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IS THE CHINESE RITES CONTROVERSY OVER? A JUSTIFICATION FOR STUDYING A SEVENTEENTH CENTURY ARGUMENT.

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THE CHINESE RITES AND ME

I hope you will excuse the very personal nature of this paper but I have decided to make it a kind of *apologia*, not *pro vita mea* but for the subject that has dominated my academic life, one might even call it the incubus on my career. On many occasions my colleagues and professional acquaintances have asked, politely of course, why I have spent so much of the last forty years pursuing a dead topic, a dusty and dreary controversy from the late seventeenth/ early eighteenth centuries. At first all I could say was that it was a matter of chance and personal interest but with time I have come to see that it is very much more.

During my doctoral research on the Jesuit China mission, forty years ago now, I became aware for the first time of a famous quarrel that had lasted over a century involving not only missionaries in China and the Chinese Christians but eventually many major European thinkers and even Chinese and European governments - the Chinese Rites Controversy. What I had thought to be a straight way through a tangle of sources - what the Jesuits thought of Confucius and how they introduced him to Europe - became a cause of endless complication. A year in European archives in 1970, in which I often used sources apparently never previously used, made matters worse. I managed to restrict discussion of the rites issue to two chapters in my thesis and eventual book *K'ung-tzu or Confucius? The Jesuit Interpretation of Confucianism*, but at the cost of gross oversimplification. A further summer spell in Roman archives followed eventually by a whole year in Rome left me with the conviction that only a team of scholars with abundant resources could tackle the issue.

I also found at the time little interest on the part of publishers and historians of China in such an apparently obscure old argument. In 1970 there were to my knowledge only three scholars anywhere in the world interested in the question, all Jesuit ex-missionaries, two in France and one in California. Today, the Chinese Rites question is a scholarly industry; there have been several international conferences and through the work of two scholars, Erik Zürcher of Leiden and Jacques Gernet of the Collège de France, both of whom interestingly turned from the study of Chinese Buddhism to that of Chinese Christianity, it has become almost mainstream in Chinese studies. And, at last, thanks to an endowment from a Texas IT company to a research institute at an American Jesuit university in California, I find myself, an Australian, heading an international team of scholars at the Ricci Institute in San Francisco working on a multi-volume history of this controversy. I am also editing for the Macau Ricci Institute a multi-volume annotated translation of the key document on the papal legation of Charles Maillard de Tournon to China 1705-1710, the *Acta Pekinensia*. And I have just returned from a conference in Taipei to commemorate the fourth centenary of Matteo Ricci's death which was mostly devoted to the subject and which had 77 papers by scholars from Europe, USA, Taiwan, the P.R.C. Hong Kong, Macau – and two others besides myself from Australia.

WHAT WAS THE CHINESE RITES CONTROVERSY ABOUT?

Let me begin with an attempt to sum up what the Chinese Rites controversy was about. The rites in question were primarily the famous ancestor rites, or to use the common but misleading label, 'ancestor worship'. Could Chinese Christians participate in the regular family rituals honouring their ancestors? Might they keep and pay respects to ancestor tablets? Should they participate in all aspects

of funerals and memorial rituals held at the graves at New year and Qing Ming 清明? Furthermore, for the scholars and graduates among the early Christian converts in China, the monthly rituals in honour of Confucius in the Confucian *miao* 廟 ('temple' or 'hall', another vexed question of terminology) became problematic. Even more so were the imperial court rituals but since few officials were involved in them and, despite the best efforts of the Jesuits no late Ming or early Qing emperor was converted, this never became a practical issue. It is, though, worth thinking about the dilemma of the missionaries if they had succeeded in converting Kangxi. Would they have accompanied him to the Altar of Heaven?¹ And what about his concubines?²

Many Chinese Christians, however, held local office, and one of the duties of district magistrates was to perform rituals in honour of the city god, the *cheng huang* 城隍 or 'walls and moats' god. There seems to have been no prescribed solution to this problem. Most probably simply did it without fuss, sharing the view of most of their Confucian colleagues that it was a lot of nonsense useful for the appeasement of popular anxiety. When forced to defend the practice some Jesuits likened the *cheng huang* to a guardian angel or patron saint of a city (although an examination of the human antecedents of many of these 'gods' may have cast doubts on their sanctity). Others suggested that a procession with a Christian image should replace the ceremony. There is no evidence, however, as Pascal and Arnauld were to claim, that the Jesuits permitted Christian mandarins to perform the ritual with a concealed cross as the object.

There is an even older controversy than that over rituals, but one intimately related to the rites controversy proper, known as the 'terms' controversy. This deals with the name or names for God and other key Christian terms in Chinese. Might Christians refer to their God as Heaven (*Tian* 天) or *Shang Di* 上帝 (High God - perhaps High Ancestor)? What does *Shen* 神 mean in Chinese? God (with a capital letter), or god (lower case) or even gods (plural), or spirits, or 'spirit' in general? Is it safer to use grotesque (to the Chinese) expressions which were attempts to render European sounds in Chinese characters, or risk misunderstanding?

