

Mediating Humanism and Scholasticism in Longobardo's "Resposta breve" and Ricci's Reading of Confucianism

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The "Resposta breve" (Brief response, 1623–24) by Niccolò Longobardo was one of the most controversial documents ever penned in the Jesuit China mission. Longobardo criticized the use of indigenous Chinese vocabulary by Matteo Ricci to express Christian concepts as a perilous accommodation to diabolical monism. This article proposes a close reading of how Longobardo employed Scholastic, humanist, and Chinese sources to critique Ricci's disregard for the neo-Confucian interpreters in his reading of ancient Confucianism. It argues that Longobardo's polemic with Ricci was not theological in nature but reflected his distrust of philology in reconstructing the original meaning of ancient texts.

INTRODUCTION

HISTORIANS OF THE Jesuit missions have largely assumed that the exegetical tools employed by the Jesuits in their reading of Confucianism represented an unproblematic symbiosis of humanist and Scholastic culture.¹ This view has been recently voiced by R. T. Pomplun, who claims that "the opposition between humanism and Scholasticism collapsed further with the broadening of the philological, grammatical, and historical knowledge of Asian languages in European universities."² Pomplun demonstrates this point by examining how Jesuits used their study of Oriental languages, which he identifies as a humanist activity, to deliver Scholastic arguments for the existence of God and the immortality of the soul. Pomplun finds support for this symbiosis in Kristeller's view of Renaissance humanism as an outgrowth of medieval Scholasticism.³

¹ See Goodman and Grafton; O'Malley; Criveller, 2–20; Üçerler; Burson; Standaert, 2003.

² Pomplun, 109.

³ A similar view is articulated in Kim, 33–70.

All Jesuits were undeniably conversant with humanism and Scholastic philosophy thanks to the formation they received under the *ratio studiorum*, which covered both intellectual cultures; however, it does not follow that this marriage was always harmonious. This study seeks to explore tensions between humanist and Scholastic approaches to Chinese religion by examining the “Resposta breve sobre as controversias do *Xâm tý, tien xîn, lîm hoên*” (Brief response on the controversies of Shangdi, *tianshen*, *linghun*, ca. 1623–24) by Niccolò Longobardo (1559–1654), who succeeded Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) as superior of the Jesuit China mission.⁴ In this work, Longobardo delivered his scathing critique of Ricci’s use of indigenous Chinese vocabulary to express the Christian concept of God (Shangdi 上帝), angels (*tianshen* 天神), and the soul (*linghun* 靈魂). Scholarship on Longobardo’s treatise has expanded in recent years, but most researchers have been concerned with its illustrious afterlife. In fact, studies rarely refer to Longobardo’s original Portuguese text, instead citing the translations in French, Spanish, and English that came later.⁵ In addition to occasional slips in translation and the intrusion of the translators’ editorial voices, these versions redact Longobardo’s patristic and Scholastic citations and do not include the original Chinese text discussed and paraphrased by Longobardo. Hence, they offer a limited view of the exegetical and methodological grounds upon which Longobardo came to reject Ricci’s position.⁶ Overall, as Kim notes, the intellectual context in which Longobardo came to oppose Ricci’s accommodation of Confucianism

⁴ A Portuguese manuscript, which has been identified as being the original of this work, is located in the Archivio Storico “De Propaganda Fide” (hereafter APF), Scritture riferite nei congressi (hereafter SC), Indie Orientali e Cina, vol. 1, fols. 145^r–168^r. A copy of this manuscript can be found in the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF), Manuscrit Espagnol 409, fols. 82^r–101^v. Since the APF Portuguese manuscript is mutilated in parts, the Portuguese text has been reconstructed with reference to the BnF copy. For clarifying meaning, the author has also referred to the 1661 Latin translation of Antonio Caballero de Santa Maria (APF, SC, Indie Orientali e Cina, vol. 1, fols. 170^r–197^v), which preserves the Chinese marginal annotations. It is not clear when Longobardo finished the Portuguese manuscript. The missionary Giandomenico Gabiani (1623–94) cataloged the manuscript in his 1680 summary of documents relating to the Terms Controversy and dated it to 1623–24. Bernard-Maitre, 69 (no. 22). All translations are the author’s except where otherwise noted.

⁵ Indeed, there has even been some misapprehension about which manuscript was originally penned by Longobardo. Jacques Gernet seems to believe that Longobardo’s text was originally “published” in Latin with the “De Confucio Ejusque Doctrina Tractatus”: Gernet, 31.

⁶ For a comparison of the manuscripts, see Pan Fengjuan. There are some inaccuracies in Pan Fengjuan’s citations, which have been indicated by Thierry Meynard in the edition of the “Resposta breve” yet to be published.

remains poorly understood, especially in comparison to the wealth of studies on Ricci and the Rites Controversy at the turn of the eighteenth century.⁷

This article proposes that the tensions between the missionary approaches of Longobardo and Ricci are due to contrasting approaches to textual criticism that can ultimately be traced to the humanist-Scholastic debate.⁸ Ultimately, it reveals that the vision of the Renaissance that Ricci and Longobardo transmitted to China was far from homogenous or monolithic—indeed, it was fractious and contested. Although Longobardo utilized classic Scholastic arguments to challenge some of the humanist exegetical commitments advanced by Ricci, it is not the case that Ricci and Longobardo represent binaries, as both seamlessly embedded Scholastic and humanist propositions into their arguments. Rather, Longobardo's Scholastic critique of Ricci is best seen as a reflection of how a different emphasis on common assumptions can lead to drastically different strategies for interpreting Chinese culture.

BACKGROUND TO LONGOBARDO'S "RESPOSTA BREVE"

Ricci's passing, in 1610, was an ironic high-water mark for the early Jesuit missionaries in China. Having established social networks with the upper echelons of Chinese society, Ricci was afforded by the Wan Li 萬曆 Emperor the unprecedented privilege of receiving burial in China despite his foreign status. Nicolas Trigault (1577–1628), in his Latin edition of Ricci's diaries, which achieved great popularity in seventeenth-century Europe, triumphantly compared Ricci's death to that of Samson, because "God granted him more power in death than he had exercised while living on earth."⁹

Yet soon after his death, the missionary methods with which he achieved such success would be challenged from within the Jesuit order. While the Chinese mission basked in the glow of apparent imperial sanction, the Japanese mission began to collapse under fierce persecution. Many of the missionaries working in Japan found refuge in Macau, and, at a loss for ways to exercise their apostolic zeal, they turned their attention to the mission in China. Both the Chinese and Japanese missions implemented the policy of cultural accommodation that had been elaborated by the Jesuit Visitor overseeing the Jesuit missions in the East, Alessandro Valignano (1539–1606). Ricci's methods in China not only made regular recourse to indigenous vocabulary, such as Shangdi for God, but also attempted to demonstrate the metaphysical compatibility of Christianity with Confucianism by presenting Christianity as

⁷ Kim, 173n241.

⁸ For the humanist-Scholastic debate, see Rummel, 1995 and 2008.

⁹ Trigault and Ricci, 566.

the fulfillment of the original philosophy of Confucius, which had been lost and corrupted in Song-dynasty neo-Confucian commentaries.¹⁰ The missionaries in Japan, however, had been scarred by Francis Xavier's (1506–52) unfortunate use of the Buddhist Sun deity *Dainichi* 大日 to translate God and were thus reluctant to employ indigenous analogues for expressing Christian theological concepts, such as God, angels, and the soul, instead preferring phonetic transliterations into Japanese.

According to Niccolò Longobardo, Ricci's successor as superior of the Jesuit China mission, the Visitor of Japan Francesco Pasio (1554–1612), who, together with Michele Ruggieri (1543–1607), had in fact preceded Ricci in obtaining permission to settle in Zhaoqing, in 1582,¹¹ initiated the polemics over Ricci's missionary strategy. On 24 September 1611, Pasio wrote to Longobardo expressing his concern about "some Chinese books written by our fathers over there [in China] [that] agree with the errors of the pagans" and implored Longobardo to conduct a thorough theological examination of these books.¹² Longobardo found that his confrere Sabatino de Ursis (1575–1620) shared his doubts about the equivalence between Shangdi and the Christian God. Xu Guangqi 徐光啓 (1562–1633), Yang Tingyun 楊廷筠 (1557?–1627), and Li Zhizao 李之藻 (1565–1630), collectively known as the Three Pillars of Chinese Catholicism, were called upon to give testimony, but De Ursis and Longobardo found unconvincing their entreaty to disregard the discrepancies between Confucian texts and commentaries and to focus on the texts that agree with Christian teaching.

