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# Enlightenment as Global History: The Reception of Confucianism in Eighteenth-Century France

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Enlightenment as Global History: The Reception of Confucianism  
in Eighteenth-Century France

An Honors Paper for the Department of History

By Rachel Yang

Bowdoin College, 2022

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## INTRODUCTION: The Polycentric Heritage of the Enlightenment

What is the Enlightenment? Where was the Enlightenment? Immanuel Kant (1720-1840) famously posed the former question in 1784 with “Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung?” (“Answer the Question: What is Enlightenment?”), and it was echoed by Michel Foucault (1926-1984) in his 1984 essay, “Qu’est-ce que les Lumières?”<sup>1</sup> The latter question, however, appeared much more self-evident. Since the emergence of Enlightenment historiography in the twentieth century, the West proclaimed the term as a unique product of its intellectual achievement and a gift to the rest of the world’s progress towards rationality, civil consciousness, and modernity.<sup>2</sup> Yet, recent scholars of European intellectual history have started to challenge this Eurocentric notion. Rather than perceiving the Enlightenment as a self-contained movement that matured in isolation within a handful of European states, historians are looking to situate the Enlightenment in context of globalization during the early modern period. This has given rise to a new field of inquiry known as the “Global Enlightenment.”

After Edward Saïd’s monumental study on Orientalism appeared in 1978, Western academics can scarcely find another satisfying way of interpreting the East-West relationship besides one rooted in malicious misrepresentation and subjugation. In this postcolonial framework, the West stands as the invasive, dominant, and masculine force, while the East is the perpetual

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<sup>1</sup> Immanuel Kant, “What is Enlightenment?” in *Sources of the Western Tradition*, Volume II, Marvin Perry, et. al., (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1995), 56-57; Michel Foucault, « Qu’est-ce que les Lumières ? » *Dits et Ecrits*, tome IV, (1984), 562-578.

<sup>2</sup> For landmark Enlightenment scholarship that relates it as a uniquely European phenomenon, see: Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment: Updated Edition*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009, originally published in 1932); Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation* (New York: Knopf, 1966); Robert Darnton, *The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995); J.G.A. Pocock, *Barbarism and Religion*, 5 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999-2011); Roy Porter, *The Creation of the Modern World: The Untold Story of the British Enlightenment*. (New York: Norton, 2000). For studies on Enlightenment historiography, see: J. G. A. Pocock, “Historiography and Enlightenment: A View of Their History.” *Modern Intellectual History* 5, no. 1 (2008): 83–96. Annelien de Dijn, “The Politics of Enlightenment: From Peter Gay to Jonathan Israel.” *The Historical Journal* 55, no. 3 (2012): 785–805; Jonathan Israel, “J. G. A. Pocock and the ‘Language of Enlightenment’ in His *Barbarism and Religion*,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 77, no. 1 (01, 2016): 107-127.

“Other” who completes the dichotomy. The subjugated Orient therefore becomes a site of projection for Europe’s repressed fears and desires—a mirror image that consolidated European strength and identity. Furthermore, Saïd emphasizes the “sheer knitted together strength of Orientalist discourse” that reiterates the uneven power dynamic between East and West, thus “overriding the possibility that a more independent, or more skeptical, thinker might have had different views on the matter.”<sup>3</sup> Consequently, post-Saïd historians balk at the danger of replicating Orientalist discourse when examining cross-cultural encounters in a way that does not affirm the East’s quintessential nature as a victimized “mirage” or an “Other” to the West.<sup>4</sup>

But in fact, rethinking Enlightenment historiography can provide an entryway to dismantling this Orientalist discourse. Saïd points out how the West saw the East as “the source of its civilizations and languages” and its biggest “cultural contestant,” implying that the East loomed as an imposing yet inscrutable figure in Europe’s imagination even before its ascendancy into colonial power.<sup>5</sup> This presents Asia as an important subject of investigation for the Global Enlightenment, which may shed light on an East-West dynamic that precedes the postcolonial paradigm. The project of Global Enlightenment, by considering Asia as a potential contributor to a piece of intellectual heritage that in many ways sanctioned the imperial confidence of the nineteenth century, can reset the uneven power structure established by Oriental discourse and uproot Europe’s monopoly over a set of intellectual traditions so embedded in today’s sociopolitical vocabulary.

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<sup>3</sup> Edward Saïd, *Orientalism*, (New York: Penguin Random House, 1979), 6-7.

<sup>4</sup> Stefan Gaarsmand Jacobsen, “Chinese Influences or Images? Fluctuating Histories of How Enlightenment Europe Read China.” *Journal of World History* 24, no. 3 (2013): 638-647; J. J. Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment: The Encounter Between Asian and Western Thought*, (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 1997), 14.

<sup>5</sup> Saïd, 1.

Indeed, many historians of the Global Enlightenment have contributed to the field by reevaluating the role of Asia.<sup>6</sup> However, their models of interpretation diverge, and some are less satisfying than others. Sebastian Conrad's abundantly cited study on the Global Enlightenment proposes a model of exportation. Conrad maintains that, while Enlightenment ideals originated from Europe, the significance and nuance they presently possess were the collective work of "historical actors around the world...who invoke the term, and what they saw as its most important claims, for their own specific purposes."<sup>7</sup> To illustrate, Conrad points out how thinkers of Meiji Japan (1868-1912) and the Ottoman Empire (1299-1922) appropriated certain Enlightenment ideals such as "civilization" and "humanity" to facilitate periods of critical transition in their respective nations.<sup>8</sup> This allowed the Enlightenment to evolve and accumulate meaning even after the movement ended in Europe. Conrad frames his thesis as an attempt to subvert the Eurocentric historiography that considers the Enlightenment to have ended around 1800, because such a chronology "erases the vibrant and heated contestations of 'Enlightenment' in the rest of the world, particularly in Asia."<sup>9</sup> To stress his point, Conrad cites the rhapsodizing words of a Meiji reformer: "Whenever we open our mouths, it is to speak of 'enlightenment.'"<sup>10</sup> It is not difficult to spot the irony and the troubling implication within this model of exportation. Although it suggests that

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<sup>6</sup> For the body of work consulted on Enlightenment and Asia, see: Virgile Pinot, *La Chine et la formation de l'esprit philosophique en France 1640-1740*, (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1971); Basil Guy, *The French Image of China before and After Voltaire* (Genève: Institut et musée Voltaire, 1963); David E. Mungello, *Leibnitz and Confucianism: the Search for Accord* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1977); John M. Hobsen, *The Eastern Origins of Western Civilization*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); David Martin Jones, *The Image of China in Western Social and Political Thought*, (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 14-36; Madeline Dobie, *Trading Places: Colonization and Slavery in Eighteenth-Century French Culture*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010); Jürgen Osterhammel, *Unfabling the East: The Enlightenment's Encounter with Asia*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018); Alexander Statman, "The First Global Turn: Chinese Contributions to Enlightenment World History," *Journal of World History* 30, no. 3 (2019): 363-392.

<sup>7</sup> Sebastian Conrad, "Enlightenment in Global History: A Historiographical Critique," *The American Historical Review* 117, no. 4 (2012), 1001.

<sup>8</sup> Conrad, 1001-2, 1014.

<sup>9</sup> Conrad, 1015.

<sup>10</sup> Conrad, 1015; cited in Albert M. Craig, *Civilization and Enlightenment: The Early Thought of Fukuzawa Yukichi* (Cambridge, Mass., 2009), 149.

global actors have popularized and redefined Enlightenment legacy, the movement's purely European origin remains unquestioned and even aggrandized as an invaluable intellectual heritage that helped to inspire modernity in various non-European cultures.<sup>11</sup> Ultimately, despite his claim to subvert Eurocentrism, Conrad's thesis dangerously feeds into the Orientalist framework that endows the West with intellectual superiority and originality.

Directly opposing Conrad is the model of importation, which proposes that foreign philosophies played a part in the formation of the intellectual landscape of early modern Europe. In her study, "Could David Hume Have Known about Buddhism?" Alison Gopnik attempts at presenting Buddhism as a possible source of inspiration for Hume's metaphysics and skepticism, citing his contact with Jesuit missionaries who extensively studied Buddhism in Siam and Tibet and brought these ideas back to Europe. Although Hume may not have directly invoked Buddhism in his writings, Gopnik argues that the network of intellectual influence and engagement is not limited to explicit discourse between philosophers, because "psychologically, people can be influenced by ideas, even when they themselves forget the source of those ideas."<sup>12</sup> Gopnik's thesis illuminates just how intricate and vibrant the process of transnational intellectual exchange could be during early Enlightenment, in which the missionaries played an integral role in broadening the ideological scope of the later *philosophes*.<sup>13</sup> More importantly, this potential connection between Hume and Buddhism shows that non-European philosophies, especially those imported from the Far East, might have participated and even inspired Enlightenment conversations. Gopnik's model, though innovative, is overly speculative. Her argument for the

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<sup>11</sup> Antoine Lilti, *L'héritage Des Lumières: Ambivalences De La Modernité*, (Paris: Gallimard, 2019), 57-58.

<sup>12</sup> Alison Gopnik, "Could David Hume Have Known about Buddhism?: Charles François Dolu, the Royal College of La Flèche, and the Global Jesuit Intellectual Network." *Hume Studies* 35 (2009). 6-7.

<sup>13</sup> Gopnik, 22.



possibility of engagement and inspiration between thinkers on a purely “psychological” level suggests that it is difficult to find concrete evidence for such a process.

A more prevalent method of examining the Global Enlightenment is through the model of appropriation. While this approach also advocates for the prominent presence of Asian intellectual traditions in Enlightenment spaces, it focuses on how European thinkers purposefully appropriated and distorted these ideas to advance their own intellectual agenda, lacking in any genuine interest to understand their cultural nuances. Although the Enlightenment appeared to profess an interest and even admiration for certain foreign cultures, its attempt to engage with them was ultimately superficial, one-sided, and grounded in misunderstandings. This model gives a critical and rather pessimistic view on the treatment of Asian presence in early modern European intellectual history. It declares that, much like the explosion of Orientalist trends such as “chinoiserie” in cultural spaces, Europe’s interest in Eastern philosophies was simply another manifestation of this shallow and fleeting craze masquerading as cosmopolitan spirit.<sup>14</sup>

Historians who apply the model of appropriation when evaluating Enlightenment’s encounter with Asia often stop at drawing a critical conclusion about the hopeless Eurocentric ego of the age. Consequently, they fall short of recognizing and articulating the intellectual power that imported cultures *did* exert in Europe, and how it was precisely made possible through acts of appropriation by local thinkers. The notion of appropriation tends to evoke the postcolonial understanding of East-West dynamics; that is, a one-directional act of gross misrepresentation that consolidated European identity or a fetishization that contributed no valuable progress towards

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<sup>14</sup> Edwin J. Van Kley, “Europe’s ‘Discovery’ of China and the Writing of World History.” *The American Historical Review* 76, no. 2 (1971): 358–85; Arnold H. Rowbotham, “La Mothe Le Vayer’s Vertu Des Payens and Eighteenth-Century Cosmopolitanism.” *Modern Language Notes* 53, no. 1 (1938), 14.

cross-cultural understanding. There is, however, the danger of reductionism in applying this model regardless of the historical or cultural contexts in which the act of appropriation took place.

Studies that approach the development of certain political and artistic movements from a transnational lens have proposed the possibility of a productive form of appropriation. Xiaomei Chen, in her influential work on the phenomenon of Occidentalism in Maoist China, argues that appropriation and the imagining of an “Other” could effectively localize imported ideologies and use them to produce a “politically liberating” discourse that undermines the existing power structure.<sup>15</sup> Hence, appropriation or “misunderstanding” is not inherently problematic and may even be a natural process of cross-cultural exchange, since not all acts of appropriation are necessarily an act of power or an assertion of cultural hegemony. As Chen astutely observes: “it is an essentialist claim to assume that the West is by nature or definition monolithically imperialistic, and therefore has subjugated all non-Western cultures throughout all historical periods.”<sup>16</sup>

Chen’s critique against essentialism can help us understand cross-cultural interactions before the age of colonialism in a new light. Considering the Enlightenment as an intellectual revolution against numerous religious, political, and cultural structures in early modern Europe, it may serve our interest to reexamine how appropriation fit into the Enlightenment and even became an indispensable aspect of its development. As my study will show, it is no coincidence that some of the most radical thinkers of the French Enlightenment, such as Pierre Bayle and Voltaire, were also self-proclaimed enthusiasts of Confucian China. In *L’héritage des Lumières*, Antoine Lilti notably makes an attempt to reconcile the failings of Enlightenment cosmopolitanism with the

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<sup>15</sup> Xiaomei Chen, *Occidentalism: A Theory of Counter-Discourse in Post-Mao China*. (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 25. Chen is not the only scholar who argues for the productive potential of cultural misrepresentation, especially between Europe and China, that breaks away from the postcolonial framework. See, for example, Lydia H. Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity, China 1919-193*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995); Marie-Paule Ha, *Figuring the East: Segalen, Malreaux, Duras, and Barthes*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 95-117.

<sup>16</sup> Chen, 12.

rising interest in writing and studying world history. Using Voltaire's positive and extensive discussion of China and India in *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations*, Lilti argues that, although these cultures were only relevant to Voltaire in how they could serve Europe's need to be liberated from religious fanaticism, the sincerity of the *philosophe's* interest and effort to look beyond Europe to inform his anti-cleric perspective remains valid, regardless of his ultimate intention.<sup>17</sup> That is to say, if we continue to dismiss Enlightenment's interest in Eastern philosophies on the grounds of misrepresentation, the "politically liberating" effect that they produced in Europe will also be lost, thus ironically perpetuating the East-West power imbalance that emerged in the nineteenth century.

Using Lilti's observation as a point of departure, I hope to fill the gap left by scholars too entrapped by the postcolonial paradigm to consider how appropriation functioned differently, and even productively, in eighteenth-century Europe. I will examine the reception of Confucian thoughts, and more broadly, the cultures and image Confucian China, in France to uncover the polycentric origin of the Enlightenment heritage. In direct opposition to Conrad's model of exportation, which positions Europe as the disseminator of ideologies and Asia as the receiver who appropriated them to achieve progress for themselves in the nineteenth century, I argue that Enlightenment Europe itself had been a junction, and even a product, of ideological importation and reproduction. Confucianism, which was inseparable from the image of China since the Jesuits first brought the philosophy to Europe and later found its way into the vocabulary of monumental French thinkers such as Pierre Bayle and Voltaire, will serve as a case study of how an imported philosophy addressed eighteenth-century France, by necessity, through the reinterpretation of local intellectuals. This understanding of the Global Enlightenment builds upon the model of

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<sup>17</sup> Lilti, 25.

appropriation by recognizing and centering the Eurocentrism that fueled each attempt at engaging foreign cultures, while integrating the model of importation to provide a more careful consideration of how these cultures, though misrepresented, shaped Enlightenment narrative and served as a vehicle for some of its most formidable players to develop and articulate their ideas.

In sum, it is imperative to recognize the polycentric origins of the Enlightenment as a reason that makes it a subject of global studies. True, the fact that Enlightenment ideals continued to circulate and proliferate around the world after the end of eighteenth century elevated its relevance beyond European history; but to truly revise the Eurocentric historiography, we must not treat the Enlightenment as the beginning of cross-cultural encounters, but a product shaped by the century-long globalization that started in the early modern period. In other words, the Enlightenment was not just an idea to be consumed by non-European actors but was itself a *consumer* of imported ideologies in a complex network of intellectual exchange.

The following study is divided into two chapters. The first examines the conception of the image of Confucian China in the seventeenth century under Jesuit missionaries working in the Chinese imperial court. These missionaries, who served as intellectual intermediaries between Europe and Asia and therefore a key contributor to the transnational fertilization of ideas over the next century, constructed a Christianized interpretation of Confucianism to seek support for their conversion mission while also attempting to bolster the relevancy of religious consciousness in Europe. This section focuses on *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*, a Jesuit translation of Confucian classics published in France in 1687. It was the work that first provided Europe with access to Confucian writings and exerted a formative influence over China's image in European imagination in the next century.<sup>18</sup> The second chapter explores how the Christianized reading of Confucianism

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<sup>18</sup> Rowbotham, "Impact of Confucianism," 227; Kund Lundbaek, "The Image of Neo-Confucianism in *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 44, no. 1 (1983), 19.

presented in *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* transformed under the hands of later Enlightenment thinkers, who conjured a vastly different understanding of Confucian China to complement their political and intellectual agenda. Although these thinkers failed to approach Confucianism with a sincere desire to understand it, their reinterpretations enabled this imported philosophy to resonate within the local context and be incorporated into Enlightenment conversations.

### **Context: The Conception of the First Latin Translation of Confucian Classics**

Given the centrality of *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* to the first half of this study, it is necessary to briefly contextualize this translation project, its Chinese source material, and the Jesuit mission to China that conceived it. The attempt to learn and translate the Confucian canon started in the late sixteenth century with a pair of Italian Jesuits, Michele Ruggieri (1543-1607) and Mateo Ricci (1552-1610), soon after the first group of missionaries arrived at China in 1579.<sup>19</sup> While the project was partly driven by the need to learn the Chinese language and assimilate into the indigenous culture to facilitate the conversion mission, it was also politically motivated. The Jesuits understood that, in order to establish themselves among the Chinese literati and court officials and spread Christian propaganda from the top-down, knowledge of Confucianism was imperative, since it was the state ideology of China and the philosophy of the elites.<sup>20</sup> The collective efforts of Ruggieri and Ricci produced a Latin translation of a collection of Confucian texts known as the Four Books (四书 *Sishu*), and the manuscript was passed down onto successive generation of Jesuits in China.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Brockey, 4; Thierry Meynard, *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus (1687): The First Translation of the Confucian Classics*, (Rome: Institutum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 2011), 3-27.

<sup>20</sup> Brockey, 8.

<sup>21</sup> David Mungello, 253.

In Confucian traditions, the Four Books are comprised of the following texts: *Daxue* (大学, The Great Learning), *Zhongyong* (中庸, The Doctrine of the Mean), *Lunyu* (论语, The Analects), and *Mengzi* (孟子, Mencius). The first three supposedly recorded the teachings of Kongzi, or Confucius (551 BCE – 479 BCE), on subjects ranging from rituals, human relations, social obligations, the virtue of governance, and more. Together with the Five Classics (五经, *Wujing*), the Four Books make up a core component of Confucian canon and were a mandated subject of study for the educated elites since the tenth century in China, from court officials to Emperors. The Four Books were also a source of rich scholarly engagement through the tradition of commentary-writing. Students of Confucius rarely approach ancient texts such as the Four Books and the Five Classics alone, but rather with the help of interlinear commentaries by some later scholar that explained ambiguous terms and speculated on the intended moral lessons. Confucian commentarial tradition emerged around the time of Han Dynasty (202 BCE – 220 CE), when the philosophy was adopted as a part of the state ideology. Since then, Confucian scholars up until the modern day produced a rich corpus of commentaries on the canon that offered diverging interpretations, posed questions, and entered dialogues with each other. The most influential commentaries could even be inaugurated into a part of the canon. Thus, the commentaries attested to the dynamic and evolving nature of the philosophy.<sup>22</sup> As my study will show, while the Jesuits meticulously studied and deployed various editions of Confucian

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<sup>22</sup> Daniel K. Gardner, "Confucian Commentary and Chinese Intellectual History," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 57, no. 2 (1998), 397-422; for additional scholarship on Confucian commentarial traditions, see: John B. Henderson, *Scripture, Canon and Commentary: A Comparison of Confucius and Western Exegesis*, (Princeton University Press, 2014, originally published in 1991); Gardner, *Zhu Xi's Reading of the Analects*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003); Philip J. Ivanhoe, "Whose Confucius? Which Analects?" in *Confucius and Analects: New Essays*, ed. Bryan W. Van Norden, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 119-130; John Makeham, *Transmitters and Creators: Chinese Commentators and Commentaries on the Analects*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Thierry Meynard, *The Jesuit Reading of Confucius: The First Complete Translation of the Lunyu (1687) Published in the West* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 16-71.

commentaries in their translation, the commentarial tradition was either ignored or remained unknown to the thinkers in Europe, who all too gladly represented Confucianism as timeless and perfected wisdom passed down from the legendary Chinese sage.

