

## **Pragmatic Cultural Accommodation: A Study of Matteo Ricci's Chinese Works**

ESGUERRA, Paula

### **I. Introduction**

Designed in 1579 by Alessandro Valignano, the Jesuit Visitor to the East Indies, the strategy of 'conversion through cultural accommodation' became the landmark of the Jesuit project in East Asia. Valignano believed that increasing the sensitivity to local conditions and acquiring a deeper understanding of local religious beliefs would help convince indigenous peoples of Christianity's validity. This awareness, in addition to a better knowledge of local languages, would enable the Jesuits to establish friendly relationships with local priests, Christian converts, and powerful personalities.

Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) was responsible for establishing the Jesuit mission in China in 1583. The success of his missionary project resulted, to a great extent, from his unique implementation of Valignano's strategy of cultural accommodation. Ricci's intelligence and his devotion to the study of the Chinese language and literary texts placed him among the best-known Confucian scholars of Ming China (1368-1644). Ricci's Chinese writings sold in large quantities and were greatly admired by the Chinese educated elite; he became the first European to compose texts in the Chinese language and the first foreigner to have his writings included in an imperial anthology.

Paradoxically, in contrast with Ricci's indisputable recognition and accomplishments on Chinese soil, his efforts to accommodate Christianity to Chinese ideas were received with less acclaim among his Jesuit colleagues who

had a background in the Japan mission, such as João Rodrigues Tçuzzu 陸若漢 (1558-1634).<sup>(1)</sup> Rodrigues was particularly critical of Ricci's methods; he believed that by establishing similarities between the Christian God (*Deus*) and the Chinese Lord of Heaven (天主 *T'ien-chu*) Ricci had gone "too far" and, had introduced elements of paganism into the teachings of Christianity.

This essay demonstrates why even though both Chinese and Japanese Jesuit missions adopted Valignano's strategy of conversion through cultural accommodation, Ricci's methods were considered unacceptable to Rodrigues. The main argument presented is that the strategy of cultural accommodation obliged Ricci to pragmatically use his knowledge of the Chinese classics, skillfully display or conceal certain ideas, use concepts flexibly, and carefully choose among specific topics and writing styles. Analyzing Ricci's methods through his unique Japanese experience, Rodrigues was unable to understand Ricci's complex writing strategy; he possessed a limited familiarity with the Chinese classics, religion and language, and thus tended to confuse Ricci's carefully designed missionary strategy with a dangerous interpretation of Christian doctrine.

In order to illustrate this argument, this essay is structured into six main sections, followed by brief discussions. The first part contextualizes the link between the Jesuit missions in Japan and China. Section two summarizes Valignano's policy of cultural accommodation. Section three is an introduction to Matteo Ricci's missionary career. The fourth section deals with Ricci's unique method of cultural accommodation and his efforts to make Christianity understandable to the Chinese. Section five draws attention to the pragmatic and rhetorical elements of Ricci's missionary strategy by contrasting selections from two of Ricci's Chinese texts —*Essay on Friendship* (交友論) (1595) and *The True Meaning of The Lord of Heaven* (天主實義) (1605)— and Ricci's personal writings. In particular, section five demonstrates why Ricci's authorial choices should not be

equated with the assumption that Ricci was, as his Jesuit colleagues claimed, confused about either Christianity or Chinese ideas: this analysis highlights Ricci's deep knowledge of both traditions. Finally, through an examination of João Rodrigues' critique of Ricci, section six analyzes how the Jesuits' attempt to adapt Christianity to local cultures resulted in a clash of opinions between Jesuits with a background in the Japan mission, and Jesuits who had only worked in China.

## **II. Contextualization: Why did the Mission in Japan Need China?**

The observations of Francis Xavier (1506-1552), the Jesuit pioneer in Asia, would determine the future form the Jesuit mission in Japan and China would take. Xavier was deeply impressed by the Japanese. He recorded in his journals that among the peoples he had seen so far, the Japanese stood out for their good manners and high levels of literacy and rationality.<sup>(2)</sup> Xavier insisted that, given the exceptional characteristics of the Japanese, with only some minor corrections, they had great potential for becoming good Christians (Boxer 1951, 36). Based on this positive experience and the high expectations it generated, following Xavier's visit, Japan became the preferred center of operations for the Jesuit mission in East Asia.

In his records about Japan, Xavier expressed his bewilderment when members of the Japanese educated elite would pose the question: why, if the truths of Christianity were as the Jesuits preached, did the Chinese know nothing about them (Schurhammer 1973, 112)? From this indication, Xavier concluded that unless the Chinese were converted to Christianity, the Jesuit efforts in Japan could be easily reverted in the future. To avoid this result from occurring, Xavier attempted to establish Christianity in China. However, he died enroute to the Chinese mainland in 1552, failing to realize his missionary goal (Billings 2009, 1).

Continuing Xavier's legacy, Valignano and the Jesuit leaders in Asia believed the establishment of a Chinese mission was indispensable to secure the advances Jesuits were making in Japan. The close link between both missions explains why Valignano's strategy of conversion through cultural accommodation was adopted simultaneously in both countries, and why besides importing books and ideas produced by the China mission to Japan, the Jesuits in Japan retained a particular interest in the missionary work done in China. This perceived interconnection also explains why later on the Jesuits with a background in Japan would become Ricci's harshest critics.

### **III. Valignano's Strategy of Cultural Accommodation**

Alessandro Valignano's strategy of conversion through cultural accommodation was envisioned as an optimal method for establishing Christianity in Asia. Valignano's formulation resulted from his wish to establish a dynamic local Church that could continue to thrive even if the local political authorities forced the Jesuit missionaries to leave their territories (Corradi 2010, 232). The method of cultural accommodation operated on at least three levels: doctrinal, cultural and educational. At the doctrinal level, it meant the "adaptation of the practices and teachings of Christianity as much as possible to local cultures without losing the essence of the doctrine. At the cultural level, it consisted in adopting the dress, etiquette, and, of course, language of a local culture in order to proselytize more effectively" (Billings 2009, 11). Additionally, it was believed increasing cultural understanding would help smooth the day-to-day relationships between Europeans and the Japanese members of the Jesuit mission. Finally, in order to ensure the continuation and growth of Christianity, even in the face of political upheaval, it was deemed essential to increase the number of local converts and train a group of proficient local priests who could, if necessary,

assume the leadership of the Church (Ross 63, 1994).