The controversy intensified with the arrival of Fr. João Rodrigues (1561/62–1633/34), known as Tçuzu (The Interpreter), in recognition of his native-level fluency in the Japanese language.¹³ Rodrigues expressed his misgivings on the matter in a letter to Fr. Valentim Carvalho (1559–1630), provincial of the Japanese and Chinese provinces from 1611 to 1617,¹⁴ who ordered a

¹⁰ The most emblematic text of this approach is Matteo Ricci's *Tianzhu shiyi* (The true meaning of the Lord of heaven, 1603). For a recent edition, see Ricci, 2016.

¹¹ For a biography of Francesco Pasio, see López-Gay.

¹² APF, SC Indie Orientali Cina, vol. 1, fol. 145^r: "alguns livros compostos pellos Nossos em lingua sinica, heram ali notados de combinarem com os erros dos gentios." The date of the letter is not mentioned in Longobardo's treatise, but it can be found in the list (*elenchus*) of documents on the Rites Controversy compiled in 1680 by the then vice-provincial of China, Giandomenico Gabiani (1623–94), as part of the *Dissertatio Apologetica*. The *elenchus* is not included in the version printed in 1700, but is included in full in appendix to Bernard-Maitre.

¹³ For a superb biography, see Cooper, 1974.

¹⁴ The dates of Carvalho's tenure as provincial are taken from Kim, 167.

“thorough examination of the term Shangdi.”¹⁵ Francisco Viera, Visitor from 1613 to 1619,¹⁶ renewed Carvalho’s instruction. Having noted that there were dissenting views on the subject matter, Viera ordered the missionaries to examine methodically whether correspondences to the Christian concept of God, the angels, and the rational soul could be found in China’s religious traditions. Frs. Diego Pantoja and Alfonso Vagnone wrote in favor of Ricci’s methods, whereas Frs. Sabatino de Urbis and João Rodrigues wrote against them.¹⁷ In 1617, Longobardo submitted his conclusions to Viera in the “Res Memorabiles pro Dirigenda Re Christiana” (Memorable things for directing the Christian mission), but in 1621 the Visitor Jerónimo Rodrigues (Visitor 1619–21 and 1622–26) decided in favor of Ricci at a conference in Macau.¹⁸

The implacable Longobardo, however, did not let the matter settle, replying around 1623 with his “Resposta breve.” The “Resposta breve” draws extensively on Scholastic and patristic sources, humanist texts, the Confucian classics, the Ming-dynasty encyclopedia *Xingli daquan* 性理大全 (Summa of natural philosophy), and the testimony of Chinese literati to demonstrate the incoherence of Ricci’s position. The appearance of the “Resposta breve” only added further fuel to the fire, provoking a number of counter-replies until the Visitor André Palmeiro (Visitor 1626–35) convoked a conference at Jiading, near Shanghai, from December 1627 to January 1628.¹⁹ The conference followed Longobardo in forbidding the use of Shangdi in the Chinese mission, but Longobardo did not succeed in convincing his confreres to reject Confucianism as the main vehicle for expressing Christianity. Even after the conference, missionaries continued to argue for the Riccian position, which eventually became the semi-official position of the Jesuit order.

Longobardo’s treatise was not intended for dissemination, but the French Jesuit Jean Valat (1614?–1696), who was sympathetic to Longobardo’s position, found parts of the treatise in the Jesuit archives of Beijing and handed

¹⁵ APF, SC Indie Orientali Cina, vol. 1, fol. 145^v: “que se fizesse summa diligentia acerca do nome do Xámty.”

¹⁶ There are some discrepancies about Viera’s term of office. Joseph Dehergne suggests he was Visitor from 1616 to 1619, whereas Antonio Rosso gives 1613–20: Dehergne, 321; Rosso, 93.

¹⁷ The treatises are not extant, but a summary of the many treatises written by various Jesuit missionaries at the time on these questions can be found in Gabiani’s *elenchus*: Bernard-Maitre, 64–76.

¹⁸ Rosso, 96.

¹⁹ For the activities of the André Palmeiro surrounding the Terms Controversy, see Brockey, 219–20. Scholars have diverged greatly on the results of the Jiading conference. It is most likely that the conference broadly agreed with Longobardo’s position, but nevertheless the Jesuit missionaries came to adopt Ricci’s position as their semi-official policy.

them to the Franciscan friar Antonio Caballero de Santa Maria (1602–69), one of the Jesuits’ fiercest adversaries in the Rites Controversy. In 1661, Caballero translated Longobardo’s treatise into Latin as the “*Responsio Brevis*.”²⁰ During the Guangzhou conference, from 1667 to 1668, Antonio Caballero de Santa Maria gave a copy of Longobardo’s treatise to the Dominican friar Domingo Fernandez Navarrete (1618–89). Navarrete absconded from Guangzhou on 9 December 1668 and translated the treatise into Spanish for inclusion in his *Tratados históricos, políticos, ethicos, y religiosos de la monarchia de China* (Historical, political, ethical, and religious treatises concerning the monarchy of China, 1676).²¹ Through this work, which was widely disseminated despite Jesuit attempts to suppress it,²² the European republic of letters was introduced to Longobardo’s treatise. Subsequent translations into French and English at the beginning of eighteenth century, when the Rites and Terms Controversies reached their peak, provided powerful ammunition for the Jesuits’ opponents, as it became apparent that many of the reservations nursed by the Jansenists and friars had in fact been shared by none other than Ricci’s hand-picked superior.²³ Longobardo’s treatise continued to be influential well into the early eighteenth century, used as a source for information about neo-Confucianism by Nicolas Malebranche (1638–1715) and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646–1716).²⁴

CHALLENGING TEXTUAL AUTHORITY: THE HUMANISM OF MATTEO RICCI

The chief contention of this article is that Longobardo’s polemic against Ricci’s accommodation should be viewed not merely in theological terms but also as a continuation and reapplication of contemporary European debates over humanist exegesis within a Chinese context. Whereas Ricci and Longobardo were undoubtedly in agreement on the evils of pagan idolatry and in their assessment of neo-Confucianism, they diverged on how to reconcile discrepancies between ancient sources and medieval commentaries and on how much weight to afford later interpreters as guides for interpreting the past. At the heart of this debate was the question of whether textual critics could arrogate to themselves the authority to override tradition and establish a direct

²⁰ The full title is “*Responsio brevis super controversias de Xám Tí: hoc est, de altissimo domino; de tiên xín: id est, de spiritibus caelestibus; de lím hoên: hoc est, de anima rationale*”: APF SC, *Indie Orientali, Cina*, vol. 1, fols. 170^r–197^v. See Collani.

²¹ Navarrete, 245–89. For Navarrete’s escape from Guangzhou, see Cummins, 166.

²² Navarrete, 214.

²³ Longobardo, 1701 and 1704.

²⁴ Mungello; Perkins, 191–93.

relationship with the past. This debate has often been referred to as the humanist-Scholastic debate, which, inaugurated by Petrarch in the fourteenth century with *De Sui Ipsius et Multorum Ignorantia* (On his own ignorance and that of many others, 1368), progressed unabated in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, as humanists such as Lorenzo Valla (1406–57) and Desiderius Erasmus (1469–1536) applied their philological expertise to the criticism of the *textus receptus* of the Bible, enraging Scholastic theologians who appealed to the authority of tradition and the medieval commentators.²⁵

In a study entitled *Humanism and Scholasticism in Late Medieval Germany*, Overfield already cautioned against simplistic dualisms in juxtaposing humanists and Scholastics, considering the significant crossover between these two categories of intellectuals.²⁶ In the case of the Jesuits, a categorical dichotomy seems even more inappropriate. While the Jesuits followed the schools in extolling Saint Thomas Aquinas as their master in theology and Aristotle in philosophy, the Jesuit constitutions and the *ratio studiorum* also placed classical rhetoric at the foundation of curriculum.²⁷ Before studying philosophy and theology, Jesuits were expected to master Latin prose and verse by reading extensively in the classics and by emulating the best classical models. However, as Rummel playfully quips, “if humanist and Scholastic purists did not exist, it would be necessary to invent them for structural purposes.”²⁸ The debates of humanist philologists with Scholastic theologians were not a fancy of intellectual historians, but serious in their implications, even if the intellectual allegiances of the participants could not always be clearly defined.