On the whole this was not an issue for the Catholic missions which early adopted a compromise of *Tianzhu* 天主 - 'Lord of heaven' - for the Christian God, and the straightforward doxology - Father, Son and Holy Spirit - using the common Chinese terms rather than the unintelligible *Ba-de-li* 罷德力 *Fei-luo* 費略 *Er-si-bi-li-duo san-duo* 斯彼利多三多 which some suggested. In their apologetic literature, though, they continued to identify *Tianzhu* with *Tian* and *Shangdi* until finally forbidden to do so by

¹ James Legge, missionary and translator of the Confucian Classics, notoriously and controversially visited the Altar of Heaven in Beijing and the homeland of Confucius in Qufu in 1873. At the Altar of Heaven he and his companions took off their shoes and performed what Girardot calls 'an impromptu liturgy'. While agreeing with Girardot that this experience was 'epiphanic' for Legge, I reject his interpretation that it marked a departure from Christian orthodoxy. v. Norman J. Girardot, *The Victorian Translation of China: James Legge's Oriental Pilgrimage*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.

² Lawrence Kessler (*K'ang-hsi and the consolidation of Ch'ing rule, 1661-1684*, Chicago (University of Chicago Press) 1976, pp.106-7), raises the question of the Jesuits and the imperial women, but misinterprets a letter of Ferdinand Verbiest in the process. Verbiest, he says, 'believed that K'ang-hsi went north to escape the summer heat of Peking and the tiring necessity of continual intercourse with his concubines. It is unlikely that the emperor "tired" of this "necessity", but the good fathers in Peking worried often about this imperial habit.' In fact, Verbiest expresses no worry about the matter at all but simply notes that women rarely came along on these expeditions to Manchuria. And I have never found any references in the Jesuit letters to this aspect of the Emperor's life which presumably was entirely private and hidden even from most members of the inner court. But I have often wondered exactly how the Jesuit brother Giuseppe Castiglione got to paint Qian Long's concubines. Was it from life?

Clement XI's 1704 anti-Rites decree. The 'terms' controversy flared again in the nineteenth century among Protestant bible translators.

The fallout from these arguments remains today. Most Chinese, as you may know, think there are two totally distinct religions - *Tianzhu Jiao* 天主教 'The Lord of Heaven Religion' i.e. Catholicism, and *Jidu Jiao* 基督教 'The Christ religion' i.e. Protestantism. And many modern Chinese bible translations were issued in two or even three versions - a *Tianzhu* version, a *Shangdi* version, and sometimes a *Shen* version, too, depending on the name of God adopted.

There is also an issue of historical perspective. Few of the participants in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth century debates seemed aware that the sacrosanct European names for the Christian God - *Theos*, *Deus*, *Gott* – had arisen in contexts decidedly at odds with Christian belief.³ A certain linguistic essentialism has bedevilled the discussion.

As if 'rites' and 'terms' were not complications enough, the situation was exacerbated by conflicts and jealousy between religious orders, jurisdictional disputes among national churches and with the Holy See, and differences of language and culture. The Jesuit monopoly of the China mission in the late-Sixteenth/early Seventeenth centuries was challenged by Spanish Franciscan, Dominican and Augustinian friars, then by French clerics of the Missions Étrangères de Paris, and, from late in the Seventeenth Century, by missionaries, both from the regular and secular clergy, sent by the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (Propaganda Fide) in Rome. The jurisdiction of the Jesuit and other religious superiors was subordinated to that of missionary bishops or Vicars Apostolic appointed by Rome. All brought distinct and conflicting spiritual traditions confusing to the new Christians of China.

The Jesuit missionaries initially came to China via Lisbon, Goa and Macao under the protection (*padroado*) of the Portuguese crown. Spanish friars, in defiance of the Treaty of Tordesillas and explicit Spanish and Chinese government prohibitions, then crossed over from the Philippines to Fujian province. French missionaries followed in the late Seventeenth century, Jesuits as well as members of the Missions Étrangères de Paris, as French cultural and political power grew. The French Jesuit mission's attempt to achieve autonomy weakened the unity of the China mission at a crucial point in the controversy while the fading influence of Portugal in Rome failed to protect their nationals against the centralizing project of the papal bureaucracy.⁴

The issue of French political and religious ascendancy had a theological dimension too, one which opposed the Jesuits to other parties. In France they won the battle against Jansenism and, in the process, implicitly challenged the Gallican church by upholding papal authority against national sentiment. An analysis of the composition of the papal commission that adjudicated the Chinese Rites issue leads one to conclude that there was a certain payback involved and Pope Clement XI seems to have admitted this was the case.

So, the Chinese Rites controversy was an enormously complicated affair and any attempt to deal with it adequately must be equally complex. James Joyce, in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* writes of three 'nets' he was attempting to evade. 'You talk to me', he says. 'of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by these nets.'⁵ I fear that I have been snared in them for forty years and am far yet from escaping them.