The idea of cultural accommodation was generally well received among Jesuits in Asia, as they themselves realized that becoming culturally sensitive would be helpful for the success of the mission. Among this general acceptance, the Jesuit fathers Matteo Ricci (利瑪竇) (1552-1610) and João Rodrigues (陸若漢) (1558-1634) stood out in their support, adherence, and dedication to the Jesuit project of cultural accommodation. In China and Japan, Ricci and Rodrigues respectively became outstanding linguists, scholars, and interpreters of the local moral and literary traditions.

#### **IV. Matteo Ricci: Life and Mission**

Based on his experiences in Japan, Valignano proposed that in China the Jesuits should aim to transmit the principles of Christianity through private dialogues with members of the elite, rather than make massive conversions, (Ross 1994, 132). Valignano delegated this task to his friend, Matteo Ricci, granting him a great degree of independence and instructing him to take all necessary measures to adapt Christianity to the Chinese cultural context (Dunne 1962, 291).

From the perspective of cultural accommodation, Ricci's conversion project in China was an indisputable success. Since arriving in Macao in 1582 to join the Jesuit mission in Asia, Ricci plunged into learning the Chinese language and the studying the Chinese classics. Endowed with a gift for languages, extraordinary memory, and an acute scholarly mind, he eventually became an influential figure. Ricci's erudition allowed him to establish long-lasting relationships with members of the Chinese elite and to enter the circles of Confucian literati. Ricci's Chinese writings, in particular *Essay on Friendship* (1595), *The True Meaning of the Lord in Heaven* (1603), and his astronomical works, *Writings on Heavenly Studies* (1629) and *Mappamondo* (1598), sold in large quantities and were greatly admired by the

Chinese elite of Ming China (1368-1644). Ricci became the first European to compose texts in Chinese according to the literary norms of the time, and the first foreigner to have his writings included in an imperial anthology (Billings 2009, 1-4). Furthermore, Ricci was the first European to gain access to the imperial Forbidden City in Beijing (Ross 1994, 140).

## **V. The Ricci Method:**

### **Making Christianity Understandable in Confucian Terms**

When describing his mission in China, Ricci often used the metaphor of agriculture, where rather than planting or reaping fruits, he saw himself as preparing the Chinese soil so that Christianity could flourish (Zhang 1996, 20). For Ricci, part of the process of “preparing the ground” consisted in Christianizing Chinese concepts and vocabulary, a task that he set out to accomplish through writing. The topics and style of Ricci’s Chinese works were in accord with the literary parameters of the time, and addressed the interests, beliefs, and cultural expectations of the Chinese. These works were rhetorical in style and skillfully concealed Ricci’s true authorial intentions of eventually replacing Chinese beliefs with Christian ideas (Ross 1994, 143-144). In addition to his religious works, during his stay in China, Ricci wrote extensive personal letters and journals, in either Italian or Latin, where he explicitly expressed his intentions and presented nuanced interpretations of Chinese ideas.

To illustrate the particularities of Ricci’s version of cultural accommodation and his pragmatic use of Chinese ideas to introduce Christian concepts, the following section contrasts entries from Ricci’s personal writings with selections from his main Chinese works: *Essay on Friendship* (交友論) (1595) and the *True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* (天主實義) (1605). This exercise will provide evidence of (i) Ricci’s flexible approach to pragmatically adapting Chinese ideas, and (ii)

that contrary to what the Jesuits with a background in Japan believed about Ricci's works, he clearly differentiated between the rhetorical missionary discourse he intended for the Chinese audience and his personal understanding of Christian ideas.

## VI. Two Voices of Matteo Ricci: Pragmatic Cultural Adaptation

### A. *Essay on Friendship*<sup>(3)</sup> (交友論) (1595)

*Essay on Friendship* (1595), the first of Ricci's Chinese writings, is the best example of Ricci's early accommodative approach. This work played a crucial role in establishing Ricci's name among the Chinese, and its popularity surpassed Ricci's expectations (Billings 2009, 3).<sup>(4)</sup> Simply put, with this book, Ricci aimed at making friends with members of the Chinese elite. That is to say, he hoped the suspicion existing towards him and the Jesuits in China would be reduced by establishing friendship as a common value worth pursuing (Billings 2009, 20).

The *Essay on Friendship* can be generally classified as a secular work that provides ethical guidelines for edifying nourishing friendships. It consists of a selection of a hundred maxims on the topic of friendship drawn from texts of famous Western thinkers such as Aristotle, Augustine, Seneca and Cicero.<sup>(5)</sup> Although only two maxims in the whole text have religious references, in this work Ricci was deliberately introducing Chinese intellectuals to ideas of Western thinkers whose works played a major role in the development of Christianity (Billings 2009, 64). This effort corresponded closely to Ricci's mission of preparing an ideological groundwork upon which the seeds of Christianity could be planted.

In the *Essay on Friendship*, Ricci's choice of topic, proem and colophon reveal interesting features of his early accommodative strategies. Within the scholarly circles of Ming China, friendship was a popular subject of discussion. It is almost

certain, having witnessed the interest of the Chinese elite in that topic, Ricci strategically chose it for his first Chinese work. As Billings pointed out in his commentary on the *Essay on Friendship*, “Ming intellectuals wrote about friendship almost obsessively: thus, the topic itself was perfectly chosen to take advantage of this intellectual and political trend among the educated class. To put it another way, writing such an essay at such a time was the perfect way to make friends among the elite” (Billings 2009, 22). In this sense, it seems adequate to interpret the *Essay on Friendship* as Ricci’s first attempt to participate in the ongoing philosophical dialogue.

The choice of friendship as a topic shows that the Chinese intellectuals’ preoccupations became a main stimulus for Ricci’s work; in order to enter into a dialogue with the Chinese elite, Ricci was obliged to choose among the topics of the day. In this sense, Ricci’s writings were at the same time a response to the current Chinese intellectual context and an attempt to introduce Christian (i.e. European) ideas into the Chinese intellectual landscape. Viewed through the lens of cultural accommodation, Ricci’s intellectual work in China needs to be understood in terms of a dynamic dialogue, rather than as an isolated activity. In this case, the Chinese context dictated the rules of the game, and Ricci, by engaging in the debates proactively, assumed his missionary role.

