of Christian doctrine.

The language that Valignano employs is highly scholastic, and perhaps naive, considering that many Japanese who were sympathetic to Christianity failed to convert because of familial, personal, or even moral constraints. While Valignano's unbridled confidence in the veracity of his doctrine may seem to be patronizing, at least he establishes his Japanese interlocutors as his rational equals. In his mind, the arguments employed in Europe have the same persuasive force in Japan. Thus, despite the chasm between the two cultures, rational dialogue is possible.

The introductory chapter of Ruggieri's *Tianzhu shilu* is premised upon similar assumptions, and likewise evokes animal behaviour in explaining the operation of human virtues. But whereas Valignano dwells upon a scholastic *ratio* that would seem alien to his Japanese interlocutors, Ruggieri anchors the nexus of intercultural dialogue on a shared ethical understanding:

It is said that among the five constant virtues [*wuchang* 五常], benevolence [*ren* 仁] and righteousness [*yi* 義] are foremost. Hence, among the five cardinal relationships [*wulun* 五倫], those that we have with our sovereign and parents are considered the most important. Our body, hair, and skin are taken from our parents. As their children, we repay our parents because of conscience [*liangzhi* 良知] and natural capacity [*liang neng* 良能]. Our love for our parents does not come from learning but nature. Hence even birds and beasts, despite their imperfect nature [*xingpian* 性偏], show gratitude towards their parents by feeding their mothers or kneeling when sucking their mothers' milk. Wouldn't it be more so with humans?

(嘗謂五常之序，惟仁義為最先，故五倫之內，以君親為至重。人之身體髮膚，受於父母，為人子之報父母者，皆出於良知、良能，不

待學而自然親愛者也。故雖禽獸性偏，亦有反哺跪乳之恩，矧伊人  
 兮？)<sup>44</sup>

The conceptual categories that Ruggieri draws upon in this passage derive not from Western philosophy but from the Confucian tradition, which Ruggieri had been studying as part of his language studies. In a way, Ruggieri's opening passage can be considered an excursus on Mencius's concept of intuitive ability (*liangneng* 良能) and intuitive knowledge (*liangzhi* 良知)<sup>45</sup> in relation to the Five Constant Virtues (*wuchang* 五常) and the Five Mutual Relationships (*wulun* 五倫).<sup>46</sup> These references are not gratuitous displays of erudition, but strategic attempts to justify his missionary activity through the norms of Confucian ethics. In the Latin text, Ruggieri merely commences with the observation that among the Five Constant virtues, those that are linked to gratitude are considered far more excellent.<sup>47</sup> This vague reference is made more precise in the Chinese text, where Ruggieri identifies the pre-eminent virtues as benevolence (*ren* 仁) and righteousness (*yi* 義).<sup>48</sup> Hence Ruggieri argues that the duty that we owe to our rulers and parents is of paramount importance. While passing over political loyalty, Ruggieri claims that this filial obligation is intuitive and that our love for our parents does not require any instruction because of our biological connection with our parents.

Ruggieri's shift from a rationalist dialogue to a common ethical understanding is supported with an *a fortiori* appeal to animal behaviour as evidence for human ethical obligations. Notably, Ruggieri's Latin text attempts to construct this argument by evoking Valignano's rationalist hierarchy of humans and animals: since natural instinct (*naturae instinctus*) instils in animals a filial piety despite being devoid of reason (*rationis expertes*), all the more should human beings be found to exhibit such behaviour.<sup>49</sup> However, the

44. Nicolas Standaert and Ad Dudink, eds., *Yesuhui Luoma dang'anguan Ming Qing Tianzhujiào wenxian* 耶穌會羅馬檔案館明清天主教文獻 (Taipei: Ricci Institute, 2002), 1:3.

45. James Legge, *The Works of Mencius*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1895), 456 (Mencius, Jin Xin, 1.15).

46. The *wuchang* are benevolence (*ren* 仁), righteousness (*yi* 義), ritual propriety (*li* 禮), wisdom (*zhi* 智), and trustworthiness (*xin* 信). The Han dynasty scholar Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (179–104 BCE) developed the *wuchang* by adding *xin* to Mencius's catalogue of four virtues.

47. Tacchi Venturi, 2:498.

48. Standaert and Dudink, 1:3.

49. Tacchi Venturi, 2:498–99.



implied distinction between rational humans and irrational animals deprives animals of moral agency and thus weakens the logical force of the *a fortiori* argument. Crucially, in the Chinese text Ruggieri reconfigures the distinction between humans and animals in moral terms by adopting a quintessentially neo-Confucian definition of animals as having a “skewed nature” (*xing pian* 性偏). In Zhu Xi’s thought, animals were considered moral agents, and their subordinate status in nature was a reflection of their inferior moral status.<sup>50</sup> By placing animals and humans within an ethical continuum, Ruggieri is able to strengthen the logical force of the appeal to animal behaviour as evidence for human ethical obligations. Since animals with their morally inferior nature express their gratitude towards their parents by feeding them (*you fan bu gui ru zhi en* 有反哺跪乳之恩), such behaviour should be even more apparent among human beings with their superior moral nature (*shen yi ren xi* 矧伊人兮).