Although Ricci’s humanism is a commonplace in scholarship on the Jesuit China mission, Kim has argued strenuously that Ricci’s Thomism was far more influential on his missionary background than his humanism. Kim’s study acknowledges that humanism influenced Ricci’s “benign attitudes” toward pagan culture, infused in works such as the *Jiaoyou lun* 交友論 (On friendship, 1595) and the *Ershiwu yan* 二十五言 (Twenty-five sayings, 1600), which wed Stoic models such as Cicero and Epictetus to Confucian ethics.²⁹ But Kim follows Kristeller and Grendler in stressing the intellectual continuities between

²⁵ The contours of the humanist-Scholastic debate are expertly narrated in Rummel, 1995. For a collection of essays on the impact of this debate on biblical criticism, see Rummel, 2008. While the impact of Renaissance humanism on the Jesuit *ratio studiorum* has been given much attention, how tensions between Scholastic and humanist methodology played out in the Jesuit order require further examination.

²⁶ Overfield.

²⁷ Cf. Farrell.

²⁸ Rummel, 1995, 11.

²⁹ Kim, 45–46. For English editions of the *Jiaoyou lun* and *Ershiwu yan*, see Ricci, 2009; Spalatin.

the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, claiming that there was nothing inherently humanist about the citation of pagan authors, because this was a common practice in medieval Scholasticism.³⁰ However, the distinction between humanist and Scholastic approaches to classical antiquity does not consist in the mere usage of pagan authors, whom Christian theologians had cited without interruption since patristic times, but in the opposing tools of textual criticism that were used by medieval and Renaissance authors to interpret such texts. In this respect, Ricci's exegetical presuppositions are profoundly humanist: he unpacks Confucianism with the same tools that Renaissance authors used to unpack antiquity. He has little respect for received tradition and has great confidence in his own interpretative ability to uncover the authentic meaning of the classics.

Kim also confusingly conflates the arguments that Ricci gives to prove the existence of God and to dispute neo-Confucian metaphysics in the *Tianzhu shiyi* 天主實義 (The true meaning of the Lord of Heaven, 1603) with Ricci's identification of God with Shangdi:³¹ while the former are undoubtedly a translation into Chinese of Thomistic argumentation, the latter depends on philological principles that are largely alien to the spirit of medieval Scholasticism. Crucially, however, it must be considered that the mere translation of Scholastic arguments into Chinese is neither innovative nor controversial. The crux of the controversies over Ricci's missionary strategy revolved around the identification of God with Shangdi, which strongly suggests that at its roots the Terms Controversy was not theological but philological, and was thus deeply invested in continuing debates over humanist exegetical practices.

Ricci never systematically outlines his methodology for interpreting the Chinese classics, but its contours can be reconstructed from his copious writings. The first extant letter of Ricci's that discusses the Four Books is to Claudio Acquaviva, dated 10 December 1593, from Shaozhou, in which he compares the Four Books to "another Seneca or another of our authors who are most famous among the gentiles."³² Here, Ricci expresses his admiration for the moral contents of these works, by "four very good philosophers," and informs

³⁰ Kim, 46.

³¹ Kim, 59–60: "According to Ricci, naming God '*Shangti*' as the Christian God in Chinese meant a return to 'the state of pure nature,' and the restoration of human relation to God. In other words, Ricci's translation of the divine name of the Christian God in China was a genuine Thomistic enterprise. I want to further investigate how Matteo Ricci made use of the Thomistic mode of naming God in detail by means of a comparative reading of the *ST* and the *T'ien-chu Shib-i*."

³² Ricci, 2001, 185: "un altro Seneca o altro autore dei più nostri famosi tra gentili."

the superior general that he had been tasked by Valignano to translate them into Latin “to assist with the preparation of a new catechism.”³³ While writing again to Acquaviva from Nanchang on 4 November 1595, he relates in passing his practice of citing passages from the ancient Chinese classics that “were favorable to the teachings of the Christian faith, such as the unity of God, the immortality of the soul, and the glory of the blessed.”³⁴

In his letter to Pasio dated 15 February 1609, Ricci moves beyond the view that the Chinese classics are merely amenable to a Christian reading, strongly affirming the superiority of the ancient Chinese in their worship and observance of the natural law in comparison to other pagan peoples. In light of their adherence to the dictates of natural reason, Ricci expressed his hope that the ancient Chinese could find salvation.³⁵ Echoes of this letter can be found in Ricci’s memoirs, which were being composed around the same time but with an important difference that has been largely ignored by scholarship: whereas in his letter to Pasio he places the ancient Chinese worship of heaven and earth before the Lord of Heaven and implies that these are distinct divinities, in his memoirs he positions the Lord of Heaven as the primary object of ancient Chinese worship and suggests that Tian Di 天地 (Heaven and Earth) was but an alternative name for the Lord of Heaven. Ricci’s grounds for this assimilation are explained in the *Tianzhu shiyi*, where Ricci cites a passage from *Zhongyong* 中庸 (Doctrine of the mean): “The ceremonies of sacrifices to heaven [*jiao* 郊] and earth [*she* 社] are meant for the service of the Sovereign on High [Shangdi 上帝].” In his commentary on the passage (*Zhongyong zhangju* 中庸章句), the Song-dynasty commentator Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) explains that “earth” is not repeated for the sake of “brevity” (*shengwen* 省文). Ricci corrects Zhu Xi by claiming that the failure to repeat “earth” was because Confucius actually believed these two entities were one, not two.³⁶ This eliminates the theologically problematic insinuation that the ancient Chinese worshipped heaven and earth but introduces additional questions, such as how a transcendent God could be identified with both heaven and earth. Hence, Ricci proposes that the ancient Chinese conception of God was pantheistic or animistic, in that heaven and earth served as the living body (*corpo vivo*) of the supreme divinity (*suppremo nume*):

³³ Ricci, 2001, 184: “quattro filosofi assai buoni e di buoni documenti morali. Questi anco mi fa il p. visitatore traslatate in latino per agiutarmi di quello in fare un uovo catechismo.”

³⁴ Ricci, 2001, 315: “che favoriscono alle cose della nostra fede, come della unità di Dio, della immortalità dell’anima, della gloria de’ beati etc.”

³⁵ Ricci, 2001, 518.

³⁶ Ricci, 2016, 96.

Of all the pagan peoples that our Europe has come to know of, I do not know of any that had fewer errors in matters of religion than China in its earliest antiquity. For this reason, I find in their books that they always adored a supreme divinity, which they call King of Heaven [Shangdi], or Heaven and Earth [Tian Di], perhaps because they thought that heaven and earth were one animate thing, and that they made a living body together with the supreme divinity as its soul. They also venerated various tutelary spirits of the mountains, rivers, and the four parts of the world.

In all their works, they always paid much attention to following the dictate of reason, which they said to have received from heaven; they never believed of the King of Heaven and all their other spirits and ministers such indecent things as our Romans, Greeks, Egyptians, and other foreign nations believed. Hence we can hope from the immense goodness of the Lord that many of these ancient [Chinese] were saved in the natural law, with that particular help that God is accustomed to extend to those who do everything they can to receive it.³⁷

The claims that Ricci makes about primitive Chinese theology might have suggested to his seventeenth-century reader echoes of the *prisca theologia*, or ancient theology, which had been popularized by Marsilio Ficino and which acquired a significant following in Counter-Reformation Catholicism under the guise of the *philosophia perennis* of Agostino Steuco. While later Jesuits, such as Martini, Couplet, and Bouvet, certainly made such a connection,³⁸ Ricci leaves the origin of Chinese monotheism perplexingly ambiguous. The *prisca theologia* is usually accompanied by a diffusionist account that traces the transmission of monotheistic doctrines among the gentiles back to conduits such as the Chaldeans or Egyptians, who were perceived as being the purest pagan recipients of ancient wisdom because of their temporal and spatial

³⁷ D'Elia, 1:109: "Di tutte le gentilità venute a notizia della nostra Europa non so di nessuna che avesse manco errori intorno alle cose della religione di quello che ebbe la Cina nella sua prima antichità. Perciochè ritruovo ne' sui libri, che sempre adorano un suppremo nume, che chiamano *Re del cielo* [天帝], o *Cielo e Terra* [天地], parendo forse a loro che il cielo e la terra erano una cosa animata, e che con il suppremo nume, come sua anima, facevano un corpo vivo. Veneravano anco varij spiriti protectori de' monti, e de' fiumi, e di tutte le quattro parti del mondo. Fecero sempre molto caso di seguire in tutte le loro opere il dettame della ragione che dicevano avere ricevuta dal cielo, e mai credettero del Re del cielo e degli altri spiriti, suoi ministri, cose tanto sconcie, quanto credettero i nostri Romani, i Greci, gli Egittij et altre strane nationi. Di dove si può sperare dalla immensa bontà del Signore, che molti di quegli antichi si salvassero nella legge naturale, con quello agiuto particolare che suole Iddio porgere, a quegli che di sua parte fanno quanto possono per riceverlo."