Ruggieri and Ricci's translation was eventually edited by Father Prospero Intorcetta (1626-1696) and then published in 1662 in China under the name *Sapientia Sinica* (*Chinese Wisdom*) as an instruction manual for new missionaries. It was around this time that certain voices emerged within the Catholic Church to question the theological integrity of Confucianism, since it mandated many rituals, such as ancestral worship, that appeared superstitious and idolatrous.<sup>23</sup> These debates evolved into what came to be known as the Chinese Rites Controversy, which persisted for decades between Europe and the missionaries abroad.<sup>24</sup> During the Rites Controversy, the opponents of Confucianism cited Intorcetta's translation to prove the idolatrous nature of the philosophy. In response, Intorcetta assembled a group of Jesuits to produce a revised translation of the Four Books with a new and distinct objective in mind: to prove the congruence between Confucianism and Christianity and thus the Chinese population's potential to receive conversion, since the Jesuits recognized that it would be impossible for the locals to abandon their Confucian heritage.<sup>25</sup> Thus, the intended audience of this new translation was no longer limited to the Jesuits in China, but also the readers, specifically the elite members of the Catholic Church, back in Europe. A notable member of Intorcetta's team was the Flemish Jesuit Philippe Couplet (1623-1693), who would later organize the final publication of *Confucian Sinarum Philosophus* and serve as a key ambassador between the French state and the mission in China.

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<sup>23</sup> Meynard, *CSP*, 7-8.

<sup>24</sup> For more studies on the Chinese Rites Controversy, see: Guy, 23-55; Yu Liu, "Behind the Façade of the Rites Controversy: the Intriguing Contrast of Chinese and European Theism," *The Journal of Religious Studies*, 44, no. 1 (2020): 3-26.

<sup>25</sup> Meynard, *CSP*, 10.

For over a decade, the translation project was disrupted and delayed for different reasons, until Couplet returned to Rome in 1680 to prepare the translated manuscripts of the Four Books for publication. Within a few years, Couplet managed to secure the patronage of the French monarch, King Louis XIV (1638-1715), for the mission in China. At the time, Louis XIV was the most powerful supporter of the Catholic Church in Europe. His impending revocation of the Edict of Nantes, which would outlaw the practice of Protestantism in France, further solidified his image as the worthies and likeliest ally for the Jesuits. With Louis XIV's financial and political support, Rome would not be able to contest the publication of the manuscripts despite the unsettled nature of the Chinese Rites Controversy. Thus, with Couplet's coordination, *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus, sive Scientia Sinensisi* (*Confucius, the Philosopher of China, or the Chinese Learning*) appeared before the French public in 1687. The following chapter will show how a consolidated image of the Chinese Sage emerged out of this volume, and how the translation produced a Christianized interpretation of Confucian classics that the Jesuits hoped to mobilize for their political interests in Europe.



## CHAPTER I. The Christian Interpretation: *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* <sup>26</sup>

Six months after the publication of *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* (hereafter *CSP*), a book review by one Pierre Régis (1632 - 1707) appeared in *Le Journal des Sçavants* in January 1688. As a Cartesian scholar with a keen interest in theology, Régis' review of *CSP* was noteworthy not only as one of the earliest public reactions towards Confucianism in France, but also in how it encapsulated the key takeaways of a Christian reading of Confucianism that the Jesuits hoped to evoke with their translation and commentaries on the Four Books.

A summary on each of the Four Books and the Five Classics constituted the main body of Régis' review. In his opening paragraphs, Régis affirmed the legitimacy of the Jesuit's ethnographic and scholarly pursuits in the Chinese empire despite possible linguistic challenges.<sup>27</sup> He proceeded to highlight the spiritual achievement of their mission in introducing Christian verities to the Chinese, which they apparently not only accepted with openness and trust, but also regarded as “des consequences qui se déduisaient de leurs principes, et qui étaient confirmées par l'autorité de leurs propres Philosophes.”<sup>28</sup> Régis' assessment of the conversion efforts in China had vastly overstated the Jesuits' success in this undertaking. As to the claim that Christian principles would have been readily approved by the Chinese philosophers, Régis' review would

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<sup>26</sup> I would like to acknowledge that in writing this chapter, I am hugely indebted to the works of Professor Thierry Meynard, JS. His English translations of *Daxue* and *Lunyu* in *CSP*, published in 2011 and 2015 respectively, and his comprehensive introduction to intellectual background of Jesuits' translation project, served as foundational resources in the building of my argument.

<sup>27</sup> For scholarship on the Jesuit missionaries in China, see: Guy, 56-105; Arnold H. Rowbotham, *Missionary and Mandarin: The Jesuits at the Court of China*, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1942); David E. Mungello, *Curious Land: Jesuit Accommodation and the Origins of Sinology*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989); Lydia H. Liu ed. *Tokens of Exchange: The Problem of Translation in Global Circulations*, (Duke University Press, 1999); Liam Matthew Brockey, *Journey to the East: The Jesuit Mission to China, 1579-1724*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); Nicolas Standaert, “Jesuits in China,” In *The Cambridge Companion to the Jesuits*, ed, Thomas Worcester, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 169–85; Meynard, *CSP*, 3-27.

<sup>28</sup> Pierre Régis, “Compte rendu du *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*,” *Journal des savants* (janvier, 1688), 100. Translation: “...results naturally deduced from their (the Chinese people's) principles and were confirmed by the authority of their own philosophers.”

demonstrate that it existed above all else in the imagination of the Jesuits and their faithful readers in Europe.

After introducing each of the Four Books and the Five Classics in compact paragraphs, Régis commented: “Il faudrait employer trop de discours pour parcourir toutes les maximes de Morale, qui sont renfermées dans les trois livres de Confucius. Nous nous contenterons de les proposer seulement en abrégé dans la description qu’il fait lui même de la Charité.”<sup>29</sup> Such a conclusion reveals much about the treatment Confucianism received under a Christian interpretation. The cultural and ideological nuance of the philosophy were sacrificed in favor of a familiar and abridged presentation to European readers. For Régis, the essence of Confucianism boiled down to the single concept of Charity, which conveniently aligned with one of the most valued Christian virtues. After proposing the compatibility between Christianity and Confucianism on the matter of charity, Régis incorporated a lengthy, word-for-word French translation of a passage he cited from *CSP*, in which Confucius defined “Charity” as a state of “perfect piety” achieved through constant self-improvement founded on reason and abandonment of self-interest, which would allow humanity to attain a state of perfect harmony and universal love as if it was a single entity.

This citation corresponds to a line from passage 6.28 of *Lunyu*. Originally a two-sentence remark from Confucius, it appeared before Régis as a meandering lecture on piety, the unity of men, and selfless love, all of which are words nowhere to be found in the classical *Lunyu* text. While I will offer a closer analysis on the translation of this passage later in this chapter, I introduce it here to point out how the liberally interpretive nature of *CSP*’s translation influenced subsequent European engagement with Chinese philosophy. The mixture of paraphrasing, synthesizing, and

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<sup>29</sup> Régis, 103; Translation: “Much discourse is needed to cover all the moral maxims, which are enclosed in the three books of Confucius. We will be content to only propose in abridgement that he (Confucius?) also practiced charity.”

(de)contextualizing implemented by the Jesuits in translating this passage produced a heavily Christianized interpretation of Confucius' words, which the French readers, such as Régis, took for granted since they had no means of accessing and cross-referencing the Chinese sources. For instance, towards the end of Régis' citation, Confucius supposedly said: "Ne vouloir pas qu'il leur arrive ce que nous ne voulons pas qu'il nous arrive à nous-mêmes." This was in fact a phrase from a different conversation in Book 12 of *Lunyu* that the Jesuits inserted into Book 6.<sup>30</sup> Conveniently for Régis, the citation ended with a statement that bore strong resemblance with the Christian Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." This created a perfect lead-up to his observation in the following paragraph: "Je ne vois pas qu'au motif près, la charité des Chinois soit différente de celle des Chrétiens," that God had bestowed in these infidels the same capacity for grace and enlightenment as Christians.<sup>31</sup> Régis was correct, however, in noting the centrality of "charity" in Confucian texts. It is only that using "charity" as a translation captured but a small facet of the Chinese term which, until this day, lacked a perfect equivalent in Western languages, that is the concept of *Ren* (仁). Among the multitude of French words that could indicate *Ren* under different contexts, Régis chose a passage that interpreted *Ren* as charity in attempt to amplify the appeal of this philosopher to European readers.

Régis, however, did not understand how this *Lunyu* passage was largely a product of Jesuit's artful maneuvering; he was simply delighted to see the universality of Christian principles manifested in a civilization as antiquated and prosperous as China, and eagerly proclaimed to his French readership this great discovery of the Jesuits. His review foretold the total severance of European thinkers' version of Confucianism from its cultural context. Through translation, the

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<sup>30</sup> Régis, 104; Translation: "Do not wish upon others what we do not wish upon ourselves." The Chinese text is: "己所不欲，勿施于人" (12.1)

<sup>31</sup> Régis, 104; Translation: "I see no reason that the charity of the Chinese would be different than that of the Christians."

Jesuits acted as powerful intellectual intermediaries between France and China, setting up *CSP* as the work that shaped European understanding of Chinese thoughts over the next century.<sup>32</sup> But before we can analyze the legacy of *CSP*, we must first investigate what the Jesuits hoped to accomplish with it, with particular attention to their religious and political motives. This chapter begins with a close reading of *CSP*, focusing on its representation of the Confucian virtue *Ren*, the Jesuits' methods in constructing a consistent Christian narrative, and the political stake of *CSP* regarding the status quo of Christianity in Europe. It then turns to a French translation of the Four Books, *Lettres sur la morale de Confucius* (1688), based on *CSP*. Together, these texts illustrate how, since their earliest appearance in France, translation distorted Confucian texts to repurpose them for French religious and political needs.

In scrutinizing instances of textual manipulation or misrepresentation of Confucian texts in translated works, my objective is not to prove the presence of a proto-orientalist approach or to critique the inevitable Eurocentrism in this process of intellectual exchange between France and China; instead, it is to uncover the global origin of the Enlightenment. The Jesuit translators transformed Confucianism into a vessel of European intellectual discourse, enabling Confucian ideas to transcend the culture-specific application they were bound to and subsequently find relevance in seventeenth-century Europe. They became a malleable tool for Western thinkers to engage with the weightiest moral and intellectual problems of their time. To understand the story from the beginning, this chapter examines the aspects of Confucianism that most appealed to theologically minded readers such as Régis, who inhabited a space that was physically and epistemologically segregated from classical China, and considers to what extent these readers' response was a product of the "repackaging" or ideological adaptation spearheaded by the Jesuits.

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<sup>32</sup> Arnold H. Rowbotham, "The Impact of Confucianism on Seventeenth Century Europe," *The Far Eastern Quarterly* 4, no. 3 (1945), 227; Clarke, 40.

## 1.1 *Lunyu* and Christianity

*Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* opened with a letter from Philippe Couplet addressed to King Louis IV, where Couplet established, firmly and immediately, the religious connotations of Confucianism. In an earnest pitch for the moral integrity of Confucius despite his apparent paganism, Couplet declared in this letter: “Since truly this very wise Philosopher has recognized, by the light of nature and reason alone, that men should revere religion above all things, he conducted his teaching and training towards the single goal that mortals should arrange all their lives according to the laws and precepts of the supreme divine will.”<sup>33</sup> In stating that Confucius’ piety rested on “nature and reason,” Couplet acknowledged that the Chinese philosopher only practiced “natural theology” and thus did not reach full enlightenment due to the lack of revelation; still, Couplet tried to present Confucius as possessing perfect potential to receive conversion, since he apparently already recognized the deference to a “supreme divine” as the basis of his moral teachings.<sup>34</sup>

Couplet’s claim that a “religion,” at least in a Western monotheistic sense, existed in Confucianism was problematic. While the idea of a Heaven (*tian* 天) and deferring to Heaven’s Mandate (*tian ming* 天命) were indeed important to Confucianism, Confucian scholars had offered a multitude of ways to understand Heaven and its relationship with men, signifying that the conception of Heaven was malleable at best, and ambiguous at worst.<sup>35</sup> What is certain is that the classical texts by no means provide a systematic doctrine for the conceptualization and worship of

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<sup>33</sup> Meynard, *CSP*, 85.

<sup>34</sup> Meynard, *CSP*, 85.

<sup>35</sup> For a sample of scholarship on the various interpretations of Heaven (*tian*) in Confucian tradition, see: Robert B. Loudon, “‘What does Heaven Say?’ Christian Wolff and Western Interpretations of Confucian Ethics,” in *Confucius and the Analects*, 73-86; Philip J. Ivanhoe, “Heaven as a Source of Ethical Warrant in Early Confucianism,” *Dao*, 6, (2007), 211-220; Ding Weixiang and Huang Deyuan. “Destiny and Heavenly Ordinances: Two Perspectives on the Relationship between Heaven and Human Beings in Confucianism.” *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* 4, no. 1 (2009): 13–37; Stephen C. Angle, “*Tian* as Cosmos in Zhu Xi’s Neo-Confucianism,” *Dao*, no. 17 (2018), 169-185.

a single divine entity. Such ambiguity is prominent in seventeenth century Neo-Confucian scholarship due to the highly influential text by Song Dynasty intellectual Zhu Xi (朱熹 1130 - 1200), *Collected Commentaries of the Four Books* (*Sishu Jizhu* 四书集注), whose metaphysical interpretation of Heaven that the Jesuits worked hard to suppress in their translation.<sup>36</sup>

In Zhu Xi's commentary, he proposed a unique concept, "li" (理), or "principle," and discussed its role in shaping morality and human nature. Neo-Confucianism adopted Zhu Xi's li-principle as a part its orthodoxy, defining it as *a priori* moral knowledge endowed by Heaven and innate to every human being.<sup>37</sup> This interpretation is consistent with Zhu Xi's idea that li-principle is a manifestation of Heaven (*tianjili* 天即理). According to Zhu Xi, Heaven's Mandate is implicated in each person's nature (*xing* 性) since birth. To obey Heaven, therefore, is to understand, cultivate, and follow one's own nature. In Zhu Xi's words: "If each person follows what is natural to this nature, he will always take the proper path in his day-to-day affairs. It is this that we call 'the Way.'"<sup>38</sup> As one can see, Heaven acquired a metaphysical quality in orthodox Neo-Confucianism inseparable from human nature, and not so much as a distinct and superior entity that acts as a moral judge of humanity. In short, the most authoritative interpretation of Heaven in seventeenth-century Neo-Confucianism, as represented by Zhu Xi's *Collected Commentaries of the Four Books*, contradicted Couplet's claim that Confucius sought to regulate human actions based on a uniform set of "laws and precepts of the supreme divine will." Naturally, the Jesuits found this version of Heaven disagreeable to their religious agenda, since the Christian

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<sup>36</sup> For more contextualization on the school of Neo-Confucianism, see: Theodore de Bary, *The Unfolding of Neo-Confucianism*, (New York: Columbia University Press); Tu Weiming, *Humanity and Self-Cultivation: Essays in Confucian Thought*, (Berkeley: Asian Humanities Press, 1979), 71-211.

<sup>37</sup> Yü Ying-shih, *Chinese History and Culture: Seventeenth Century Through Twentieth Century*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 120; Makeham, 195.

<sup>38</sup> Daniel K. Gardner, "Zhu Xi's Commentarial Work" in *Zhu Xi: Selected Writings*, ed Philip J. Ivanhoe, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 191.

perception of Heaven was founded on the notion that divinity and humanity were inherently distinct and interacted with each other based on a strict hierarchy; hence the need for absolute obedience towards Heaven.<sup>39</sup>

The Jesuit's resolve to obscure Zhu Xi's influence over Confucius' Heaven was a large part of why they opted for the commentary of the Ming Dynasty (1368 - 1644) statesman Zhang Juzheng (张居正 1525 - 1582), *Direct Commentary on the Four Books* (Sishu Zhijie 四书直解), as their primary source material due to its presentation of a much more palatable understanding of Heaven. Although Zhang Juzheng, like most other Neo-Confucian scholars of the Ming Dynasty, drew heavily upon Zhu Xi's interpretations of the Four Books on many subjects, he envisioned a much more concrete and personal Heaven compared to the amorphous *li*-principle. Notably, in his commentary on *Lunyu*, Zhang Juzheng repeatedly emphasized the need to fear and revere Heaven as an ultimate source of reward and punishment, thus recognizing it as a self-contained and purposeful entity. As he proclaimed in his writings: "There is only one heaven which should be honored to the highest degree and that nothing else is equal to it."<sup>40</sup> This theological interpretation of Heaven did not originate from Zhang Juzheng, but can in fact be traced back to the idea of "the mutual interaction between heaven and men" (天人感应 *tianren ganying*) from the Han dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE), which became popular again in late-Ming and was subsequently adopted by Zhang Juzheng.<sup>41</sup> This model of "mutual interaction" founded upon the absolute subordination of men towards Heaven closely aligned with Christian ideology, and therefore served as a strong indication of the Chinese's pious nature in the Jesuits' reports back to Europe.

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<sup>39</sup> Yu Liu, "Behind the Façade," 21.

<sup>40</sup> Meynard, *CSP*, 36-7. Chinese Text: "盖天下之至尊而无对者，惟天而已。"

<sup>41</sup> Meynard, *Lunyu*, 37.

