

# Utilization of Confucian Concepts in *Tianzhu Shiyi* (天主實義, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*)<sup>\*</sup>

Kim, Hae-young<sup>\*\*</sup>

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## ■ 국문요약

본 연구는 서양의 유교 사상 인식 양상을 고찰하기 위하여 예수회 선교사 마테오 리치(Matteo Ricci)의 『천주실의(天主實義, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*)』를 대상으로 유교의 주요 개념인 '仁(인)', '孝(효)', '君子(군자)'의 활용 양상을 분석하였다. 리치는 중국 선교 과정에서 적응주의 전략을 채택하고, 중국 사회에서 유교가 지닌 중심적 위상을 고려하여 유교의 도덕적 가치를 매개로 그리스도교 교리를 소개하고자 하였다. 이는 궁극적으로는 그리

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\*\* Researcher, the Institute of Youngnam Culture Research at Kyungpook National University / haeyoungkim44@gmail.com

스도교가 유교와 양립 가능함을 입증하려는 시도였다.

첫째, 리치는 하느님을 ‘인’의 구현으로 제시하고, ‘인’의 품성을 지닌 천주는 인간이 혼란과 고통의 세계에 처해 있는 상황을 차마 견디지 못하는 존재로 묘사하며 이를 바탕으로 원죄설과 천당·지옥설을 설명한다. 또한 리치는 ‘인’ 개념을 근거로 만물일체설, 윤회설, 공(空)무(無) 사상 등 성리학, 불교, 도교 사상을 비판하였다. 둘째, 효 사상이 군신 관계로 확장되어 ‘충(忠)’ 사상으로 전개된 유교적 논리를 바탕으로, 리치는 천주에 대한 ‘효’의 실천을 강조하였다. 한편, 가정의 아버지, 나라의 아버지, 그리고 천지의 아버지를 위계적으로 구분함으로써, 천주의 뜻에 따르는 것이 궁극적 효의 실천임을 강조하였다. 셋째, 리치는 유교의 이상적 인물상인 ‘군자’의 지혜로운 이미지를 활용해 군자가 천주의 천지 창조, 내세, 천국과 지옥 등 기독교 교리에 대한 올바른 인식과 믿음을 갖춘 인물임을 주장하였다.

이와 같이 리치는 기독교 교리 설명에 중국인에게 익숙한 유교 개념어를 문화적, 수사적, 매개체로 활용하였다. 특히 『천주실의』는 유교 경전 고유의 표현을 전략적으로 채택함으로써 유교와 그리스도교의 대화의 장으로 기능한다.

**주제어** : 『천주실의』, 마테오 리치, 예수회 선교사, 적응주의

## 1. Introduction

Jesuit missionaries who engaged in missionary work in late Ming China adopted a strategy of accommodationism, which sought to align Christian teaching to local conditions, environment, and culture of the mission field. Therefore, Jesuit missionaries made efforts to understand Chinese culture, within which Confucianism was the most influential philosophical

system. Rooted deeply in Chinese history, it had long served as the guiding philosophy for moral conduct, governance, and personal cultivation. In this context, Jesuit missionaries sought to understand Confucianism as the central moral and philosophical system of Chinese society.

One important outcome of this effort to understand Confucianism was the translation of Confucian classics into Western languages. Matteo Ricci(1552–1610) represents one early example of Jesuit missionaries' efforts to translate Confucian classics into Western languages. Unfortunately, these translations have not been preserved.<sup>1)</sup> Afterwards, other Western missionaries continued the translation of Chinese classics. Representative works include Prospero Intorcetta(1626–1696) and Ignácio da Costa(1603–1666), *Sapient Sinica*(1662); Intorcetta, *Sinarum Scientia Politico Moralis*(1669); Philippe Couplet(1623–1693) et. al., *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* (1687); François Noël(1651–1729), *Sinesis Imperii Libri classici Sex*(1711); Angelo Zottoli(1825–1902), *Cursus litteraturæ Sinicæ: Neo-missionaries Accommodates*(1879); and so on. These translations of Confucian classics served as textbooks for missionaries preparing to work in China—providing instruction in the Chinese language and culture—and were introduced to

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1) He is said to have translated the Four Books into Latin around 1590, but the translation manuscripts have not been discovered yet. See Sukehiro Hirakawa, Matteo Ricci, trans. Younghée Noh (Seoul: Donga Asia, 2010), pp. 160–162.

the West to garner support for missionary activities in China. Later, Protestant missionaries and Western sinologists inherited this translation work and laid the foundation for Western sinology.

In addition to translating Confucian classics, Jesuit missionaries also composed Chinese catechisms as a primary means of evangelization. They adopted a top-down evangelization strategy that targeted the literati, employing “documentary evangelism.” This strategy relied on written works—such as catechisms, translations of Western scientific texts, and maps—as primary tools for spreading the faith. The Jesuits wrote catechisms in classical Chinese to reach the Chinese literati effectively.