In the proem of the text, Ricci, using the Chinese name he had chosen for himself, Li Madou (利瑪竇), writes that on one occasion he was invited to the palace of the Prince Jian’an Wang (建安王). Since friendship was a topic of common interest at the time, the Prince asked what the sages of the West thought about friendship. Inspired by the Prince’s question, Li Madou (Ricci) returned home and for the next few days devoted himself to a recollection of passages on friendship from the Western sages.<sup>(6)</sup> After finishing the compilation of phrases, he presented the book as a gift to the Prince (Ricci 2009, 89). Ricci’s correspondence

shows how he pragmatically used this anecdote to add authority to his *Essay on Friendship*. In 1596, in a letter to the Jesuit superior Claudio Aquaviva in Rome, Ricci wrote regarding his *Essay on Friendship*:

“Last year, as an exercise, I wrote in Chinese several sayings on friendship, selected from the best of our books; and since they were from so varied and eminent personages, the literati of this land were left astonished, and, in order to give it more authority, I wrote an introduction and gave it as a present to a certain relative of the king’s, who also has the title king” (Quoted in Billings 2009, 8).

Billings points out that Ricci’s *Essay on Friendship* most likely began as a translation exercise and that later on, in view of the acceptance the text received from his Chinese friends, Ricci decided to add the proem with Jian’an Wang’s anecdote to make his text authoritative (Billings 2009, 9). The phrase “to give it authority” explicitly reveals that, although Ricci was friends with the Jian’an Wang Prince,<sup>(7)</sup> he pragmatically made use of this connection to make the text even more appealing to the members of the Chinese elite. This strategic move reveals how Ricci consciously introduced elements that would have seemed natural, or even noble, to a Chinese eye simply to make his works appealing. Another letter dealing with the same topic, composed three years later, provides further evidence to argue that pragmatic language usage was one of the chief elements of Ricci’s version of cultural accommodation:

“I will send you enclosed herein certain sayings about friends that I wrote four years ago now in the province of Jiangxi at the request of a relative of the king’s, [...] and together with this I will send you the

Italian translation; but it cannot have the grace of the Chinese language, because I accommodated myself in every way to them, and, where it was necessary, I changed several things in the sayings and *sententiae* of our philosophers” (Quoted in Billings 2009, 9)

In this passage, Ricci explicitly admits that, although he translated the wise sayings of Western philosophers, his wish to adapt to Chinese cultural expectations obliged him to modify certain elements of the sayings. Perhaps he did this to avoid critiques from the Chinese *literati*. However, it is interesting to note that Ricci does not provide any details about the elements he modified or the specific reasons why he did so, besides his intention to culturally accommodate to the *literati*. In this case, Ricci’s silence to his superior can be read as a way to avoid drawing the Jesuit authorities’ attention towards the elements from the Western canon that he was altering in order to adapt to the Chinese.

Contrasting the proem of the *Essay on Friendship* with the two letters to his Jesuit superiors discussed above, it becomes evident that as a skillful writer, Ricci was very careful about the information he shared with each of his readers; as an experienced rhetorician, he intentionally expressed or concealed information based on his specific interests and the effect he wished to impress on the reader. For this reason, it is inappropriate to assess Ricci’s task, like his Jesuit colleague João Rodrigues would later do, based on a literal reading of any single one of his writings.<sup>(8)</sup>

In order to appeal to his Chinese readers, another strategy Ricci utilized in his texts was the inclusion of references that would make it appear as if he was a member of one of the well-established intellectual schools in China. For example, in the colophon of *Essay on Friendship* he writes: “Compiled by Li Madou (利瑪竇), a mountain recluse/scholar-disciple (*sanren* 山人) from the Far West” (Ricci

2009, 137).<sup>(9)</sup> Two elements stand out in the colophon: (i) Ricci's use of a Chinese name, Li Madou,<sup>(10)</sup> and (ii) Ricci's self-designation as a mountain recluse/scholar-disciple (*sanren* 山人).

The term *sanren* was very popular among *literati* in the late Ming Dynasty. Originally, it designated the Daoist sages or Buddhist monks that chose to live in seclusion. However in late Ming, the term *sanren* no longer referred to the living style of a recluse, but rather, as a self-designation, it described an "attitude of intellectual and aesthetic refinement, and of critical detachment, often against the Confucian norm" (Billings 2009, 16). Ricci's inclusion of the term *sanren* is a legacy of the early Jesuit approach of imitating the dress and lifestyle of Buddhist monks. Eventually, following the persecution of Buddhism in the mid-1590's, this approach would be replaced and Jesuits in China would fashion themselves after the scholar-official model of the Chinese Confucian *literati* (Dunne 1962, 33). In brief, Ricci's self-designation as the Chinese *sanren* Li Madou reveals his attempt to enter the intellectual discussions of the Ming elite without explicitly disclosing either his foreign origin or his proselytizing Christian interests.

### **B. *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* (天主實義) (1605)**

In 1605, at the final phase of his Chinese mission, Ricci composed his Chinese work, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, a religious treatise which would have a long-lasting effect on the Chinese intellectual world (Zhang 1996, 99). Mirrored after the intellectual debates of the Confucian elite, the text is carefully crafted to appeal to the Confucian *literati*. It is designed in the format of a dialogue between a Confucian *literati* and a Western scholar; their conversation revolving around the qualities of the Lord in Heaven (*T'ien Chu* 天主). Having understood the "true" meaning of the Lord of Heaven, thanks to the wise exposition of the Western scholar, the closing scene presents the Confucian *literati's* conversion to

Christianity.

In a similar fashion to how Ricci expanded on the Chinese concept of friendship using Western sources in the *Essay on Friendship*, in *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, Ricci's accommodative strategy consisted of using familiar Chinese concepts to introduce novel Christian ideas into the Chinese intellectual landscape. In particular, Ricci's clarification of the "true" nature of the Lord of Heaven consisted in the pragmatic use of the Confucian terms for the Most-High, (*T'ien Chu* 天主), to introduce the qualities of the Christian God (Kim 2004, 162). Although Ricci's colleagues, with a background in the Japan mission, such as João Rodrigues, would later characterize Ricci's equating of the Confucian Lord of Heaven with the Christian God as a doctrinal mistake, Ricci's journals reveal that his adoption of the Chinese term was a pragmatic and carefully thought-out decision:

"This term [Lord of Heaven] fitted well with our intentions since the Chinese adore "Heaven" as their supreme God and some even think that this Heaven is the material sky. By this name we have given to God, we clearly declare how much greater our God is than that which they hold as their supreme God, because He is the lord of their Heaven" (Rule 1986, 44) .