³ Ironically, recent research suggests an etymological affinity between the Indo-European *dyos*, *deus* etc. and the Chinese *di*. v. Chang Tsung-tung 'Indo-European Vocabulary in Old Chinese', *Sino-Platonic Papers* 7 (Jan. 1988).

⁴ v. Antonio Vasconcelos de Saldanha, *De Kangxi para o Papa pelo via de Portugal*, Lisbon (Instituto Português do Oriente) 2003.

⁵ *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, London (Cape) 1958, 39.

RELIGION

Let us begin with the last net, 'religion', since that is where the Jesuits began. At a conference in October 2001 in Beijing to commemorate the fourth centenary of Matteo Ricci's arrival in the capital, some speakers, including myself, felt obliged to remind others present, especially Chinese academics and European historians of science, that whatever the scientific and cultural side-effects of the Jesuit presence in China, they came as missionaries, to spread the Christian message as they understood it.

But how did they understand it? As I have tried to tease this out by exploring their theological and general education, it has become obvious that there were many diverse understandings of Christianity on the part of the Jesuits of different backgrounds and the members of other orders, and that this explains much of the conflict. The Jesuits did share a common spirituality, another area neglected until recently, one that was world-affirming and summed up in the 'Contemplation to Attain Love' of the Fourth Week of the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius Loyola:

I will consider how God dwells in creatures; in the elements, giving them existence; in the plants, giving them life; in the animals, giving them sensation; in human beings, giving them intelligence; and finally, how in this way he dwells also in myself, giving me existence, life, sensation, and intelligence...⁶

Importantly, this had strong affinities with the Neo-Confucian spirituality of their Chinese contemporaries, and was, in my view, more crucial in the relations between Jesuits and Chinese scholars than philosophical and theological doctrines.

The Jesuits of the early mission were mostly educated in the Aristotelianism of the Roman College and the Coimbra manuals. The Italians, at least, were also humanists. I sometimes think that it was fortunate that Matteo Ricci, the great pioneer of the Jesuit mission, had a very truncated theological education, by my reckoning some two years only in Portugal and Goa en route to China. Much more operative in his life and work were his studies in classics and rhetoric, and in the new mathematical sciences as taught him by his teacher and friend, Christopher Clavius, the creator of the Gregorian calendar. So, too, on the whole, was the training and approach of the most important of Ricci's successors, the German Johann Adam Schall von Bell and the Belgian Ferdinand Verbiest who between them directed the imperial astronomical bureau for over half a century. The Portuguese were less humanistically oriented and narrower in their theology (although this has been exaggerated by anti-Iberian prejudice on the part of some scholars). The French Jesuits who arrived towards the end of the Seventeenth Century had a different training again, more mathematical and philosophical, philological and literary.

Unfortunately, it has proved more difficult to pin down the world-view of the Spanish friars. Their theology was generally Thomist (i.e. of the school of St. Thomas Aquinas who was the official theologian of the Society of Jesus too) but many have labelled this kind of 'school' Thomism, especially its Spanish version, degenerate and rigid. They came to China not directly but via Mexico and the Philippines where most spent a considerable time before moving on to China. Many worked in the Manila 'Chinatown' with the mainly Fujianese local Chinese and learned Chinese through the Fujian dialect. They then proceeded to Fujian itself. What I am tempted to call 'the Fujian difference' - the peculiar nature of popular sectarian religion in Fujian still evident today - deeply influenced their interpretation of Chinese rituals. From the beginning they rejected wholesale all expressions of what they regarded as 'paganism' and showed a hostility to higher Chinese culture.

⁶ Translation by George E. Ganss, S.J. in Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works*, (New York, 1991), 177.

The first Jesuit missionaries in China were, however, Italian and Portuguese, trained in a Renaissance humanist tradition, who interpreted Chinese beliefs and practices in the light of 'natural theology'. They were hostile to Buddhism but largely on philosophical grounds, sometimes through ignorance and misinterpretation but sometimes founded on serious objections to fundamental Buddhist teachings such as karma, reincarnation and monism. They associated Daoism with popular superstition and it was about a century before the treasures of the Daoist classics attracted their interest.

Matteo Ricci, the ideological mentor of the mission, thought he had found in Confucianism not only a valuable ally since it was the value-system of the state and its servants, but a kind of natural religion, based on an ancient monotheism and a high moral code. In the light of this, the ancestor cults were, he thought, in origin unobjectionable and in practice reformable by shedding the corruptions introduced by Buddhism and Daoism. It is not sufficiently noted, I think, how provisional his judgements were. He did not, unlike later Jesuit apologists, deny the 'religious' nature of ancestor rituals but looked forward to the development of distinctively new Chinese Christian practices which would combine the best in Chinese and Western traditions. It is only recently that, with Catholic liturgical reform, Ricci's vision has begun to be implemented.