These two achievements of the Jesuit missionaries—translations of Chinese classics and Chinese catechisms—were closely related. The missionaries’ understanding and interpretation of Confucianism were reflected in their Chinese catechisms. Therefore, this paper aims to reveal the aspects of Western missionaries’ perception of Confucianism contained in their catechisms. Among Jesuit missionaries, Ricci is particularly suitable for examining this relationship between Confucian interpretation and catechetical writing. First, he mastered the Chinese language and translated Confucian classics. He was one of the Jesuit missionaries who deeply understood Confucianism. Second, Ricci authored several

catechisms in Chinese. For example, there are *Jiao You Lun* (交友論/*On Friendship*, 1595), *Er Shi Wu Yan* (二十五言, *Twenty-Five Sayings*, 1599), *Tian Zhu Shi Yi* (天主實義, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, 1603), and *Ji Ren Shi Pian* (畸人十篇, *Ten Discourses on the Man of Paradox*, 1608). Among them, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* (hereafter TMLH) is particularly significant, for it is regarded as a catechism that integrates Confucianism and Christianity.<sup>2)</sup> It is structured as a dialogue between a Western Christian and a Chinese Confucian scholar, presenting Christian doctrines in ways that align with Confucian values and philosophical frameworks. This dialogue is not merely a one-sided explanation of biblical teachings but employs a logical and philosophical approach, facilitating a deeper understanding of Christianity.

In the preface to TMLH, *Feng Ying Jing* (馮應京) said: “This book extensively cites passages from our Six Classics to substantiate what is true and to sharply criticize the error of indulging in empty discourse.” His remark indicated that the work grounds much of its Christian missionary argumentation—as well as its critique of rival religious doctrines—on the

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2) Some researchers have characterized the missionary activities of Matteo Ricci and other Jesuit missionaries as forms of syncretism or assimilation. However, to avoid the negative connotations associated with identity loss or coercion, this study adopts the term “integration” to describe the Jesuits’ characteristics.

authority of Confucian classics. In this respect, TMLH may be regarded as a deliberate attempt to integrate Confucianism with Christianity.

TMLH has been the subject of extensive scholarly research due to its significance in the transmission of Christianity in East Asia and in the broader context of religious and philosophical exchanges between East and West. Among these studies, those that approach how Ricci integrated Christianity and Confucianism in the text can be broadly divided into two categories. First, there are studies on Ricci's translation of Christian theological terms into Chinese classical terms. For instance, Kim, Sangkeun (2004), Ahn, Sung Ho (2010) examined the translation of Deus or God into *shang di* (上帝) and *tian zhu* (天主).<sup>3)</sup> Second, other studies have focused on the characteristics or limitations of Ricci's comprehension of Chinese philosophical thought. Shin, Eui-yun (2010) argued that Ricci reinterpreted such concepts as *tian zhu*, *shang di*, *li* (理), *ren* (仁), *liang neng* (良能) in a way that differed from their original Confucian meanings, interpreting this divergence as a limitation of Ricci's engagement with Chinese philosophy.

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3) In the TMLH, the terms "Shangdi (上帝)" and "Tianzhu (天主)" are used interchangeably. Similarly, the preface of *Feng Ying Jing* (馮應京) states: "What is Tianzhu? It is Shangdi (天主何? 上帝也)." For a detailed discussion of related terminology, see Sangkeun Kim, *Strange Names of God: The Missionary Translation of the Divine Name and the Chinese Responses to Matteo Ricci's "Shangti" in Late Ming China, 1583-16449*(New York: Peter Lang, 2004).

Kim, Myong-Hee (2014) demonstrated how the interreligious discourse among Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism is structurally embedded in the text. Wang, Jia Di (2022) elucidated Ricci's interpretation of the Confucian concept of *xiao* (孝) through its systematic association with *zhong*, *ren*, and *yi*. The author underscored that Ricci drew Aristotelian philosophy, Western logical inference, and dialectical reasoning upon his understanding of Confucian concepts, through which Confucian thought was introduced and mediated to the Western intellectual tradition.

While these studies have contributed valuable insights, a specific exposition on the methodological integration of Christianity and Confucianism within the text remains limited. This paper focuses on Ricci's sustained and systematic use of Confucian concepts in his Chinese catechisms. Specifically, it analyzes how Ricci employed key Confucian concepts—such as *ren* (仁, “benevolence”, “humanity”), *xiao* (孝, “filial piety”), and *junzi* (君子, “virtuous man”, “gentleman”)—as conceptual channels through which Christian doctrines were articulated.