The next stage of Ruggieri’s argument evinces a cosmopolitan humanism that displaces Valignano’s appeal to a transcultural *ratio*. Ruggieri stresses that despite his foreign status (*sui sheng wai guo* 雖生外國) he shares a common humanity (*jun renlei ye* 均人類也), and thus is similarly bound by the same ethical obligations (*keyi bu ru qinshou, er bu si suo yi bao ben zai* 可以不如禽獸，而不思所以報本哉). Thus, he decides to preach the gospel, not merely out of solicitude for the salvation of their souls, but because the gospel is the only means by which this impoverished monk can satisfactorily repay his Chinese hosts for their kindness in having received him.

Despite Ruggieri’s limited understanding of Chinese language and philosophy at the time, this opening passage of the *Tianzhu shilu* reveals a keen appreciation of the relational nature of Confucian ethics, which contrasts with the more individualist conception of cultivating virtue proposed in the Aristotelian tradition by which Ruggieri was formed. Whereas for Aristotle acquisition of virtue is related to the fulfillment of a function (*ergon*) specific to an individual, *ren* 仁 is grounded on human relationships—a notion

50. There were two sets of binaries for qualifying *qi* 氣: *zheng* 正 (upright) or *pian* 偏 (inconstant); and *tong* 通 (subtle) or *se* 塞 (obtuse and dense). The nature of a thing is determined by the interaction of these binaries. Zhu Xi and Li Jingde, *Zhuzi yulei* 朱子語類 (Taipei: Wenjin Chubanshe, 1986), 1:57. For a summary of Zhu Xi’s views, see Youngsun Back, “Are Animals Moral?: Zhu Xi and Jeong Yakyoung’s Views on Nonhuman Animals,” *Asian Philosophy* 28.2 (2018): 97–116, dx.doi.org/10.1080/09552367.2018.1453234.

emblemized by the structural components of the character: person (*ren* 人) and two (*er* 二).<sup>51</sup> Indeed, Ruggieri's claim that gratitude and filial piety are at the heart of the Chinese hierarchy of virtues finds resonance even in modern treatments of Confucian ethics. In defining the typical features of Confucianism in the Chinese context, Lai Chen, a scholar of Song and Ming Neo-Confucianism, sees Chinese filial piety as rooted in the obligation to cherish and repay the affection of one's parents. Quoting the Song dynasty philosopher Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107), Chen affirms that *ren* is grounded on filial piety and its practice: "To practice *ren* one should start with *xiao* 孝 and *ti* 悌. *Xiaoti* is one important event (*shi* 事) in the practice of *ren*."<sup>52</sup>

In short, Ruggieri preaches the gospel because he claims that he is bound by the Confucian ethical norm of repaying benefactors, which is an elaboration of filial piety. This argument is a little crude and perhaps even disingenuous, especially considering that Ruggieri only came to China to preach in the first place. But it is striking the lengths to which Ruggieri goes to find hooks in the Chinese tradition for couching his missionary enterprise. In addition to evoking Mencius and Confucian virtues, he flatters the Chinese reader with praise for the wealth and self-sufficiency of China in contrast with his own poverty. Later in the first chapter, Ruggieri even claims that the reason why he came to China was to witness with his own eyes China's excellent governance and to learn from it. While Ruggieri is still unambiguously the sole possessor of the knowledge necessary for salvation, here, as in other parts of the catechism, he inverts the relationship between the monk and his Chinese interlocutor, portraying himself as indebted to his Chinese benefactor and a student of Chinese political science. In this way, a true dialogue can be constructed with each participant having something to contribute to a cultural exchange. Such a dependency of the instructor on the learner is unprecedented in coeval European catechisms, which invariably represent the knowledge transfer as unidirectional.

51. Jiyuan Yu, "Virtue: Confucius and Aristotle," *Philosophy East and West* 48.2 (1998): 323–47, dx.doi.org/10.2307/1399830.

52. Lai Chen, "Historical and Cultural Features of Confucianism in East Asia," in *Confucianisms for a Changing World Cultural Order*, ed. Roger T. Ames and Peter D. Herschok (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2018), 103, dx.doi.org/10.1515/9780824873325-008. This view is also shared by Yu (see "Virtue: Confucius and Aristotle").