When the Spanish Friars finally managed to definitively establish themselves in Fujian in the late 1630s, after a short time they became disturbed by some of the practices of their converts and began a formal inquisition into them invoking their powers delegated from Manila. This inquiry was both legalistic and methodologically deficient. They attempted to directly equate Chinese terms like *ji* 祭 commonly applied to ancestor rituals, with scholastic terminology. The records of this inquiry show them moving between Spanish, Latin and Chinese. Their Chinese was very deficient, their informants presumably had little or no Spanish. Their conclusion, predictably, was that *ji* equated with 'sacrifice' in the full theological sense. They did not examine the classical texts and commentaries but were content with an 'essentialist' approach: a Chinese word had only one meaning, and that a European one.

The issue was referred to Rome and a decision was given in 1645 favourable to the Friars whose testimony alone was presented. The Jesuit procurator, Martino Martini, took it to Rome again, providing new material, and Rome this time (1656) decided in favour of the Jesuits. The Dominicans protested and in 1669 the Holy Office, with approval of Clement IX, declared both the 1645 and 1656 decrees were in force 'according to questions, circumstances and doubts raised'. This apparently ambiguous decision was, in my view, eminently sensible. While it did not decide the issue in practice it wisely insisted that only the local church could do so in the light of local knowledge and experience.

What many at the time failed to grasp was that, for the Chinese, orthopraxis was more important than orthodoxy. All the major Chinese thinkers from Confucius on wrote extensively about ritual matters. *Li* 禮, 'ritual', embraced all forms of behaviour, of body language, and was the mark of the 'gentleman' (*junzi* 君子). To abandon *li* was to reject civilization and society. My current problem, yet another 'net', has been the proliferation of recent studies of Chinese ritual, another scholarly industry that has developed since I began work on the Chinese Rites.

For some decades in the second half of the Seventeenth Century there was peace on the mission on this matter if not on others. The Dominicans in Fujian prohibited ancestor rituals leading to occasional skirmishes with local officials. The Franciscans on the whole followed the Jesuit practice, especially after the Canton Conference of 1669. But as a new wave of missionaries arrived at the end of the century they started to go over the old ground invoking new theological weapons.

The French priests of the Missions Etrangères de Paris, many of whom came armed with episcopal powers, tried to reopen the old questions of terminology and ritual. In 1693 Charles Maigrot, the Vicar Apostolic of Fujian, using data supplied by the Spanish Dominican Francisco Varo, issued a decree banning ancestor rites and rites in honour of Confucius and the use of the terms *Tian* and *Shang Di*. The Sorbonne theologians seized on it as a weapon in their perennial battle with the Jesuits. The

issue was referred to Rome where proceedings dragged on for years, involving both the Holy Office and the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith.

The Jesuits sent a series of ‘procurators’ to Rome armed with the accumulated Jesuit treatises on the subject. More importantly, for the first time, a vast amount of Chinese testimony was provided from a church now, in some cases with third or fourth generation Christians. This documentation, brought especially by François Noël and Kaspar Castner, was not even considered by the commission. However, it is today invaluable in any attempt to study the Chinese Rites Controversy and much of it has recently been published.⁷

Although a papal legate, a young Piedmontese aristocrat, Charles Maillard de Tournon, had been appointed in 1701 to implement the not yet issued decree, and left for the East in early 1703, the decree itself was delayed until November 1704 and even then not promulgated.

The deeper I have gone into the affair the murkier it gets. The day before the decree was approved the Pope, in private audience with Noël and Castner, assured them that the decree would be favourable to them. De Tournon acted from the beginning as if an anti-Jesuit decision was already made and in his secret correspondence with the Secretary of State, Cardinal Paulucci, wrote as if his mission was to smite the Jesuits in all circumstances. He had been chosen at the last minute to replace an older senior Cardinal (Cenci) who was friend of the Jesuits as well as patron of de Tournon, and who wrote to de Tournon as if the younger man shared his views. Had he been ‘conned’ into abdicating the mission? Further, de Tournon was constantly ill, highly irascible and surrounded by an incompetent and sycophantic train. The story of the de Tournon legation which is the pivotal moment of the Rites Controversy has been difficult to sort out due to the monopoly of publication on the subject by the enemies of the Jesuits who ignored the prohibition on publication imposed by the papacy. That should, however, soon be redressed by the publication of the key Jesuit document, the *Acta Pekinensia*.⁸

De Tournon, on his way south from an unsatisfactory series of audiences with the Chinese Emperor, issued in February 1707 in Nanjing a decree condemning the Rites. He claimed to the Jesuits that he had a papal decree to that effect but refused to show it to them saying he was not obliged to. In fact, the very next day, writing to the Pope, he admitted he had not yet received the decree, just heard that it had been issued.⁹

The fact that the Papal Legate issued his Nanjing decree before being safely out of China is a measure of his failure to grasp the realities of the situation. He ignored the Kangxi emperor’s proclamation of November 1700, declaring the Jesuit interpretation of the Rites to be the authentic Chinese interpretation. Invoking a ‘pagan’ Emperor in church affairs may have been a mistake on the

⁷ In the collection Yesuhui Luoma Dangan Guan 耶穌會羅馬檔案館, *Ming Qing Tianzhujiào wenxian* 明清天主教文獻, ‘Chinese Christian Texts from the Roman Archives of the Society of Jesus’, Nicholas Standaert & Adrian Dudink eds., 12 vols., (Taipei: Taipei Ricci Institute, 2002).