Although Ricci advocated the theory of *bu ru* (補儒論), he aligned himself not with Neo-Confucianism but with traditional Confucianism. Since the core of Confucianism lies in moral virtues rather than metaphysical speculation, this study concentrates on what may be regarded as its most fundamental concepts: *ren*, *xiao*, and *junzi*. *ren* and *xiao* constitute

foundational values within the humanistic Confucian tradition, while the *junzi* represents the ideal moral subject in Confucian thought. Ricci strategically mobilized these concepts to render Christianity intelligible within a Confucian philosophical framework.

This study offers a detailed analysis of the specific textual contexts in which Ricci deploys each of these concepts and examines the interpretive strategies through which he reconfigures their meanings. Moreover, it extends the analysis beyond TMLH by comparatively examining Ricci's use of Confucian concepts in his catechetical writings both prior to and subsequent to TMLH. Through this comparative approach, this study provides a basis for evaluating TMLH as a text that represents a significant attempt to integrate Christian doctrine with Confucian thought.

## 2. Utilization of Confucian concepts

### 2.1 *ren* (仁)

*Ren* is one of the most fundamental concepts in Confucian philosophy, commonly translated as “benevolence,” “humanity,” or “perfect virtue.” In TMLH, Matteo Ricci frequently employed the concept of *ren*, referring to it ninety-two times. Given that the concept of *ren*, a core tenet of Confucian thought, is

referenced approximately 110 times in *The Analects*, it can be inferred that Ricci uses the concept of *ren* with considerable frequency in his catechism. This frequency suggests that *ren* functions as a central conceptual anchor in Ricci's catechetical strategy.

This part provides illustrative examples of the ways in which he employed the concepts of *ren* in his texts. First, he depicted God's character as *ren*. Examples are as follows.<sup>4)</sup>

(1) 蓋天主至智至仁, 凡厥所爲, 人不能更有非議。 (Ricci 1607, juan 3).

Since the Lord of Heaven is supremely wise and *ren*, people cannot refute his accomplishments.

(2) 西士曰, 不信上帝至仁至公, 其君子人歟?否歟? (Ricci 1607, juan 6).

The Western scholar asks: If one does not believe that the Sovereign Lord is supremely *ren* and just, can he be called a *junzī*?

(3) 而俾民疑上帝之仁義, 無所益於爲政。 (Ricci 1607, juan 6).

To make people doubt the Sovereign Lord's *ren* and *yì* brings no benefit to the governance.

Ricci characterized God as "wise and humane" (至智至仁) in (1)

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4) Unless otherwise indicated, all translations from the Chinese in this study are the author's own. To avoid a common problem in existing translations—namely, the rendering of Confucian concepts by multiple English terms, which can obscure their original and comprehensive meanings—key concepts such as *ren*, *xiao*, and *junzi* are consistently presented in Hanyu pinyin to better reflect their usage and semantic range.

and as “humane and just”(至仁至公) in (2). Furthermore, he emphasized that people must believe in God’s *ren*; he maintained in (2) that one who does not believe in it cannot be regarded as a *junzi*, whose concept will be discussed in greater detail in Section 2.3, and in (3), he contended that governing people who lack faith in the God’s *ren* and *yi* would be difficult.

Thus, he considered faith in God—conceived as the embodiment of *ren*—as a prerequisite for becoming an ideal moral person and as conducive to good governance. In doing so, he grounded a core Confucian moral standard in belief in God. Ultimately, by depicting God as *ren*, Ricci facilitated a Chinese understanding of God as an ideal moral entity, drawing on the high esteem accorded to *ren*.

Furthermore, he expounded Christian doctrines of original sin, heaven and hell with reference to God’s *ren*.

(4) 天主始制創天地，化生人物，汝想當初乃卽如是亂苦者歟。殊不然也。天主之才最靈，其心至仁，亭育人群以迨天地萬物，豈忍置之於不治不祥者乎哉？(Ricci 1607, juan 8).

The Lord of Heaven first created heaven and earth, bringing forth all living beings. Do you suppose that the world was in such disorder and misery from the very beginning? By no means. The talents of the Lord of Heaven are most numinous, and He is immensely *ren*. He begat man and created heaven, earth, and all things. How could He bear to leave man in a chaotic and inauspicious place?

In (4), Ricci asserted that God possesses divine talents and *ren*. Accordingly, he explained that when God created human beings and the world, He did so on the basis of the virtue of *ren*. Possessing this virtue, God could not bear to see humanity living in chaos: the world, therefore, was originally created in an orderly and harmonious state. At the time of creation, human beings were free from illness and death, and their sole obligation was to revere and obey the Lord of Heaven. However, when humans acted against reason and violated the Lord's commandments, disorder and calamity entered the world, resulting in numerous forms of suffering. Through this account, Ricci suggested that although the world was originally created in a state of complete peace grounded in the virtue of *ren*, its present condition is the consequence of human transgression.