As this passage reveals, Ricci's agenda was to use the Confucian concept, Lord of Heaven (天主), to later on prove the superiority of the Christian God. In the text, Ricci establishes a compelling parallel: the Confucian Lord of Heaven is the supreme ruler of the earth and has the power to determine the success or failure of human affairs; in the same way that there is an Emperor that rules over China and a being that rules over the earth, there must be a Lord of the heaven. This

Lord, the “true” Lord of Heaven, Ricci further claimed, corresponded exactly with the Christian God (Kim 2004, 160).

Ricci's placing of the Christian God above the Chinese Lord of Heaven is the first argumentative step in *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*. Next, he sets about to demonstrate that the “true” Lord of Heaven must also necessarily be a creator. According to Chinese cosmology the Lord of Heaven is a maintainer of the universe, but not necessarily its creator. To refute this idea, Ricci demonstrates that nothing comes into existence all by itself, but owes its being to a cause external to it:

“Since nothing is capable of producing itself, there must be someone who is both original and unique and is the creator of the Chinese Lord in Heaven and of the first ancestors: that someone we call the Lord of Heaven. [...] The true Lord of Heaven is the uncaused cause and “the source of all things” (Quoted in Zhang 1996, 106-07).

Ricci's construction of the argument for God as a creator is further illustrated in the dialogue between the Western scholar (WS) and the Chinese literati (CL):

“WS: If Heaven above or the sky cannot be revered, how much less can the earth beneath, which is trodden on by man and where filth accumulates? Therefore, only the one true Lord of Heaven who produces and preserves mankind may be revered; [...] we ought therefore to thank the gracious Lord of Heaven and earth and all creation, and serve Him reverently with the utmost sincerity. How can we abandon this lord, who is Supreme Source of all creation?

CL: If things really are as what you just said, then we are still in a state

of confusion: probably this is because when we look up all we see is the sky so we only know of worshipping it. [...]

WS: Inevitably men of stupidity regard what they can see with their eyes as existent, and what they cannot see with their eyes as nonexistent. For this reason they only think they should serve the physical heaven and earth and are unaware that there is a Lord of Heaven and earth, creator and maintainer” (Ricci 1985, 129).

We have already seen from his journal entry that Ricci was aware the Chinese Lord of Heaven was a transcendental entity, and he realized that only a few people identified it with the physical sky. In this passage, however, he makes it seem as if the Chinese Lord of Heaven was generally understood to correspond with the physical sky. He knew that the *literati* would agree with this objection. So, once he had established a point of agreement with his readers, Ricci skillfully introduced the idea of God as a creator. The way the idea is presented in this dialogue makes it seem that, if the Lord of Heaven is not just the sky, then, evidently, he also must be a creator. The seamless way in which the Christian idea is introduced illustrates how Ricci’s texts successfully conceal his true intentions. In this case, he makes it seem as if the main argument he is trying to make is a mere distinction between the Chinese Lord of Heaven and the physical sky when in reality, he is introducing a revolutionary idea into the Chinese cosmology, namely God as creator. Regarding what he wished to accomplish with the text, Ricci writes in his journal:

“The text presents certain truths of Christianity, such as that there is in the universe a God, who has created all things and continually conserves them in being; that the soul of man is mortal, and will receive from God

in the next life remuneration for its good and evil works; [...] it does not propose to refute directly all the errors of the sects in China, it destroys at its very roots, with irrefragable arguments, the opinions of the Chinese which contradict those truths" (Quoted in Dunne 1962, 96-97).

As can be seen from this journal entry, Ricci had a very clear agenda for the text: to destroy, at the very roots, the Chinese ideas which did not coincide with those of Christianity. Moreover, it is clear that, rather than confusing the attributes of the Chinese Lord of Heaven and the Christian God, which his colleagues in Japan would later accuse him of doing, Ricci understood extremely well the differences. Instead of making a uniform generalization, Ricci was attempting to impose the attributes of the Christian God onto the Chinese concept of the Lord of Heaven.

In the same way that denying the existence of the Chinese Lord of Heaven would be unacceptable to the eyes of his literati readers, Ricci knew that he could not directly confront the teachings of the Chinese sages. Thus, when "correcting" the errors of Chinese cosmology, he is very careful in setting up his arguments. Rather than taking issue with the Chinese sages, in the dialogue, Ricci has the Western scholar question the contemporary interpretations of classical teachings. This move appears very early, in the opening section of the text:

"I thought that the Chinese, since they are the people of Yao and Shun, and the disciples of the Duke of Zhou and of Zhongni (Confucius), must not have changed the doctrines and teachings about Heaven and must never have allowed them to be stained. But inevitably, even among them there have been errors [...]. Although a lone traveler from afar and still awkward with the Chinese tongue, he, Matteo, has been compelled

to write this book to expose such errors, so that the truth about the Lord of Heaven may be known again throughout China (Ricci 1985, 58-60).

In this passage, Ricci acknowledges the wisdom of the Chinese sages, while asserting even “among them there have been errors.” As the text proceeds, he softens this claim. It is worth noting that while making this point, in contrast with the *Essay on Friendship*, where Ricci uses his Chinese name Li Madou, this time he uses his real name. This authorial choice shows how the initial need to disguise his Christian and foreign origin was replaced by the need to assume his true identity as a messenger of the “true” teaching about the Lord of Heaven.

Later on in the text, while discussing the characteristics of the Christian God, the Confucian literati asks the Western scholar: why, if what he is teaching is true, have people in China never heard such an interpretation? Faced with this question, the Western scholar uses the opportunity to ratify his respect for the wisdom of the Chinese sages, state the limitations of contemporary Chinese interpretations, and mention the Western teachings about the Lord of Heaven (i.e. Christian books written in Western languages):

“That which has been taught by sages and worthies has been handed down, from the creation of heaven and earth, men and all things by the Lord of Heaven, to the present times through canonical writings and in such a manner as to leave no room for doubt. But the scholars of your esteemed country know little of the languages and culture of our regions and thus are unable to understand” (Ricci 1985, 103-04).