⁸ This is a 1467 page Latin document in the Roman Jesuit archives incorporating the key documents of the legation, including the Chinese ones, and giving a day-by-day account of events, compiled by Kilian Stumpf, a German Jesuit who worked at the court. The Macau Ricci Institute began a project for the translation of the document using initially mainly Australian Jesuits of the Latin-using generation. I am editing the translation and annotating it with the assistance of Antonio de Saldanha (Lisbon) and Claudia von Collani (Würzburg).

⁹ v. Edward J. Malatesta, ‘A Fatal Clash of Wills: the Condemnation of the Chinese Rites by the Papal Legate Carlo Tommaso Maillard de Tournon’, in D. Mungello, ed., *The Chinese Rites Controversy: Its History and Meaning*, Nettetal (Steiner Verlag), Monumenta Serica Monograph Series, XXXIII, 1995, p. 225. Clement XI himself claimed in *Ex Illa Die* (19 March 1715) that the 1704 decree, *Cum Deus Optimus* had not been sent to China until 25 January 1707.

part of the Jesuits but it shows the extent to which the China Jesuits had come to adopt the Chinese world-view in which the Emperor was supreme arbiter of scholarly and religious matters. In any case, in their view it was a matter of fact, of ethnology and philology not theology: what did the Chinese really mean by their rituals? In retrospect, though, it was one of those things that seemed a good idea at the time.

De Tournon was, on the orders of the Emperor, placed under house arrest in Macao pending the return of his Jesuit envoys to Rome, no less than four sent after Noël and Castner (who were, in any case, delegates of the mission not the Emperor), and none of whom made it back. Two (Barros and Beauvillier) were shipwrecked; one died of illness (Arxo); and one was delayed for many years only to die on the return journey (Provana). So de Tournon languished in Macao until his death in 1710 aged only 41. His 'martyrdom', as it was represented in Europe by his supporters, made it impossible for Rome to change the decision despite vigorous Portuguese protests. The Jesuits were even accused of poisoning him, a charge repeated just a few years ago in the catalogue of a Franco-Chinese exhibition in Hong Kong.¹⁰ Equally blamed were the Portuguese authorities, although it is clear that de Tournon was under Chinese guard on orders of the Emperor. The Portuguese should, in my view, have admitted that their control over events in Macau was in this period limited by Qing officials on whom they depended for access to food and, more importantly, trade.

This is another issue on which I have made some interesting discoveries. In 1988 the San Francisco Ricci Institute acquired some papers auctioned by Sotheby from the collection of Philip Robinson which I have helped catalogue. These documents seem to have come ultimately from Ilarione Sala, a member of de Tournon's entourage. They enrich rather than change our view of the de Tournon mission except in one important detail. In a note dated Macao, 25 February 1710¹¹, Giuseppe Francisco di Langasco O.F.M. reports a private conversation with 'the prefect Chin' [Chen Zongde?]: 'He told me in strictest confidence that the cessation of the molestations which His Eminence Cardinal De Tournon is now suffering from the guards placed at his door to prevent supplies from coming in, depends on the prefect Nin [Lin?] Fuye, and if His Eminence should wish to lend him two or three hundred Spanish *scudi* to satisfy the many creditors who are now besieging the same prefect's house, he promised to put an end to the molestations.' De Tournon in this as other respects seems to have been ignorant of, or to have scorned the rules of the Chinese game. It would seem that the Portuguese authorities who swore that they were not responsible for the harshness of the guard, the Cardinal's supporters who complained of its severity, and the Chinese provincial officials who denied the Emperor was responsible, may all have been right.

Ultimately, however, this was not a quarrel about personalities or political positions but about the fundamental question central in contemporary theology of religions of the status of 'non-Christian religions' (to describe them in this common but pejorative formulation). Shortly before I began my work on the Chinese Rites the Jesuit theologian, Karl Rahner, floated the idea of 'anonymous Christians'¹² which has resonated ever since. His reasoning was impeccable. God wills all men to be saved. In fact, most men through time and space, have not had contact with Christianity. Therefore, they must be saved through, not despite, their own religious systems. Since then the debate has raged

¹⁰ Pierre Fournier in Hong Kong Museum of Art, *From Beijing to Versailles: Artistic Relations between China and France*, Hong Kong (Urban Council of Hong Kong) 1997.

¹¹ Lot 20, no.46.