Particularly noteworthy is Ricci's use of the rhetorically charged expression *qi ren* (豈忍, "How could He bear"), which emphasizes that God could not possibly endure witnessing human beings suffer in a disordered world. Ricci argued that, since God is supremely *ren*, it would be inconceivable for Him to impose such suffering upon humanity. In this framework, suffering and calamity enter creation solely as consequences of human sin. This line of reasoning closely parallels Mencius' conception of *ren* as "the heart that cannot bear to see others suffer" (*bu ren zhi xin* 不忍之心). In other words, just as Mencius maintained that every person endowed with the virtue of *ren*

would be unable to bear seeing a young child about to fall into a well, Ricci suggested that God, who fully embodies *ren*, could not endure seeing human beings suffer in a world marked by disorder. Through this engagement with Mencius' moral philosophy and its conception of *ren*, Ricci implicitly echoed the structural logic of the doctrine of original sin.

He also explained the Christian concepts of heaven and hell based on God's attributes of *ren* and *gong* (公, “just”). To illustrate, Ricci referenced a sentence of the *Great Learning*, “Only a person who has *ren* can love and hate others (唯仁人, 爲能愛人, 能惡人).”<sup>5)</sup> Because God possesses the virtue of *ren*, He can both love the good and hate the wicked, rewarding the former with entrance into heaven and punishing the latter with condemnation to hell. Additionally, Ricci explained that while rewards and punishments in this world may not always be fair, God is so just, ensuring that each person's deed receives their due recompense after death.<sup>6)</sup> In this way, the Christian teaching on heaven and hell is grounded in the Lord of Heaven's possession of *ren* and *gong*.

Ricci framed the concept of *ren* in *On Friendship* prior to

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5) Confucius, *Daxue* (大學), 14. Chinese Text Project, <https://ctext.org/liji/daxue>

6) Matteo Ricci, *Tianzhu shiyi* 天主實義 [*The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* (Hangzhou intermediate edition, 1607; reprint in Young-bae Song, Geum-ja Im, Jeong-ran Jang, In-jae Jeong, Gwang Cho, and So-ja Choe trans. *Cheonjusilui* [Seoul: Seoul National University Press. 1999]), p. 244.

TMLH, referencing the same phrase that the humane person can love and hate others. In *On Friendship*, he employed *ren* once in a commentary on the saying, “If you treat your friend’s friends as your own, and your friend’s enemies as your enemies, you will be a true friend.” He added, “My friend must be *ren*: thus, he knows how to love and hate others, so I can rely on him.”<sup>7)</sup> The difference is that in TMLH, *ren* is used to describe God, while *ren* is a personality trait of a friend in *On Friendship*. In both texts, Ricci characterized friends and God alike as *ren*, regarding it as the quality that enables one to love and hate others truly.

Second, Matteo Ricci drew on the principle *ren*, which means “loving others,” from *The Analects*. While grounding his discussion in Confucius’ original thought, Ricci significantly expanded the scope of *ren* by reinterpreting it as “love for God.” Examples are as follows.

- (5) 仲尼說仁，惟曰愛人，而儒者不以爲外學也。余曰仁也者，乃愛天主，與夫愛人者，崇其宗原而不遺其枝派，何以謂外乎。(Ricci 1607, juan 7).

Confucius defines *ren* as “Loving others,” yet Confucians did not consider this extrinsic teaching. I maintain *ren* is

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7) Ricci, Matteo. 2013. *On Friendship*(1595), *Twenty-Five Sayings*(1599) and *Ten Discourses on the Man of Paradox*(1608)—*A Study and Translation*. Translated by Young-bae Song, Seoul: Seoul National University Press, p. 20. Original text: 友友之友，仇友之仇，爲厚友也。（注）吾友必仁，則知愛人，知惡人，故我據之。

to love the Lord of Heaven and others, honoring the root and not discarding the branches—how could it be called extrinsic?

- (6) 夫仁之說，可約而以二言窮之，曰愛天主，爲天主無以尚，而爲天主者，愛人如己也。行斯二者，百行全備矣。然二亦一而已。篤愛一人，則并愛其所愛者矣。天主愛人，吾真愛天主者，有不愛人者乎。此仁之德，所以爲尊。其尊非他，乃因上帝。(Ricci 1607, juan 7).

*Ren* can be summed up in the following two sentences: “Love the Lord of Heaven,” for he is supreme. One who reveres the Lord of Heaven loves others as they love themselves. Whoever carries out these two doctrines, everything one does will be perfect. Yet these two are, after all, simply one. If one loves someone passionately, one will love what that person loves. The Lord of Heaven loves people: if one genuinely loves the Lord of Heaven, can one fail to love the people he loves? This is why the virtue of *ren* is held in such high esteem—its dignity derives from the Sovereign Lord.

- (7) 然愛天主之效，莫誠乎愛人也。所謂仁者愛人，不愛人，何以驗其誠敬上帝歟？(Ricci 1607, juan 7).