### Proving the existence of God

The contrast between Valignano's scholastic *ratio* and Ruggieri's appeal to common ethics becomes even more apparent in their respective attempts to demonstrate the existence of a transcendent God. What is unusual about Valignano's catechism is that the thematic sequence of its first five chapters does not follow the standard topical structure of catechisms but is articulated around the confutation of significant errors identified by Valignano in Japanese sects, especially surrounding the first principle (God), its relationship with the cosmos (creation), the causes of Japanese errors (demons), the immortality of the soul, and the afterlife. Christian doctrine is introduced only after having demonstrated the irrationality of the beliefs held by the Japanese sects. Hence, while Valignano makes a point in the prooemium of avoiding offensive language and focusing on purely rational arguments ("Nihil dicitur, quod iniuria aliquem afficiat, vel offensione laedat: sed potiùs eo animo, ut planè omnes intelligant, quid differat inter verum, & falsum"), he is extremely antagonistic to Japan's indigenous religious traditions. He endeavours more to demonstrate their metaphysical errors than to identify commonalities with the Christian tradition. Ruggieri, too, rejects any common ground between Chinese religion and Christian metaphysics; strikingly, though, he postpones the confutation of Buddhist error to the third chapter after drawing on Chinese moral philosophy to justify his presence in China, thus making the opening chapters of his catechism seem much less confrontational towards China's religious and intellectual traditions.

The first chapter of Valignano's catechism opens with the claim that all peoples are confronted with the question of whether there is some first and supreme Creator of the world who has providential concern for humanity and rewards or punishes people in this and the next life according to their deeds. Following the universalizing rationalism of the *prooemium*, Valignano alleges that this question, which is a prerequisite of moral living, is so ingrained in the minds of all that all nations, including the most barbarous, have some understanding of the need for one first and supreme principle of all things (*unum primum, & summum rerum omnium principium*):

Since this question is greatly of interest to all people so that everyone can order one's life well and correctly, it is so naturally inherent and impressed

in the minds of all that there are no nations or peoples by which it has not been carefully treated and painstakingly argued. This is testified by the numerous volumes of writings in many different languages of people everywhere that have dealt with this question. There is no nation of people so barbarous, so uncouth and ignorant which, when led by reason or enlightened by some ray of light, does not understand that there necessarily is one first and supreme principle of all things by which this whole world and whatever is contained in its vast complex derives its beginning.

(Haec quaestio, ut quae vehementer omnium hominum interest, quò quisque suam vitam bene, recteque instituat, ita est in omnium animis naturaliter insita, & impressa, ut nullae penitus sint nationes, & gentes, à quibus non fuerit accuratè tractata, & disputata diligenter. Id apertè testantur tot tantaque scriptorum volumina, tam varijs, & diversis ubique hominum linguis de huius quaestionis tractatione confecta: nec est ulla hominum natio tam barbara, tam rudis, & ignara rerum quae ductu rationis, ceu quodam luminis radio illustrata non intelligat, necessariò constitui debere unum primum, & summum rerum omnium principium, à quo suum ducat initium, et originem habeat, totus hic mundus, & quidquid eius complexu vastissimo continetur.)<sup>53</sup>

Valignano's presuppositions in this passage are thoroughly in line with the tenets of scholastic theologians, who often assumed that God's existence could be proved by the universal agreement of nations. Although this notion, known as the *consensus gentium* argument, was originally employed in polytheistic contexts,<sup>54</sup> it was reframed in monotheistic terms by early Christian apologists.<sup>55</sup> Lactantius (250–325), for instance, contended that even among pagan peoples there was a latent monotheism which was revealed in times of disaster or through the contemplation of the universe.<sup>56</sup> While the *consensus gentium* argument

53. Valignano, *Catechismus christianae fidei*, 3v–4.

54. Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, trans. John E. King (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), 1.30.

55. Jakob De Roover, "Incurably Religious? *Consensus Gentium* and the Cultural Universality of Religion," *Numen* 61.1 (2014): 5–32, [dx.doi.org/10.1163/15685276-12341301](https://doi.org/10.1163/15685276-12341301).

56. Lactantius, *Divine Institutes*, ed. Anthony Bowen and Peter Garnsey (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003), 2.1.

does not appear as part of the Five Ways (*quinque viae*) of Thomas Aquinas (1225–74), elsewhere Aquinas does allow that knowledge of God is innate to human nature insofar as His existence can be known by principles innate to us.<sup>57</sup>

Valignano's starting point, therefore, is that the Japanese—like all other peoples—already have a conception of the first principle, but this conception is thoroughly confused. Hence most of the first chapter is dedicated not to proving the existence of this first principle but to correcting the erroneous doctrines about the nature or substance of the first principle, the relationship of its nature with other things, and the ends of actions in relation to the first principle.<sup>58</sup> Valignano affirms the presence of two contradictory teachings in Japan, the *Gonijt* (*gonjitsu* 權實), consisting of an exoteric doctrine with only the appearance of truth for the common people, and an esoteric doctrine which is regarded as true and reserved for the elite.<sup>59</sup> As Valignano debunks the absurdities of the exoteric doctrine in chapters 4 and 5, the focus of his attack in the first chapter is the esoteric doctrine. It is only towards the end of the first chapter that Valignano introduces a series of seven arguments to prove the existence of God for the benefit of those few (*nonnulli*) who deny His existence.