¹² In 'Christianity and the non-Christian Religions', a lecture originally given in April 1961 to the Abendländische Akademie, and published in English in *Theological Investigations* 5, London (Darton, Longman & Todd) 1966, 115-134.

among exclusivists, inclusivists and pluralists and those, like myself, who resist these categories.¹³ However, they alert us to general theological positions which influenced the debate, and especially to the dark shadow of St. Augustine with his notion of mankind as a *massa damnata* which inspired the adage *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, 'no salvation outside the church'.

Much attention has been given to the Jansenists and their possible role in the Chinese Rites decision¹⁴ but not enough to other Augustinians. The 'New Augustinians' who took their lead from Cardinal Enrico Noris, himself a member of the Augustinian Order, had from the late seventeenth century been expounding the doctrine that unbelievers, since deprived of grace, were unable to perform good works; and that the unbaptized, even children, were necessarily condemned to hellfire. Unlike the Jansenists, they taught that Christ died for all men, but somewhat paradoxically, that God does not apply the merits of Christ to all men, a view with serious implications for missionary activity. Noris himself was one of the committee of four cardinals who prepared the brief for the Holy Office that was to result in the anti-Rites decree *Cum Deus Optimus*, issued in the year of his death, 1704.

Also, there is much fuel in the history of the Chinese Rites controversy for the contemporary discussion about accommodation, inculturation and acculturation, indigenization, structural integration and cross-cultural dynamics which has occupied not only missiologists but a much wider range of scholars.¹⁵ I have tried to tread warily around these minefields but, unfortunately, cannot avoid them altogether.

LANGUAGE

It might seem that 'language' is a somewhat easier net to escape than the notoriously divisive question of religion, but I have got just as seriously entangled in this over the years.

My first efforts followed a well trodden path, one taken by the early missionaries as well as their modern apologists. I examined the canonical texts, the so-called Chinese classics, for contexts in which *Tian* and *Shang Di* were employed and compared their semantic range with the traditional Christian attributes of God. The examination of dictionaries, concordances and commentaries can produce quite convincing parallels which seem to justify their use. The problem, however, is that of unintended and implicit meanings which might be extremely misleading. Even *Tianzhu* had some earlier religious uses which, however, would have been unknown to all but the very erudite. Recently, though, I have been asking the more important question, by no means easy to answer, of how the first generations of Chinese Christians understood these terms. The publication of many of their writings has made the task easier but also more exhausting.

Secondly, I have got lost in the thickets of modern linguistic theory. An indication of the problems here is a famous dispute between the late Joseph Needham and his collaborators on the final volume of his great *Science and Civilisation in China* which deals with the question of the extent to which the Chinese language affects what can be said and thought in Chinese. Derk Bodde who was to have written this section could not reach agreement with the old man and withdrew his manuscript which was published separately as *Chinese Thought, Society and Science* in 1991. Since then the first part of Volume 7, by Christoph Harbsmeir, has been published and I find I can follow about half of it. Philosophers like Chad Hansen and Angus Graham, and linguists like Alfred Bloom have added to the

¹³ v. Paul Rule, 'The Negotiation of Religious Diversity in Christian Theology', in G. Bouma ed., *Managing Religious Diversity: from Threat to Promise*, Sydney (Australian Association for the Study of Religions) 1999, 47-59.

¹⁴ For example, Malcolm Hay *Failure in the Far East*, London (Neville Spearman) 1956.

¹⁵ See, for example, Louis J. Luzbetak, *The Church and Cultures: New perspectives in Missiological Anthropology*, Maryknoll, New York (Orbis Books) 1989.

confusion. Can Chinese understand counter-factuals? Is there a verb 'to be' in Chinese, and, if not, can Chinese understand Western ontology, based as it is on notions of 'being'? And this leaves aside the whole bewildering world of post-modern theory - Derrida and Levinas, Foucault, Rorty et al. - and post-modern sinologists like David Hall and Roger Ames. What is a poor historian to do?

What I have mostly done, in fact, is what historians always do: go back to the documents. Leaving aside the arguments whether the Chinese Christians should have, could have, understood Christianity what is the evidence for what they did understand? Even more, what is the evidence for what they did, how they acted? Their ritual practice, in so far as it can be reconstructed, was confidently Chinese and Christian, not in some mishmash of disparate elements, but in an integrated Chinese Christian mode.

And this brings me to another preoccupation regarding language. I was considerably shaken when Jacques Gernet produced his major work on China and Christianity, published in French in 1982 and English translation in 1985. I had the temerity to review it unfavourably both times in the face of a flood of adulatory reviews. Gernet, following the linguistic theories of Emile Benveniste about the incompatibility of Indo-European language structures and those of languages like Chinese, denies that the Chinese could have understood what the Jesuits preached to them. I have examined many of the passages in the anti-Chinese texts he cites and found his interpretation wanting. I also challenge his focus on incompatible cosmologies which I think is misleading; the very texts he cites are evidence that the hostility of the seventeenth century Chinese critics of Christianity was primarily religious not scientific.¹⁶ But, in the end, again I come back to the writings of the Chinese Christians themselves. *Eppur se muove* as Galileo is said to have remarked, 'and yet it moves'. To those who say men like Xu Guangqi, Grand Secretary towards the end of the Ming, and a host of lesser scholars and ordinary men and women, could not have understood what they professed to believe, I claim the evidence is overwhelming that they did.¹⁷

Despite the problems, I cannot escape the net of language. But it is not wasted effort. As the very last sentence of the *Sayings of Confucius* points out: 'If you do not understand their words, how can you understand people'.