Another ideological ammunition that Zhang Juzheng lent to the Jesuit was the notion that Confucianism was the purest and most orthodox philosophical school in China. In the letter to King Louis, Couplet cited a phrase from *Lunyu* passage 2.16, *gong hu yiduan* (攻乎異端), which he translated as “to attack heresies,” to advance his argument that “there was nothing higher in [Confucius’] list of priorities than thoroughly overthrowing the foreign sects and doctrines by which, he was wont to say, nations were destroyed and dynasties brought down.”<sup>42</sup> Here, the strong wording of “attacking heresies” imbued an orthodoxic tone to Confucianism. In his translation and annotation of *CSP*, Meynard points out that Zhu Xi’s commentary interpreted the phrase as “to study aberrant teaching brings harm,” whereas Couplet designated the word *yiduan* as “heresy” to introduce the dichotomy of orthodoxy and heterodoxy into Confucianism.<sup>43</sup> The Jesuits’ religious agenda became more pronounced when Couplet brought up how Louis IV, who he referred to as “the most Christian King of all the Christian countries in the world,” would be exalted by Confucius for eradicating heresy in Europe by bringing down “the edicts of the past.”<sup>44</sup> This was a reference to the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes by Louis IV in 1685, which outlawed the practice of Protestantism in France on the grounds of heresy.

In other words, *CSP* did not stop at finding Christian values in Confucianism, but specifically equated the philosophy with the doctrinal purity of Catholicism. By proclaiming Confucius’ supposed intolerance towards competing sects, such as the vulgar Daoism and the idolatrous Buddhism, Couplet presented the philosopher as the most faithful interpreter of ancient wisdom. Thus, he hoped to inspire sympathy for Confucianism within the Catholic-ruled France for how it appeared as the staunch protector and disseminator of orthodoxy. While Couplet’s stance

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<sup>42</sup> Meynard, *CSP*, 84-85.

<sup>43</sup> Meynard, *CSP*, 85.

<sup>44</sup> Meynard, *CSP*, 85.



seemed overtly self-serving and militant, he was in fact largely echoing Zhang Juzheng's sentiment when it comes to scorning the corrupting influence of Daoism and Buddhism in China. Regarding the tendency among his contemporaries to take inspiration from Daoism and Buddhism when interpreting Confucian texts, Zhang Juzheng reacted with worry and stern disapproval.<sup>45</sup> His station as the Grand Secretary of Ming and the royal tutor sufficiently rationalized his advocacy for the absolute authority of Confucianism, at least in the political realm, since the philosophy was traditionally meant to serve the ruling elites. Still, the Jesuits believed that Zhang Juzheng's accusations of heterodoxy were too vague and insufficient. This compelled them to incorporate the ideas of additional commentators who were more forward in defending the ideological purity of Confucianism. Among those chosen were Song intellectual Cheng Yi (程颐 1033 – 1107) and Ming historian Qiu Jun (邱濬 1418-1495), both of whom cautioned against heterodoxy's potential to bring about not only moral corruption, but also dynastic downfall, and their ideas were promptly cited throughout *CSP*'s commentary on *Lunyu*.<sup>46</sup> An interesting insight is thus revealed: the Jesuits were exceedingly crafty and resourceful in the composition of their translation. They were clearly well-acquainted with a wide range of commentarial works and demonstrated a keen understanding of their merits and faults in relation to their objective of constructing a Christian interpretation of the Four Books.

Overall, Couplet's letter to the King represented only a small portion of the Jesuits' rumination over the theological implications of Confucianism in *CSP*'s substantial preface; however, it sufficiently exemplified the compulsion to interpret Confucianism according to a Christianized and monotheistic framework, resulting in likely the deliberate distortions of their

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<sup>45</sup> Meynard, *Lunyu*, 26.

<sup>46</sup> Meynard, *Lunyu*, 45-6.

Chinese source materials. Having laid out sweeping claims over the moral piety of Confucian China and its readiness to receive Christian revelation due to its pre-existing religious consciousness, the main body of the *CSP* sought to offer textual evidence for these claims through the careful selection of commentaries that complemented Jesuit agenda posing as Confucius' intended meaning. I will examine several passages relating to the idea of *Ren* to demonstrate how Confucian morality was presented to be in tune with Christian principles.

*Ren*, the defining yet elusive concept of Confucian thought, was extensively discussed in *Lunyu*, often taking shape as dialogues between Confucius and his disciples on the theoretical and practical nature of this supreme virtue.<sup>47</sup> *CSP* equated *Ren* to “charity and piety”, “true virtue of the heart”, and “universal love,” among many others.<sup>48</sup> Since Régis' review served as an introduction to the religious reading of Confucianism in Europe, let us first examine *Ren* as charity. *Lunyu* passage 12.22 recorded a conversation between the Master and his disciple Fan Chi. *CSP* translated the first part of the conversation as the following:

樊迟问仁。子曰：“爱人。”问知。子曰：“知人。”

Fan Chi asked again about the virtue of *ren*, or piety. Confucius answered: “To love people so that you embrace and cherish everyone in the wide bosom of charity.” Similarly, Fan Chi asked about prudence, to which Confucius answered: “To know people.”<sup>49</sup>

In the classical text, Confucius responded to the first question simply with *ai ren* (爱人), which literally means “to love people.” The latter part of the sentence about charity for all of mankind

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<sup>47</sup> For a sample of scholarship on *Ren* in classical and Neo-Confucian traditions, see: Tu, 5-14; David L. Hall and Roger T. Ames, *Thinking through Confucius*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 110-125; Yong Huang, “Zhu Xi on Ren (Humanity) and Love: A Neo-Confucian Way Out of the Liberal-Communitarian Impasse”, *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 23, 2 (1996): 213-235; Makeham, 225-6, 234-7; Kwong-Loi Shun, “Rén 仁 and Li 理 in the *Analects*” in *Confucius and the Analects*, 53-70; Bryan W. Van Norden, *Introduction to Classical Chinese Philosophy*, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2011), 39-43; Ming-Huei Lee, “The Debate on Ren between Zhu Xi and Huxiang Scholars” in *Confucianism: Its Roots and Global Significance*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2017), 41-53.

<sup>48</sup> Meynard, *Lunyu*, 64-66.

<sup>49</sup> Meynard, *Lunyu*, 386.

was added on as a Jesuit interpretation. Meynard remarks that Zhang Juzheng's commentary explained Confucius' notion of "love" as contingent on the level of intimacy in one's relationship to another.<sup>50</sup> The Jesuits, however, deviated from Zhang Juzheng by defining the act of "to love people" as universal and intrinsic, which was more in accordance with the Christian commandment of "love thy neighbor as thyself." The Jesuits' emphasis on unconditional love for all of humanity in Confucianism is interesting in how it contradicted the rest of passage 12.22. When Fan Chi expressed confusion towards his Master's response, Confucius elaborated: "One should raise and promote the right and honest people to rule the country, and should ignore the perverse and dishonest people. By doing this, the dishonest people can be changed into right and honest people."<sup>51</sup> Such a statement did not properly reflect the Christian charity of having compassion and love even for the unworthy; instead, it evoked a sense of pragmatism, specifically in a political context, by clearly differentiating the treatment between honest and dishonest people with the goal of promoting morality.

This is not the only place where the Jesuits encountered challenge in comparing Confucius' highest virtue of *Ren* to Christian charity. For instance, *CSP* translated passage 4.3 of *Lunyu* as: "Confucius said: 'Only someone honest can safely love people and safely hate them.'<sup>52</sup> Interestingly, the word "honest" in this translation corresponded to *Ren* in the Chinese text; yet, unlike in 12.22, the Jesuits did not elucidate in their Latin translation that the virtue of *Ren* was mentioned in this passage. No doubt, the fact that Confucius proclaimed that someone who attained the ultimate virtue of *Ren* can still rightfully express hate for others greatly troubled the Jesuits. Therefore, they chose the word "honest" as a stand-in for *Ren* in this passage, a quality that held

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<sup>50</sup> Meynard, *Lunyu*, 383.

<sup>51</sup> Meynard, *Lunyu*, 383. Chinese text: 子曰：“举直错诸枉，能使枉者直。”

<sup>52</sup> Meynard, *Lunyu*, 184. Chinese text: 子曰：“唯仁者能好人，能恶人。”

more ambivalence in Christian doctrines compared to the undeniably laudable quality of being charitable. As one can see, *CSP* manipulated the vast interpretive potential of *Ren* according to the contexts of different *Lunyu* passages, sometimes deliberately allowing its appearance in the Chinese text to become lost in translation, in order to support the narrative that Confucianism had been nurturing various virtues necessary for Christian enlightenment.

The Jesuits, by presenting *Ren* as charity, hoped to stress universal love as an important theme in Confucianism and its most crucial congruence with Christianity. As an example of their attempt to expound the unifying and almost spiritual potential of *Ren*, let us return to passage 6.28 in *Lunyu*, the very one that Pierre Régis deemed to be illustrious enough for Confucianism to recite in full when reviewing *CSP*:

子贡曰：“如有博施于民而能济众，何如？可谓仁乎？”子曰：“何事与仁，比也圣乎！尧舜其犹病诸。夫仁者，己欲立而立人，己欲达而达人。能近取譬，可谓仁之方也已。”

Zigong said, “If there is someone who is generous to his people and works to give relief to all those in need, what do you think of him? Can he be called [*Ren*]?”

The Master said, “This is no longer a matter of [*Ren*]. You must be referring to a sage. Even Yao and Shun found it difficult to accomplish what you’ve just described. A [*Ren*] person wishes to steady himself, and so he helps others to steady themselves. Because he wishes to reach his goal, he helps others to reach theirs. The ability to make analogy from what is close at hand is the method and the way of realizing [*Ren*].<sup>53</sup>

The conventional interpretation among historical and modern commentators was that, in this exchange, the Master reprimanded Zigong for speculating about some grand yet unrealistic hypotheticals without taking the most fundamental steps towards cultivating *Ren*, that is introspection and self-improvement. Once a person rights his own character, he will naturally be able to extend the same care and aspirations for himself to others through empathy and compassion.

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<sup>53</sup> Ann-ping Chin, *The Analects: Lunyu*, (New York: Penguin Books, 2014), 96. While Chin designated *Ren* as “humanness,” for the purpose of this essay I choose to leave *Ren* untranslated.

The Jesuits, on the other hand, perceived this passage as a perfect rendition of universal love. Consequently, they set out to expand beyond the classical text by adding the following framing statements to contextualize the translation:

Indeed, my disciple, the holiness, charity, or piety that I request, this is the constant disposition of the mind conforming to reason, by which one abandon his self-interest and the care for his comfort and embrace all the people on earth, just as if they were a single, unique entity [...] Once this charity, or piety, seizes the human mind, then all humanity on the whole earth will be like one family, and even like one man. Because of an awesome connection and order everywhere between the highest, intermediate, and smallest things, this will look like one identical substance.<sup>54</sup>

The Jesuits chose this occasion to endow immense gravity to *Ren* by equating it with holiness, charity, and piety, rather than merely “honesty,” as they did in *Lunyu* 4.3. This Latin translation suggested that a person with *Ren* will be able to extend his endless wealth of love towards all humanity and reserve nothing for his self-interest, an antithesis to the interpretation that self-cultivation was a pre-requisite for doing good for others. In fact, in the classical text, the definition of *Ren* proposed by Zigong and subsequently rejected by Confucius bore a striking resemblance to the Jesuits’ ambitiously selfless man. When Zigong asked whether a person who strives to help everyone deserves to be called *Ren*, Confucius replied that such an action would not indicate *Ren*, but a saintliness that even the ancient sage kings such as Yao and Shun could not achieve. The Jesuits, however, interpreted the saintliness (translated into Latin as “holiness”) that Confucius spoke of as unattainable only due to the lack of God’s grace, yet it was still a vision that everyone should strive towards.<sup>55</sup> With this logic in mind, *CSP* was able to resolve the Master’s incredulous attitude towards the prospect of helping all of humanity and present the message of passage 6.28 as such:

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<sup>54</sup> Meynard, *Lunyu*, 241.

<sup>55</sup> Meynard, *Lunyu*, 241.

Just as a pious person wishes himself to succeed and flourish, similarly he devotes his action, influence, and strength to life all those who have been stricken by innate poverty or infirmity, or crushed and destroyed by some more serious accident of fortune. Similarly, wishing to see all things, he cannot stand seeing others erring blindly, or falling vanquished by pains and hardships. He himself attempts and undertakes everything to help everyone. He makes them solve and unravel the hardships they face, and successfully surmount the darkness of their errors and ignorance.<sup>56</sup>

The Jesuits cleverly reversed the subject of emphasis when translating this maxim. Whereas Confucius tried to redirect his disciple's attention from being pre-occupied with the hypothetical of caring for all under heaven to first cultivating one's own character (i.e. "the ability to make analogy from what is close at hand"), the Jesuits urged the readers to transcend the boundary of individual existence and treat everyone with the same love and care as if they all stem from the same being, thus completely forgoing one's self-interest.

Yet, *CSP*'s expansion upon the classical text was not a baseless and delusional effusion that saw implications of divinity and transcendence where there was none. Zhu Xi and Zhang Juzheng, the two most prominent predecessors for the Jesuits, both understood the virtue of universal love as the unspoken message of passage 6.28. As Zhu Xi explained in his commentary: "a person who possesses *Ren* sees the myriad things in heaven and earth as a single body, that is himself. Recognizing it as himself, there are no lengths he is not willing to go [for others] ..."<sup>57</sup> Interestingly, Zhu Xi's metaphysical penchant previously rejected by the Jesuits ended up complementing their agenda on this occasion. Zhang Juzheng, who closely heeded Zhu Xi's commentarial tradition, wrote regarding this passage that "all under heaven for one family; the myriad things form the disposition of one entity."<sup>58</sup> Meynard further hypothesized that the Jesuits

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<sup>56</sup> Meynard, *Lunyu*, 241.

<sup>57</sup> Zhu Xi commentary: "仁者以天地万物为一体，莫非己也。认得为己，何所不至"；For another translation and analysis of passage 6.28 in Zhu Xi's commentary, see: Gardner, *Zhu Xi's Reading*, 57-61.

<sup>58</sup> Meynard, *Lunyu*, 67. Chinese text: 天下一家，万物一体的气象

might have taken the idea of universe as a single entity as an affirmation of the Christian dogma that “all humanity recapitulates itself in one man, Jesus Christ”—one further reason to equate *Ren* with a piousness that proved the religious consciousness of Confucianism.<sup>59</sup>

Lastly, another reason that makes passage 6.28 a singular case study of *CSP*'s rhetoric and methodology lies in how it conveyed the craftiness of the Jesuits translation. They expertly cherrypicked threads from several commentaries to weave together a Christian narrative in the Four Books, taking full advantage of Zhu and Zhang's words where they fed into such narrative and leaving them out where they introduced inconsistencies, all the while demonstrating an admirable knowledge of Confucian intellectual tradition. With such careful orchestration, it is no wonder that European theologians such as Régis would lavish praise and attention onto the Chinese sage for how his teachings seemingly captured the essence of Christianity through perfect natural reasoning despite the lack of proper enlightenment.

## 1.2 Confucianism against the Reason of State

So far, I have used excerpts from the Preface and *Lunyu* sections of *CSP* to illustrate the ways in which it attempted to present a Christianized interpretation of Confucianism, both explicitly and implicitly. I will now examine a key reason behind the Jesuits' vehement advocacy for the virtue and the theological integrity of this pagan philosopher, which was to counter the rising moral skepticism in the late seventeenth-century Europe that threatened the power of the Catholic Church.<sup>60</sup> The goal is to demonstrate how the missionaries leveraged Confucianism to address the diminishing role of moralism in European statecraft, thus paving way for the Chinese

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<sup>59</sup> Meynard, *Lunyu*, 67.

<sup>60</sup> Thierry Meynard, “Translating the Confucian Classics: the *Lunyu* in the *Confucius Sinarum Philosophu* (1687)” in *Sinologists as Translators in the Seventeenth to Nineteenth Centuries*, ed. Lawrence Wangchi Wong and Bernhard Fuehrer (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2016), 22-3.

example to become a vehicle of intellectual discourse that fueled the emergence of the Enlightenment mentality.

Since their arrival in China in the late sixteenth century, driven by the grandiose vision of bringing Christian enlightenment to this vast and isolated kingdom, the Jesuits had their eyes set on Confucianism as the key to the success of their conversion mission. Uninterested in penetrating the common populace and spreading Christianity from the bottom up, the Jesuits eagerly sought out the friendship and patronage of scholar-officials in the imperial court, who by definition and tradition were educated as Confucian literati, to ascend quickly on the social and political ladders.<sup>61</sup> This top-down conversion strategy was consistent with the Jesuit operation in Europe, where they ingratiated themselves with monarchs who demonstrated support for the Catholic agenda, as can be gleaned from Couplet's flattering dedication to Louis XIV in *CSP*.<sup>62</sup> Therefore, this close alignment with the Chinese elite gave away the political agenda behind the missionaries' enterprise to study and translate Confucian texts. Since Confucianism consistently served as the ideological and operational backbone of the Chinese bureaucracy for nearly two millennia, the Jesuits developed a natural affinity and admiration for it as a state-sponsored religion that successfully ingrained its moral teachings into the rulers' conducts. Moreover, the Jesuits shrewdly discerned Confucianism's potential to affirm the place of Christian virtues in statecraft, and consequently

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<sup>61</sup> Brockey, 244; David Mungello, *The Great Encounter of China and the West, 1500–1800*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012), 20. For a more in-depth study on Confucianism and the education system of Ming dynasty, see Dardess, John W. *Confucianism and Autocracy: Professional Elites in the Founding of the Ming Dynasty*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

<sup>62</sup> For studies on Jesuits and early modern Europe, see: H. Höpfl, *Jesuit Political Thought: The Society of Jesus and the State, c. 1540-1640*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Jeffrey D. Burson, "Between Power and Enlightenment: The Cultural and Intellectual Context for the Jesuit Suppression in France," In *The Jesuit Suppression in Global Context: Causes, Events, and Consequences*, ed. Jeffrey D. Burson and Jonathan Wright, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 40–64. Damien Tricoire, "The Fabrication of the *Philosophe*: Catholicism, Court Culture, and the Origins of Enlightenment Moralism in France," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 51, no. 4 (2018): 453-477.



amplify the political influence of the Society once its teachings become broadly admired in Europe.<sup>63</sup>

Among the Four Books, *Daxue* (大学), or “The Great Learning,” provided most solid and straightforward evidence for Confucianism’s utility as a political philosophy. An important concept explained in *Daxue* was the so-called “ordering of the world” (*jingshi* 经世), which mandated that the promotion of peace and order in a kingdom must start with the ruler’s inner cultivation. The Song-Ming Neo-Confucian tradition related this concept to the classical Confucian expression of “sageliness within and kingliness without” (*neisheng waiwang* 内圣外王).<sup>64</sup> Together, the two ideas revealed the social and relational nature of the philosophy, for its teachings sought beyond benefitting the individual with the ultimate goal of servicing the collective. The gravity of “ordering the world” can be gleaned from the fact that in the Confucian curriculum established by Zhu Xi, *Daxue* came first in a student’s study.<sup>65</sup> The seventeenth century, which saw not only the conception of CSP but also the dynastic transition from Ming to Qing (1636 -1912), inspired an urgency among Confucian scholars to act upon the principle of “ordering of the world” in a time of palpable and irresistible societal changes.<sup>66</sup> Zhang Juzheng, an important Confucian literati and statesman of the time, incorporated this activism into his commentary on the Four Books, which he wrote as a textbook for the young prince under his tutelage. Therefore, it is likely that the late-Ming and early-Qing preoccupation with exerting “kingliness without” to restore social order helped affirmed the Jesuits’ conviction that Chinese statecraft was centered on the presence of a virtuous monarch, who perfected himself according to the teachings of the sage

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<sup>63</sup> Taussig, 37.