This passage shows that Ricci’s method of refuting their interpretations of Confucianism through cultural adaptation was to profess respect for the teachings

of the Chinese sages while simultaneously condemning the Chinese scholars' ignorance of Western languages. Through this rhetorical move, Ricci was setting the stage not only to "correct the errors" of the Chinese scholars, but, at the same time, claim that the "complete" and "correct" notion of the Lord of Heaven had been preserved in parallel with orthodox Confucianism and "was recorded in canonical texts written in Western languages [...]. "Unfortunately," the Chinese had been out of touch with these "truths" due to linguistic and cultural barriers" (Zhang, 104). This move shows that Ricci's goal was not only to make evident the fundamental errors of Chinese religious thought, but also the basis upon which such errors were founded.

## VII. Questioning the Boundaries of Cultural Accommodation:

### Rodríguez' Critique of Ricci

Much the same as Ricci's position in China, João Rodríguez Tçuzzu 陸若漢 (1558-1634) was the main linguist and scholar of the Japanese classics for the Jesuits in Japan. Under Valignano's instructions, Rodríguez composed various works on Japanese linguistics that are still considered authoritative by scholars today, in particular his *Vocabulario da Lingoa de Iapam* (1603), *Arte da Lingoa de Iapam* (1604) and *Arte Breve da Lingoa Japôa* (1620). Additionally, until he was expelled from Japan in 1610, Rodríguez served as interpreter for the Jesuits before the courts of Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Tokugawa Ieyasu (Kim 2004, 180).<sup>(11)</sup> Later, following his exile from Japan, Rodríguez traveled to Macao and China, becoming the first European Jesuit to visit the capitals of both China and Japan (Cooper 1974, 280).

Although Rodríguez was deeply interested in the Japanese language, the training he inherited from his Jesuit predecessors in Japan biased him to oppose the translation of the Christian names of God into Japanese. This resistance to

utilize Japanese words to refer to Christian terminology originated from an unfortunate experience of Francis Xavier, commonly known among Japan scholars as the ‘Dainichi episode’.<sup>(12)</sup> When Xavier arrived in Japan in 1549, his early informant, a Japanese named Anjirō, suggested the Jesuits use the term *Dainichi* (大日) to refer to the Christian God. Unaware of Anjirō’s limited literacy and his poor knowledge of religious matters, Xavier adopted the term without knowing that *Dainichi* was used in Shingon Buddhism to refer to the ultimate reality (Kim 2004, 79). Thus, in his sermons during his initial missionary period, Xavier mistakenly encouraged the Japanese to worship *Dainichi*. Eventually, while debating with a group of Buddhist monks, Xavier realized that they, too, used the term *Dainichi*. Shocked by this mistake, Xavier is said to have raced down the streets, this time preaching “Do not worship *Dainichi*!” (Kim 2004, 81).

Following the Dainichi episode, determined to no longer use Japanese words to refer to Christian concepts, the Jesuits in Japan examined two methods to introduce Christian concepts; the creation of new Japanese words and, alternatively, the introduction of foreign words. In the work *Arte da Lingoa de Iapam*, Rodrigues summarizes the alternatives to the problem of translation:

“Because the Japanese language lacks some of the words to express many new things which the Holy Gospel contains, it is necessary either to invent some new ones, or to take them from our own language, corrupting these words so that they sound better according to Japanese pronunciation” (Quoted in Cooper 1974, 285) .

After much debate, in their final decision in 1555, and in an effort to avoid similar problems in the future, the Jesuits opted for the latter alternative: deciding to employ Latin or Portuguese terms and to adapt those terms phonetically so

they would sound appropriate in Japanese. The Jesuits deemed the transliteration of religious terminology safer than creating new terms using Japanese ideograms (Cooper 1974, 285), as this strategy prevented new converts from establishing associations between the newly introduced Christian terms and local religious concepts. As a result, words like *Deus* (God), *trinidad* (trinity), *sacramento* (sacrament) and *eucaristia* (mass) were introduced to the Japanese linguistic landscape. Paradoxically, however, the phonetical rendering of Latin and Portuguese Christian terms into Japanese was no less problematic as it accentuated the foreignness of Christianity. In his work *Deus Destroyed*, Elison points out that Japanese religious personalities mocked the Jesuits because the Latin name they used for the Christian God, *Deus* (Jp. *Daiusu*), was a homophone of the Japanese word *dai uso* (大嘘) meaning “great lie.” In fact, as Elison highlights, later on the pronunciation similarity of these two words would, among other reasons, be used by the Japanese political authorities as justification for Christian persecution (Elison 1988, 179).

Given the firm stance the Jesuits in Japan adopted towards the historically problematic translation of Christian concepts, it is not surprising that Rodríguez reacted with severe criticism when he learned about Ricci's strategy of borrowing Chinese terms to express Christian ideas.

Following his exile from Japan, Rodríguez fled to Macao. There, in 1612, he was commissioned with the task of comprehensively investigating the different Chinese religious sects. The objective was to eventually unify the language and doctrinal ideas presented in Jesuit books in Japan and China. The scope and objective of Rodríguez's expedition to China are best expressed in his 1616 letter to the Jesuit General in Rome:

“During the entire two years I was there [in China] I was kept busy

investigating these sects in depth. I had studied them diligently in Japan, and for this purpose I traveled over most of China and visited all our houses and residences, as well as other parts where our men have never been so far [...] I went there [to China] on the special commission of Father Francisco Pasio, the Visitor, to investigate the teachings of these sects of philosophers who have been in this Orient since ancient times, for these run contrary to our holy Faith in essential matters. This was done in order to refute them at the root by using their own principles in the catechism which is being compiled for these two missions [...] I was entrusted with this work so that this could be perfectly done at one and the same time and could be used by both these missions. We can thus harmonize the various opinions, where they exist, concerning our doctrine, so that there will be no discrepancy in our books. For the letters and characters of these two missions and, consequently, of the books, are common to these nations, China and the Japanese" (Quoted in Cooper 1974, 278-279).