The arguments crafted by Valignano are adapted from standard scholastic sources. The first argument is a development of the *consensus gentium* argument that was already anticipated in the opening remarks of the chapter. Echoing Lactantius, Valignano asserts that all peoples acknowledge the existence of some divine force that they fear when perpetrating evils, placate with prayers, and implore when in difficulty. Valignano's version of this classical argument does not depend upon unanimity of opinion, because he acknowledges that different peoples hold different and erroneous views about the supreme deity. Rather, he argues that awareness of the divine is engrained in the mind, in a manner analogous to the biological argument articulated by Seneca:

We are accustomed to attach great importance to the universal belief of mankind. It is accepted by us as a convincing argument. That there are gods we infer from the sentiment engrafted (*insita*) in the human mind;

57. Thomas Aquinas, *Super Boetium De Trinitate* (Rome and Paris: Commissio Leonina-Éditions Du Cerf, 1992), pars 1 q. 1 a. 3 ad 6. For Aquinas's Five Ways, see Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Thomas Gornall (London: Blackfriars, 1964), 1a q. 2 a. 3.

58. Valignano, *Catechismus christianae fidei*, 4.

59. For an excellent discussion of this, see App, 58.

nor has any nation ever been found, so far beyond the pale of law and civilization as to deny their existence.

(Multum dare solemus praesumptioni omnium hominum et apud nos veritatis argumentum est aliquid omnibus videri; tamquam deos esse inter alia hoc colligimus, quod omnibus insita de dis opinio est nec ulla gens usquam est adeo extra leges moresque proiecta ut non aliquos deos credat.)<sup>60</sup>

Reiterating his remarks in the introduction, Valignano premises his argument upon the assumption that it is impossible for natural reason (*ratio naturalis*) to lead us to a false judgment. Since nature (*natura*) itself has impressed (*impresserit*) into our minds this belief in a divinity, we are compelled to accept it as true. In anticipation of Matteo Ricci's identification of the Christian God with *Tian* 天, Valignano claims that this divinity is known in both Japan and China as *Tento* 天道.<sup>61</sup> Although the *consensus gentium* argument was generally accepted in Valignano's time, its position here as Valignano's foremost argument is rather strange and rhetorically ineffective because he is supposedly at this point arguing against Japanese atheists, whose very presence contradicts the empirical premise of the argument. Indeed, by the end of the seventeenth century, philosophers such as Pierre Bayle (1647–1706) and John Locke (1632–1704) habitually cited the presence of atheists among newly discovered peoples in the Americas and the East as evidence of this argument's vacuity.<sup>62</sup>

Ruggieri's approach towards the *consensus gentium* argument in the *Tianzhu shilu* is much more circumspect and perhaps reflects the doubts about Chinese religious beliefs that he held at an early stage of his missionary activity in China. In an early letter to Everard Mercurian, dated 12 November 1581, Ruggieri affirms frankly that the Chinese are “without knowledge of God

60. Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Ad Lucilium epistulae morales*, ed. L. D. Reynolds, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 117.6.

61. Valignano, *Catechismus christianae fidei*, 9–9v.

62. Pierre Bayle, *Various Thoughts on the Occasion of a Comet*, trans. Robert C. Bartlett (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000); John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (London: Thomas Bassett, 1690). See Thomas Kelly, “*Consensus Gentium*: Reflections on the ‘Common Consent’ Argument for the Existence of God,” in *Evidence and Religious Belief*, ed. Kelly James Clark and Raymond J. Van Arragon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 135–56, dx.doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199603718.003.0009.

and that supreme cause” (“*priva della cognitione de Iddio et di quella prima e suprema causa*”), attributing everything to “heaven” (*Tien*).<sup>63</sup> While Valignano and other missionaries at the time believed analogues for Christian monotheism could be found in all societies, Ruggieri betrays an acute awareness of the insuperable metaphysical chasm separating Christianity and neo-Confucian orthodoxy, which did not perceive any ontological distinction between divine transcendence and earthly world but a cosmic union between heaven and humanity (*Tian ren heyi* 天人合一).<sup>64</sup>

In later writings, Ruggieri would also accept the identification of the Chinese divinity *Shang Di* 上帝 with God that would become the hallmark of Ricci’s accommodation of ancient Confucianism,<sup>65</sup> but at least until the publication of the *Tianzhu shilu* Ruggieri categorically rejected any identification of the Christian God with any particular Chinese figure. In the Latin text of the *Tianzhu shilu*, Ruggieri expresses his delight at how China has everything necessary for the nourishment and sustenance of man, but laments that it lacks knowledge of the true God.<sup>66</sup> While the corresponding Chinese text removes this latter affirmation, the sense that God is unknown to the Chinese is conveyed in both the Latin and Chinese text of his Chinese interlocutor’s reply, which frankly confirms that in all his study of the Chinese classics he, too, has never come across any mention of *Deus* or *Tianzhu*:

*Ruggieri’s Latin text*

While perusing many books and unravelling many volumes of our own philosophers and poets, I have never been able to find anything about that God Whom you preach. Therefore, I beseech you to say something about Him while I listen with my whole mind.