³⁸ Mori.

proximity to the Hebrews or antediluvian patriarchs.³⁹ However, Ricci's exaltation of primitive Chinese theology is a deprecation of the Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans, and is thus a striking contrast to the transmission theories of the *prisca theologia*. In the passage above, Ricci only attributes the origin of Chinese natural theology to "the dictate of natural reason" ("il dettame della ragione"), though he never explains what rational processes the Chinese underwent to arrive at such an understanding. Indeed, in another place, Ricci expresses a low view of Chinese dialectic, suggesting that ancient Chinese philosophy amounted to nothing more than confused moral maxims: "The science of which they had greater knowledge was moral. But since they did not know any dialectic, they say and write everything not in a scientific way but confusedly, by means of maxims and discourses, following everything that they could understand with the light of natural [reason]. The greatest philosopher among them is Confucius, who was born 550 years before the coming of the Lord into the world, and he lived a very good life for more than seventy years, teaching this nation with words, deeds, and writings."⁴⁰

Conversely, Kim sees Ricci's belief in "the purity of the Chinese natural lights" as a Thomistic appeal to the purity of prelapsarian natural reason. According to Kim's reading, just as human reason was corrupted by the Fall, so Chinese natural reason had been "corrupted" first by 'atheistic' Buddhism and 'pantheistic' Taoism, and later by Sung Neo-Confucianism, which syncretized the monotheistic purity with the religious corruption of Buddhism and Taoism."⁴¹ However, this reading is also unsatisfactory because Ricci makes no claim that primitive Chinese theology was representative of prelapsarian reason. In fact, as the above passage makes clear, the Chinese reasoning was highly imperfect, and their animistic concept of God diverged from the original revelation infused into Adam by God. Ricci's claim is merely that the ancient Chinese were purer than other gentile civilizations, not that they embodied purity *per se*.

Ricci was well aware that his interpretation of the Chinese classics could not be supported with reference to contemporary readings. In a letter of 13 October 1596, Ricci laments that China lacks any knowledge of God whatsoever,

³⁹ For a classic study, see Walker.

⁴⁰ D'Elia, 1:39: "La scientia di che hebbero più notitia fu della morale; ma conciosiacosachè non sappino nessuna dialectica, tutto dicono e scrivono, non in modo scientifico, ma confuso, per varie sententie e discorsi, seguendo quanto col lume naturale potettero intendere. Il maggiore filosofo che ha tra loro è il Confutio, che nacque cinquecento e cinquanta uno anni inanzi alla venuta del Signore al mondo, e visse più di settanta anni assai buona vita, insegnando con parole, opre, e scritti, questa natione."

⁴¹ Kim, 58–59.

comparing the three sects of contemporary China to the three-headed Lernaean Hydra, each head spawning another three when cut off.⁴² In his memoirs, he makes abundantly clear that the atheist literati of his day do not share his reading of the Confucian classics and that their most common view, which perceives everything as one substance, was introduced during the Song dynasty under the influence of the idolaters.⁴³ But here and elsewhere he conceals that the neo-Confucian interpretation was not just the most common but also the orthodoxy mandated by the government in the imperial examination system (*keju* 科舉). In fact, in one place he makes the remarkable claim that the “true literati” (“veri letterati”) do not speak about the creation of the world or its beginning, because “some of little authority take for granted extremely frivolous and ill-founded judgements, but they are given little attention.”⁴⁴

In his Western-language writings Ricci only occasionally mentions the Song-dynasty commentaries and hardly explains their status in relation to the Confucian classics.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, a hint of Ricci’s disdain for the commentaries can be found in a letter of 9 September 1597 to Lelio Passionei, where he stresses that the Four Books were books of morals, composed during the time of Plato and Aristotle, consisting of aphorisms (*sententie buone*) that were not structured according to a scientific method (*scientia*). The books themselves, he confesses, are comparable in size to the letters of Cicero, “but the commentaries and glosses, and commentaries of commentaries and other expositions and discourses on them are already endless.”⁴⁶ Ricci does not reveal to Passionei that the commentaries conflict with his monotheistic reading of the classics, but his description of them as endless self-referential verbiage is far from flattering, inviting a comparison to critiques of Scholastic *verboſitas* made by

⁴² Ricci, 2001, 330.

⁴³ D’Elia, 1:116: “Ma l’opinione che adesso è più seguita, apre a me pigliata dalla setta degli idoli da cinquecento anni in qua, è che tutto questo mondo sta composto di una sola sustantia, e che il creatore di esso con il cielo e la terra, gli huomini e gli animali, alberi et herbe con i quattro elementi, tutti fanno un corpo continuo, e tutti sono membri di questo corpo; e da questa unità di sustantia cavano la charità che habbiamo d’aver gli uni con gli altri; con il che tutti gli huomini possono venire a esser simili a Dio per esser della stessa sustantia con esso lui. Il che noi procuriamo di confutare non solo con ragioni, ma anco con autorità de’ loro antichi, che assai chiaramente insegnorno assai differente dottrina.”

⁴⁴ D’Elia, 1:115: “alcuni di puoca autorità fanno certi suoi giudicij assai frivoli e mal fundati; di che si fa puoco caso tra essi.”

⁴⁵ D’Elia, 1:117: “I libri di questa legge sono li *Quattro libri* [四書] et le *Cinque Dottrine* [五經] per dove imparano le loro lettere; e non vi è altra cosa di autorità se non commenti sopra questi.”

⁴⁶ Ricci, 2001, 349: “ma gli comentarij e glosse, e comentarij de’ comentarij et altre esposizioni e discorsi sopra essi sono già infiniti.”

successive generations of humanists such as Petrarch and Valla. It is only in the *Tianzhu shiyi* that Ricci expressly articulates the philological premises of his rejection of neo-Confucianism:

The teaching handed down from the sages was geared to what people were capable of accepting; thus, there are many teachings, which, though handed down for generations, are incomplete. Then there are teachings that were given direct to students and were not recorded in books, or, if recorded, were subsequently lost. There is also the possibility that later, perverse historians removed parts of these records because they did not believe in their historical veracity. Moreover, written records are frequently subject to alteration, and one cannot say that because there is no written record certain things did not happen. Confucians today constantly misinterpret the writings of antiquity, and this is inexplicable. Since they put greater emphasis on style than on meaning, today's morality has declined despite the flourishing of today's scholarship.⁴⁷

The centerpiece of Ricci's philological identification of Shangdi with the Christian God is found in the second chapter of the *Tianzhu shiyi*, where Ricci rebuts the errors of the "three sects" of China—Buddhism, Taoism, and neo-Confucianism. At the beginning of the chapter, Ricci seemingly sides with the neo-Confucians, criticizing the void (*kong* 空) of Buddhism and nothingness (*wu* 無) of Daoism and arguing that the Confucian concept of existence (*you* 有) and their striving for self-cultivation on the basis of sincerity (*cheng* 誠) serve as more acceptable principles.⁴⁸ Ricci wields the Scholastic principle of "ex nihilo nihil fieri" ("nothing comes from nothing") to demonstrate the absurdity of the metaphysical presuppositions held by Buddhism and Daoism.⁴⁹ But in the latter part of the chapter, Ricci reveals his fundamental opposition to the neo-Confucian concept of *taiji* 太極, or the Supreme Ultimate. There are two fundamental grounds to his opposition. First, the ancients revered Shangdi, the sovereign of heaven and earth, not the Supreme Ultimate.⁵⁰ Second, according to Ricci's Scholastic reasoning, the concept of *taiji* is logically absurd and no different from the *wu* and *kong*.

⁴⁷ Ricci, 2016, 268–69: “聖人傳教，視世之能載，故有數傳不盡者。又或有面語，而未悉錄于冊者。或已錄，而後失者。或後頑史不信，因削去之者。況事物之文，時有換易，不可以無其文，即云無其事也。今儒之謬攻古書，不可勝言焉。急乎文，緩乎意，故今之文雖隆，今之行實衰。” I have modified the translation in parts to more accurately reflect the meaning of the Chinese text.

⁴⁸ Ricci, 2016, 72.

⁴⁹ Ricci, 2016, 76; Aquinas, Ia, q. 45, a. 2.