Love for the Lord of Heaven results in sincere love towards others. This is saying, “*Ren* is to love others.” How can one’s reverence for the Lord be verified if one does not love others?

- (8) 仁者愛天主，故因爲天主而愛己愛人。(Ricci 1607, juan 7).  
*Ren* is to love the Lord of Heaven, and therefore, for His sake, to love oneself and others.

In (5), he quoted Confucius’ words and defined *ren* as loving others. Further, he extended this definition to loving God, and

regarded loving God as the foundation of *ren*: by loving God, one can also love people. Similarly, in (6), he summarized *ren* as two inseparable elements—loving God and loving others as oneself. He considered these two to be essentially one, with loving God holding the highest position, and serving as the foundation for loving others as oneself. His logic was explicit: if God loves people and I love God, I will also love those He loves. In (7), he likewise stated that the effect of loving God is loving others. One cannot truly revere the Supreme Being without loving others. In other words, the concept of *ren* connects love for God with love for others. According to his reasoning, by loving God, one can also practice *ren*, the highest virtue in Confucianism. In (8), it is also emphasized that *ren* is loving God; based on it, one can love oneself and others. Ricci repeatedly stressed that *ren* is loving God.

Similarly, *ren* is mentioned as loving *Shangdi* in the *Twenty-Five Sayings* before the TMLH. It is stated as follows.

(9) 夫仁之大端，在於恭愛上帝。上帝者生物原始，宰物本主也。仁者信其實有，又信其至善，而無少差謬，是以一聽所命，而無俟強勉焉。知順命而行，斯之謂智。……因而不順命，甚且怨命，是皆失仁之大端者也。（Ricci 1599, 8）

An essence of *ren* lies in revering and loving *Shangdi*. He is the origin of all creations and the original ruler of all things. The one who embodies *ren* believes that He truly exists and also believes in His perfect goodness with no fault. Thus, such a person listens to His words.

is willing to follow them, and has no reluctance. To know His will and to act in accordance with it—this is what is called wisdom. To disobey His will, and even to resent it, is to lose the foundation of *ren*.

*The Twenty-Five Sayings* emphasized that the essence of *ren* is expressed as *gong ai* (恭愛, “respecting and loving God”). Although this interpretation paralleled his treatment of *ren* in TMLH, the wording differs markedly. In *Twenty-Five Sayings*, he employed the compound term *gong ai*, a phrase rarely found in Confucian classics, whereas in TMLH he just used *ai* (愛, “loving”), the same expression that appears in the *Analects*, *ai ren* (愛人, “loving others”).

This suggests that Ricci employed terminology strategically in TMLH. In addition, the passage from the *Twenty-Five Sayings* focused more explicitly on Christian doctrines—faith, obedience, and submission to God’s commands as taught in the Bible. In contrast, TMLH aligned more closely with Confucian canonical texts in terms of both terminology and content. TMLH directly cited phrases in the *Analects* and highlighted the common grounds between Confucianism and Christianity.

Beyond theological exposition, Ricci also employed *ren* as a criterion for criticizing Neo-Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. He distinguished Neo-Confucianism from ancient Confucianism, characterizing it as atheistic in nature. He criticized Neo-Confucianism on the grounds that it does not

acknowledge a personal God, a creator, or a transcendent deity. Ricci regarded Christianity as potentially compatible with Confucianism, but not with Neo-Confucianism.

For example, Ricci criticizes the Neo-Confucian doctrine of the Unity of All Things while employing the concept of *ren*. Examples are as follows.

(10) 西土曰：前世之儒，借萬物一體之說，以冀愚民悅從于仁。所謂一體，僅謂一原耳已。如信之爲眞一體，將反滅仁義之道矣。何爲其然耶。仁義相施，必待有二。若以衆物實爲一體，則是以衆物實爲一物，而但以虛像爲之異耳。彼虛像焉能相愛相敬哉。故曰爲仁者，推己及人也，仁者以己及人也。義者人老老長長也，俱要人己之殊。除人己之殊，則畢除仁義之理矣。設謂物都是己，則但以愛己奉己爲仁義，將小人惟知有己，不知有人，獨得仁義乎。（Ricci 1607, juan 4）。

The Western scholar says that earlier Confucians employed the Unity of All Things doctrine to encourage the common people to practice *ren*. However, the Unity of All Things acknowledges only one origin. If one truly believes in it, one will eventually destroy *ren* and *yì*. Why is that? *Ren* and *yì* require at least two distinct entities. If all beings are regarded as one, they are but one, and their differences are nothing more than illusions. How could one love and respect illusion? Therefore, Confucius said practicing *ren* means loving others as oneself: *ren* expands love from oneself to others. *Yì* means respecting elders, superiors, and others. Both require a distinction between oneself and others. To abolish this distinction would abolish the essence of *ren* and *yì*. If one were to claim that all things are oneself,

one would take self-loving and self-honoring as *ren* and *yi*. Then, ultimately, a petty man would recognize only himself and not others. How could he attain *ren* and *yi*?