NATIONALITY

The last net, not unconnected to language, is nationality. The more I pursue the sources in Italian and French, Spanish and Portuguese, and the common language of Latin, the more I am struck by the role of national characteristics and national rivalries in the Rites controversy. Even among the Jesuits, problems arose from the international composition of the mission. The mainly Portuguese superiors mistrusted the Italians and Northern Europeans and especially the French. The European Jesuits had widely divergent views as to whether Chinese should be admitted to the Society, and, especially, whether they should be ordained priests.

The Portuguese *Padroado* created more problems. Not only did the Popes and their officials increasingly challenge the rights over the church in China originally granted to the Portuguese crown in perpetuity on the grounds of the canon law principle that a pope is not bound by a decision of his predecessor, but Portugal herself was increasingly unable to provide the protection and financial support required. Even for travel to and from Europe the non-Portuguese missionaries increasingly chose English and French ships which were faster and safer. Portuguese awareness of this made them

¹⁶ See Paul Rule, 'The Jesus of the "Confucian Christians" of the Seventeenth Century' in Volume 2 of the Monumenta Serica series, *The Chinese Face of Jesus Christ*, (Sankt Augustin: Institut Monumenta Serica/China-Zentrum, 2003), pp. 505-507.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, especially the case studies, pp.508-514.

all the more jealous of their rights. The Portuguese king even referred to China in a letter to the Jesuit General in 1689 as part of his *conquistas*¹⁸, a very strange description of Macao let alone the rest of China.¹⁹ Much of the tragedy of the de Tournon mission was due to this hyper-sensitivity.

Leaders of the mission, like the Belgian Ferdinand Verbiest, desperate for helpers, turned to the rising power, France. But the French wanted to enter China on their own terms, and support from the French king was linked to France's mercantile ambitions in South China. The behaviour of the French Jesuits: their machinations to secure independence for their mission including enlisting the aid of Louis XIV through his confessor, Père de la Chaise; their ill-concealed sense of intellectual and cultural superiority; alienated their supporters among the non-Portuguese Jesuits. It is striking that in the documents sent to the Jesuit headquarters in Rome from China in the 1690s a greater bulk deals with the French/ Portuguese struggle than the Rites issue. The Jesuit General finally had to urgently advise them that while they were quarreling among themselves, their enemies in Rome were massing against them. And during and after the crisis of the Chinese Rites controversy, some French Jesuits pursued their own will-o'-the-wisp, the 'Figurist' theory that the Sage kings of the Chinese classics had been the biblical patriarchs in drag (another fascinating question that has diverted me from the Rites proper).²⁰

The popes, even more the papal bureaucracy, had another centralizing agenda but this too was upset by lobbying in Rome and the changing political balance in Europe. In 1673 Pope Clement X stripped the *Padroado* of its privileges and appointed the first Vicars Apostolic. In 1678 his successor Innocent XI prescribed an oath of obedience of all missionaries to these Vicars Apostolic. In 1682 the King of Portugal replied by ordering the Viceroy of India to forbid all missionaries to take the oath. The Jesuits, caught between the two, appealed for a suspension of the oath which was granted in 1684 but, it would seem, more due to protests by the Spanish crown than the Jesuits. In 1690, the new pope, Alexander VIII, created new bishoprics in China - Beijing, Nanjing and Macau - subject to the *Padroado* but, after some initial confusion, reaffirmed the jurisdiction of the Vicars Apostolic as well. The result of these changes was naturally considerable uncertainty, especially for those who heard of Roman decisions over a year late and often second-hand. It is not surprising that when de Tournon arrived, amid attacks from the Viceroy of India and the Governor of Macao, many were unclear not only of their loyalties but their legal and moral obligations.

And complicating all this, for contemporaries and the hapless historian, is the delicate and shifting relationship of the missionaries in Beijing to the Chinese Emperor. Kangxi, during most of his long reign, 1662-1723, was friendly to the Jesuits who provided many services to the court. The nature of that service has often been misunderstood. The first important modern book on the Jesuit mission in China, by Arnold Rowbotham, published in 1942, sounded a false note by its title, *Missionary and Mandarin: the Jesuits at the Court of China*. The vast majority of the court Jesuits were not mandarins but courtiers, members of the imperial household, 'foreign experts' who as artists, mathematicians, musicians, architects, tutors in European sciences serving the Emperor directly rather than the state. In

¹⁸ Lisbon 12 January 1689 to Thyrsus Gonzalez, ARSJ: Epp. Ext. 36:256r-257.