<sup>64</sup> Yü Ying-shih, 125.

<sup>65</sup> Makeham, 180.

<sup>66</sup> Yü Ying-shih, 125.

and consequently promoting peace and virtue throughout his kingdom. In other words, it appeared that Heaven, which the Jesuits believed to be the source of morality in Confucianism, and the state were inseparable in China.

Such an understanding was crucial to the Jesuits' agenda of advocating Confucianism in seventeenth century Europe. Let us turn our attention once again to Philippe Couplet's letter to Louis IV, which revealed right from the start the undeniably political dimension of *CSP*. Recall that in the letter, Couplet eulogized the monarch for revoking the Edict of Nantes, a political move that fortified the power of the Catholic Church in France. But more interestingly, Couplet tried to present Confucianism as an anti-Machiavellian philosophy for the Princes. He ecstatically imagined that, should Confucius find his way to seventeenth-century France, "he will declare that he has found at last that Prince whom he had burned to see with an ardor that had until now been in vain;" that he would submit to King Louis' wisdom "like Stars to the Sun" because the Chinese sage "had conceived in his mind such an outstanding Emperor and he had sketched his outline in his books, but yet, amid the ancestral Princes of the Empire, he could find no one who truly conformed to his wishes," that is, until the reign of Louis IV.<sup>67</sup> The extent of Couplet's flattery was rather astounding, proclaiming the French King as the paragon of Confucian virtue that none of the Chinese emperors throughout the millenniums could hope to match. Couplet's explicit reasoning was that, by persecuting the Protestants and restoring Christianity to its purest form represented by Catholicism, Louis IV understood Confucius' mission as an inheritor and disseminator of ancient wisdom. However, while Couplet's letter pointed to religious dissents as the principal threat to a virtuous and stable society, there was in fact another implicit enemy that

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<sup>67</sup> Meynard, *CSP*, 84.

he hoped to condemn by promoting Confucianism as political philosophy, that is, an atheistic approach to rulership exemplified by the Reason of State.<sup>68</sup>

Couplet's basis for using Confucianism to attack the Reason of State rested on the aforementioned principle of "ordering of the world" found in *Daxue*. As an example of *Daxue*'s rhetorical style, its approach on governance, and how it complemented Jesuit agenda, the following translated passage from *CSP* is particularly illustrative:

物格而后知至，知至而后意诚，意诚而后心正，心正而后修身，身修而后家齐，家齐而后国治，国治而后天下平。

When everything has been deeply penetrated within, or exhausted, then next the intellective power will be brought to completion and made perfect. When the intellective power has been brought to completion and made perfect, then next the intention and the will are checked... When the intention has been checked, then next the mind will be rectified... When the mind has been rectified, then the body will be well composed... When the person, or the body, has been well composed, then the domestic family will be well educated through this example. When the domestic family has been correctly educated, then one's private kingdom will be correctly managed. When the kingdom has been well governed, then all the Empire will be optimally educated and will thoroughly enjoy peace.<sup>69</sup>

This excerpt outlined the process of creating a peaceful and unified society, starting with correcting one's innermost character. Differently from the maxims of *Lunyu*, which speaks about conducts and virtues that should be broadly emulated across society, this passage from *Daxue* applies more specifically to the ruler of a nation, or at least high-ranking officials, in leading up to the ultimate goal of correctly managing one's private kingdom, its corresponding Chinese phrase translates directly into "bringing peace to all under Heaven" (*ping tianxia* 平天下). One can also see the rhetorical use of logical progression in this passage, with the step-by-step ascension from the lowest order of one's intellective power, to the physical body, to the private family, and finally to

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<sup>68</sup> For studies on the definition and reception of Reason of State in early modern Europe, particularly relating to religious orthodoxy, see: H. Höpfl, "Orthodoxy and Reason of State," *History of Political Thought* 23, no. 2 (2002): 211–37; Höpfl, *Jesuit Political Thought*, 84–6; Robert Bireley, "Introduction," in *Botero: The Reason of State*, ed. Robert Bireley, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), xiv.

<sup>69</sup> Maynard, *CSP*, 340.

conducting the affairs of the state naturally and virtuously. Thus, an important observation about Confucian statecraft arises from this ascension of order: consistent with teachings of *Lunyu*, Confucianism maintained self-cultivation as a pre-requisite to acquiring a virtuous persona and exerting a positive influence onto others. It was a verity that made no exception, and perhaps was more essential than ever, for the Son of Heaven (*tianzi* 天子) tasked with ensuring the well-being of all his subjects. Contemporary Confucian scholar Bai Tongdong, in focusing on the political utility of introspection and cultivating family relations, argues that their ultimate purpose is to develop the compassion of the ruler. He explains that in Confucianism, understanding how one's own body and desires functions as a steppingstone to attending to the needs of others. Having self-love naturally transfers to one's immediate family through the expression of filial piety, which in turn extends into one's interactions in broader society.<sup>70</sup> A virtuous Prince, then, should strive towards loving and understanding his people as if he loves and understands himself and his family, seeing no boundary between the private and the public.

The Jesuits saw another dimension to moral cultivation in Confucian statecraft that was infinitely attractive. As Daniel Canaris has observed, *Daxue* confirmed that good governance depended on the ruler's sound moral conscious and genuine deference to the laws of the Heaven and rejected the practice of "[prioritizing] the conservation and expansion of the state over the observance of moral precepts" exemplified by the Reason of State.<sup>71</sup> *CSP* seized the lessons from *Daxue* as an opportunity to lay forth the claims that an atheist yet prosperous society cannot exist, and that China always had knowledge of the True God as shown by the internalization of a hierarchical structure. In the Preface of *CSP*, Couplet addressed the apparent paradox that while

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<sup>70</sup> Bai Tongdong, *China: The Political Philosophy of the Middle Kingdom*, (London; New York: Zed Books. 2012), 35-36.

<sup>71</sup> Daniel Canaris, "Peace and Reason of State in the *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* (1687)," *Theoria (Pietermaritzburg)* 66, no. 159 (2019), 99.

ancient China only had natural religion, it maintained good life for its citizens, a moral public, and a fair government that could only be founded upon a true religion.<sup>72</sup> Couplet looked to the distinctive Confucian virtue of filial piety and the mirroring between the private and the public realms to argue for importance of religion in Chinese political system, replacing the centrality of humanity that Bai Tongdong perceives:

[The ancient Chinese] teach that the subjects should serve their ruler the same way as the rulers and the nations all serve the supreme Emperor of heaven, and that the children should obey their parents in the same way as they themselves obey heaven. Yet if the religious worship are false and deceitful, then the obedience and observance toward rulers and rulers and kings, as well as piety toward parents and ancestors, are necessarily false as well.<sup>73</sup>

In other words, Couplet observed that a hierarchical structure based on absolute obedience and respect for one's superior permeated throughout both the private and the public spaces of Chinese society. This led him to conclude that this hierarchy was modeled after the collective reverence towards the supreme mandate of the Heaven, or as the Jesuits believed, the true God. As the *Daxue* passage above suggested, a ruler cannot establish peace and order in his kingdom without first nurturing a healthy family dynamic. Since the same reverence and piety towards Heaven was practiced even on the most basic level of social interactions such as between parents and children, husbands and wives, the Jesuit concluded the benevolence of the prince must also be internalized virtues rather than a pretense grounded in the pragmatism of the Reason of State. Couplet cited the virtue of "honesty" (*cheng* 诚), which was a recurring motif in the pedagogy of Song-Ming Neo-Confucian commentators, to pose Reason of State and Confucianism as ideological antitheses:

Would they [the Song-Ming commentators], then, in the most important matter of religion, have been insincere and treacherous politicians? Would they have embraced religion only as a deceitful mean for keeping the people in check? Those atheo-political innovators, the interpreters of the Song dynasty, would surely never admit it. Even though they created a hollow monster out of their

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<sup>72</sup> Meynard, *CSP*, 195.

<sup>73</sup> Meynard, *CPS*, 201.

political divinity, they never hesitated to make truth and solidity, expressed by the word of *cheng*, the basis of their whole Philosophy.<sup>74</sup>

The “atheo-political innovators” of Song was no doubt referring to Zhu Xi, whose metaphysical conception of Heaven kept his name largely out of *CSP*’s annotations and acknowledgements. But what is important here is Couplet’s argument that even the thinkers who misunderstood Heaven or denied the existence of a personal God had insisted on the sincerity of virtue, or the conformity between intention and action, of a Confucian ruler, just as the phrase so wisely summarized: “sageliness within and kingliness without.”

In sum, *CSP* leveraged ideals such as filial piety and self-cultivation in Confucian statecraft for two main purposes. Firstly, they complemented the *CSP*’s overarching goal of presenting the Chinese civilization as semi-enlightened with the knowledge of a supreme divine in a Christian sense. Since Confucianism, the most widely practiced school of thoughts in China, advocated for the careful observance of social hierarchy and respect for one’s superior even in private sphere, the Chinese must possess a religious conscience that was carefully and sincerely cultivated. Secondly, and more implicitly, since Confucian political philosophy stressed moral cultivation as an essential lesson for the Prince, the Jesuits used it to refute the possibility of having a prosperous society solely founded on the Reason of State without an internalized moral code. With this observation in mind, *CSP* raised the Chinese example to both Louis VI and the French public in a bid to combat the postulation of an atheist state yet healthy state, affirm the necessity of religion in rulership, and consequently strengthen the Jesuits’ political status in Europe.

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<sup>74</sup> Meynard, *CSP*, 200.

### 1.3 *Lettre sur la Morale* (1688): an Early Vernacular Translation

The scholarly diligence and the political scheming that the Jesuits poured into the making of *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* seemed to have paid off, as this Christianized interpretation of Confucianism captivated French scholars immediately upon its publication in 1687. From then on, this comprehensive translation of Confucian canons became one of the principal sources for Europe's venture to understand and engage with Chinese philosophy. Pierre Régis' book review in *Journal des Sçavants* was only a preamble to the vibrant intellectual reactions that Confucianism provoked in Europe, and the manifold ways in which the philosophy was interpreted, distorted, and transformed under a vastly different cultural context. This section will turn to one of the first substantial scholarly works inspired by *CSP* that followed its religious reading of Confucianism, in attempt to measure the direct impact of its Christianized interpretation and, more broadly speaking, the power of translation in appropriating and reimagining foreign ideologies.

In 1688, there appeared an abridged French translation of *CSP* titled *Lettre sur la Morale de Confucius, Philosophe de la Chine*. It contained a brief preface, selected passages from the three Confucian texts translated by the Jesuits, and an anonymous author signing himself as "S.F." Based on the initial, historian commonly attributed this translation to the French intellectual and Catholic theologian Simon Foucher (1644-1696). Similar to Couplet and his colleagues, Foucher's objective was to extract the essence of Confucian wisdom based on a Christian understanding, and to reconstruct the classical text in a way that would accentuate such an understanding to the readers. Yet, in sharp contrast with the translation style of *CSP* that relied on elaborated commentary to make sense of the elusive maxims, *Lettre sur la Morale* was characterized by its succinct and often terse paraphrasing of Jesuits' interpretation that removed any room for ambiguity and debate around Confucius' stance on issues such as charity, piety, and human nature. In other words, while

the Latin translation interpolated Christian ideologies by filling in the gaps that the classical texts left up to interpretation, Foucher's version opted for condensation and the removal of cultural nuance to assert Confucianism's compatibility with Christianity in a way that was easily accessible to the French readers.

To illustrate the rhetorical style and the religious agenda of *Lettre sur la Morale*, I will turn to the following passage from *Lunyu* as an example:

子曰：“君子无所争。必也射乎！揖让而升，下而饮。其争也君子。”

The Master said: “Gentlemen have no reason to contend. But, of course, there is the archery contest. Yet on such occasions, they bow and yield to each other as they ascend the steps to the hall; afterward, they descend the steps and drink together. Even when they compete, they are gentlemanly.”<sup>75</sup>

The “gentleman” (*junzi* 君子), sometimes translated as an “exemplary person,” made over one hundred appearances in *Lunyu* and stands as a Confucian ideal as distinguished as *Ren*.<sup>76</sup> The two concepts are also intimately related to one another: the title of a gentleman typically denotes someone who either possesses *ren* or is on the self-perfecting path to attain this supreme virtue. In the above passage, the Master highlighted the importance of rituals in guiding the interactions between gentlemen, as shown through the ritualized acts of bowing and drinking before and after an archery contest. It is necessary here to briefly explain the unique function of rituals in Confucianism. As previously established, Confucianism is a human-centered philosophy that perceives individuals as fundamentally relational beings whose identity and humanity can only develop in a social context. Essentially, if everyone adhered to sets of ritualistic conducts specific to different social scenarios, social harmony will flourish, and each person will be able to fulfill

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<sup>75</sup> Chin, 28.

<sup>76</sup> Yuri Pines, “Confucius’ Elitism: The Concepts of *junzi* and *xiaoren* Revisited,” In *A Concise Companion to Confucius*, Paul R. Goldin, ed (Hoboken: Wiley, 2017), 165. For more on the idea of *junzi* in Confucianism, see: Hall and Ames, 182-194; Wenyu Xie, “The Concept of ‘Junzi’ in the ‘Zhongyong,’” *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* 6, no. 4 (2011): 501–20.



their respective relational roles and cultivate virtuous personalities. A gentleman, having fully internalized these ritual processes that he behaves according to them naturally, would remain collected, respectful, and just even during a competition, understanding the ultimately social purpose of such occasion. Both Zhu Xi and Zhang Juzheng took care to further contextualize the ritual process from the ancient times for their readers and distinguished the formalized competition between gentlemen from the quarrels of “petty persons” (*xiaoren* 小人). The heart of the lesson therefore lies in the last sentence: “Even when they compete, they are gentlemanly.”

Provided with the nuanced cultural and ideological context to the archery contest maxim, its dramatic alteration in *Lettre sur la Morale* appears jarring. In Simon Foucher’s words, the passage above crystallized into the following statement: “Entre les personnes éclairées, il n’y a pas lieu de contester.”<sup>77</sup> Besides the bluntness of tone that characterized Foucher’s translation, there are several other problems deserving of attention. Firstly, a “gentleman” becomes an “enlightened person,” whereas *CSP* translated the term as “serious and honest men,” thereby introducing a spiritual undertone that was absent in both the classical and the Latin texts. Secondly, the framework of an archery contest was completely removed, leaving only the first sentence to fend for itself when it was only meant to serve as an introduction to the main point on the function of social rituals the making of a gentleman. It is important to note here that Foucher’s inadequate translation was due to no fault of the Latin source material. Not only was the archery contest soundly preserved in *CSP*, but the Jesuits even meticulously described the rituals of bowing and drinking according to Zhang Juzheng’s commentary, with details such as “[the gentlemen] respectfully bow three times to their fellows, and three times they invite them to go first; only then

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<sup>77</sup> Simon Foucher, *Lettre sur la morale de Confucius: philosophe de la Chine*, (Paris: 1688), 15. Translation: “Between enlightened persons, there is no room for disagreement.”

can they enter the hall.”<sup>78</sup> Given that the Jesuits had correctly understood the relationship between rituals and virtues to be the essence of this lesson, the liability of misrepresentation and misinterpretation fell heavily onto Foucher.<sup>79</sup>

Regarding the deliberate purging of textual nuance in *Lettre sur la Morale*, Thierry Meynard explains: “Foucher was not so much interested in learning something new as much as interested in using Chinese culture to prove the universality of moral laws.”<sup>80</sup> Indeed, using *CSP* as its launching point, Foucher’s translation marked a further departure from the reality of Confucianism in China. This is a dissonance that would have completely eluded Foucher’s target audience, which was the greater French-speaking public, who likely found the voluminous Latin translation inaccessible and its annotations superfluous. There was undoubtedly an appeal and a clear rationale to Foucher’s decontextualization. His foremost mission was not to do justice to the discursive style of the classical Confucian text, but to succinctly and colloquially convey the agreement between Confucian and Christian that the Jesuits had so painstakingly illustrated through their *magnum opus*. If he had decided to include the various culture-specific elements of Confucian texts such as the archery contest, it might encourage his readers to immerse in the *mis en scene* of ancient China, and thus lose sight of the fact that Confucian wisdom was essentially echoing Christian principles. Furthermore, these curious details could easily distract the readers from the spiritual message and invite secular interest and investigation into ancient Chinese culture, which was a not the sort of conversations that Foucher hoped to inspire. Therefore, by removing the cultural peculiarities in Confucianism, Foucher was able to keep *CSP*’s religious agenda while also introducing Chinese intellectual thoughts to a wider readership.

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<sup>78</sup> Meynard, *Lunyu*, 158.

<sup>79</sup> For more examples of Foucher’s reductionism and more comparisons between the translations of *CSP* and *Lettres sur la Morale*, see: Meynard, “Translating the Confucian Classics,” 23-7.

<sup>80</sup> Meynard, “Translating the Confucian Classics,” 26.

To Foucher, the true wonder of Confucianism was how a pagan philosopher living centuries before the arrival of Christ was able to adequately, and even admirably, replicate many Christian virtues in his teachings, which were adopted as the orthodoxy of a powerful ancient civilization. This could only speak to the intrinsicity and the timelessness of Christian ideals, and this was the key takeaway that Foucher hoped for his readers in a time when the relevance of religious consciousness was visibly eroding in European public. This was in fact also one of the chief propositions of *CSP*, demonstrated by its portrayal of Confucius as “the Wisest Teacher and Oracle of both Moral and Political Philosophy” who derived certain eternal truths “by the light of nature and reason alone.”<sup>81</sup> In other words, the philosophizing of a truly wise and virtuous man would ultimately lead him to the wisdom of God even without reading the scriptures. Foucher’s reinterpretation of the *Lunyu* passage, “entre les personnes éclairées, il n’y a pas lieu de contester,” seems to implicate such a sentiment. While “éclairées” can signify “touched by the light of God,” it also inevitably calls to mind the “enlightened” philosophes that would shape the next century of European history. Foucher seems to proclaim through Confucius that religious piety and natural reason were essentially the same, that the deference to Christian truths served as a unifying force among the truly enlightened, regardless of cultural or ideological disparity.

Foucher’s laid down his dedication to promoting the Christianized interpretation of Confucianism in his brief preface to *Lettre sur la Morale*. “On voit chez Confucius comme un crayon ou une ombre du christianisme, & aussi un abrégé de tout ce que les philosophes avaient reconnu de plus solide en matière de morale,” wrote Foucher to an unspecified “Monsieur.”<sup>82</sup> In making the Eurocentric claim that Confucian thoughts were only a rough sketch, an inkling to the

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<sup>81</sup> Meynard, *CSP*, 85.