⁵⁰ Ricci, 2016, 80: “余雖末年入中華，然竊視古經書不怠，但聞古先君子敬恭于天地之上帝，未聞有尊奉太極者。如太極為上帝—萬物之祖，古聖何隱其說乎？”

It is not this latter ground that establishes the concordance between the Christian God and Shangdi but, rather, the former, and Ricci's arguments are derived from the principles of humanist textual criticism. Ricci sifts through eleven citations of Shangdi in the *Shijing* 詩經 (Book of odes), *Liji* 禮記 (Book of rites), *Shujing* 書經 (Book of documents), and *Zhongyong* 中庸 (Doctrine of the mean) and demonstrates that the immanentist identification of Shangdi with the material heaven (*tian* 天) and principle (*li* 理) is an anachronistic imposition that betrays the internal logic of these ancient texts. For instance, since in the *Yijing* 易經 (Book of changes) it is stated that "the Sovereign [Lord] emerges from Zhen in the east," it would be absurd to identify this "sovereign" with the material heaven because "the blue sky embraces the eight directions" and, thus, cannot come from one direction alone.⁵¹ It is on these grounds that Ricci asserts that Tianzhu and Shangdi are one and the same except in name.⁵²

Ricci's philological reasoning was rather simplistic and was undoubtedly limited by his superficial understanding of neo-Confucianism. In fact, his understanding of the Four Books and Five Classics is quite limited, and he tends to isolate terms from their context. Although he rightly points to the ancient belief in Shangdi during the Zhou 周 dynasty, this element was seemingly marginal, or at least was not retained, during the Han 漢 dynasty. Hence, the centrality that Ricci gives to Shangdi is philologically questionable.

Nonetheless, Ricci betrays a strong historical consciousness, distinguishing between linguistic and conceptual forms that he attributes to later periods of Chinese philosophy from the teaching of the ancients. For Ricci, not only are terms such as *taiji* essentially absent from the writings of earliest antiquity, but the neo-Confucian identification of an immanentist *taiji* with Shangdi contradicts the plain reading of the texts. Such concerns were alien to most medieval Scholastics, who did not care much for philological accuracy or the historical context of ancient texts. As Grafton argues, while medieval Scholastics undoubtedly cited classical texts, "they did so in forms that their own creators would have found hard to recognize."⁵³ Their primary concern was the utility of these ancient texts for exploring philosophic views. A similar lack of "historical grounding" can be observed in Song-dynasty classical exegesis, which employed a "philosophical hermeneutics" in its interpretation of the classics that assumed "a metaphysical order in which the text is embedded, and

⁵¹ Ricci, 2016, 98: "《易》曰：'帝出乎震。'夫帝也者，非天之謂，蒼天者抱八方，何能出於一乎？"

⁵² Ricci, 2016, 100: "歷觀古書，而知上帝與天主，特異以名也。"

⁵³ Grafton, 2015, 156.

to which the interpreter possesses privileged access.”⁵⁴ While humanists differed in their understandings of the purpose and methods of classical scholarship, they had an acute awareness of the historical chasm separating the world of the ancients from their own day, and they privileged philology as a bridge.⁵⁵ Ricci’s application of philological analysis to discredit the dominant Song dynasty cannot be divorced from his humanist leanings, even if these humanist textual practices mirrored late Ming critiques of Song symbolic and allegorical approaches to the classics that would later find fuller development in the *kaozheng* 考證 textual criticism of the Qing.⁵⁶

LONGOBARDO’S CRITIQUE OF RICCI’S INTERPRETATIVE PRACTICES

It must be reaffirmed that Ricci and Longobardo, despite their differences, share many conceptual and interpretative assumptions. Strikingly, the Greco-Roman echoes found in Ricci’s writings are developed more explicitly and systematically in Longobardo’s treatise. But whereas Ricci only vaguely articulates the relative purity of ancient Confucianism, Longobardo draws on an alternative tradition of the *prisca theologia* that saw the transmission of pagan knowledge as an act of diabolical deception. Such a view found sanction in Augustine’s ambiguous treatment of figures such as Hermes Trismegistus, who, despite accurately foretelling the decline of idolatry, was said to have been inspired by a “fallacious spirit.”⁵⁷ Longobardo identifies Fuxi 伏羲, the legendary creator of humanity and first sovereign of China, with Zoroaster, who, after initiating the heretical sects in the West, came to China, where he established a new kingdom and the Confucian literati. Longobardo refers the reader to the above-mentioned report of Rodrigues for a more extensive treatment of the topic.⁵⁸ Should Rodrigues’s thesis that Confucianism had an ultimately diabolical origin be accepted, it would go without saying that the entire edifice of Ricci’s accommodation would be compromised.

Longobardo’s tracing back of Confucianism to diabolical deception drew upon Counter-Reformation trends. Although in the early sixteenth century Ficino’s ideas had been popularized by Agostino Steuco in *De Perenni Philosophia* (On the perennial philosophy, 1540), by the end of the century there was a reaction against them among many Counter-Reformation

⁵⁴ Lackner, 139.

⁵⁵ Grafton, 1985, 620.

⁵⁶ Elman.

⁵⁷ Oort.

⁵⁸ See Pina.

theologians in Rome.⁵⁹ For instance, Ficino's blending of pagan and Christian sources was vociferously condemned by Giovan Battista Crispo in *De Ethnicis Philosophis Caute Legendis* (On the need for caution when reading pagan philosophers, 1594). Crispo claimed to have been supported in his caution against excessive accommodation to paganism by none other than Francisco de Toledo (1532–96), Roberto Bellarmino (1542–1621), Cesare Baronio (1538–1607), and Antonio Possevino (1533–1611), “the leading lights of this generation,” all of whom, with the exception of Baronio, were Jesuits. Indeed, Possevino reciprocated Crispo's gesture by citing *De Ethnicis Philosophis Caute Legendis* in the second edition of the *Bibliotheca Selecta* (Selected library, 1603).⁶⁰ Nevertheless, these works generally did not dispute the historical reality of Ficino's *prisci theologi*, which would not receive its first significant challenge until 1614, with Isaac Casaubon's redating of the Hermetic corpus.⁶¹ Nor did they reject Ficino's transmission thesis, which accorded well with the commonly held view that all peoples descended from Noah, who undoubtedly was monotheistic.

The fact that there were mixed views about Zoroaster and the *prisca theologia* at the turn of the seventeenth century would have made Longobardo's claims about the diabolical origins of Confucianism a rather weak attack on ancient Chinese wisdom. Hence, while he refers to this theme on several occasions throughout his treatise, he deliberately announces that this will not be the focus of his critique, referring the reader instead to Rodrigues's elaboration of this theme. Yet Longobardo's assumptions about Fuxi's place in the *prisca theologia* still threads the substance of his attack on Ricci's interpretation of the ancient Chinese classics.

The focus of Longobardo's treatise was a sustained and cogent critique of Ricci's interpretative practices that emphasized the importance of commentaries and consensus for navigating the ambiguities of the past in both the Western and Chinese traditions. In the first prelude, Longobardo provides an overview of the range of texts employed in China and their respective authority there: of first rank were the five ancient *jing* 經 (*Yijing*, *Shujing*, *Shijing*, *Liji*, *Chunqiu* 春秋) and the Four Books (*Sishu* 四書); of second rank were the commentaries; of third rank were the summaries of Chinese natural and moral philosophy contained in the *Xingli daquan*; of fourth rank were works composed after the great burning of books by Qin Shihuang 秦始皇, in 212 BCE, an event frequently alluded to by the Jesuits as emblematic of the chasm between pre- and post-Qin intellectual culture. Of interest here is how

⁵⁹ Kraye.

⁶⁰ Possevino, 2:35–36.

⁶¹ Grafton, 1983.

Longobardo introduces the commentaries. Whereas Ricci saw the sheer quantity of seemingly endless and self-referential commentaries in the same way a humanist would scorn medieval *verbositas*, Longobardo is evidently very impressed not only by their number but also by their consistency, evoking a comparison with the church fathers as authoritative guides to sacred scripture:

There is a great number of ancient interpreters: for there are 107 interpreters of the *Sishu* or Four Books of Confucius; 136 interpreters commenting on the *Yijing*, 166 on the *Shujing*, and so on for the remaining *jing* or books of their teachings, as is seen in their catalogue printed at the beginning of them. It is wondrous to see how they combine everything in their understanding of the substantial points of their doctrine. It seems an image of our Holy Fathers in the interpretation of Sacred Scripture. Hence not without reason great attention is paid to these commentaries in China because the compositions that the literati write about the text cannot be admitted unless they agree with the interpretation of the commentaries.⁶²

Longobardo's argument is essentially that missionaries do not possess sufficient philological skills to reconstruct with confidence an interpretation of the classics that so blatantly contradicts the received tradition of the commentaries. At the heart of his concern is the sheer obscurity of the Chinese classics. In the third prelude, Longobardo asserts that obscurity is not restricted to Chinese antiquity but is an integral part of the *prisca theologia* tradition to which he subsumes his account of ancient Chinese wisdom. Citing the Coimbra commentary on Aristotle's *De physica*, a work that probably had arrived in China upon Trigault's return, in mid-1620, Longobardo argues that "all ancient pagan philosophers devised various symbols, enigmas, and figures so that the mysteries of their philosophy can be covered up and hidden."⁶³ His signal example is naturally the abstruse *Yijing*, which he considers emblematic of the theoretical part of Chinese teaching: "The primary symbols are even and odd numbers, lines that are broken in the middle and whole, white and black

⁶² APF, SC, Indie Orientali Cina, vol. 1, fol. 147^r: "O numero destes Interpretes antigos he grande, porque soo no *suxu* entram alguns 107. No comento do *YeKim* entram 136. No do *XuKim* 166. E assi das mais *Kins*, como se vee nos catalogos que andas impressos no prime [iro] das mesmas *Kins*. E he pera pasmar, ver como combinam e conspiram todos na intellig [enti]a das cousas fundamentaes e substansiaes das suas doutrinas, que he huma imagem dos nossos Santos Padres doutores na exposiçao da sa[gr]ada scriptura. Por onde não sem rezao se faz na China tanto caso destes comentos, que não se admitemas composicoes que fazem os Letrados sobre o Texto, se não forem conformes ao sentido que lhe dao os Comentos."