In his travels across China, Rodríguez had numerous opportunities to experience Jesuit missionary activity. From Rodríguez' records, it is clear that some of the practices he witnessed in China disconcerted him. In particular, he was distressed to see the extent to which Ricci and his colleagues had adapted their discourse to Chinese thought. According to Rodríguez, the two main faults of the Jesuit fathers in China were (i) overly accommodating themselves to please the *literati*, and (ii) failing to distinguish between the two levels in Chinese religious doctrine that Rodríguez identified (Cooper 1974, 281). Assertive of his discoveries about Chinese religions and considering his interpretations to be correct, in the same letter, Rodríguez points out the limitations of the China

mission and, in particular, of Ricci's work:

“Until I came to China our fathers here knew nothing about this and almost nothing about their [Chinese] speculative philosophy, but only about the civil, popular, and fabulous doctrine, for there was nobody to explain it to them and enlighten them in this matter. Father Matteo Ricci himself worked a great deal in this field and did what he could, but for reasons which only our Lord knows he was mistaken on this point” (Cooper 1974, 281).

From this section of his letter, it is clear Rodríguez considered his insights about Chinese religions superior to those of Ricci. Subsequently, also in the same letter, Rodríguez claims that in addition to the Chinese having two levels of doctrine, all the religious sects of China (Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism) are “atheistic because they deny divine providence and claim that matter is eternal” (Cooper 1974, 282). In this letter, Rodríguez asserted that the inability of Ricci and the Jesuit fathers in China to see this weakness of Chinese religion, was one of their fundamental mistakes. However, based on an analysis of Ricci's personal writings and *The True Meaning of The Lord of Heaven* presented earlier in this essay, it is clear that Rodríguez' assessment of Ricci's work was inaccurate; Ricci's writings show that he was well aware that the idea of God as a creator was foreign to Chinese cosmology. In fact, this explains why Ricci went through the trouble of designing a rhetorical method to introduce this idea, a key concept in Christian cosmology, into the Chinese intellectual landscape. As discussed earlier, one of the most meaningful contributions of Ricci's work, *The True Meaning of The Lord of Heaven*, is the claim that since the Chinese Lord of Heaven (天主) differed from the physical sky, then by necessity, He must be a creator.<sup>(13)</sup>

It is surprising that, despite his acute intellect, Rodríguez failed to recognize Ricci's nuanced introduction of the idea of God as a creator in the *The True Meaning of The Lord of Heaven* as having derived from his awareness of the absence of this idea in Chinese thought, and thus, of the necessity to introduce this notion in the Chinese intellectual landscape as a precondition to the introduction of other Christian ideas in China. Tangentially, it would be interesting to uncover what led Rodríguez to believe in the existence of two levels of Chinese religions. What data or evidence led to this claim? Was Rodríguez' belief his own or an idea he inherited from the Jesuit fathers in Japan?

Interestingly, Rodríguez also asserts in his 1616 letter to Rome that the limited understanding of his colleagues in China was further aggravated by their mistakes having been recorded in the Jesuits' books.

"The Fathers in China knew nothing of this, and as our Lord has enlightened me on this matter they will receive much light from me going there; they will find many fundamental errors against the Faith which are contained in our books and are explained by obscure terms possessing another meaning different from what the words seem to mean, as they are very subtle and lofty. This was something new for our men, and many of them had such an opinion of the Chinese and their doctrine that they declared that their ancients knew the true God and held the true doctrine concerning Him, and that the doctrine which we preach is the same as that which their ancestors had. All this was because they thought it a good plan to join ourselves to the *literati*, and this, along with other errors, is printed in our books" (Quoted in Cooper 1974, 282).

Although, in this specific passage Rodríguez does not criticize Ricci directly it is clear from his objections he had Ricci's work in mind. After all, the strategy discussed by Rodríguez is the very same strategy that would become a historically recognized landmark of Ricci's contributions. Namely, not to oppose traditional Chinese thought or refute the basis of Confucianism, but rather to focus the critique towards the faults of contemporary interpretations. As it has been discussed previously, in his missionary strategy, Ricci asserted that except for a few mistakes, the teachings of ancient Confucianism were in line with the teachings of Christianity. Calculatingly, Ricci used terms familiar to the Chinese and integrated them with Christian ideas.

Again, presenting a direct critique to one of Ricci's primary rhetorical methods, the last section of Rodríguez' letter focuses on the question of terminology. In particular, he further describes the mistakes created by using Chinese words to refer to Christian concepts. Rodríguez declares the Chinese words used to express the concept of God within Jesuit publications in China unacceptable, "because in addition to it being the name of a famous deity among them, it does not mean God but something else very different" (Quoted in Cooper 1974, 282).<sup>(14)</sup> In his disapproval, Rodríguez went as far as to describe "Ricci's identification of the Christian Deus with the Confucian Lord of Heaven (天主 *T'ien-chu*) as blasphemy" (Kim 2004, 181).

Rodríguez claimed he had discussed the problem of terminology with some of the Christian scholars who had helped Ricci polish the style of the Chinese Jesuit books. In his analysis of Rodríguez letter, Cooper writes:

"In Rodríguez' opinion, they had a very imperfect grasp of Christian doctrine and had tried too much to accommodate the Christian message to the teaching of the *literati*. Previously, this learned men had approved

the errors written in Jesuit books, but after hearing Rodríguez' explanations, they had realized "the hidden poison" contained within the text of the books and had reportedly agreed that such errors had to be rectified and that terms such as *Deus* (God), *alma* (soul) and *Anjo* (angel) should be used in the future" (Cooper 1974, 283).

In addition to the terminology employed by the missionaries in China, Rodríguez found fault with some of the rituals and practices the Jesuit fathers in China allowed Christian converts to perform.<sup>(15)</sup> Not only did Rodríguez regard these practices as personally unacceptable, he prepared a case against them by writing various treatises on the subject and presenting them to the Jesuit authorities.

As a product of his travels across China, Rodríguez compiled a list of "errors" by the Chinese fathers and left it with Niccolò Logbarado, the China mission superior, for revision. Rodríguez proposed to rearrange the Jesuit organizational structure in the Far East by placing the China Mission under the supervision of the Japan Mission. This reorganization of the Jesuit Mission would ensure all Jesuit materials written in Chinese be investigated by Japanese priests (Kim 2004, 182).