<sup>82</sup> Foucher, 3. Translation: “One perceives in Confucius’ thinking a sketch or a shadow of Christianity, and an abridgement of all that the other great philosophers have recognized as most solid matters of morality.”

coming of Christ and his teachings, Foucher set up his agenda for the rest of the work, which was to demonstrate the omnipresence of Christian ideals. Confucianism, albeit only a crude and imperfect rendering of these ideals, had allowed an ancient and virtuous civilization to flourish. Foucher ended his preface with the following thought: “Au reste, Monsieur, ces enseignements ne sont pas seulement bons pour les gens de la Chine, mais je suis persuadé qu’il y a peu de Français qui ne s’estimât fort sage & fort heureux s’il les pouvait réduire en pratique.”<sup>83</sup> Thus, it seemed that Foucher had inherited onto himself *CSP*’s mission of leveraging Confucianism to counter the diminishing authority of the Church in Europe towards the end of the seventeenth century. In suggesting the French to take the heavily Christianized maxims to heart and put them into practice, Foucher sought to reassert the relevance of religious consciousness and moral cultivation in governance as well as everyday life.

So far, I have presented three versions of the Confucian texts: the classical text interpreted by Song-Ming Confucian scholars, *CSP*’s Latin translation built upon these commentaries, and Foucher’s French translation based on *CSP*. From *CSP* to Foucher, we perceive a fascinating and dynamic transformation taking place with the classical texts. First, the Jesuits enthusiastically expanded upon the Four Books in their attempt to render the elusive maxims more accessible to European readers and to weave in a Christian narrative. Yet, the Jesuits were not so much abusing their power as the translators as following the commentarial conventions essential to the Confucian scholarship. Incorporating the ideas of several renowned sources such as Zhu Xi and Zhang Juzheng while demonstrating a nuanced understanding of classical and Neo-Confucian ideas, *CSP* can be considered as a commentarial work with its own integrity. Since the “original” meanings

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<sup>83</sup> Foucher, 4. Translation: “Moreover, sir, these teachings are not only good for the people of China, but I am convinced that there won’t be a lack of Frenchmen who will consider themselves wiser and happier if they can put them into practice.”

behind Confucius' words were lost to history, despite Couplet's repeated claims that the Jesuits were representing the true intentions of the Master, commentaries became the default means of engaging with the Four Books and a source of evolving interpretations. *CSP*'s unique contribution as a commentary lies in proposing a Christianized interpretation that helped Confucianism find relevance in a new ideological and cultural milieu. This version of Confucianism was then aggressively decontextualized by Foucher to further demonstrate the universal appeal of Christian principles. These two layers of translations put the Four Books through a streamlined process of expansion and contraction that removed the text further and further away from its roots, while its semblance to Western thinking, specifically Judeo-Christian traditions, became increasingly clear. Once displaced in Europe, the cultural nuance that Confucianism accumulated in China was instantly stripped of its relevancy as a vastly different group of thinkers read new meanings into these foreign texts, transforming them into a vehicle of discourse with which these thinkers can advance their own ideological agenda. In the next chapter, I will investigate how the image of Confucianism evolved under the treatment of radical Enlightenment thinkers by offering immense opportunities for appropriation in a time of changing intellectual currents.

## CHAPTER II. The Revision of the “Chinese Example” under Freethinkers and *Philosophes*

Europe had spiraled for some years into, as historian Paul Hazard coins it, a “Crisis of Conscience” when *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* made its timely debut in 1687. As not only the fruits of Jesuits’ century-long assimilation in China, but also an ideological leverage to counteract heterodoxy’s brewing momentum in Europe, Hazard deems *CSP* to be “a work concerned less with science than with doctrine, less with facts, as such, than with the interpretation of facts...”<sup>84</sup> Yet, that was hardly a concern for the European thinkers captured by the wisdom of the Chinese Sage. In inspiring figures such as Pierre Régis and Simon Foucher, who reiterated and reinforced the Christianized reading of Confucianism, it seemed that *CSP* had contributed the right momentum to the *fin de siècle* push and pull between religion and reason. “Thus then,” observes Hazard, “were these soldiers of Christ armed with weapons calculated to serve them in good stead in the battle lay before them.”<sup>85</sup>

But Couplet and his colleagues were not the only group to recognize and exploit the interpretive potential of an imported philosophy. By giving Europeans access to Chinese thoughts and culture through translation, the Jesuits had unwittingly placed ammunition in their opponents’ hands. Towards the end of the seventeenth century, opponents to the old religious order were growing in both number and formidability when they encountered Confucianism. Known as the freethinkers (also referred to as libertines or rationalists), these intellectuals were not united by any specific set of doctrines beyond their shared desire to rebel against religious orthodoxy, thus making them a provocative and dangerous presence to the Jesuits.<sup>86</sup> Often considered as the

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<sup>84</sup> Paul Hazard, *The Crisis of the European Mind, 1680-1715*, trans. J. Lewis May, (New York: New York Review Books, 2013), 22.

<sup>85</sup> Hazard, 22.

<sup>86</sup> Hazard, 121.

predecessors to the eighteenth-century *philosophes*, the freethinker's engagement with Confucianism in advancing their ideological agenda paved way for its popularity during the High Enlightenment (circa 1730-1780), in which the image of China often took the center-stage philosophical discourses rather than remaining as a niche interest or an ephemeral cultural trend. So, with the approach of a new century, the Christianized reading of Confucianism would gradually lose its influence as the philosophy became abundantly cited in radical Enlightenment discourse.<sup>87</sup>

Though the “Crisis of European Conscience” was a deeply influential idea, scholars no longer see Hazard's designation of the late-seventeenth century as a period of pivotal transition from religious superstition to enlightened and rational debates to be adequate.<sup>88</sup> Damien Tricoire, for instance, argues that the late seventeenth-century religious disputes within the Catholic Church “were a decisive factor in inventing the *philosophe's* persona” in the eighteenth century.<sup>89</sup> This positions the Jesuit missionaries and the theologians as equally legitimate participants of early Enlightenment conversation as the freethinkers, rather than putting them into an obsolete ideological camp bound to be replaced by the Age of Reason. Consequently, it is imperative to see *CSP* and its Christianized reading of Confucianism as a foundation and a precedent for the secularized interpretations of China. So, under this continued process of interpretation and appropriation from the missionaries to the freethinkers and finally to the *philosophes*, Confucianism departed further from its cultural nuances until it flattened into a paradigmatic image

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<sup>87</sup> Jonathan Israel, “The Battle over Confucius and Classical Chinese Philosophy in European Early Enlightenment Thought (1670—1730),” *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* 8, no. 2 (2013), 188. While Israel stands as an authoritative and pioneering voice on the idea of “Radical Enlightenment,” his uncompromising stance and susceptibility for overstatement created controversy around his scholarship. See, for example Antoine Lilti, “Comment écrit-on l'histoire intellectuelle des Lumières ? Spinozisme, radicalisme et philosophie,” *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, 64, no. 1, (2009), 171-206; Harvey Chisick, review of *Democratic Enlightenment: Philosophy, Revolution, and Human Rights 1750-1790* by Jonathan Israel, *H-France Forum*, 9, no.4 (2013).

<sup>88</sup> Lilti, 15; Gopnik, 22.

<sup>89</sup> Tricoire, 454.

synonymous with wisdom, atheism, and civilization, neatly packaged for whenever there rises a rhetorical need to invoke it.

The dominant twentieth-century historiography pronounced that, while China was prominently featured in Enlightenment conversations, its integration was superficial since intellectuals mostly used it to proclaim ideas that were already abundant in Europe. In his foundational study on the encounter between China and the French Enlightenment published in 1963, Basil Guy pronounces the verdict that, “while flattering itself that it was international or cosmopolitan by the adoption of Chinese airs just as it adopted Persian, Indian, or even English ones, the eighteenth century still remained French at heart.”<sup>90</sup> Evidently, the French Enlightenment could not be anything else but “French at heart,” but its reception of various foreign cultures merits a more nuanced examination. Since Guy’s time, there have been notable attempts to challenge this insistence on the failures of the Enlightenment.<sup>91</sup> Jürgen Osterhammel brings up the “model of disillusioned humanism” to reconcile Enlightenment legacy with the inevitability of Eurocentrism. The model maintains that “every culture contains a reservoir of meaning that, given sufficient attention and interpretive effort, could be accessed even by outsiders.”<sup>92</sup> In other words, despite the inadequacy of Enlightenment cosmopolitanism, it was still possible that Europe became more open to and aware of other cultural realities during that time. Antoine Lilti proposes that the Enlightenment’s heritage has taken on a significance far beyond the beliefs and failures of the philosophers who came to represent it. Thus, Lilti argues, there is a need for us to “reclaim the heritage of Enlightenment” and to reevaluate who, other than European thinkers, has played a part

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<sup>90</sup> Guy, 431.

<sup>91</sup> Jacobsen, 652-658; for a salient work that reevaluates the West’s encounter with, and appropriation of, the East beyond Saïdian Orientalism, see J. J. Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment*.

<sup>92</sup> Jürgen Osterhammel, *Unfabling the East: The Enlightenment’s Encounter with Asia*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 12-13.



in producing this heritage, if it falls upon us to subvert the Eurocentric narrative of the age.<sup>93</sup> This study on the reception of Confucianism in eighteenth-century France is essentially an attempt at this “reclamation.” Expanding upon Lilti’s statement, I argue that the appropriation of Confucianism by the *philosophes* is crucial to the project of Global Enlightenment for how it implicates an Asian intellectual tradition as a part of its heritage.

This chapter, indebted as it is to Guy’s comprehensive research on the subject, ultimately seeks to reevaluate and nuance his claim regarding Enlightenment France’s engagement with Confucianism by building upon recent scholarship that treat the Enlightenment as a part of global history. I contend that it is no longer productive to indiscriminately treat the myriad forms of French interest in China—cultural, intellectual, and anthropological—as either extensions of “chinoiserie” or proto-orientalist misrepresentations simply due to the poorly-disguised Eurocentrism that pervaded Enlightenment language. If *CSP*’s Christianized reading of Confucian texts converted them into a Western intellectual lexicon to allow them to speak to the French public, then the popularization of the Chinese example in High Enlightenment attested to the effectiveness of this ideological “repackaging.” By examining the works of four French thinkers—François Bernier, Pierre Bayle, Voltaire, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau—I will roughly outline the trajectory of Confucianism’s integration into Enlightenment’s armory against religious orthodoxy. Parallel to that is the trajectory of Confucianism’s increasing removal from its cultural reality which, ironically, popularized it beyond the circle of sinologists and contributed momentum to some of the most heated debates of the epoch on matters such as universalism, religious tolerance, and the progress of civilizations.

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<sup>93</sup> Lilti, 30.

## 2.1 François Bernier's "Introduction": Towards a Secular Interpretation

June 7<sup>th</sup>, 1688, six months after Pierre Régis proclaimed Confucius' allegiance to Christianity, another *CSP*-inspired *compte rendu*, "Introduction à la lecture de Confucius," appeared in *Le Journal des Sçavants*. Its author was the French physician and travelogue-writer, François Bernier (1620 - 1688), known to history as an ethnographer of the Mongol Empire and one of the pioneers of modern race theory.<sup>94</sup> "Le public est fort obligé au R.P. Couplet jésuite, qui nous l'a apporté de la Chine," wrote Bernier at the end of his piece in referring to the Confucian canons translated in *CSP*.<sup>95</sup> Unlike Régis, Bernier's did not focus on reviewing the content of these classics, nor was he preoccupied with assessing the religious integrity of the philosophy. Instead, Bernier's "Introduction" broadly surveyed three aspects of Chinese society which he believed were shaped by Confucian ideology: its laws and government, the virtue of filial piety, and the example of the Prince. In writing about each of these subjects, Bernier professed an unabashed admiration for this distant land which appeared before him as a philosophical, eternal, and utopic Empire. If Régis' review demonstrated the effect that Confucianism could have on the imagination of a religious-minded European reader, then Bernier's "Introduction" heralded the passion that it would stir up among the thinkers who worshipped the rational and the secular, who would eventually turn the Jesuits' weapon against them in a fight to undermine the Church's domination over European thoughts.

Bernier commenced his "Introduction" by citing China's chronology that stretched over four millennia and traced the origin of its civilization to the five legendary Sage Kings hailed by

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<sup>94</sup> For Bernier's monograph on race theory, see: Francois Bernier, "Nouvelle division de la terre par les différentes espèces ou races qui l'habitent," *Journal des sçavants*, (avril, 1684); on Bernier and travel-writing, see: Nicholas Dew, "The Double Eclipse: François Bernier's Geography of Knowledge," in *Orientalism in Louis XIV's France*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 132-167.

<sup>95</sup> François Bernier, "Introduction à la lecture de Confucius," *Journal des sçavants*, (7 juin, 1688) 26. Translation: "the public is much obliged to R.P. Couplet, who brought them to us from China."

Confucianism as the epitome of virtue. Bernier claimed that laws and customs laid down by the Sage Kings were so perfect that adhering to their ways promised peace and prosperity within the Empire, while straying from them led to wars and misfortunes. The essence of the Sage Kings' wisdom, Bernier proposed, was that "la vertue est le fondement du bon gouvernement, comme étant impossible qu'un État soit bien gouverné à moins que le Prince & les sujets ne soient véritablement & solidement vertueux."<sup>96</sup> And the most genius and exemplary way in which the Chinese built a virtuous citizenry was through the cultivation of filial piety. This is a reverberation of the ideas that Couplet extracted from *Daxue* and expanded upon in prefacing *CSP*. Recall that an important part of the Jesuit's political agenda was to pit Confucianism against the Reason of State in emphasizing that a ruler must be equally virtuous in his actions and intentions to promote peace and order. The practice of filial piety, according to Couplet, ensured that the subjects and the ruler cultivate a relationship modeled after that of obedient children and a benevolent parent.

There was, however, a subtle rupture between Couplet and Bernier in how they perceived filial piety's connection with the idea of Heaven in Confucianism. Whereas Couplet saw filial piety, in both the child-parent and subject-ruler contexts, as a mirroring of the ultimate reverence towards a personal God that proved the religious consciousness of Confucianism, Bernier saw that: "... les Loix doivent d'autant plus insister sur cette piété paternelle, qu'elle est fondée dans la nature, dans la justice, dans la raison, & par conséquent dans la volonté du Ciel qui nous a donné la raison."<sup>97</sup> Unlike Couplet, Bernier did not place a divine entity at the center of Confucian thoughts as the ultimate source and beneficiary of moral cultivation. Instead, he understood the love between parent and children to be intrinsic to human nature and reason, endowed by a divine

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<sup>96</sup> Bernier, "Introduction," 19. Translation: "Virtue is the foundation of good government, as it is impossible for a state to be well-governed if the Prince and the subjects are not truly virtuous."

<sup>97</sup> Bernier, "Introduction," 19. Translation: "...the Laws should all the more insist on this filial piety, since it is rooted in human nature, in justice, in reason, and consequently in Heaven which endows us with reason."

source that seemed to represent the natural order more than a monotheistic deity. Obeying the tendency to respect one's parents and love one's children is therefore following "le dessin du Ciel," while going against it leads to disgrace and misfortune not as a punishment from God, but as a consequence of unnatural impulses.<sup>98</sup>

Then, Bernier devoted two substantial sections of his "Introduction" to examining the genius of filial piety in creating a stable and virtuous government. In rationalizing the political utility of filial piety, Bernier reflected: "une famille nourrie & élevée dans cet esprit d'amour, d'obéissance & soumission à l'égard des pères & des mères... serait fort dispose à se soumettre doucement & sans contrainte aux Loix & aux Magistrats, & conséquemment à obéir volontiers aux Ordres du Prince..."<sup>99</sup> This shows that the submission to laws and the state replaced the reverence for God as the primary objective of cultivating filial piety. Bernier, believing that the modeling of the family unit after the state was established since the days of the ancient Sage King, concluded that China under Confucianism had attained a state of perfection in the ethics and philosophy of governance since its conception. Thus, as a culmination to his utopic imagining of Confucian China, Bernier effused: "Car il n'en est point de ceci comme de la République de Platon qui n'a jamais été qu'en idée. Il est constant que ce grand Empire de la Chine a été plus de quatre mille ans très bien gouverné sur ces principes qui peut-être ne vous paraîtront d'abord mériter d'être mis entre les fondamentaux."<sup>100</sup> In short, China was the Platonic ideal manifested. Never

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<sup>98</sup> Bernier, "Introduction," 20. Translation: "Heaven's design"

<sup>99</sup> Bernier, "Introduction," 22. Translation: "...a family nourished and raised in this spirit of love, obedience, and submission towards the parents... would also be inclined to willingly submit to the Laws and the Magistrates, and thus happily obey of the Order of the Prince."

<sup>100</sup> Bernier, "Introduction," 24. Translation: "It is nothing like Plato's Republic, which was never more than an ideal. It is constant that this Great Empire of China has been well-governed for more than four thousand years on these principles which may not appear to you at first as deserving a place among the fundamentals." In fact, Bernier was not the only one or the first one to explicitly compare China with Plato's Republic. Dutch thinker Issac Vossius (1618-1698) made a similar point in his *Variarum observationum liber* (1685), whose work was later reviewed by Pierre Bayle in his periodical; see Israel, *Enlightenment Contested*, 640-1.

mind that Confucianism did not encompass the entirety of Chinese intellectual tradition, nor was it a timeless set of doctrines passed down and repeated by the descendants as truisms, as demonstrated by the rich commentarial traditions among Confucian scholars that ceaselessly reinterpreted the classical texts.

Bernier's writing demonstrates the use of what Basil Guy terms as "the Chinese example" in developing certain intellectual agenda for seventeenth-century Europe. His account of Confucian political morality was rife with hyperbolic language and litanies of praises for the unparalleled wisdom, piety, and virtue of the Chinese civilization.<sup>101</sup> The resulting product was a China that was more a paradigm than a place, which supposedly possessed and thrived upon the many attributes that Bernier hoped to see realized in France; for instance, a Prince who functions as moral example for the people, the education of a virtuous citizenship since childhood, and a mutually loving and beneficent relationship between the ruler and the subjects.<sup>102</sup> A key advantage of leveraging the Chinese example, specifically through the focus on filial piety as a uniquely Chinese virtue, was that it allowed Bernier to break away from Western intellectual traditions. He did not have to turn towards Judeo-Christian scholars or Greco-Roman heritage for an answer to the sociopolitical problems he perceived in Europe.<sup>103</sup> This expansion of intellectual horizon was infinitely exciting for Bernier, as he mused to his reader: "Cette grande diversité qui est entre eux & nous dans la manière de regarder les choses... excitera sans doute votre curiosité les examiner avec attention. Que sait-on si nous ne nous tromperions point dans le jugement que nous en faisons, & s'ils n'auraient point mieux rencontré que nous ?"<sup>104</sup> Although Bernier's China was largely a

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<sup>101</sup> Bernier, "Introduction," 25.

<sup>102</sup> Guy, 136.

<sup>103</sup> Sylvie Taussig, "Introduction occidentale des classiques confucéens au XVIIe siècle," in *Confucius ou la science des princes*, ed. Sylvie Taussig and Thierry Meynard (Paris: Éditions du Félin, 2015), 90.