- (11) 西士曰：吾聞君子於物也，愛之弗仁。今使之於人爲一體，必宜均仁之矣。(Ricci 1607, juan 4).

Western scholars contend: I have heard that the *junzi*, in relation to things, cherishes them but does not extend *ren* to them. Now, if one claims that things and men are one body, then surely *ren* must be equally applied to all.

In (10), Ricci argued that *ren* and *yi*, the two most important concepts of Confucianism, cannot be sustained because their practice necessarily requires counterparts. However, the Unity of All Things doctrine denies the distinction between self and others. Ricci pointed out that *ren* entails loving others as oneself, which presupposes recognition of the boundary between self and others. He further stressed that *yi* posited distinctions between old and young, as well as high and low. The principle of *yi* guides people to treat others appropriately according to age and social status. If one embraces the theory of the unity of Heaven, Earth, and all things, such distinctions would collapse, thereby undermining *ren* and *yi*. Thus, he concluded that the Unity of All Things doctrine directly contradicts the distinction of *ren* and *yi*.

Furthermore, in (11) he quoted the passage from *Mencius*, “The *junzi*, regarding creatures, loves them but does not extend

to them *ren* (君子於物也, 愛之弗仁).<sup>8)</sup> This statement emphasizes that different virtues are to be practiced depending on the object of moral action: *ai* (愛, “love”) in relation to things, *ren* toward the people, and *qin* (親, “intimacy”) within the family. Ricci drew upon this passage to stress that *ren* should not be understood as a virtue toward inanimate objects, but rather as a moral quality that properly applies to human relationships.

He observed that it was paradoxical for Confucian scholars, who once criticized Mozi’s (墨子) doctrine of *jian'ai* (兼愛, “universal love”), to now endorse extending *ren* even to inanimate objects. He further pointed out that when the Lord of Heaven created heaven, earth, and all things, He assigned each its proper kind and purpose; therefore, to regard them all as one contradicts the Creator’s will. Ricci consistently condemned the Unity of All Things, regarding it as contrary both to *ren* and to the intention of the Lord of Heaven.

Similarly, Ricci also employed the concept of *ren* to refute the Buddhist theory of reincarnation. In a dialogue between a Chinese scholar and a Western scholar, the former asked why the Lord of Heaven, the source of *ren*, opposed to the Buddhist principle of non-killing, which seems closely aligned with *ren*.

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8) The gentleman’s attitude toward things is love but not *ren*: toward the people, it is *ren* but not intimacy; toward family members, it is intimacy, and through intimacy to one’s kin one extends *ren* to the people, and through *ren* to the people one extends love to things (君子之於物也, 愛之而弗仁; 於民也, 仁之而弗親; 親親而仁民, 仁民而愛物).” (Mencius, 7A:45, Chinese Text Project, <https://ctext.org/mengzi/jin-xin-i>

The Western scholar responds by sharply criticizing the doctrine of reincarnation and clarifying that *ren* applies only to human beings. To support his argument, Ricci cited *the Analects* “Do not do unto others what you would not have them do unto you (己所不欲, 勿施於人).”<sup>9)</sup> explaining that the norm of *ren* governs relations among humans but does not extend to animals or objects. In this way, Ricci differentiated *ren* from the Buddhist prohibition of killing and rejected its association with reincarnation.

Furthermore, Ricci invoked *ren* to argue that the Buddhist and Daoist notions of voidness and nothingness could not serve as foundations for moral order.

(12) 倘如空無者, 非人, 非神, 無心性, 無知覺, 無靈才, 無仁義, 無一善足嘉。(Ricci 1607, juan 2).

If voidness and nothingness are neither human nor divine, and mind, awareness, intellect, *ren*, and *yì*, nothing therein can be considered good.

(13) 夫吾天主所授工夫, 匪佛老空無寂寞之教, 乃悉以誠實引心于仁道之妙。(Ricci 1607, juan 7).

The discipline the Lord of Heaven imparted is not the Buddhist and Daoist doctrine of voidness, nothingness, and desolate quietude: rather, it guides the mind with complete sincerity toward the subtle way of *ren*.

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9) *Confucius, The Analects* (論語), 15.24, Chinese Text Project, <https://ctext.org/analects/wei-ling-gong>

In (12), Ricci pointed out that the doctrines of voidness and nothingness cannot be the foundation of moral virtues, for they are devoid of mind, awareness, *ren*, and *yi*. In (13), he further contrasted the teaching of the Lord of Heaven with the Buddhist and Daoist doctrine of voidness and nothingness, presenting it instead as a path that leads the mind toward *ren*. Ricci's critique of Neo-Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism was coupled with a deliberate adaptation of the Confucian ideal of *ren*.