(Habet enim, ut verum fatear, quidquid ad victum cultumque hominis optari potest. Illud tamen unum desidero, veri scilicet Dei cognitionem.)<sup>67</sup>

63. Tacchi Venturi, 2:402.

64. Julia Ching, *The Religious Thought of Chu Hsi* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 6.

65. Shih, 56.

66. Tacchi Venturi, 2:501.

67. “Multos ego quidem libros pervolutans, multa nostrorum et sapientium et poetarum volumina evolvens nunquam aliquid de isto, quem praedicas, Deo invenire potui. Qua propter dic, quaeso, aliquid de illo: ego tota mente interim auscultabo.” Tacchi Venturi, 2:501.



*Ruggieri's Chinese text*

Someone says: Every day I have studied under numerous famous teachers and studied tens of thousands of poems and books, but I have never heard of a *Tianzhu* who made the cosmos, people and things. Therefore, please tell me, is there truly one God?

(或曰：予平日所從有數位明師，所習有萬卷詩書，未聞有一位天主，而能制作乾坤人物。茲者請教，果有一位天主否也？)<sup>68</sup>

In the Latin text, Ruggieri reacts to this statement with marvel, given that “even the barbarous and savage nations” (“*etiam barbarae atques immanes gentes*”) have some knowledge of God, even if they have not fully understood His magnitude. This remark is prudentially removed from the Chinese text, probably because it implies that the Chinese who lack this knowledge of God are in this respect inferior to the most barbarous nations. Nevertheless, the inclusion of this remark in the Latin text reveals that Ruggieri’s instinct, like Valignano’s, is to predicate his catechism on the *consensus gentium* argument. Indeed, Ruggieri’s Latin vocabulary echoes that of Valignano, who similarly appeals to the testimony of the “barbarous and uncouth” (“*tam barbara tam rudis*”) nations. But Ruggieri’s preliminary studies in Chinese philosophy and culture led him to question one of the empirical assumptions with which Valignano and other Europeans had engaged with non-Christian cultures up until his time. Nonetheless, he still shares with Valignano the conviction that the human mind is compelled to accept the existence of God when confronted with sound reasons:

*Ruggieri:*

But since human intelligence is most greatly enlightened after listening to reasons, I will give to you a few brief ones. After you have heard them, you will not be able to deny that there is God and that all things are governed by a single divinity.

68. Standaert and Dudink, 1:10.

(Sed quoniam hominis intelligentia rationibus auditis maxime illustratur, paucas illas quidem et breves tibi proponam, quibus perceptis, Deum esse et ab uno numine omnia gubernari inficiari non poteris.)<sup>69</sup>

*Valignano:*

Nor is there any nation of people so barbarous, so uncouth and ignorant that, when informed by reason or, as it were, a certain ray of light, does not understand that there necessarily must be one first and supreme principle of all things from which this whole world and everything that is contained within its vast complex draws its beginning and origin.

(nec est ulla hominum natio tam barbara, tam rudis, & ignara rerum quae ductu rationis, ceu quodam luminis radio illustrata non intelligat, necessariò constitui debere unum primum, & summum rerum omnium principium, à quo suum ducat initium, et originem habeat, totus hic mundus, & quidquid eius complexu vastissimo continetur.)<sup>70</sup>

At the same time, Ruggieri attempts to reconfigure the *consensus gentium* in a way that would seem plausible to a Chinese interlocutor who had just admitted that he had never heard of anything like God. To achieve this, Ruggieri strips the supernatural presuppositions of the *consensus gentium* and attempts to articulate the argument through the use of social experience. Instead of asserting a universal belief in God, Ruggieri merely asserts that even the most stupid individuals profess that there are things above them deserving of respect (*ren sui zhi yu, zhi you zunzhang zai shang, ze fengjing zhi* 人雖至愚，知有尊長在上，則奉敬之).<sup>71</sup> Whereas Lactantius would argue for an innate knowledge of the being who ought to be venerated as supreme, Ruggieri acknowledges that people are in fact ignorant of it (*zhi bu zhi shui wei zhi zun er fengjing zhi* 只不知誰為至尊而奉敬之).<sup>72</sup>

The secular premise of this argument allows Ruggieri to prove the existence of the one supreme being by constructing a political analogy between

69. Tacchi Venturi, 2:501.

70. Valignano, *Catechismus christianae fidei*, 3v–4.

71. Standaert and Dudink, 1:10.

72. Standaert and Dudink, 1:10.

the unicity of God and the Chinese emperor. The parallel that Ruggieri draws between divine and earthly governmental structures is not original, finding its earliest expression in Hellenistic political theology.<sup>73</sup> In medieval political philosophy, theorists such as John of Salisbury (late 1110s–80) employed it as a commonplace to reflect on the proper comportment and duties of a monarch.<sup>74</sup> Perhaps of greater significance for Ruggieri is that Aquinas in *De regno ad regem Cypri* adduced God's solitary governance over the cosmos as evidence that only a monarchy can ensure peace, stability, and order.<sup>75</sup> Such an argument, however, is only workable in a monotheistic theological context. But the parallel can still be salvaged because Ruggieri does not seek to demonstrate the superiority of monarchy, but presumes it, and such a presumption is possible because of political values common to China and Europe at the time. By drawing on the political experiences of his Chinese interlocutor, Ruggieri is able to ensure that his arguments are much more accessible and familiar than if he were to commence, as Aquinas does in the *Summa theologiae*, from the argument of the unmoved mover. Indeed, in the Latin text, Ruggieri hints at the purpose of his rhetorical strategy by acknowledging that his Chinese interlocutor is best acquainted with Chinese governance: "First of all, I use a certain analogy taken from this most noble kingdom, in which you were born and whose governance you know extremely well" ("In primis utar similitudine quadam sumpta ex hoc nobilissimo regno, in quo tu ipse natus es et cuius gubernationem optime cognoscis").<sup>76</sup>