<sup>104</sup> Bernier, "Introduction," 14. Translation: "This great disparity between us and them in the way of looking at things... will undoubtedly excite your interest for a close examination. How do we know if we are not deceived in our judgement, and they are not more worldly than us?"

figment of his imagination, there seemed to be a genuine desire to learn from foreign intellectual thoughts and apply them to Europe's needs, as well as a questioning of the assumed superiority of Western cultural heritage.

Bernier's focus on the sociopolitical implications of Confucianism marked his "Introduction" as a notable attempt to depart from the Jesuit-monopolized representation of China. This secularizing the Chinese example reflected more broadly the approach of a critical stage of transition for France. Additionally, Bernier's moderate and compromising tone demonstrated his attempt to establish some common ground between the religionnaires and the freethinkers, using Confucianism as a channel to engage the public in Enlightenment-style dialogue. In the last section of his "Introduction," he acknowledged Régis' review of *CSP* and commended the theologian's discerning take on the religious integrity of Confucianism. Specifically, Bernier brought up the passage from *Lunyu* that Régis cited as an emblematic example for the connection between *Ren* and Christian piety, and remarked: "Ce passage est admirable, & M. Régis a bien raison de dire qu'au motif près aucun chrétien n'a jamais mieux parlé de la véritable charité qui regarde généralement tous les hommes."<sup>105</sup> Bernier appeared to find a Christian reading of Confucianism to be valuable, particularly in how it affirmed the universality of virtues such as charity among humanity. Yet, his next sentence introduced a pivotal shift from Régis that suggested the insufficiency of a theological treatment of Confucian ideals. "Mais je souhaiterais qu'il eût ajouté cet autre petit passage du même philosophe," Bernier proposed before quoting the following:

Je me souviens avec plaisir de ce soldat du royaume de Lu, qui avait perdu son bouclier, & qui après l'avoir bien cherché sans le trouver, dit enfin pour se consoler:

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<sup>105</sup> Bernier, "Introduction," 25. Translation: "This passage is admirable, and M. Régis is certainly right to say that almost no Christian has said better about the true charity that concerns all of humanity."

Un homme de Lu l'avait perdu ; un homme de Lu l'aura trouvé. Il aurait encore pu mieux dire: “un homme l'aura trouvé.”<sup>106</sup>

This passage, despite a few variations in details, corresponds to an anecdote dating from the Spring and Autumn Period (770 BC – 256 BC) in China. It was later adapted by Confucian scholars as a part of the text, *Kongzi Jiayu* (孔子家语, *Family Sayings of Confucius*), which is a collection of aphorisms that complement the study of *Lunyu*.<sup>107</sup>

If Régis' choice of passage captured the universality of Christianity, then Bernier's addition elevated Confucianism into a proof for the universality of *humanity*, not just religious ideals, that transcends national boundaries. Régis' conclusion that “tant il est vrai que Dieu a répandu dans l'esprit même des Infidèles des lumières qui les conduisent à des vertus” reinforced the trope of the “virtuous pagans,” which alienated Confucian China while commending it.<sup>108</sup> Bernier, on the other hand, seems to want to altogether discard the distinction between pagans and Christians. Such a sentiment overshadows Bernier's attachment to a Christianized reading of *CSP* and precluded the emergence of Enlightenment universalism that would become an important yet increasingly questioned aspect of Western intellectual heritage. Thus, Bernier's “Introduction” signifies a growing awareness of the secular potential of Confucianism. It reveals the malleability of the Chinese example under European appropriation, as it evolves from its initial introduction to France as a defense of Christian morality and edges towards the other end of the spectrum as a means to criticize the failings of the religious institution and its oppressive influence. The next figure explored in this chapter, Pierre Bayle (1647-1706), would complete the secularization, and

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<sup>106</sup> Bernier, “Introduction,” 25. Translation: “I remember with pleasure this soldier from the kingdom of Lu who lost his shield, and having searched without finding it, finally consoled himself in saying: a man from Lu lost it, a man from Lu shall find it. It would be even better for him to say: ‘a man shall find it.’”

<sup>107</sup> Chinese Text: 楚恭王出游，亡乌嗥之弓，左右请求之。王曰：“止。楚王失弓，楚人得之，又何求之？”孔子闻之：“惜乎其不大也！不曰：人遗弓、人得之而已，何必楚也！”

<sup>108</sup> Régis, 104; Taussig, 21. Translation: “God's light touches even the Infidels, and guides them towards virtue.”

thus the weaponization, of the Chinese example while setting the stage for the intellectual giants of the French Enlightenment to engage Confucian ideals in expressing the anxieties and aspirations of their epoch.

## 2.2 Pierre Bayle's Atheist Interpretation of Confucianism

A Huguenot who fled to Netherlands after Louis XIV's revocation of the Edicts of Nantes, Pierre Bayle was perhaps the most emblematic freethinkers and one of the fiercest critics of Catholic orthodoxy.<sup>109</sup> Bayle founded the periodical *Nouvelles de la Republique de Lettre* in 1684, where he reviewed and engaged with the writings of his contemporaries while broadcasting ideas too heterodox to appear in *Journal des Sçavants*—a publication that was fundamentally French and therefore conservative despite its prestige and its mission of encouraging intellectual explorations.<sup>110</sup> François Bernier was among the thinkers reviewed by *Nouvelles*. The positive publicity that he enjoyed from Bayle's good words established a foundation of friendship between the two, as Bernier wrote in a letter to Bayle: "tout le monde m'en demande depuis ce que vous en avez dit dans les *Nouvelles* de decembre... mais ils ne sçavent pas ce que je leur diray pour sauver vostre honneur à mon egard, que vous estes du moins aussi bon amy que bon juge."<sup>111</sup>

While the two may not be equally militant in their push for rationalism over orthodoxy, Bernier and Bayle evidently shared similar opinions and interests. Among them was a fascination for China and its philosophy. In April 1686, Bernier mentioned in a letter to Bayle about Couplet's

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<sup>109</sup> For Bayle's contribution to radical Enlightenment thoughts, especially atheism and scepticism, see: Hazard, 99-115; Robert C Bartlett, "On the Politics of Faith and Reason: The Project of Enlightenment in Pierre Bayle and Montesquieu," *The Journal of Politics* 63, no. 1 (2001): 1-28; Richard H Popkin, *History of Scepticism: From Savonarola to Bayle*, (Cary: Oxford University Press, 2003), 435-463; Jonathan Israel, *Radical enlightenment: philosophy and the making of modernity, 1650-1750*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 321-341.

<sup>110</sup> Hazard, 75.

<sup>111</sup> François Bernier à Pierre Bayle, 28 février 1686. *Correspondance de Pierre Bayle*. Translation: "Everyone has been asking for my work since what you said about it in *Nouvelles* in December...but they don't know what I would say to them to save your honor, that you are as much a good friend as a good judge."



recent return from Rome. Expressing hope for what this visit might bring to the community of savants, Bernier wrote: “Nous avons icy depuis 15 jours le R[everend] Père Couplet revenu de Rome... nous esperons qu’ils nous donneront toutes les oeuvres de Confusius traduites, il y auroit grand plaisir de voir ce que ces Messieurs de l’autre monde pensoient de leur costé sur la morale à peu pres au mesme temps que Socrate y pensoit du sien.”<sup>112</sup> Bernier would not be disappointed, for less than a year later *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* appeared in Paris. Although Bayle’s replies were lost, it is reasonable to assume that he was also eager to hear directly from the renowned Chinese sage rather than through secondary reports such as travelogues and ethnographies, and therefore most likely read *CSP* upon its publication. Though, as the prior chapter established, the Confucius speaking to Bernier and Bayle was little more than a construction of the Jesuits and the Chinese commentators they referenced.

As the following section will show, the revision of the Chinese example under Pierre Bayle was as dramatic as it was ironic. A victim of King Louis’ religious prosecution, the very act that Couplet used to crown the monarch as a paragon of Confucian virtues, Bayle turned *CSP*’s religious agenda completely on its head, and his representation of China would go on to influence the next generation of critics against orthodoxy. Rather than presenting Confucius as a natural theologian that validated religion and reason, Bayle deemed him to be blind “in regards to the true God and his Laws;”<sup>113</sup> rather than seeing Confucian China as a reflection of the universality of Christian ideals and their integral role in maintaining a virtuous society, Bayle argued that it was

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<sup>112</sup> François Bernier à Pierre Bayle, 11 avril 1686. *Correspondance de Pierre Bayle*. Translation: “It has been 15 days since R.P. Couplet returned from Rome...we hope that they will give us all the translated works of Confucius, it will be a great pleasure to see what these Gentlemen from the other world were thinking about moral on their end around the same time that Socrates were thinking about his.”

<sup>113</sup> Pierre Bayle, *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique*, Tome 3. *Cinquième edition*. ([Amsterdam]: P. Brunel, 1740), 296.

thoroughly atheist and the living proof that not only can a society function without religion, but it can in fact be virtuous and prosperous.

Bayle had his eyes set on the heterodox potential of China several years before the appearance of *CSP*. His view on China was heavily influenced by the French intellectual and a leading Sceptic, La Mothe le Vayer (1588 - 1672), who argued for China's atheism in his work *La vertu des payens* (1642) and was seen as a chief precursor to Enlightenment Sinophilia and cosmopolitanism.<sup>114</sup> A fundamental disagreement between Bayle and a Christianized reading of Confucianism was the relationship between reason and religion. The Jesuits, attempting to reconcile Confucius' paganism with the theological integrity of his philosophy, framed him as a natural theologian who discovered and promoted Christian principles "by the light of nature and reason alone."<sup>115</sup> Implicit in this argument was the idea that reason and religion complement one another. It was only natural that a virtuous, albeit pagan, philosopher such as Confucius would come upon Christian ideals. After all, they were inherent truths that transcend time and cultural divides. Therefore, the Christian interpreters never really perceived reason as the enemy of faith, though it was inconceivable that reason can stand alone without the guidance of faith. Pierre Bayle, on the other hand, seemed to consider reason and religion, or at least religious orthodoxy, as the antitheses of each other.<sup>116</sup> As he remarked sardonically in *Réponse aux questions d'un provincial*:

I fancy I gathered from some of you that, as regards the Trinity and some other articles of the Christian faith, reason must bow to the word of God, but that, as regards the Fall of Adam and its consequences, the Scriptures must defer to the judgment of the philosophers. I should be sorry for you if you really took this view and believed you could differentiate to that extend.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Rowbotham, "le Vayer's *Virtue des Payens*"; Guy, 119.

<sup>115</sup> Meynard, *CSP*, 85.

<sup>116</sup> Hazard, 110.

<sup>117</sup> Bayle, *Réponse aux questions d'un provincial*, vol. III, 1706, ch. CXXVIII; Cited from Hazard, 110.

In other words, certain intellectuals' fancy that they could balance their loyalty between religion and logic would sooner or later confound them with paradoxes. Bayle was not championing an atheist society, as he himself was a Protestant. Yet, he was calling for a deep introspection and a questioning of the most fundamental social principles among his contemporaries—Catholics, deists, and philosophers alike. For him, religious intolerance and violence was a prime example of the absurdity allowed to happen in a society supposedly founded upon both reason and faith, and it served as the catalyst for his advocacy of skepticism and fueled some of his most influential works, such as *Pensées diverses sur la Comète* (1682) and *Dictionnaire historique et philosophique* (1696).<sup>118</sup> This is where the presentation of China as an atheist society lends a powerful hand to Bayle's skeptic rhetoric.

In his writings, Bayle laid down the atheist nature of Confucianism as the very source of its virtue. "Vous avez vu ci-dessus que la physique des philosophes chinois est un système d'athéisme," he proclaimed before quoting from a Jesuit writer's praise of China, "*à l'égard de la morale ils paraissent beaucoup plus raisonnable... la fin que le sage (i.e. Confucius) se propose est uniquement le bien public.*"<sup>119</sup> Confucian atheism, Bayle expounded, was not a primitive "negative atheism" practiced by certain civilizations he deemed as "backward," but a highly sophisticated "positive atheism" derived through natural reason.<sup>120</sup> Notably, Bayle advocated that the Confucian atheism approached the ideas of Spinoza (1632-1677), the notorious Dutch philosopher regarded as the "prince of atheism" and one of the most abundantly cited authors in

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<sup>118</sup> Simon Kow, "Enlightenment Universalism? Bayle and Montesquieu on China," *The European Legacy, Toward New Paradigms* 19, no. 3 (2014), 350.

<sup>119</sup> Pierre Bayle, *Œuvres diverses de M. Pierre Bayle, Tome 3*, (n.p.: La Haye, 1737), 397. Translation: "You can see here that the Chinese philosophers uphold a system of atheism...*on the matter of morals they appear much more reasonable...the objective promoted by the sage (i.e. Confucius) was solely the public good.*"

<sup>120</sup> Israel, "The Battle over Confucius," 188.

the radical Enlightenment discourse.<sup>121</sup> Provided with this positive atheist model, Bayle repeatedly leveraged Confucian China as the embodiment of reason to underline the failings of Christian Europe. In his *Commentaire Philosophique*, for instance, Bayle imagined how the Confucian scholar-officials would react to the competing Christian sects coming into their nation to win converts. “*Messieurs les convertisseurs Chrétiens...qui venez de si loin pour nous apprendre, que vous n’êtes pas d’accord entre vous,*” the scholar-officials would thus address the missionaries, before announcing that they would also like to hear from the sects who were not represented before them before making a sound and informed judgement; but in the meantime, “*vous ne gagnerez aucun Chinois, pourvue que vous ne vous serviez que de la raison...*”<sup>122</sup>

In this scenario, the scholar-officials’ impartiality and neutrality juxtaposed with the petty squabbles among Christian sects. There was also the implication that the Confucian literati’s dissociation of moral principles from religious zeal promoted rational discourse and the freedom of expression under the Chinese government, which aligned with Bayle’s vision of republican ideal.<sup>123</sup> In short, Bayle believed that Confucianism provided China a set of moral codes based on reason alone; and, unlike the critics of atheisms surmised, a society founded purely on reason had not only remained functional for thousands of years, but it also fostered greater peace and tolerance by avoiding the imposition of a universal religious conscience. Again, one perceives an image of China that conveniently functioned as the physical manifestation of an ideal, or more accurately, a thought experiment, proposed by a French thinker looking to enact some form of social reconstitution within his society. This removed kingdom, with a philosophy that appeared rational

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<sup>121</sup> Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 161; Israel, *Enlightenment Contested*, 644; Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, IV, 271.

<sup>122</sup> Pierre Bayle, *Commentaire philosophique sur ces paroles de Jesus-Christ Contrain les d’entre*. (Cantebury: Chez Thomas Litwel, 1686). Translation: “Gentlemen Christian Converters...who come so far to inform us that you have not agreed among yourselves... you can never win over one Chinese, unless you employ no other means than Reason...”

<sup>123</sup> Simon Kow, *China in Early Enlightenment Political Thought*, (New York: Routledge, 2017), 71-72.

and moral, yet ambiguous and inaccessible enough to invite appropriation, served as solid proof that heterodox speculations can become reality.<sup>124</sup>

Bayle's objective in raising Confucian China as a paradigmatic atheist state was to undermine the role of religion in dictating moral conscience, and thus, true to the epoch's freethinking spirit, challenge his contemporaries to adopt a similar attitude of Skepticism.<sup>125</sup> Basil Guy has rightly pointed out the exploitative nature of Bayle's treatment of the Chinese example:

Relativism, the separation of morality and religion, negating the validity of miracles—all this, and more, Bayle drew from innumerable documents printed before him, finding in China the perfect proof of his argument... We must in all fairness note that especially where China was concerned, the facts Bayle used in forging his experimental free-thinking were precisely those facts that were already familiar and to the great liking of the general public, especially his observations on Chinese customs. The great flowering of exotic literature in the seventeenth century... is ample proof of public interest in these matters.<sup>126</sup>

There is no lack of similar theses by contemporary historians commenting on early modern Europe's distorting representations of Asia. The consensus was that most Sinophiles of Bayle's time were less interested in understanding the reality of China than what China could do for them. While Guy and other scholars have convincingly undermined the façade of cosmopolitanism the European savants proclaimed for themselves, it may not be sufficient as the only way to think about Enlightenment's role in the context of global history. I argue that it is time to look beyond the fact of ideological appropriation itself, and instead focus on how such acts of appropriation were a necessarily part of importing and repurposing foreign ideologies into a part of the Enlightenment conversation as a more productive way of examining the role of non-European cultures during the time.

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<sup>124</sup> Walter W. Davis, "China, the Confucian Ideal, and the European Age of Enlightenment," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 44, no. 4 (1983), 534.

<sup>125</sup> Kow, "Enlightenment Universalism?" 351.

<sup>126</sup> Guy, 127.

Notably, Bayle's commentary on Chinese religious tolerance directly confronted the general assumption of European moral and cultural superiority during the seventeenth century. Raising the Chinese example in juxtaposition to the hypocrisy and foolishness of Christian factionalism, Bayle wrote: "Je ne sais pas pourquoi les Chrétiens font si peu de réflexions sur l'esprit de tolerance qui règne dans ces rois païens que nous traitons hautement de barbares et de féroces."<sup>127</sup> François Bernier had professed a similar sentiment in his "Introduction," albeit in a much more amicable and moderate manner, in suggesting "que sait-on si nous ne nous tromperions point dans le jugement que nous en faisons, & s'ils [les Chinois] n'auraient point mieux rencontré que nous ?"<sup>128</sup> As one can see, despite the rhetorical use of China in their writings, Bayle and Bernier seemed to seriously weigh the value in reading Chinese sources and learn about how they might benefit and inform the European public. Inevitably, the freethinkers' attempts to define Confucianism with terminologies such as "rationalism," "atheism," or "natural theology" were anachronistic and misleading, rooted as they are in the Western intellectual framework. Yet, to bridge the epistemological gap between China and the West, and therefore to situate and effect Confucianism as a part of Enlightenment discourse, requires a level of appropriation that detaches it from its application in seventeenth-century China and endows it with relevance in a new context.

Simon Kow raises an insightful question in his study on Bayle and China: "To what extent can particular interpretations of China by Enlightenment thinkers be seen as attempts to reconcile moral universalism and cultural diversity...even if they fall short of contemporary anti-colonial and multicultural attitudes?"<sup>129</sup> Kow concludes that, while Bayle did not actually consider atheism

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<sup>127</sup> Cited from Guy, 124; Translation: "Christians have so little reflected on the spirit of tolerance which reigns in the Pagan Kings, whom we haughtily treat as barbarians and savages" (taken from Kow, *China in Early Enlightenment Political Thought*, 55).

<sup>128</sup> Bernier, "Introduction," 14. Translation: "How do we know if we are not deceived in our judgement, and they are not more worldly than us?"

<sup>129</sup> Kow, "Enlightenment Universalism?" 348.

to be morally superior to having a religious conscience, he used Confucian China to defend the moral integrity of atheism, and to argue that a tolerant atheist society is preferable to the religious fanaticism that led to injustices such as the revocation of the Edicts of Nantes.<sup>130</sup> Again, there was a tangible effort to reflect on and criticize the insufficiency of European institutions and to treat a foreign social model as a legitimate and intellectually sound alternative. Although Bayle was not concerned with representing Confucian China as authentically as possible—an impossible feat to start with due to the spatial and linguistic inaccessibility of the source materials—his status as an emblematic figure in this “Crisis of Conscience” and his heterodoxy’s inflammatory effects in the following century allowed Bayle’s version of China to become a formidable player in Europe’s intellectual arena.