Recognizing central role of *ren* in Confucian thought, Ricci incorporated this concept into his own writings with the ultimate aim of propagating Christianity. He portrayed God's character as *ren*: benevolent being who loves humanity, created a peaceful and orderly world, and ensures just recompense after death. On this basis, he expounded Christian doctrines—such as original sin, heaven and hell—by interpreting them as expressions of God's *ren*. He further emphasized that love for God constitutes the origin of *ren*, from which human are obliged to love God and others. At the same time, he employed the concept of *ren* polemically to refute Neo-Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist doctrines, contending that such teachings were incompatible with a moral order grounded in *ren*.

This intention becomes even more evident in the closing passage of TMLH, where a Chinese scholar, expressing gratitude for the transmission of the Holy teaching(*sheng jiao*

聖教), prays that the Lord of Heaven will assist the teacher in expounding *ren zhi* (仁指), so that His doctrines may spread throughout China. By juxtaposing *sheng jiao* with *ren zhi* in this final scene, Ricci effectively identified the Christian teaching with the Confucian moral principle *ren*. Through this rhetorical alignment, he presented Christianity through the lens of Confucian ethics, situating it within the conceptual and philosophical framework already familiar to the Chinese literati.

## 2.2 *xiao* (孝)

*Xiao* (filial piety) is also one of the fundamental concepts in Confucianism philosophy, representing respect and reverence for one's parents, elders, and ancestors. In Confucian philosophy, family ethics extend to the realms of society and the state, serving as a basis for maintaining order; consequently, *xiao* has profoundly influenced Chinese society. Ricci also recognized the significance of *xiao* and employed it strategically in his catechetical writings. He used the term *xiao* thirty-three times. First, he basically broadened the scope of *xiao*, arguing that it should be practiced not only toward parents but also toward God. Examples are as follows.

- (1) 父母授我以身體髮膚，我固當孝，君長賜我以田里樹畜，使仰事俯育，我又當尊。矧此天主之爲大父母也，大君也，爲衆祖之所出，衆君之所命，生養萬物，奚可錯認而忘之。(Ricci 1607, juan

2).

Our parents give us our bodies, hair, and skin, and we ought to practice *xiao*. Our rulers grant us fields to farm and raise livestock, enabling us to support our elders and foster our children. Therefore, we ought to honor them as well. However, God is the greatest parent and the king of kings, who created all things on earth, commanded all kings, and gave birth to and raised all things. How could we mistake or forget him!

- (2) 子孝嚴親，無所不至，然子何以知孝。惟信人之言，知其乃生己之父也，非人言，自何以知之乎。子又忠於君，雖捐命無悔。其爲君，亦只信經書所傳耳，臣孰自知其爲己君乎。……況夫天主事，非一夫之言。天主親貽正經，諸國之聖賢傳之，天下之英俊僉從之。  
(Ricci 1607, juan 7).

A son practices *xiao* to his own father, leaving nothing undone. Yet how does the son know what *xiao* is? Only by trusting the words of others, who inform him that this is indeed the father who gave him life. Were it not for what others say, how could he know it himself? In the same way, he shows loyalty to his sovereign, without regret, even if it costs him his life. Yet that this sovereign is truly his ruler is known only through trust in what is transmitted in the Classics. Which subject could ascertain this by himself? ... How much more, then, with regard to the Lord of Heaven! Such matters cannot be found upon the testimony of a single man. The Lord Himself has bestowed the true Scriptures, which sages from various nations have transmitted, and the worthies of the world have all acknowledged and embraced.

In (1), Ricci asserted that one should honor both one's

parents, who give life, and the rulers, who provide care and protection. He further described God as both the great parent and the great king, for He grants existence and sustains life. Elsewhere, Ricci frequently referred to God as father, as in “the Lord of Heaven is the father of all beings (天主乃萬靈之父).” Just as people are devoted to their parents and remain loyal to their sovereign, Ricci argued, they must also devote themselves to God. Similarly, in (2), he underscored that *xiao* toward one’s father and loyalty toward one’s sovereign are both grounded in trust that they are indeed one’s father and sovereign. By the same reasoning, he maintained that filial devotion must also be practiced toward God, based on belief in Him. In doing so, Ricci broadened the scope of *xiao* by extending filial obligation beyond family and state to include the Lord of Heaven.

In Confucian philosophy, *zhong* (忠, “loyalty”) represents the extension of *xiao* from the family to the political realm: the loyalty of subjects to their rulers parallels the filial piety of children toward their parents. Ricci further appropriated this principle by expanding *xiao*, identifying God as its ultimate recipient, adopting this Confucian structure to situate God at the apex of an already familiar moral continuum. Li Zhizao(李之藻) also highlighted the same idea in his preface to TMLH, writing: “Serving Heaven and serving one’s parents are the same, and Heaven is the ultimate source of such service(事天事親同一事, 而天其事之大原也).” He stressed that serving heaven

and serving one's parents are inseparable, and that service to heaven constitutes the foundation of service to parents. Therefore, parents, the ruler, and God all became recipients of *xiao*, which remained the same obligation assigned to human beings.