The denunciation of Ricci's missionary strategies initiated by Rodríguez regarding the terminology and Chinese rituals would have long-lasting consequences for both the internal dynamic of the Jesuit mission in Asia and the forms in which Christianity would be implemented in Asia in the future. However, from the start, Jesuit responses to Rodríguez's denunciation were polarized. On the one hand, some Jesuits did not support Rodríguez' critique, believing the form of cultural adaptation in China implemented by Ricci was not only adequate, but highly successful. Moreover, accepting there were errors in

their own books would oblige them to correct their printed books and make the Jesuit mission lose credibility. On the other hand, Rodríguez' knowledge of Japanese language and literature and the thoroughness of his investigations in China had earned him great esteem among his Jesuit superiors. For this reason, despite some Jesuit fathers opposition to Rodríguez' denunciation, in 1624, Longbardo ordered various Chinese Jesuits works, including one of the Catechisms written by Ricci, to be withdrawn for revision and other works to be burned (Dunne 1962, 285). Furthermore, Rodríguez' critiques eventually led to the *Terms Controversy* (1621-1628): a heated debate among Jesuit missionaries in Asia about whether or not Christian concepts, including the names of God, were translatable into non-European languages. After much debate, the controversy about terminology was finally settled in year 1633 in favour of Ricci's strategy of cultural adaptation. Thus, to this day in China, the term used to refer to the Christian God is *T'ien-chu* (天主), as well as other words used to refer to Christian ideas also have Chinese origin (Dunne 1962, 285).

### **VIII. Consequences of Rodríguez' critiques**

The long lasting effect that Rodríguez' critiques of Ricci had on the form linguistic cultural adaptation took in both China and Japan can be broadly summarized as follows:

First, it is noteworthy that Rodríguez' critiques of Ricci were not necessarily based on solid foundations, because, for the most part they derived from the *Dainichi* episode. However, a more careful examination reveals Xavier's and Ricci's translations to be fundamentally different. When Xavier adopted Japanese terms, he knew very little about the Japanese language or classics. Ricci, on the other hand, based on a well thought-out missionary strategy and a thorough knowledge of Chinese ideas and mores, chose to utilize terms familiar to the

Chinese with the intention of subsequently imposing Christian ideas on those terms. In his critiques, Rodríguez did not take this fundamental difference into consideration, presumably because his critiques were based mainly on the information available in Ricci's Chinese works. Like Rodríguez's evaluation of Ricci's works, any assessment of Ricci's methods based exclusively on his Chinese texts is doomed to be misleading, for it would bypass the clear distinction he made between his rhetoric work as a writer and his personal understanding of Christian doctrine. In his written works, Ricci intentionally and craftily concealed his true intentions to introduce Christian ideas systematically. From this point of view, Rodríguez' critiques reveal the strength of Ricci's methods. They demonstrate that Ricci's concealment of his true intentions, and the nuances of his strategy, succeeded so well they became invisible even to Rodríguez. Rodríguez' inability to recognize the skillful deftness with which Ricci introduced Christian ideas, by means of cultural adaptation, reveal their effectiveness, rather than showing the limitations of Ricci's methods. Not even Rodríguez, the most well versed Jesuit in Asian languages and thought after Ricci, could comprehend the interconnection between the ideas presented in Ricci's written works and Ricci's insightful understanding of Chinese thought.

Second, the high regard in which Rodríguez and his work were held by the Jesuit authorities proved to be a major contributing factor leading to the scrutiny, revision, and correction of works written in China. Until the *Terms Controversy* was resolved, missionary activity in China, both in the form of books and writing, was to a great degree determined by missionaries trained in Japan. Hence, as a result of these events, the missionary independence that Ricci and his team once enjoyed in introducing Christianity to China in the way they found most appropriate was suddenly lost. The tension and scrutiny that developed between missionaries trained in China and in Japan highlight the limits of cultural

adaptation; Ricci's willingness to adapt to the Chinese eventually resulted in a backlash from his colleagues and attempts to remove Chinese elements from his texts -the introduction of which he considered fundamental for Christianity to thrive in China. The censorship of Ricci's texts raises questions about the appropriateness of Jesuits like Rodríguez, who were very knowledgeable about the Japanese language and religion, but possessed a limited understanding of Chinese language, religion and customs, critiquing a missionary strategy implemented in China.

Third, Rodríguez' critique of Ricci's methods led Rodríguez to modify his own approach to Japanese literature. In the early to mid-part of his career, Rodríguez was very fond of including fragments from Japanese and Chinese classics in order to provide examples, illustrate grammatical usages, and indicate linguistic nuances (Cooper 1974, 228).<sup>(16)</sup> Interestingly, as Cooper pointed out, Rodríguez stopped this practice shortly after discovering the "erroneous" approach Ricci had adopted. To date, the relationship between Rodríguez' critique of Ricci and his dropping the practice of using Japanese classical literature to make his works authoritative, has received little scholarly attention. For example in his work *Rodríguez the Interpreter* (1974), Cooper, explains this interruption simply in terms of Rodríguez becoming overly occupied with practical tasks and not having enough time to trace references and revise his manuscripts (Cooper 1974, 224) Given the heated debates that resulted from Rodríguez' critique of the Jesuit method in China, it seems appropriate to interpret Rodríguez' discontinuance as a response to the "Terms Controversy" and as an attempt to avoid using the same methods he was now criticizing.

## **IX. Conclusion: The Boundaries of Cultural Accommodation**

By contrasting Matteo Ricci's personal writings with his main Chinese texts,

*Essay on Friendship* (交友論) (1595) and *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* (天主實義) (1605), this essay presented Ricci's unique approach to the strategy of conversion through cultural accommodation. In particular, the discussion demonstrated the extreme care with which Ricci constructed his texts: he chose the topics of his works, the writing style, and a format based on the disposition of his intended readers, the Chinese *literati*. Also, Ricci disclosed or revealed important information, including his own identity as a Western Catholic missionary, depending on the specific needs of the Jesuit mission at that particular time. Additionally, Ricci's usage of the Chinese concept of the Lord of Heaven (天主 *T'ien-chu*) to introduce characteristics of the Christian God reveals the flexible and pragmatic way Ricci utilized Chinese concepts to achieve his missionary goal of "preparing the Chinese ground" for Christianity to flourish.

The last section of this essay presented critiques of João Rodrigues' criticism of Ricci's methods and missionary strategy. This discussion revealed the source of the clash of opinions concerning the form cultural accommodation would take between Jesuits trained in China and Japan. Rodrigues was unable to understand Ricci's complex writing strategy by reason of his judgement being conditioned by his previous missionary experience in Japan, and his limited knowledge of the Chinese classics and language. These elements led Rodrigues to mistakenly confuse Ricci's carefully designed missionary strategy with an erroneous understanding of Christian doctrine on Ricci's part.