Thanks to the labor of Pierre Bayle and his Skeptic agenda, the secularization of the Chinese example becomes complete. The fact that thinkers as diametrically opposed as Couplet and Bayle both appropriated Confucianism to vie for influence over public sentiment attests to not only the interpretive potential of the philosophy, but also its full integration as a part of the conversations building up to a transformative era of European history. Confucianism’s momentum will continue and multiply into the eighteenth century, as monumental figures such as Voltaire and Rousseau entered the picture and picked up where the Jesuits and the freethinkers left off.

### **2.3 Voltaire and Rousseau: China as a Vehicle of Discourse in the High Enlightenment**

Pierre Bayle’s prolific attacks on religious orthodoxy has been dubbed as the “Arsenal of Enlightenment” for how eighteenth-century French thinkers leveraged them to consummate the demise of the *ancien régime*.<sup>131</sup> Naturally, China became a part of Bayle’s intellectual heritage to

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<sup>130</sup> Kow, “Enlightenment Universalism?” 351.

<sup>131</sup> Popkin, 296.

the philosophes. Voltaire, a name that has become synonymous with the French Enlightenment, also happened to be the most vocal and influential Sinophile of his age.<sup>132</sup> The fact that Confucius' portrait hung on the library at Voltaire's Ferney Château, where he lived from 1761 until his death in 1778, attested to the extent of his idolization of the Chinese Sage.<sup>133</sup> The Chinese example was also featured in some of Voltaire's most emblematic works, such as *Dictionnaire philosophique* (1752) and *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations* (1756). Yet, the reaction towards this foreign ideology was not one of unanimous admiration in France. Jean-Jacque Rousseau, the other intellectual giant of the age and Voltaire's ideological opponent on many fronts, was a prominent critic of Confucian China for how it challenged his ideal of the "Noble Savage."

This section follows Europe's transition away from the "Crisis of Conscience" to fully enter the High Enlightenment, and then examines how Confucianism's ideological implication was still potent enough to inspire both admiration and condemnation among the champions of reason. I will use the writings of Voltaire and Rousseau, the two most illustrious philosophes of the age whose contrasting ideological stance manifested in their reception of Confucianism, to demonstrate the way in which the interpretation of Confucian ideals became a vehicle of intellectual discourse that allow French thinkers to engage in debates and push forward their personal ideological agenda. This signifies the full departure of Confucianism from its place of origin, shedding the layers of cultural nuance it had accumulated over the centuries before adopting the vocabulary of the Enlightenment, thus contributing to the global origin of the movement in how it acted as a stimulus for critical conversations to take place. It is impossible to both adequately

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<sup>132</sup> On Voltaire and China, see: Guy 214-284; Arnold H. Rowbotham, "Voltaire, Sinophile," *PMLA* 47, no. 4 (1932): 1050-65; Rowbotham, "The Impact of Confucianism," 229-232; Davis, 541-545; David Morgan, "Sources of Enlightenment: The Idealizing of China in Jesuits' *Lettres Edifiantes* and Voltaire's 'Siècle de Louis XIV,' *Romance Notes*, 37, no. 3 (1997), 263-272; Urs App, *The Birth of Orientalism*, (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2010), 15-76; Van Kley, 372-4, 382-5; Clarke, 44-47; Lilti, 24-5.

<sup>133</sup> Rowbotham, "Voltaire, Sinophile," 1057.



and concisely capture Voltaire's long record of Sinophilia and the countering force of Sinophobia in the eighteenth century. As a result, I will focus on Rousseau's essay, *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* (1750) and Voltaire's play, *L'Orphelin de la Chine* (1755) to examine the dialogic nature of these two works concerning the ideological implications that Confucianism raised for Enlightenment France.

A celebrated *philosophe* whose fame during his lifetime nearly matched his posthumous legacy, Voltaire was a versatile writer with a corpus as diverse as his interests. He had produced biting satires as social critiques, historical chronicles, popular plays, and rich philosophical treatises. The foremost and most consistent agenda that Voltaire championed was the vehement criticism of Christianity, especially the Catholic Church, for how it bred intolerance and superstition in Europe, a phenomenon he referred to as *l'Infâme* (The Infamous). His interest in China, frivolous and incidental in its nature, proved to be a valuable weapon in his crusade against *l'Infâme*.<sup>134</sup> Voltaire's acquaintance with Confucianism and his affinity for it trace back to his education at the Jesuit school of Louis-le-Grand, where he was introduced from a young age to a number of Jesuits' sinological literature such as *Lettres édifiantes et curieuses de la Chine* and *Description de l'empire de la Chine* by Father Jean-Baptiste Du Halde. Basil Guy also notes that Voltaire "appears to have read the translations from the Chinese classics prepared by a little group of Jesuits at Hangchow (Hangzhou) under Father Intoretta in the previous century."<sup>135</sup> Such an uncertainty suggests that Voltaire's future Sinophilia was less a culmination of systematic scholarly studies on Confucian texts—as was the case of translators such as Couplet, Foucher, and

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<sup>134</sup> See Roger Pearson, *Voltaire Almighty: A Life in Pursuit of Freedom*, (New York: Bloomsbury, 2005) for a comprehensive work on Voltaire's life and intellectual pursuits.

<sup>135</sup> Guy, 217. The translation that Basil Guy is referring to is likely *Sapientia Sinica (Chinese Wisdom)* published in 1662 or *Sinarum Scientia Political-Moralis (Political-Moral Learning of the Chinese)* published in 1667, both of which involved Prospero Intorcetta (1626-1696) and his group of Jesuits. The two works provided Latin translations of *Lunyu*, *Daxue*, and *Zhongyong*, three of the Four Books in Confucian canon, and served as a predecessor to the conception of CSP two decades later. For more information, see "Historical Background" in Meynard (2011).

Bernier—than a fascination with the image of China embodied by a sage-like figure who held a reservoir of wisdom that Voltaire might draw from according his needs.

Despite not having devoted tangible effort in analyzing Confucian texts, Voltaire was not dissuaded from alluding to the image of the Chinese Sage in his discourse. Specifically, Confucian China played an essential role in Voltaire's preaching of the superiority of deism over religious dogmas and the role of philosophers in political affairs.<sup>136</sup> The paramount status of China in Voltaire's philosophical endeavors was epitomized in *Essai sur les mœurs*, his *magnum opus* and an admirable attempt to tackle a survey of world history, where China had the honor of opening and closing this voluminous treatise.<sup>137</sup> The work opened with the following sentence: "L'empire de la Chine dès lors était plus vaste que celui de Charlemagne ... Son histoire, incontestable dans les choses générales, la seule qui soit fondée sur des observations célestes, remonte, par la chronologie la plus sûre, jusqu'à une éclipse observée deux mille cent cinquante-cinq ans avant notre ère vulgaire."<sup>138</sup> Immediately, the Chinese chronology presented itself as a subject of fixation for Voltaire. Leaving no room for doubt that the four-thousand years of history was accurate, Voltaire set up the Chinese chronology to undermine the Judeo-Christian worldview.<sup>139</sup> This attested to the central role that China assumed in Voltaire's attempt to synthesize world history and to reshape Europe's understanding on subjects such as the origin of human civilization and how to situate itself in context of other nations in the world.

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<sup>136</sup> Rowbotham, "Voltaire, Sinophile," 1053; App, 38.

<sup>137</sup> Guy, 250.

<sup>138</sup> Voltaire, "Chapter 1" in *Essai sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations in Complete Works of Voltaire*. (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation). Translation: "The Empire of China, even in those days, was larger than that of Charlemagne... Its history, which is incontestable, being the only one founded on celestial observations, is traced by the most accurate chronology, so high as an eclipse calculated 2155 years before our vulgar era..." (taken from 1759 English edition).

<sup>139</sup> Rowbotham, "Voltaire, Sinophile," 1053-5.

Subsequent mentions of Confucianism promoted the virtue of running a society based on natural theology, or deism, where tolerance and rational philosophy reigned supreme.<sup>140</sup> In introducing Confucius, Voltaire stressed his lack of divine revelation and how it did not compromise the moral integrity of his teachings.<sup>141</sup> Voltaire also rejected the accusation of atheism that the enemies of Jesuits had laid upon China, criticizing the close-mindedness of his contemporaries: “En imputant l’athéisme au gouvernement de ce vaste empire, nous avons eu la légèreté de lui attribuer l’idolâtrie par une accusation qui se contredit ainsi elle-même. Le grand malentendu sur les rites de la Chine est venu de ce que nous avons jugé de leurs usages par les nôtres: car nous portons au bout du monde les préjugés de notre esprit contentieux.”<sup>142</sup> Similar to Bayle’s invocation of Confucian China, Voltaire used it to call out the self-absorbed ignorance of those confined within the Christian worldview and urged Europe to recognize how it lagged behind in terms of tolerance and inclusivity. In short, if *Essai sur les mœurs* signified a milestone in Europe’s attempt to break out of its cultural and intellectual bubble and contextualize its history in relation to the rest of the world, then Confucian China was an indispensable vehicle in the emergence of Enlightenment universalism.

This great stride towards universalism, paradoxically, still held the interest and superiority of Europe at heart. The following statement by Voltaire best illustrates the magnitude of this Eurocentric ego: “Voilà l’histoire que tout homme sache... Tout nous regarde, tout est fait pour nous...”<sup>143</sup> In other words, Voltaire believed that the trajectory of world history culminated to this

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<sup>140</sup> App, 41.

<sup>141</sup> Voltaire, “Chapitre 2” in *Essai sur les mœurs*.

<sup>142</sup> Voltaire, “Chapitre 2” in *Essai sur les mœurs*. Translation: “In charging the government of this vast empire with atheism, we have been inconsiderate as to accuse them also of idolatry, an accusation which contradicts itself. The great mistake in regard to the Chinese rites proceeds from our judging for their customs by ours: for we carry our prejudices and litigious disposition to the further extremity of the earth” (taken from 1759 English edition).

<sup>143</sup> Voltaire, “Remarques sur l’histoire” in *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire, tome 16*. Éd. Louis Moland, (Paris, Garnier, 1877-1885). Translation: “This is history as everyone knows...All eyes are on us, and everything is done for us...”

precise and fateful moment in the eighteenth century, when Europe was about to define the next chapter of the narrative, and the other great civilizations had risen and fallen to fulfill Europe's undertaking as the maker of history.<sup>144</sup> If this was the sentiment lurking under *Essai sur les mœurs*, would it effectively undermine Voltaire's intention to acknowledge non-European cultures? Antoine Lilti proposes that Voltaire's interest in Eastern civilizations was sincere for how they could be leveraged to dismantle the Judeo-Christian narrative of world history that greatly contributed to the entrenchment of *L'Infâme* in Europe.<sup>145</sup> Though China's past glory played a supporting role to Europe's present greatness as the leading actor in history, the increased visibility of its history and philosophy served to heighten Europe's conscience for its ethical accountability and promote moral and religious inclusivity by delegitimizing the Judeo-Christian worldview.

While *Essai sur les mœurs* falls into one of Voltaire's more serious and philosophical treatments of China, contemporary historians do not consider all his uses of the Chinese example as possessing equal scholarly integrity. Basil Guy, for instance, maintains that all of Voltaire's invocations of China and Confucianism before *Essai sur les mœurs* were merely a reflection of "chinoiseries" that "did nothing but accentuate his penchant for the more obvious and superficial side of one of the many passing expressions of the Rococo."<sup>146</sup> Evidently, Voltaire was far more a Sinophile than a Sinologist, preferring to represent Confucian China according to the vaguely defined image he derived from Jesuit literature rather than seeking out insights and nuances on his own. But once we have made peace with the fact that Voltaire's intellectual stakes remained firmly grounded in eighteenth-century France despite his cosmopolitan aspirations, the next step is to reconsider how Confucianism played a part in this gamble through a reconfiguration of its themes

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<sup>144</sup> Lilti, 24.

<sup>145</sup> Lilti, 25.

<sup>146</sup> Guy, 244.

and constitution to address a new set of problems. Voltaire's play *L'Orphelin de la Chine* (*The Orphan of China*), written a year before the publication of *Essai sur les mœurs* and often regarded as a prime example of sinomania in eighteenth-century France, will illustrate my argument that, beyond creating an Orientalist sensation, the play also facilitated Enlightenment debate by serving as Voltaire's contestation against Rousseau's *Discours sur les sciences et les arts*.

Before delving into Voltaire's argument in *L'Orphelin*, it is necessary to first understand the work and the writer that provoked it. *Discours sur les sciences et les arts* was the first major expression of the Rousseau's trademark polemic on the superiority of the State of Nature over the corrupting influence of civilization. A vehement defamation of the arts and sciences for how they exert a despotic and suffocating influence over people's mind that slowly enslaves them, *Discours* created explosive controversy among the European public that lasted for a decade.<sup>147</sup> Rousseau's indictment against civilization followed the stadial theory, an emerging historiographic approach in the eighteenth century postulating that all human civilizations follow a general trajectory from barbarism to progress to eventual downfall, though some experience faster growth while others are more stagnant.<sup>148</sup> For instance, some Enlightenment thinkers looked to the American Indians as an example of primordial civilization, which could help Europe understand its undocumented past before it reached a more mature stage.<sup>149</sup> In *Discours*, Rousseau surveyed the rise and fall of numerous ancient European cities such as Athens, Rome, and Constantinople to make the point that an excess of culture inevitably leads to moral deprivation and tragic demise. Then, in a rather abrupt turn, Rousseau points an indicting finger towards the Chinese example. "Mais pourquoi chercher dans des temps reculés," Rousseau wrote, "des preuves d'une vérité dont nous avons sous

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<sup>147</sup> Guy, 228.

<sup>148</sup> Silvia Sebastiani, *The Scottish Enlightenment: Race, Gender, and the Limits of Progress*, (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013), 74-76.

<sup>149</sup> Sebastiani, 74.

nos yeux des témoignages subsistants.”<sup>150</sup> The stadial theory maintains that global civilizations share a common fate and may inform each other in their historical development. So, if Rousseau’s readers believed references to antiquity were too elusive to ring the warning bell for the eighteenth century, the recent history of China might do the trick, especially since its impression as a place of unparalleled arts and culture governed by Confucian philosopher-kings had firmly taken root in European minds.

To represent Confucian China as the epitome of civilization and, therefore, the victim of all its vices, Rousseau pointed to the Mongol conquest of China in the thirteenth century that led to the collapse of Song and the rise of Yuan. “Si les sciences puraient les mœurs, si elles apprenaient aux hommes verser leur sang pour la patrie, si elles animaient le courage, les peuples de la Chine devraient être sages, libres et invincibles,” Rousseau reasoned.<sup>151</sup> But in face of the morally uncultivated Mongols, the high culture of Confucianism did little good for the Chinese people:

Mais s'il n'y a point de vice qui ne les domine, point de crime qui ne leur soit familier ; si les lumières des ministres, ni la prétendue sagesse des lois, ni la multitude des habitants de ce vaste empire n'ont pu le garantir du joug du Tartare ignorant et grossier, de quoi lui ont servi tous ses savants ? Quel fruit a-t-il retiré des honneurs dont ils sont comblés ? Serait-ce d'être peuplé d'esclaves et de méchants ?<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discours sur les arts et les sciences*, (Les Échos du Maquis, 2012). Translation: “But why seek in such distant times for proofs of a truth for which we have existing evidence right before our eyes.” (Taken from <https://www.stmarys-ca.edu/sites/default/files/attachments/files/arts.pdf>)

<sup>151</sup> Rousseau, 12. Translation: “If the sciences purified morals, if they taught men to shed their own blood for their country, if they inspired courage, the people of China would become wise, free, and invincible.”

<sup>152</sup> Rousseau, 12. Translation: “But if there is no vice which does not rule over them, no crime unfamiliar to them, if neither the enlightenment of ministers, nor the alleged wisdom in the laws, nor the multitude of inhabitants of that vast empire was capable of keeping it safe from the ignorant and coarse yoke of the Tartars, what use have all these wise men been to them? What fruits has it reaped from all the honours lavished on them? Could it perhaps be the reward of being an enslaved and wicked people?”

As one can see, Rousseau held an attitude of contempt and skepticism towards the praises his contemporaries lavished on the Chinese sage. By pointing to an instance of dynastic transition, historically perceived in China as consequence of widespread moral decline and the collapse of social order, Rousseau shattered the consolidated image of China in the minds of Sinophiles as an eternally peaceful and prosperous society under the governance of Confucian ideals, but rather, a stagnant nation that progressed too far into the lifecycle of a civilization. For Rousseau, Confucian China exemplified the superfluous and hollow nature of advanced civilizations proclaimed as “virtuous” for their philosophy and sciences. This alluded to another heated topic of debate for the *philosophes*, that is the rise of luxury, or *le luxe*, as a result of commerce. The admirers of social progress such as Voltaire believed that industry and commerce promoted public welfare. Rousseau’s *Discours*, however, played a decisive role in inciting passionate attack against *le luxe* that outweighed its proponents in the mid-eighteenth century.<sup>153</sup> It warned against the lethargy and degeneration that excessive wealth can inflict upon a nation, a physical effect that came to be known as *mollesse*.<sup>154</sup> China’s subjugation under the Mongols can therefore be seen as a manifestation of *mollesse*, which filled China with “enslaved and wicked people” that allowed barbarism to overtake civilization. No doubt having perceived his ideological opponents’ obsession with China, Rousseau integrated this Eastern civilization in a treatise that was otherwise grounded in examining European cultural heritage to bolster his thesis.

If Rousseau saw his use of the Chinese example as a powerful rhetoric that responded to the Orientalist vogue in France, then Voltaire decided to fight fire with fire. Five years after the publication of *Discours*, *L’Orphelin de la Chine* premiered to the French public, in which Voltaire gave his own version of the Mongol conquest of China that defended the virtue of civilization.

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<sup>153</sup> Sarah Maza, *The Myth of the French Bourgeoise*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 54-55.

<sup>154</sup> Maza, 56.