Ingenuously, Ruggieri conducts his argument from the perspective of an outsider who encounters China's political structures for the first time. This foreigner notices that Guangdong and other provinces are structured according to a hierarchical bureaucracy. The peace (*an tai* 安泰) that China enjoys is contingent upon the fact that all these provinces answer ultimately to a single monarch (*ren jun* 人君). Although neither Ruggieri nor his Chinese interlocutor have seen this monarch, they can infer with reason (*li* 理) that

73. Ioannes Stobaeus, *Ioannis Stobaei anthologium*, ed. C. Wachsmuth and O. Hense (Berlin: Apud Weidmannos, 1884), 4.7.61, 4.263.7.

74. John of Salisbury, *Policraticus: Of the Frivolities of Courtiers and the Footprints of Philosophers*, trans. Cary J. Nederman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 191 (8.17).

75. Thomas Aquinas, *De regno ad regem Cypri*, trans. Gerald B. Phelan (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1949), 13 (§20).

76. Tacchi Venturi, 2:501.

China is ruled by one sovereign because such peace would otherwise not be possible.<sup>77</sup> The corollary of this observation is that the contemplation of the ordered cosmos compels us to accept the existence of a supreme governor who wards off chaos (*luan* 亂).<sup>78</sup>

In the *Catechismus christianae fidei*, Valignano advances a similar political analogy to explain the relationship between reason and revelation.<sup>79</sup> He argues that certain things that can be only taken on trust (i.e., revelation and the authority of the Catholic Church) are not necessarily irrational. For instance, although the emperor's existence cannot be proven by testimony (no one has ever seen him) or reason, the fact that everyone believes that he exists compels us to accept that he exists. Notably, however, Valignano does not invoke the emperor's position in the Japanese political system as a proof for God's role in ordering the cosmos. The weakness of the Japanese emperor at a time of incessant civil war would have made such an argument nonsensical for a Japanese reader.

The political analogy that Ruggieri constructs artfully eases the transition to the metaphysical argument from final cause. Valignano presents a similar proposition as part of his third argument for the existence of God where he contends that just as a well-ordered domestic environment presupposes an intelligent homemaker, so the regular motion of the stars implies an intelligence governing everything.<sup>80</sup> But as in the introduction, Ruggieri shrinks from giving the impression that this argument is foreign to his Chinese interlocutor. By characterizing himself as a student of Chinese governance, he acknowledges that his interlocutor is in fact much better versed in the subject. Ruggieri feigns to be making inferences about the political institutions of other provinces

77. “天庭之中，真有一位為天地萬物之主，吾天竺國人稱之謂了無私是也。吾且以理譬之。譬有外國一人，遊至中華廣省，見其各處州縣，俱事本府，府承事乎兩司，而兩司又承事乎兩院，廣省如是，則其餘省亦可知矣。然兩院獨無所承事乎？原有一位人君，撐持掌握，固能如是之安泰也。他雖未嘗親至京師，目見君王，然以理度之，誠知其有一位人君也。” Standaert and Dudink, 1:11.

78. “如此乾坤之內，星高乎日，日高乎月，月高乎氣，氣浮于水，水行于地。地隨四時而生花果草木，水養魚蝦，氣育禽獸，月隨潮水，日施光明。予忖度之，誠於天庭之中，必有一位天主，行政施權。使無天主，焉能使四時而不亂哉？此乃第一之喻理也。” Standaert and Dudink, 1:11–12.

79. Valignano, *Catechismus christianae fidei*, 56.

80. Valignano, *Catechismus christianae fidei*, 9v–10.

which his interlocutor knows to be true. In this way, the interlocutor is induced to accept the coherence of Ruggieri's argument about the necessity of a divine governor to maintain the cosmic order.