¹⁹ The king may have been using 'conquista' in the extended sense of 'conquista espiritual' but even here both the extent and nature of his ecclesiastical dominion over China is problematic.

²⁰ v. Paul Rule, 'Moses or China?' in E. Malatesta & Y. Raguin, eds. *Images de la Chine: le Contexte Occidental de la Sinologie Naissante*, Actes du VI^e Colloque International de Sinologie de Chantilly, 1989, San Francisco, Taipei, Paris (Ricci Institute) 1995, 303-331.

return the Emperor tolerated their religious activities and, to some extent, protected those of the vast majority of the missionaries who worked in the provinces.²¹

But the Emperor, too, had his political priorities. He could, and did on occasions, deflect the attacks of the bureaucrats on missionaries and Chinese Christians, but he also had to negotiate the complexities of dynastic politics. A Manchu Emperor could not afford to be seen as non-Chinese. He frequently intervened to keep the peace, for example in the French vs Portuguese squabble, acting like an exasperated head of household with quarreling children and servants. The Jesuits to some extent exaggerated their influence in their reports published in Europe and this back-fired on them when enemies like Maigrot and de Tournon blamed their influence over the Emperor for all their setbacks.

However, the Jesuits, as members of the imperial household, had a privileged insider's view of court affairs which makes their letters and reports of great interest to Qing historians and has led to the mainstreaming of this field of study. They often include accounts of inner court intrigues and behaviour that never get into the official records. The only problem is that few generalist Western historians of China and even fewer Chinese historians have the Western languages – Latin, Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, French, German – essential to this work, which increases the responsibilities of specialist like myself to make them available in English.

Towards the end of his reign, especially as a result of the Chinese Rites controversy, Kangxi's opinion of Christianity soured. When his fourth son succeeded him in 1723 in somewhat dubious circumstances and found some of the court Jesuits, in his view, over-friendly to his other brothers, he acted strongly against them. Much of the politics of the transition remains murky.

Recently, not only have the Ming/Qing archives in Beijing been opened to the public but collections of documents have been published, including particularly important internal documents in Manchu. Four volumes dealing with the Westerners have been published jointly by the Number One Historical Archives in Beijing and the University of San Francisco Ricci Institute.²² This, together with an avalanche of publications on late Ming and early to mid Qing court politics constitutes the last of the three nets I have not succeeded in avoiding.

HAS IT BEEN WORTH IT?

It should be clear by now that the Chinese Rites controversy, far from being a mere curiosity or historiographical dead-end is linked to many major issues in European and Chinese history, and to many of the big issues that plague historians today. It also touches on many contemporary sore-points in Sino-Western relations. Why and how did the European love-affair with China that produced *chinoiserie* and the passion of thinkers like Leibniz, Malebranche, Wolff, Voltaire, Montesquieu for Chinese ideas turn into contempt?²³ Should we judge the Chinese attitude towards freedom of religion by universal human rights standards or by 'Chinese values'? Why were Chinese opinions ignored by Rome, today as then? What is the future of religion in a globalized world culture?

²¹ See Paul Rule, 'Kangxi and the Jesuits: missed opportunity or futile hope' in *Chine/Europe/Amérique: rencontres et échanges de Marco Polo à nos jours*, sous la direction de Shenwen Li, Québec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2009, pp.229-248.

²² *Qing zhong qianji Xiyang Tianzhujiào zài Huá huódòng dāng'ān shìliào* 清中前期西洋天主教在華活動檔案史料 ['Historical documentation of Western Christians living in China up to the middle of the Qing dynasty'], ed. Zhongguo diyi lishi dang'an guan 中國第一歷史檔案館, 4 vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 2003).

²³ See Paul Rule 'The Tarnishing of the Image: from Sinophilia to Sinophobia', in Michel Cartier ed., *La Chine entre amour et haine: Actes du VIIIe colloque de sinologie de Chantilly*, Paris (Desclée de Brouwer) 1998, pp.89-109.

Even more directly it provides food for thought on inter-religious encounter, its procedures and pitfalls. The China Jesuits of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries, unlike their successors from the mid-Nineteenth Century on, embedded themselves in Chinese society, lived like Chinese, spoke and wrote Chinese. They had close personal relations with Chinese people. It is significant that the most popular writing of Matteo Ricci, the pioneer, was his treatise on friendship.²⁴ Despite what Gernet says, many Chinese intellectuals had a genuine interest in Western ideas and their importance for China, not just scientific and technological ideas but social and moral. The gunboats put an end to this relationship of equals and mutual respect.

With time, I have come to see my historical research as illuminating many contemporary issues, for both China and the West, and found Chinese intellectuals increasingly fascinated by the same questions as I have. The Chinese rites question has fused into the same great inquiry into the meaning of human existence.

²⁴ v. Matteo Ricci, *On Friendship: One Hundred Maxims for a Chinese Prince*, Timothy Billings ed., New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.