In particular, this essay demonstrates the critiques Ricci received from his Jesuit colleagues in Japan were based on a misunderstanding of his intentions, rather than on actual weaknesses or deficiencies within Ricci's work. However, on a different note, the fact that Rodrigues's critiques were unfounded, and in some cases exaggerated, does not imply that the form cultural accommodation took under Ricci's leadership should be understood as a tolerant or respectful way of

interacting with the value system of another culture. Under the label of cultural accommodation, Ricci strategically adopted ideas and topics from the Chinese intellectual world in order to introduce Christian ideas. However, by doing so he explicitly hoped that the “erroneous” Chinese ideas would be eventually replaced by Christianity. In this sense, despite his interest and devotion to the study of Chinese language and culture, Ricci’s methods need to be understood as a pragmatic strategy of attempting to understand the beliefs of the other, but always with the underlying intention of eventually replacing them.

## Notes

- (1) There were two Jesuit missionaries in Japan with the name João Rodrigues. João Rodrigues Girão (1558-1633) and João Rodrigues Tçuzzu 陸若漢 (1561-1634). In this essay, all mentions of João Rodrigues refer to João Rodrigues Tçuzzu. The title Tçuzzu, “The Interpreter”, derives from the Japanese *tsūjiru* (通じる) meaning translation or interpretation. Rodrigues acquired this title because of his service as an interpreter between the Jesuits and prominent Japanese political authorities such as Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Tokugawa Ieyasu (Cooper 1974, 66-69).
- (2) Note that implicit in this observation is the assumption that one of the reasons why the Japanese would make good Christians is because they could be converted through reason and literacy, that is to say they could be converted by means of books.
- (3) All the references to this text are based on Billings’ translation: Ricci, Matteo. *On Friendship: One Hundred Maxims for a Chinese Prince*. Trans. Billings, Timothy James. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.
- (4) “This Friendship has earned more credit for me and for our Europe than anything else that we have done; because the others I do us credit for mechanical and artificial things of hands and tools; but this does us credit for literature, for wit, and for virtue.” (Translated in Billings 2009, 3).
- (5) For a detailed list of the Ricci’s sources refer to Ricci, Matteo. *On Friendship: One Hundred Maxims for a Chinese Prince*. Trans. Billings, Timothy James. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009, 158-165.
- (6) It is interesting to note that in the proem, Ricci does not mention that he not only compiled but translated the aphorisms into Chinese.
- (7) According to Billings, historical records corroborate the veracity of Ricci’s account, indicating that he indeed visited Prince Jian’an Wang several times and the two

men were friends (Billings 2009, 8).

- (8) For an extensive discussion of this topic please refer to the section about Rodríguez' critique of Ricci.
- (9) In Ricci's Italian translation in the Latin manuscript, he writes: "I, Matteo, gathered myself for several days in secret place and gathered everything that I had heard" (Quoted in Billings 2009, 18).
- (10) Ricci had chosen the name Li Madou (利瑪竇) based on the phonetic closeness to his real name (Kim 2004, 158).
- (11) For a detailed account of Rodríguez' career and contributions, please refer to the excellent biography by Michael Cooper, *Rodríguez the Interpreter* (1974).
- (12) For a detailed account of the *Dainichi* episode, see Kim 2004, 77-86 and Ross 1994, 28-29.
- (13) For most details on this discussion please refer to section dealing with Ricci's work *The True Meaning of The Lord of Heaven*.
- (14) Interestingly, however, in his letter Rodríguez does not state how Chinese people understood this term.
- (15) Practices such as bringing candles to a funeral or paying for incense to be placed with the corpse (Cooper 1974, 283).
- (16) A good example of this is his inclusion of references from Japanese classical literature in his Japanese language dictionary and in his grammar. An extensive discussion of this practice can be found in Cooper 1974, 220-228.

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## 実践的文化適合

——マテオ・リッチの中国語文献に関する考察——

パウラ・エスゲラ

東南アジアを訪れたイエズス会士、アレッサンドロ・ヴァリニャーノが1579年に考案した文化適合による改宗の考えは、東アジアにおけるイエズス会の活動の試金石となった。その土地の状況に関心を持ち、土着信仰へのより深い理解を得る事は、地元の人々にキリスト教の正当性を強調することになるとヴァリニャーノは確信していたのである。その土地の言語理解に加え、この文化適合に関する認識は、イエズス会が地元の神父や改宗信者、有力者とのより友好的な交流を持つことにもつながる。

マテオ・リッチ（1552-1610年）は、1583年に中国でのイエズス会伝道の基礎を築く。マテオ・リッチの伝道活動の功績は、彼自身が独自に実践したヴァリニャーノの文化適合思想による所が大きい。やがてマテオ・リッチは、その知識と中国語や文献についての熱心な研究から、明朝の有力な儒教学者として知られるようになる（1368-1644年）。マテオ・リッチの中国語による著作は数多く出版され、中国の有識者から賞賛を得た。また中国語で執筆を行い、その著作が皇室の文献集に収められた、最初のヨーロッパ人である。

中国での揺るぎない功績にも関わらず、マテオ・リッチがキリスト教を中国での考え方に当てはめようとする試みは、日本で活動していた他のイエズス会士からはあまり評価されなかった。マテオ・リッチがキリスト教の神と中国の神々間の共通点を見出した結果、キリスト教の教えに異教の要素を取り入れ過ぎているとして非難した。

本稿においては、ヴァリニャーノの文化適合による改宗の手法が中国や日本におけるイエズス会伝道において用いられていたにも関わらず、何故マテオ・リッチの手法は日本のイエズス会に受け入れられなかったのかを論じる。主な論点

は、文化適合という手法がマテオ・リッチをして中国古典の知識を実践的に用いさせたということである。即ち、マテオ・リッチはある考え方を意図的に見せたり隠したりし、柔軟に使用し、また慎重に論点や執筆方法を選んだのである。日本に駐在していたイエズス会士達はマテオ・リッチの著書を彼等の日本での独特の経験を基に解釈しようとし、その複雑な執筆方法を理解する術はなかった。彼等は中国古典に精通していなかったし、マテオ・リッチの緻密に構成された伝道方法論をキリスト教教義の誤った解釈と混同していたのである。