Most of the other arguments that Valignano provides for proving the existence of God find parallels in Ruggieri's text. The second argument in both Valignano and Ruggieri's catechism consists in the conviction that everything, including the universe, requires a cause.<sup>81</sup> The third argument in both catechisms derives from the assumption that order presupposes a skilled and wise governor.<sup>82</sup> Valignano's fourth reason is that since inanimate objects such as the heavens cannot be moved except by an external impulse, there must be a governor in the heavens who moves them. While in Aquinas the unmoved mover is used to explain merely the move from potentiality to actuality, Valignano links it to the teleological argument by focusing on how ordered fixed movement of the heavens presupposes a wise governor.<sup>83</sup> As this is simply a variation of Valignano's third argument, it is not included in Ruggieri's catechism. Nonetheless, Valignano's analogy of a helmsman at sea is maintained as part of Ruggieri's illustration of the argument from order: a vessel is only able to navigate contrary winds and waves if it is directed by a wise seafarer. Valignano's fifth, sixth, and seventh arguments, which are not reproduced in Ruggieri's catechism, are but variations of his first four. The fifth argument extends the second with a biological analogy suggesting that everyone has a parent and that since an infinite regression is impossible, there must be first creator who made the first humans, animals, and plants.<sup>84</sup> The sixth argument draws upon the observation that all things in nature, including those which lack intelligence, direct their actions to certain ends. Since they cannot understand what they do, they must be guided by an intelligent being that has impressed such an impetus in them.<sup>85</sup> This argument, which builds logically on the fourth argument, is not found in Ruggieri's Chinese text but is nonetheless present as the concluding argument of his Latin text. Ruggieri's reluctance to include teleological arguments in his Chinese text may reflect

81. Valignano, *Catechismus christianae fidei*, 9v.

82. Valignano, *Catechismus christianae fidei*, 10.

83. Valignano, *Catechismus christianae fidei*, 10–10v.

84. Valignano, *Catechismus christianae fidei*, 11.

85. Valignano, *Catechismus christianae fidei*, 11–11v.

the difficulty of distinguishing the Aristotelian concept of teleology from the Chinese concept of *ming* 命, or “fate,” which might imply a determinism that is incompatible with the Christian understanding of free will. Later in the *Tianzhu shilu*, Ruggieri contrasts *ming* to what he terms “endowment” (*fu* 賦, translating *providentia*), which *Tianzhu* allots on the principle of Divine Justice (*Tianzhu zhi gong* 天主至公).<sup>86</sup> Valignano’s seventh argument is a further elaboration of his third but tinged with the *consensus gentium* as a conclusion. Here, Valignano argues that no people have ever been so barbarous and uncouth that upon seeing Possidonius’s sphere they did not acknowledge it as the work of a master craftsman brimming with intelligence; therefore, no one looking at the marvellous cosmos can deny that it was made by a supreme and perfect intelligence.<sup>87</sup>

Yet none of the metaphysical arguments in the *Tianzhu shilu* are as developed and sophisticated as the political analogy used as Ruggieri’s first argument. Later in the text, Ruggieri returns to the analogy, not as proof of the divine order but in order to configure Christianity as the religion that embodies *par excellence* the ideals of Confucian social relationships. In his outline of the three laws in the history of salvation, Ruggieri consistently pairs belief in God with Confucian political and ethical principles. With strong textual echoes to the *Daxue*, which extols peace in the world (*tianxia ping* 天下平) as the highest ideal of a ruler,<sup>88</sup> Ruggieri impresses the view that governance (*zhiguo* 治國) and social harmony (*hemu* 和睦) flow necessarily from belief in and devotion to God. Strikingly, in his summary of the third or Christian law, Ruggieri even argues that Christian teaching encompasses not only rituals in worship of God (*jibai Tianzhu liyi* 祭拜天主禮儀) and commandments for behaving virtuously (*xingshan* 行善) but also precepts for virtuous governance (*shan zheng zhiguo* 善政治國).<sup>89</sup>

The first unwritten law is boiled down to two principles engraved in our “hearts” (*xin* 心): an intuitive knowledge of need to worship the One True God (*shi ren xin zhong zi zhi, zhi you yi wei Tianzhu suo dang jing feng* 使人心中

86. Standaert and Dudink, 1:20.

87. Valignano, *Catechismus christianae fidei*, 11v–12.

88. James Legge, *The Chinese Classics: Confucian Analects, The Great Learning, and the Doctrine of the Mean*, 7 vols. (Hong Kong: London Missionary Society, 1861), 1:223.

89. Standaert and Dudink, 1:53.

自知，只有一位天主所當敬奉) and the Golden Rule (*shi ren cun yi tui ji ji ren zhi xin* 使人存一推己及人之心).<sup>90</sup> Of interest here is Ruggieri's choice of words to articulate the latter principle. Ruggieri's Chinese interlocutor would have recognized *tui ji ji ren* 推己及人 as a variation of *tui ji ji wu* 推己及物, which Zhu Xi (1130–1200) used in his gloss of the *Analects*: “Do not do unto others that which you do not want for yourself” (己所不欲勿施於人).<sup>91</sup> In this way, Ruggieri insinuates that ancient Confucianism partook of this natural law, albeit in an imperfect way. This view is made more explicit in the corresponding Latin text where Ruggieri expresses uncertainty as to whether the Confucian *Tian* 天 corresponds to natural knowledge of God but acknowledges that the Golden Rule can be found in the Confucian classics (“illud posterius caput ego Confusij nostri libris traditum recognosco; prius vero nequaquam ab eo expositum fuisse miror”).<sup>92</sup>