⁶³ APF, SC, Indie Orientali e Cina, vol. 1, fol. 149^v: "todos os antigos Philosophos da gentildade inventaram varios symbols, enigmas, e figuras a fim de serem encubertos e escondidos os mysterios da sua Philosophia."

dots, round and square figures, the six positions of places, and other words and metaphoric expressions.”⁶⁴ He claims that the mathematical mysteries of this book can only be understood by studying the eleventh and twelfth *juan* of the *Xingli daquan*, which include the cosmological and numerological theories of Shao Yong 邵雍 (1011–77). For Longobardo, the numerological content of this work suggests a comparison with Pythagorean numerology. This analogy is apt because, like the *Yijing*, Pythagoras’s actual philosophic doctrines were shrouded in mystery, and scholars relied upon Aristotle’s summaries and other commentaries of late antiquity for a basic knowledge of Pythagoreanism.⁶⁵ In other words, commentaries were necessary for interpreting not merely Chinese tradition but also the West. Further, the *prisca theologia* framework allows Longobardo to reverse the probative value of the Pythagorean analogy: since Pythagoras was heir to Zoroaster, whom Longobardo identified with Fuxi, the example of Pythagoras not only demonstrates the importance of commentaries but also suggests that Chinese commentaries can have a role in reconstructing knowledge of Western antiquity.

To bolster his claim about the necessity of commentaries for interpreting Chinese antiquity, Longobardo draws extensively on Western sources on pre-Socratic philosophy and Egyptian hieroglyphs. Some of his sources, such as Augustine’s *City of God*, share Longobardo’s skeptical or dismissive view of ancient wisdom, but others, such as the *Hieroglyphica* of Pierio Valeriano (1477–1558), do not reconcile easily with the tenor of Longobardo’s analysis. After all, Valeriano was very much a product of the Egyptian enthusiasm that swept across Italy with the publication of Horapollo’s *Hieroglyphica*. As Valeriano makes clear in his dedication to the reader, he saw his task to explain not only Egyptian antiquity but also the sacred letters in which Christ himself, the apostles, and the prophets were versed, as well as Pythagoras and Plato.⁶⁶

But Longobardo does not cite Valeriano because he wants to draw upon Valeriano’s views about the compatibility between Egyptian wisdom and Christianity, but because he wants to apply Valeriano’s conviction, common to most Renaissance humanists, that the Egyptian hieroglyphs are to be interpreted symbolically, as ideograms expressive of abstruse philosophic doctrines. Since these lofty doctrines would not have been comprehensible to the common man, Longobardo envisages, under the authority of Plutarch, Augustine, and the Coimbra commentaries, that there were two teachings common to all

⁶⁴ APF, SC, *Indie Orientali e Cina*, vol. 1, fol. 149^v: “Os principaes symbolos são os numeros par e impar, riscas cortadas pello meyo e enteiras, pontos brancos e pretos, figuras redondas e quadradas, as seis posições dos lugares, entras palavras e termos metaphoricos.”

⁶⁵ Celenza.

⁶⁶ Valeriano, title page.

ancient peoples—a hidden “true” philosophy of natural causes, known only to a philosophic elite, and a “false external teaching,” couched in the more accessible language of idolatry that was used as a political expedience in controlling the people: “As for the second part, it must also be noted that by reason of the symbols there were two sorts of teaching in all nations since antiquity: one true and secret, the other false and apparent. The first was a philosophy and knowledge of natural causes, known only by the philosophers and discussed secretly among them in their classes. The second was a certain false external doctrine for the people, which was an enigma of the first teaching. But the people thought it true according to the sound of the words, despite being absolutely false.”⁶⁷

This division had a long history in the Jesuits’ exposition of Japanese Buddhism, appearing in the 1556 document “Sumário dos erros en que os gentios do Japão vivem e de algumas seitas gentílicas en que principalmente confiã” (Summary of the errors in which the peoples of Japan live and of some pagan sects in which they principally believe), attributed by Wicki to Balthasar Gago (1520–83) but largely a recompilation of information about Japanese religion stereotyped in 1551—only two years after Xavier’s arrival in Japan.⁶⁸ Valignano gave this idea its clearest theoretical articulation, in his *Catechismus Christianae Fidei* (Catechism of the Christian faith, 1586). Rodrigues, however, would seem to be the first to explicitly apply it to the “three sects” of China, in his letter of 22 January 1616 from Macau to the superior general, and was most likely Longobardo’s source.⁶⁹ Intriguingly, both Longobardo and Rodrigues

⁶⁷ APF, SC, Indie Orientali e Cina, vol. 1, fol. 149^v: “Quanto a secunda parte, deve igualmente notarse, que por causa dos symbolos em todas as nações desde antigo ouve duas sortes de doutrina, huma verdadeira e secreta, outra falsa e aparente. A primeira hera a Philosophia e scientia das causas naturaes que sabiam somente os sabios, e tratavam secretamente entre si nas suas Classes. A secunda hera huma falsa apparentia da doutrina popular, que hera enigma da primeira e o povo evidava ser verdadeira na forma que soavam as palavras, havendo que na realidade hera totalmente falsa.”

⁶⁸ Ruiz-de-Medina, 662: “Esta seita do Amida hé a que isteriormente se pregua e declara. E perguntando aos mais sabios que dem rezão de que maneira o Amida pode salvar as jentes, dizem por derradeiro que tudo hé fonbem. Esta palavra fonbem [*bōben* 方便] não a entendem os simples e os que não são letrados.” For the authorship of this document, see Ruiz-de-Medina, 652–54. For the progeny of this concept in China, see Meynard, 2011. The *Sumario* is discussed extensively in App, 33–50.

⁶⁹ Cooper, 1981, 315–298. Rodrigues’s views about the Near Eastern origin of East Asian civilization predate his intervention in the Terms Controversy. At the end of his famous Japanese grammar, *Arte de Lingoa de Iapam* (1604–08), Rodrigues traces the Chinese back to the ten tribes of Israel. Similar theories are propounded in his unfinished *Historia da Igreja do Japão*, which was written between 1620 and 1621. Rodrigues, fol. 235^{r-v}; Cooper, 2001, 330–31. See also Cooper, 1974, 269–94.

compare the popular doctrine to Varro's "civil theology," described in the sixth book of Augustine's *City of God*, and then cite the same passage of Seneca quoted by Augustine. Rodrigues's comparison between the monism of Melissus and Chinese philosophy is elaborated in Longobardo's explanation of the Chinese axiom *wan wu yi ti* 萬物一體 (all things are one). However, Longobardo may have already formulated this equivalence: in a letter dated 1598 to the superior general Acquaviva, Longobardo elliptically affirms that what Aristotle said about Melissus could be applied to Chinese natural philosophy—namely, that "they err in matter and form."⁷⁰ Since Rodrigues's letter was composed before Trigault's return to China, in 1620, it understandably does not mention the Coimbra commentaries, but in his *History of Japan*, composed between 1620 and 1621, Rodrigues cites the Coimbra commentaries on *De generatione et corruptione* and *De coelo* to demonstrate the concordance of pre-Socratic cosmology with that of Sino-Japanese Buddhism.⁷¹ It is thus certainly possible that even the Coimbra citations used in the "Resposta breve" had been suggested to Longobardo by Rodrigues.