Voltaire adapted his play from a Yuan dynasty (1271-1368) Chinese drama named *The Orphan of Zhao* (*Zhaoshi gu'er* 赵氏孤儿) by Ji Junxiang (纪君祥, 13<sup>th</sup> century, precise dates unknown). Translated into French and published in 1735 as a part of Father Du Hade's *Description de l'empire de la chine*, *The Orphan of Zhao* was the first Chinese drama to be exported into Europe and greatly contributed to the development of intercultural theater during that time.<sup>155</sup> English playwright William Hatchett first adapted the play in 1741 before it fell into Voltaire's hands, and two more English adaptations followed after Voltaire. In each version, *The Orphan of Zhao* produced different polemics that voiced the political and intellectual concerns the authors perceived in their respective contexts, illustrating the tendency among Enlightenment thinkers to appropriate foreign materials and impose "universalist," but in actuality Western, ideals onto them as a way of conveying social criticism.<sup>156</sup>

In order to see Voltaire's creative decisions in adapting *The Orphan of Zhao* as a mode of discourse that, specifically, controverted Rousseau's ideas in *Discours*, a preliminary understanding of the content and context of his Chinese source material is needed. *The Orphan of Zhao*, premiered in thirteenth century China, dramatizes an event that took place during the Spring and Autumn period (770-476 BCE). The premise is based on the massacre of the powerful Zhao clan by its political rival, and follows the only surviving member of the family, the Orphan, after he was adopted by the perpetrator of the murder and eventually uncovers his true heritage to avenge his family. The revenge drama eulogizes a number of Confucian themes, such as righteousness (*yi* 义), filial duty, and the devotion to social hierarchy. Although the play is set in ancient China, the author Ji Junxiang used the story to reflect the condition of his time, that being the thirteenth

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<sup>155</sup> Yu Shiao-ling, "The Orphan of Zhao: Chinese Revenge Drama and European Adaptations," *Comparative Literature Studies* 55, no. 1 (2018), 152.

<sup>156</sup> Yu Shiao-ling, 146.



century China under Mongol rule. It has been noted that the play presents several parallels between the tragedy of the Zhao clan and the last days of the Song dynasty, thus recalling the violence and moral transgression that often accompany periods of dynastic transition and positioning itself as a critique against the injustice and brutality of Mongol rule.<sup>157</sup>

In Voltaire's version of *The Orphan of Zhao*, the most influential adaptation of the play in the West, the story's connection to the Song-Yuan history becomes explicit. Rather than retaining ancient China as a backdrop, the playwright transplanted the revenge story from the seventh century BCE to the thirteenth century CE, and anachronistically featured Genghis Khan, the Mongol ruler frequently associated with barbaric conquest, as the conqueror of China and the antagonist/antihero figure of the play. Voltaire also heavily revised the structure and content of the story to subject it to Western theatrical conventions and shifted its thematic focus from the triumph of justice and Confucian virtues to the encounter between barbarism and civilization. Voltaire's preface to *L'Orphelin* revealed the writer's ambivalent attitude towards the original Chinese play: "*L'Orphelin de Tchao* est un monument précieux, qui sert plus faire connaître l'esprit de la Chine que toutes les relations qu'on a faites, & qu'on fera jamais de ce vaste empire. Il est vrai que cette pièce est toute barbare, en comparaison des bons ouvrages de nos jours ; mais aussi c'est un chef-d'œuvre, si on le compare à nos pièces du quatorzième siècle."<sup>158</sup> On one hand, Voltaire believed the *Orphan of Zhao* to exemplify the manners and virtues of Confucian China better than any existing literature on the subject; on the other hand, its coarse structure—namely the lack of unity in action, time, and place essential to early modern European playwriting—indicated the inferiority

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<sup>157</sup> Yu Shiao-ling, 158; see also: Stephen West and Wilt Idema, *The Orphan of Zhao and Other Yuan Plays: The Earliest Known Versions*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 49-56.

<sup>158</sup> Voltaire, *L'Orphelin*, 6. Translation: "*The Orphan of Zhao* is a precious monument, which serves to acquaint us with Chinese customs better than any reports that has been written, and will ever been written, about this great empire. It is true that this is a thoroughly barbaric play compared to the great works of our time; but it is also a masterpiece if compared to our plays from the fourteenth century."

of Chinese theater compared to contemporary European standards. This not only justified the considerable liberty he had taken in adapting the play, but also shed light on what exactly Voltaire understood to be the essence of Confucian virtues based on what he presented as the moral lesson of the story.

The moral lesson of *L'Orphelin*, in brief, was the triumph of civilization over barbarism, respectively epitomized by Confucian China and Genghis Khan's Mongol Empire. In Voltaire's story, while the Mongols were able to conquer China by force, their leader was touched by the prevalence of virtue and reason that he observed across the nation and willingly submitted himself to the rehabilitating light of civilization. An exchange between Genghis Khan and his general Octar in Act IV, Scene 2 of the play illustrates a moment of profound introspection the Mongol Emperor has undergone in face of the unbending loyalty and courage demonstrated by the conquered Chinese people. Upon hearing about how the mandarin Zamti, designed by Voltaire to be a paragon of Confucian virtue, refused to give up the Orphan of the Chinese emperor despite torture, Genghis Khan sighed:

Je vois un peuple antique, industrieux, immense ;  
 Ses Rois sur la sagesse ont fondé leur puissance ;  
 De leurs voisins soumis heureux législateurs,  
 Gouvernant sans conquête, & régnant par les mœurs.  
 Le Ciel ne nous donna que la force en partage.  
 Nos arts sont les combats, détruire est notre ouvrage.  
 Ah ! de quoi m'ont servi tant de succès divers ?<sup>159</sup>

This passage reflected Voltaire and many other *philosophes'* critique of war as the antithesis of Enlightenment ideals, challenging its previous status as a mark of aristocratic virtues in France,

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<sup>159</sup> Voltaire, *L'Orphelin*, 53. Translation: "I see an ancient, industrious, and tremendous people; the wisdom of its kings was the foundation of its strength. The neighbors submit happily to the lawmakers, governing without conquest and reigning through its traditions. Heaven has only given us brute force. War is our arts, destruction is our craft. Ah! What good can all these conquests serve me?"

instead deeming it as a manifestation of intolerance, irrationality, and religious zeal.<sup>160</sup> The sentiment was aptly summarized by a contemporary of Voltaire, the French-German *philosophe* Baron d'Holbach (1723-1789): “The glory associated with conquest, war and valor in almost all countries is visibly a remnant of the savage customs that prevailed in all nations before they were civilized...”<sup>161</sup> Genghis Khan’s characterization of China strongly echoes virtues that eighteenth-century Sinophiles commonly attributed to the nation, invoking the image of an eternal, peace-loving, and well-governed empire where the arts and letters nourished the people. The result of this nourishment, according to Voltaire, was a spiritual and moral strength acquired through civilization that could prevail over the brute force of the Mongols. Genghis Khan also lamented the lack of such cultural refinement in his own people, who made conquest and destruction their only art. Octar was amazed and confounded by the respect that his leader has developed for their defeated enemies:

Pouvez-vous de ce peuple admirer la faiblesse ?  
 Quel mérite ont des arts, enfants de la mollesse,  
 Qui n'ont pu les sauver des fers & de la mort ?  
 Le faible est destiné pour servir le plus fort.<sup>162</sup>

Octar’s response was unmistakably Rousseauian. It recalled *Discours’* polemic that arts and culture soften the mind like poison, rendering a nation vulnerable against the onslaught of “iron and death” that ultimately determines the winners and the losers. Moreover, it snidely commented on the pro-war stance that Rousseau adopted in *Discours* by favoring military virtue over the cultivation of moral through arts and philosophy, which contradicted Voltaire and other

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<sup>160</sup> David Bell, *The First Total War: Napoleon’s Europe and the Birth of Modern Warfare*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2008), 64-65.

<sup>161</sup> Cited from Bell, 70.

<sup>162</sup> Voltaire, *L’Orphelin*, 54. Translation: “Can you really admire these people’s weakness? What good are the arts, the children of indolence, who cannot save these people from iron and death? The weak is destined to serve the strong.”

mainstream *philosophes*' beliefs.<sup>163</sup> *L'Orphelin de la Chine*, in dramatizing the history of Mongol conquest that Rousseau cited as a case study for the failure of excessive culture, reversed the narrative by showing how Confucian virtues persevered in a time of chaos and violence, ultimately spreading Enlightenment to the Mongols by converting their leaders to the ways of Confucius. The play ended with Genghis Khan adopting the Orphan and appointing Zamti as the "supreme interpreter of the laws" to help promote "reason, justice, and customs" in his kingdom.<sup>164</sup> Hence, the civilization of Rousseau's "Noble Savage" constituted Voltaire's happy ending for the story.

Basil Guy refers to *L'Orphelin de la Chine* as a culmination of "Voltaire's early dabbling in 'chinoiseries.'"<sup>165</sup> He points to Voltaire's disregard for realism in terms of the play's setting, characters, and costumes as evidence for his exoticization of Chinese culture. Although Guy recognizes *L'Orphelin* as Voltaire's rebuttal to Rousseau's argument in *Discours*, he primarily sees the play as an instance of French Enlightenment's failed attempt at representing foreign cultures in its preoccupation with European sociopolitical concerns: "He [Voltaire] would always pretend to study China as a philosophical representation, and as such, a weapon in his ideological armoury."<sup>166</sup> Yet, there is something remarkable about the fact that the two monumental figures the French Enlightenment clashed and proclaimed their ideals through the invocation of the Chinese example, regardless of how far removed their representations were from the reality of China and Confucianism in the thirteenth century.

*Discours* and *L'Orphelin* showcased how a foreign philosophy facilitated intellectual discussion in eighteenth-century France, and how its recognition among Europeans amplified with each instance of appropriation. Voltaire and Rousseau's image of Confucian China and its various

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<sup>163</sup> Bell, 79.

<sup>164</sup> Yu Shiao-ling, 158.

<sup>165</sup> Guy, 218.

<sup>166</sup> Guy, 226.

associations was the product of an almost century-long process of reinterpretation originating from Jesuits' sinological studies such as *CSP*, and then gradually repackaged and integrated into the Enlightenment conversations through the works of theologians such as Régis and Foucher, and then those of free-thinkers such as Bernier and Bayle. The first chapter established that *CSP*, despite its propagandist undertone and its attempt to Christianize Confucianism, can stand as a commentarial work with its own integrity that contributed to the multitude of interpretations for Confucian classics. Then, the freethinkers' and *philosophes*' attempt to make Confucianism speak to the political and moral issues of their time by fashioning it into a rhetorical weapon should also be considered as a serious attempt at breaking out of Eurocentrism. This phenomenon allowed the Chinese example to make substantial contribution to the development of the intellectual movement, thus attesting to the global origin of the Enlightenment.

## CONCLUSION

The Enlightenment faded with the closing of the eighteenth century. What awaited Europe in the nineteenth century would be another whirlwind of progress and transformation that was complex in vastly different ways. If China and the Chinese Sage had a degree of privilege in the time of Voltaire as the manifestations of virtue and sophistication, then that image eroded quickly with changing ideological currents. The proliferation of race theory and the expansion of imperial powers in Asia produced rhetoric that again and again solidified the alleged superiority of European civilizations. The weakening of Qing Dynasty (1644-1912) and the Opium Wars (1839-1842) further shattered China's aura as a great and powerful civilization that stood as an equal to the West. Along with that, a new definition of modernity measured by progress and innovation transformed China from an example of perfected civilization into a site of stagnation.<sup>167</sup>

The most notorious nineteenth-century ethnography on China may be found in *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines* (*Essay on the inequality of human races*, 1853) by the French writer Arthur de Gobineau (1816-1882). This *Essai*, in a peculiar parallel to Voltaire's *Essai sur les mœurs*, was Gobineau's attempt at writing world history in a moment when Europe's understanding of its relationship with the rest of the world was vastly different than the century before. In a chapter devoted to deciphering the cultures and customs of the Chinese race, Gobineau expounded the stagnant nature of Chinese literature and governmental principles.<sup>168</sup> On the subject of Confucianism, Gobineau dismissed it as nothing but "maximes usuelles...qui, par la manière puérilement obscure et sèchement didactique dont elles sont exposées et déduites, ne constituent

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<sup>167</sup> For an illuminating account on nineteenth-century imperialism and the notion of progress, see: Priya Satia, *Time's Monster: How History Makes History*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2020).

<sup>168</sup> Gregory Blue, "Gobineau on China: Race Theory, the 'Yellow Peril,' and the Critique of Modernity," *Journal of World History* 10, no. 1 (1999), 107-110.

pas une branche de connaissance très digne d'admiration."<sup>169</sup> These damning judgements attested to a complete reversal of opinion on the characteristics of a philosophy whose moral and political doctrines made it an incarnation of the Platonic Republic to François Bernier writing in 1688. Gobineau, though perhaps the most prominent, was far from an outlier in his opinion on China. The truth is that the Chinese Sage had lost his charm over France in this new age, falling into disgrace as his country became yet another subject of imperial conquest and a source of threat manifested as the "Yellow Peril."<sup>170</sup> In short, this was the age when Saïd's words resound with absolute authority: "The relationship between Occident and Orient is a relationship of power, of domination, or varying degrees of complex hegemony..."<sup>171</sup>

Yet, the seventeenth and eighteenth century presented a different story on the encounter between Europe and Asia—one that has been overshadowed by Saïd's postcolonial narrative. My study on the reception history of Confucianism in Enlightenment France is an attempt to bring this story to light. The introduction of Confucianism to France in an age of globalization, and its consequent appropriation by some of the most prominent thinkers of the age, transformed it into a vehicle of intellectual discourse that contributed to, and even inspired, some of the most richly debated topics during the Enlightenment. The Jesuits missionaries, who sketched out and introduced the image of Confucian China to Europe, began this process of intellectual encounter by presenting a Christianized reading of Confucian ideals in *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*. The translation, which was meant to promote the conversion mission and bolster the relevance of religious conscience in a time of radical thinking, was subsequently subsumed by the freethinkers

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<sup>169</sup> Arthur de Gobineau, *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*, (Paris : Éditions Pierre Belfond, 1967), 389. Translation: "commonplace maxims... which, in the puerilely vague and dryly didactic manner that they are taught and derived, do not constitute a branch of knowledge that deserves much admiration."

<sup>170</sup> Mungello, *The Great Encounter*, 12.

<sup>171</sup> Saïd, 6.

who recognized the interpretive potential of this imported philosophy. The freethinkers conjured an idealized and flattened image of China as the epitome of reason, tolerance, and peace that could be leveraged to address the European context, and in Pierre Bayle's case, subvert religious orthodoxy. The Chinese example, thus popularized and assimilated into the local intellectual landscape, was inherited by the *philosophes* of the eighteenth century. Voltaire and Rousseau, the two most recognizable names of the French Enlightenment, engaged in a debate on the virtues of civilization versus the state of nature by invoking Confucian China.

This is a narrative that reframes the Enlightenment as a global phenomenon rather than a legacy of European intellectual heritage. More specifically, the Enlightenment is global not only because it provided the political and philosophical vocabulary that historical actors around the world leveraged for their own ends, but because the Enlightenment itself was a product of cross-cultural fertilization and appropriation of imported ideologies. The outpour of conversations that came after the French public's encounter with Confucianism attested to how a foreign philosophy functioned as a source of intellectual stimulation, whether it presented as an appealing alternative or a counterexample to European customs. This mode of engagement, though still rooted in misrepresentation, subverts the Orientalist paradigm insisting that Europe's encounter with Asia can only take shape as exercises of power or cultural hegemony.

I have demonstrated how, under certain circumstances, acts of appropriation can be intellectually productive within the local context. As the field of Global Enlightenment continues to mature and gain recognition, this nuanced understanding of appropriation is crucial to recalibrating Europe's presumed centrality in the network of intellectual exchange in the modern age and dismantle the West's monopoly over Enlightenment heritage. The reception of Confucianism in France is merely a singular case study that offers an intriguing glimpse into a



much wider and more complex phenomenon, as the multiplicity of the Enlightenment continues to come to light with each historiographical revision.

### *Coda*

At the end of this study, let us return to the place of departure, that is, late imperial China, before we followed Confucianism westbound. I have related the encounter between the missionaries and the Chinese scholar-officials from the perspective of the Jesuits, who saw China as, above all, a vast subject of conversion that could realize the Society's spiritual and political ambitions. In the process of ingratiating themselves with the local elites, the Jesuits succeeded in converting some prominent members of the imperial court. Most notably, there was the Inspector of imperial ministries Yang Tingyun (杨廷筠 1557– 1627), the Hangzhou official Li Zhizao (李之藻 1565– 1630), and the first grand secretary Xu Guangqi (徐光启 1562– 1633), who collectively came to be known as the “Three Pillars of Early Christian Church” in China.<sup>172</sup> Working closely with Matteo Ricci, the Three Pillars played a foundational role in “harmonizing” Christianity with Confucianism, attesting to active Chinese participation in this process of cultural exchange rather than one-sided Jesuit interpretation.<sup>173</sup>

In his review of *CSP*, Pierre Régis had lauded the missionaries' great “success” in affirming Christian verities within Confucian thought, that the Chinese had received these verities with “faith” and recognized them as moral principles that aligned with their own philosophy.<sup>174</sup> This reveals a Eurocentric narrative in which the West guided the virtuous but, nevertheless, paganistic Chinese towards the light and truth of God. On the other hand, the group of converted elites held a vastly

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<sup>172</sup> Mungello, *The Great Encounter* 19-21.

<sup>173</sup> Mungello, *The Great Encounter*, 20.

<sup>174</sup> Régis, 100.

different understanding about this monumental meeting of the East and the West. For, just as the reception of Confucianism in France demonstrated the influence of Eurocentric mentality in cross-cultural encounters, Sinocentrism was rampant in a civilization equally prideful of its cultural heritage and imperial power.

In his account of the Jesuit mission to China, Roger Hart examines the events using mostly Chinese primary sources and uncovered a distinctly Sinocentric narrative. Hart points out that, while the Jesuits saw their Chinese collaborators as converts who yielded to Christian teachings, the collaborators saw the Jesuits as tribute-bearers from the West pledging their service to the Emperor and brought along teachings could help strengthen the Middle Kingdom.<sup>175</sup> Xu Guangqi, the most influential ally of the Jesuits, leveraged Western religious, scientific, and philosophical knowledge in a propagandistic manner to present solutions to various problems he perceived in Ming Dynasty during a period of dynastic decline.<sup>176</sup> Consequently, these converted literati consolidated European religion, philosophy, and scientific knowledge into the so-called Western Learning (*Xi xue* 西学), which gave rise to the imagining of a paradigmatic West where there were “no wars, rebellions, or changes in dynasties.”<sup>177</sup>

A fascinating parallel emerges from this meeting of the minds between China and Europe. For the Chinese literati working with the Jesuits, their vision of the West was an “imagined civilization” with a reservoir of knowledge and symbols that they could manipulate to promote China’s welfare; whereas for the Jesuits, Confucian ideals produced the image of a “Chinese sage” that they could leverage to defend religious orthodoxy.<sup>178</sup> Moreover, both sides adopted an

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<sup>175</sup> Roger Hart, *Imagined Civilizations: China, the West, and Their First Encounter*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013), 2.

<sup>176</sup> Hart, 257-260.

<sup>177</sup> Hart, 2.

<sup>178</sup> See p.33-49 of Roger Hart’s study for an in-depth exploration on the idea of imagined/imagining civilizations.

ethnocentric position in perceiving this encounter, expressing admiration for the other while also rejecting it as a true cultural equal. This reveals the early modern exchange between China and Europe as a narrative of isolated encounters. It is a story of perspectives clashing together and generating intellectual momentum in separate contexts, without necessarily converging into a truly multicultural understanding. To bridge the history of Asia and Europe through a global historiography, therefore, is not so much as to reconcile these narratives in search of progress towards multiculturalism, as to uncover the lasting footprints these transnational encounters left behind, which are too often submerged by the domination of ethnocentric historiography.

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