The second or Mosaic law is afforded extended discussion over three chapters (12–14). Harkening back to the first argument for the existence of God, political order is cited as the *raison d'être* for the Ten Commandments. Just as earthly kings must use laws to ensure that their kingdoms are ruled peacefully (*guo ping zhi* 國平治), so God instituted the Ten Commandments to ensure the orderly functioning of the world (*tianxia* 天下).<sup>93</sup> The notion that the Ten Commandments were necessary for social order would have appealed to Confucian political sensibilities which similarly stressed social peace as a primary goal of statecraft. Ruggieri's division of the commandments into two categories at once reinforces the dependence of social order on God's supreme authority and the importance of orderly social relations: the first three commandments solely concern reverence due to God (*wei fengjing Tianzhu eryi* 惟奉敬天主而已) whereas the last seven solely concern social harmony among people (*wei zai hemu shiren eryi* 惟在和睦世人而已).<sup>94</sup>

But even in his justification of the first three commandments, Ruggieri makes reference to Confucian ethics and Chinese social customs. The need to worship the one God is explained with an *a fortiori* analogy to filial piety. Just

90. Standaert and Dudink, 1:52.

91. Zhu Xi, *Zhuzi quanshu* 朱子全書, 27 vols. (Shanghai: Guji Chubanshe, 2010), 6:207.

92. Tacchi Venturi, 2:520.

93. Standaert and Dudink, 1:67.

94. Standaert and Dudink, 1:68.



as everyone is morally bound to pay respect (*jing* 敬) to their elders, we are even more bound to pay worship (*feng jing* 奉敬) to God because God is greater than our elders (*sheng yu qinzhong* 勝於親長).<sup>95</sup> In a similar vein, Ruggieri draws upon the Chinese practice of calling on superiors on the first and fifteenth days of the lunar month (*shuo wang* 朔望) as *a fortiori* evidence for the need to worship God on a regular basis.<sup>96</sup>

## Conclusions

The above analysis reveals that however much Ruggieri sought to apply Valignano's missionary policy in China, from the very outset he was conscious of the differences between China and Japan. While Valignano gives a fuller array of the commonplace scholastic arguments for the existence of God, Ruggieri gives greater attention to arguments deriving from his knowledge of China's political institutions and Confucian ethics. Such a rhetorical strategy was not available to Valignano because of the instability that Japan was undergoing at the time. Valignano makes a point of underlining in his *Sumario* of August 1580 the bellicosity of the Japanese, remarking how from the age of fifteen, all males carry swords and daggers.<sup>97</sup> He was fully alive to the fact that Japan was in the midst of a vicious civil war that had turned the country into a revolving wheel of fortune and had destroyed the natural bonds of kinship.<sup>98</sup> Yet conversely, Ruggieri digresses during his exposition of the Ten Commandments in the *Tianzhu shilu* that the Chinese do not carry swords and are paragons of peaceableness. In Possevino's *Bibliotheca selecta*, which presented the *Tianzhu shilu* for the first time to the European public, Ruggieri even directly compares the Japanese and Chinese missionary fields, concluding that the conversion of China would be even easier because of its "perpetual peace" ("perpetua pace") and political unity under "one king" ("uno Rege") in contrast to the "din of weapons" ("armorum strepitus") that poses such a great impediment in Japan.<sup>99</sup>

95. Standaert and Dudink, 1:69.

96. Standaert and Dudink, 1:70–71.

97. C. R. Boxer, *The Christian Century in Japan 1549–1650*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), 74.

98. Boxer, 75.

99. Possevino, 584.

For Ruggieri, therefore, preaching the Christian God cannot merely consist in the transposition of dry scholastic logic to China. The greatest proof for the existence of God comes not from the European arsenal of metaphysics but from the testimony of China's own governance.

Despite Valignano's suppression of the *Tianzhu shilu* in the mid 1590s, Ruggieri's catechism continued to wield significant influence through Ricci's *Tianzhu shiyi*, which lifted many passages directly from Ruggieri's catechism.<sup>100</sup> While Ricci develops more profoundly Ruggieri's tentative forays into the Confucian tradition, he only briefly alludes to the political analogy with which Ruggieri commenced his proofs for the existence of God, arguing *en passant* that God's unicity is necessary for order in the cosmos just as a family or kingdom can only avoid chaos (*luan* 亂) when ruled by one head (*zhang* 長) or sovereign (*jun* 君) respectively.<sup>101</sup> Instead, Ricci follows more closely Valignano's conventional articulation of the *consensus gentium* argument and gives a much fuller exposition of Valignano's metaphysical arguments for the existence of God than Ruggieri's catechism.<sup>102</sup> It would seem, therefore, that this particular innovation of Ruggieri's was short lived and that Valignano's more metaphysical approach to catechesis ultimately prevailed in the Jesuit China mission.

100. For comparative analysis, see Thierry Meynard, "Introduction," in Matteo Ricci, *Le sens réel de Seigneur du Ciel*, ed. and trans. Thierry Meynard (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2013), ix–xviii.

101. Ricci, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, 62.

102. Ricci, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, 49–51.