For Longobardo, the division between esoteric and exoteric teachings is confirmed by the Chinese classics. He cites four passages of the *Lunyu* 論語 (Analects) and one passage mistakenly attributed to the *Kongzi jiayu* 孔子家語 (Sayings of Confucius) but actually from the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 (Zhuangzi) that purportedly prove that Confucius deliberately withheld from the common people information about the supernatural, just like Sakyamuni Buddha and the pre-Socratic philosophers. Longobardo's reading of these passages is tendentious, but he is correct in identifying esoteric/exoteric tendencies in the Chinese commentary tradition. For instance, Longobardo first cites the affirmation of Zigong 子貢 (520–456 BCE), in *Lunyu* 5.13, that "Confucius's discourses about man's nature and the Way of Heaven cannot be heard."⁷² This is a very significant passage in the *Lunyu* because, as Philip J. Ivanhoe remarks, "it is one of only two places in the text where the character human nature (*xing* 性) is mentioned (the other being 17.2) and it is the only passage that mentions the Way of Heaven (*tiandao* 天道)."⁷³ The commentator He Yan 何晏 (195–249), influenced by Daoism, saw the character *yan* 言 (to say) as indicative of the ineffability of metaphysical entities such as *xing* and *tiandao* compared to observable phenomena. Variations of this esoteric interpretation can be found in the Song 宋 interpreters Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107),

⁷⁰ Longobardo, 1601, 7: "peccant in materia & forma."

⁷¹ Cooper, 2001, 358–59.

⁷² APF, SC, *Indie Orientali e Cina*, vol. 1, fol. 150^v: "夫子之言性與天道，不可得而聞也。"

⁷³ Ivanhoe, 119.

Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032–85), and Zhu Xi. But where Longobardo diverges from the commentary tradition is in his claim that Zigong “almost complained about his teacher, saying that in his whole life he never managed to have Confucius speak to him about human nature and the natural condition of heaven except toward the end.”⁷⁴ In fact, the commentators have contrasting recollections of the frequency with which Confucius opined on such matters. Cheng Yi understood the passage as meaning that “although the Master often discoursed on these topics, few could comprehend such complex and difficult teachings,” whereas Zhu Xi, perhaps recalling *Lunyu* 9.1, argued that Confucius “rarely spoke of these,” and, hence, “there were some students who had not heard about them.”⁷⁵ But at the end of the citation, Longobardo adds “except toward the end,” suggesting that when Confucius finally did discuss these matters, he cloaked them in obscurity, akin to how Buddha delivered at the end of this life his hidden atheist doctrines!

It becomes apparent that Longobardo’s concern is to demonstrate not just the consistency between the Chinese commentary tradition, which Ricci regarded too lightly, and the Chinese classics, but also the consistency between the Chinese commentary tradition and the *prisca theologia*, which assumes a common origin for both Chinese and Western paganism. The fact that the testimony of Western classics about the beliefs of the pre-Socratics largely agrees with the premises of neo-Confucianism in Longobardo’s mind proves that the neo-Confucian views were likely correct.

But in the seventh prelude, an interesting change of focus reveals that Longobardo’s concerns are broader than the authority of the Chinese commentary tradition, striking at the heart of the humanist critique of Scholasticism. Here Longobardo relates how Aristotle and the commentary tradition that largely follows him attribute to the pre-Socratics knowledge of only the material cause, since matter is “the entire essence of natural things and that all things were only one continuous thing.”⁷⁶ The pre-Socratics differed in their accounts of what this material cause was, but they were apparently united in their view that the diversity of phenomena in the universe was not substantial but only

⁷⁴ APF, SC, *Indie Orientali e Cina*, vol. 1, fol. 150^v: “como queixandose do seu Mestre, que nunca em toda a vida tinha alcançado delle que lhe falasse da natureza humana, e da natural condição do Ceo: se não depois no cabo.”

⁷⁵ Ivanhoe, 124. Interestingly, however, the Qing-dynasty philologist Zhang Xuecheng would adopt a reading similar to Longobardo’s in claiming that “everything Confucius talked about concerned human nature and the Way of Heaven, but he *never* explicitly said what these were because he feared people would abandon the actual phenomena of the world in their search for the Way”: Ivanhoe, 127.

⁷⁶ APF, SC, *Indie Orientali e Cina*, vol. 1, fol. 154^f: “hera toda a essentia das cousas naturaes, e que todas heram huma soo cousa continuada.”

accidental, resulting from factors such as rarefication and temperature. Following the Coimbra commentary, Longobardo writes, “In this sense Parmenides and Melissus asserted that all things are only one, and Aristotle cites and refutes them accordingly.”⁷⁷ As noted above, the attribution of such views to Confucius and the neo-Confucian tradition was integral to Longobardo’s critique of Ricci’s textual exegesis. Yet Longobardo is plainly aware that Aristotle’s material reading of pre-Socratic metaphysics had been disputed:

Philosophers of this time and others after Aristotle, on account of their opinions of the first philosophers, could not be persuaded that men of such genius (even if their words are that all things are one continuous substance and not different among themselves except according to their external senses, which are fallible) wished to speak in that sense in which Aristotle refutes and reproaches them, and thus they interpret them in different ways. They say that Aristotle reprimanded them on account of their words, not because he believed that they truly thought such things. Others note that Aristotle imposed on them something that those philosophers themselves did not wish to say in the sense in which he refutes them.⁷⁸

While Longobardo does not identify the target of his criticism, it was a common belief among Renaissance thinkers that Aristotle had fundamentally misunderstood the pre-Socratics. Cardinal Bessarion (1403–72) argued in his work *In Calumniatorem Platonis* (Against the slanderer of Plato, 1469) that Aristotle knew that Parmenides and Melissus shared the Platonic view of the One, Being, and the Principle of Beings but dissimulated this knowledge in order not to mislead his readers into thinking that existence is single and immutable. The crux of the confusion is Bessarion’s contention that Aristotle did not consider the underlying meaning of the words, which concern not the physical

⁷⁷ APF, SC, Indie Orientali e Cina, vol. 1, fol. 154^r: “E nesse sentido affirmaram Parmenides e Milisso que todas as cousas são huma soo cousa, e conforme a isso os refere Aristoteles e os refuta.” Cf. *Commentarii Collegii Conimbricensis Societatis Iesu in Octo Libros Physicorum Aristotelis Stagiritae*, 100–03 (liber I, c. 2, q. 2).

⁷⁸ APF, SC, Indie Orientali e Cina, vol. 1, fol. 154^v: “Os Philosophos deste tempo e outros depois de Aristoteles, pello conceito que tem daquelles primeiros Philosophos, não se persuadem que homens de tanto ingenio (posto que suas palavras são o que todas as cousas são huma Substantia continuada, e assi não differem entre si se não conforme a os sentidos exteriores os quaes se enganam) ouvessem de querer falar no sentido em que Aristoteles os refuta e reprende por onde os interpretam de varios modos. Mais dizem que Aristotels os reprende naquella forma, pera si ser as palavras, e não por cuidar que in se elles sentiam aquillo. Outros notam Aristoteles que lhes impos o que elles não quizeram dizer no sentido em que os refuta.”

realm but divine things.⁷⁹ Nearer to Longobardo in time, Francesco Patrizi da Cherso (1529–97), whom Clement VIII appointed chair of Platonic philosophy at the Studium Urbis (La Sapienza), sought in his *Dissertationes Peripateticae* (Peripatetic dissertations, 1581) to counter Aristotle's distortion of pre-Socratic philosophy by proposing the pre-Socratics as continuous with the ancient philosophic tradition that culminated in Platonism and received fulfillment in Christianity. For Patrizi, Aristotle fundamentally misunderstood the metaphysical doctrines of the pre-Socratics and Plato because his vision was anchored to empiricism.⁸⁰

To prove the accuracy of Aristotle's reading of the pre-Socratics, Longobardo presents a series of arguments that are effectively adapted from his critique of Ricci's reading of ancient Confucianism. He appeals, first, to the plain meaning of their words cited in Aristotle; second, to the fact that these authors seem to lack knowledge of an efficient cause necessary for a concept of a transcendent creator; third, to the agreement of other classical sources, such as Galen and Cicero, with Aristotle; and, finally, to the fact that Chinese sources themselves present a metaphysics that concords with the Aristotelian reading of the pre-Socratics:

Fourth, it is finally proven that this is not at all new and that other authors, who are more ancient than the ones mentioned here, had held these notions. The sect of the Indian Gymnosophists held it openly and the Chinese Bonzes, who came from the gymnosophists, also profess it. The same is held by Laozi together with his Daoist priests, and, above all, this view is held by the teachers of Rujiao, from the greatest to the least, from ancient to modern. Therefore, these three sects are more ancient than the philosophers mentioned above, and all these sects originated from the magus Zoroaster, prince of the Chaldeans, who taught and disseminated throughout the world notions such as chaos is eternal.⁸¹

It is striking that in a treatise about Chinese philosophy Longobardo feels the need to devote an entire prelude to bolstering the authority of Aristotle's interpretation of the pre-Socratics. It speaks anxieties about the status of

⁷⁹ Malone-Lee, 118–19.

⁸⁰ Vasoli.

⁸¹ APF, SC, *Indie Orientali e Cina*, vol. 1, fol. 154^v: “Quarto finalmente, provase não ser isto cousa nova, que outros Autores mais antigos que os sobre nomeados não tivessam, pois a Seita dos Gymnosophistas Indianos o tem abertamente, e o professam os Bonzos da China que delles emanaram. O mesmo tem o Laoçu com os seus Tausus, e sobre tudo os professores do Jukiao desde maior ate o minor, assi antigos como modernos. Estas tres seitas são mais antigas que os Philosophos ditos acima, e todas tem origem de Zoroastre Mago e principe dos Chaldeos, que assi o ensinou e semeou pello mundo, pondo o Chaos eterno etc.”

Aristotelian and Scholastic philosophy in the early seventeenth century, which had already suffered a sustained attack at the hands of humanism and was now suffering even greater challenges in Europe, with the profound epistemic shift taking place there during that time. Evidently, Ricci's philological criticism of the neo-Confucian commentaries was dangerous in Longobardo's eyes not only because it admitted possible heterodoxy in the Chinese Christian Church but also because his arguments were in fact derived from the very philological principles used by humanists to discredit the Scholastic tradition, which was at the heart of the Jesuit curriculum. Longobardo's sensitivity to this contradiction was no doubt heightened by the fact that since the early 1590s the Jesuits at Coimbra had been systematically commenting the entire Aristotelian corpus. At the time that Longobardo penned the "Resposta breve," in 1623, the Jesuits had just begun translating these commentaries into Chinese, a project that would have been sanctioned by Longobardo as superior of the China mission. From 1623 to 1640, some nine works were published in China that broadly canvassed the three branches of the philosophy curriculum: logic, natural philosophy, and ethics.⁸² It would have been very difficult for Longobardo to reconcile such a project with Ricci's professed disdain for commentaries.

Longobardo's anxiety about the humanist attack on the commentary tradition leads him to adopt at various points in his treatise an alternative argument that puts aside historical exactitude. Already in the second prelude, Longobardo acknowledges that, at least on the surface, discrepancies can be perceived between the texts of antiquity and the interpretations of the Song-dynasty commentators. For instance, whereas the ancients speak of Shangdi in terms that strikingly resemble the Christian God, "living in the palace of heaven, where he governs the world, bestowing reward on the good and inflicting punishment on the wicked," the commentators identify this with a material heaven or an immanent principle of nature called *li*.⁸³ In the same vein, while the ancient texts admit the existence of spiritual beings called *shen* 神, *gui* 鬼, or *guishen* 鬼神, which govern particular places, the interpreters reduce these entities to natural phenomena or the "operative virtues" ("virtudes operativas") working in things—a term used by Aquinas in explaining how an incorporeal God could be described in the Bible as having arms.⁸⁴

⁸² For a survey of these works, see Meynard, 2017.

⁸³ APF, SC, *Indie Orientali e Cina*, vol. 1, fol. 147^v: "qual esta no paço do Ceo, e dali governa o mundo, apremiando os bons e castigando os maos."

⁸⁴ Aquinas, I, q. 1, a. 10, ad 3: "Nec est litteralis sensus ipsa figura, sed id quod est figuratum. Non enim cum Scriptura nominat Dei brachium, est litteralis sensus quod in Deo sit membrum huiusmodi corporale: sed id quod per hoc membrum significatur, scilicet virtus operativa."

Even if it were to be accepted that the commentaries distorted the meaning of ancient Confucianism (a premise that Longobardo, of course, rejects), the missionaries could not escape the fact that these state-mandated commentaries were so embedded within the prevailing *sensus communis* that they were inseparable from contemporary Chinese usage. Whatever assertions a missionary made about the true meaning of Shangdi would be filtered by his Chinese interlocutor through the assumptions of the prevailing neo-Confucian orthodoxy. Longobardo illustrates this point in the seventeenth prelude with fascinating interviews between pagan and Christian mandarins that give insights into the limitations of intercultural dialogue. One notable episode involved a conversation with a non-Christian mandarin called Zhou Moqian 周慕 from Beijing.⁸⁵ After reading Ricci's *Tianzhu shiyi*, the mandarin asked Longobardo what the Jesuits meant by *Tianzhu*. Longobardo's explanation that Tianzhu was the same as Shangdi, an eternal, intelligent creator governing the cosmos, provoked laughter. His interlocutor found Longobardo's anthropomorphic explanation of Shangdi crude compared to the neo-Confucian view of Shangdi as a "virtue that governs in heaven, just as it lords and governs in all things, including our very selves."⁸⁶ The very fact Longobardo had identified the Christian God with Shangdi prevented him from responding because his interlocutor already had a preconceived view of Shangdi.

Perhaps even more damning were Longobardo's charges against Yang Tingyun (whom Longobardo calls Doutor Miguel [Doctor Michael]), Ricci's illustrious convert. Longobardo alleges that in the *Xixue shijie chujie* 西學十誠初解 (Introduction to the Ten Commandments, 1624)—a text that is unfortunately not extant—Yang interpreted Christianity through neo-Confucian monism, suggesting that "all things are the one same substance as *li*, while there is no difference among things except in terms of their external figures and accidental qualities."⁸⁷ Standaert demonstrated in his meticulous comparison between Longobardo's interview with Yang and Yang's Chinese writings that Longobardo, while mostly accurate in his citations, misrepresented Yang's true beliefs, because in other writings Yang clearly distinguished *li* from the Lord of Heaven.⁸⁸ Be that as it may, Longobardo's overall point remains coherent: exegesis cannot be conducted in a vacuum, divorced from the

⁸⁵ The author thanks Song Liming for this identification.

⁸⁶ APF, SC, *Indie Orientali e Cina*, vol. 1, fol. 165^v: "virtude que domina e governa no Ceo, como também domina e governa em todas as mais cousas, e ainda em nos mesmos."

⁸⁷ APF, SC, *Indie Orientali e Cina*, vol. 1, fol. 167^v: "todas as cousas são huma mesma Substantia que he a Ly, não differindo as humas das outras mais que na figura exterior, e nas qualidades accidentarias."

⁸⁸ Standaert, 1988, 198.

sociopolitical context. The missionaries cannot just reconstruct the original meaning of a text following the humanist appeal *ad fontes*; instead, they must consider the diversity of meanings assumed within a textual tradition and living community.

CONCLUSIONS

In contrasting the interpretative practices of Ricci and Longobardo, it must be emphasized that these figures do not represent antipodal binaries; rather, they depart from common assumptions, since they were formed in the same educational system that fused the *studia humanitatis* with neo-Scholasticism. Like Ricci, Longobardo draws extensively on humanist texts and concepts to construct his arguments. These commonalities, however, must not obscure the significant differences between their respective approaches. Ricci subliminally exploits humanist beliefs about the purity of ancient wisdom to make his reconstruction of ancient Confucian monotheism more plausible to the European reader, while Longobardo explicitly integrates ancient Chinese philosophy within a *prisca theologia* paradigm to demonstrate an equivalence between ancient Chinese philosophy and pre-Socratic monism, proving thereby the reliability of the neo-Confucian commentaries as guides to ancient wisdom.

As the above discussion has revealed, at the root of Longobardo's disagreement with Ricci were tensions between the humanist appeal *ad fontes*, which Ricci so enthusiastically embraced, and the authority afforded to the commentary tradition by the Jesuits in their interpretation of classical antiquity. Longobardo knew that the authority of commentaries had been undermined by humanist textual criticism. Hence, he saw his defense of Chinese commentaries not only as a critique of Ricci's missionary methods but also as a contribution to the rehabilitation of the commentary tradition in the West.

Longobardo's reduction of all Chinese philosophy to an offshoot of a diabolical conspiracy may be off-putting, and his readings may be too heavily filtered through his Scholastic worldview. Nevertheless, his treatise raises significant issues with the humanist mindset that inspired Ricci's confidence in reinterpreting the Confucian tradition against received tradition. While it may be somewhat farfetched to claim that Longobardo was the father of identity politics, his writings do betray an acute sensitivity to the dangers of cultural appropriation. He sees the missionaries as foreign guests in China, and any attempt on their part to contradict the Chinese, who knew their tradition far better than the missionaries, as an egregious impropriety. In this respect, Longobardo's attempt to distance Christianity from Chinese cultural forms was motivated, ironically, by a profound respect for the Chinese as the rightful guardians and best interpreters of their own culture.

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