However, Ricci argued that these three figures of fatherhood must be clearly distinguished and hierarchically ordered.

(3) 今爲子定孝之說，欲定孝之說，先定父子之說。凡人在宇內有三父，一謂天主，二謂國君，三謂家君也。逆三父之旨者，爲不孝子矣。天下有道，三父之旨無相悖。蓋下父者，命己子奉事上父者也，而爲子者順乎一，卽兼孝三焉。天下無道，三父之令相反，則下父不順其上父，而私予以奉己，弗顧其上：其爲之子者，聽其上命，雖犯其下者，不害其爲孝也。若從下者逆其上者，固大爲不孝者也。  
(Ricci 1607, juan 8).

Now, to define *xiao*, we must first define the relationship between father and son. In this world, there are three kinds of fathers: first, the Lord of Heaven; second, the ruler of the state; and third, the head of the family. One who goes against the will of these three fathers is an unfilial son. When there is order in the world, the wills of the three fathers do not conflict. For the lower fathers command their son to serve and honor the higher fathers, and thus, when a son obeys one, he in fact fulfills duty to all three. However, when there is no order in the world, the commands of the three fathers conflict. Then the lower fathers disobey the higher fathers: instead, they compel their sons to serve them alone, without serving the higher fathers. The son

ought to obey the commands of a higher father, though it means disobeying the lower, and it does not diminish his *xiao*. However, if one follows the lower father and opposes the high fathers, it is gravely unfilial.

- (4) 夫化生天地萬物，乃大公之父也，又時主宰安養之，乃無上其君也。世人弗仰弗奉，則無父無君，至無忠，至無孝也。忠孝蔑有，尙存何德乎。(Ricci 1607, juan 8).

The father created, controlled, and sustained heaven, earth, and all things: he is the supreme sovereign of all. If mankind does not reverence and serve him, it will lack both father and the sovereign. This is to be totally disloyal and utterly unfilial. Can one be virtuous at all if one is disloyal and unfilial?

In (3), Ricci defined *xiao* and three fathers in the world: first, the Lord of Heaven, second, the king, and third, the father as the head of the family. Ricci said that if there is an orderly society, the will of the three fathers will be congruent. The lower fathers will respect and serve the high fathers. On the other hand, the commandments of the three fathers will not be congruent, or the lower fathers will go against the will of the higher fathers in a chaotic world. As a result, lower fathers make their sons serve them only. He emphasized that God's will should take priority over everything else when there is a conflict between obedience to God and obedience to one's parents. He stated that following God's will is the zenith, which is true *xiao*, and added that as long as a child obeys the commands of the Higher Father, namely the Lord, the child does not violate his

*xiao*—even if he does not obey his lower father. In other words, obeying God's commands is *xiao*, while obeying a “lower father” at the expense of the “higher Father” constitutes unfilial behavior. He added that the kings and subjects, as well as fathers and sons, are all just brothers compared to the highest father. In (4), he indicated that without filial piety and loyalty toward God, the cardinal virtues of Confucian philosophy, *xiao* and *zhong*, could not be established. Consequently, no other virtue could exist. Through this hierarchical ordering, Ricci redefined true *xiao* as obedience to God, even when such obedience conflicted with the will of one's parents or ruler.

On the other hand, he recognized that certain aspects of the Confucian concept of *xiao* were incompatible with Christianity. For example, Mencius asserted that the most excellent form of unfilial conduct is not to marry or leave no descendants. From this perspective, Western clergy who neither marry nor have children would be deemed unfilial. Ricci responded to this in two ways. First, Ricci refuted the idea by pointing out that this passage does not align with Confucius' teachings since there is no reference to it in *the Great Learning*, *Doctrine of the Mean*, and *the Analects*. Therefore, Mencius' quotation cannot be considered a foundational Confucian principle.<sup>10)</sup> Second, Ricci

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10) Matteo Ricci's attitude toward Mencius's text is ambivalent. On the one hand, he criticized the claims on filial piety in *Li Lou* II, dismissing them as not representative of Confucius's teachings; on the other hand, he cited Mencius as an authoritative source on the restrained use of material things.

pointed out that none of Bo Yi (伯夷), Shu Qi (叔齊), or Bi Gan (比干)—figures honored in Confucian philosophy as paragons of loyalty, righteousness, and moral integrity—had offspring.<sup>11)</sup> These counterexamples further undermined the claim that bearing descendants was the essence of *xiao*.

Ultimately, Ricci associated the Christian God with both the father of the family and the ruler of the state as objects of *xiao* in a broad sense. This reasoning parallels his discussion of *ren*: one must love not only other human beings but also God. What is particularly noteworthy in utilizing the concept *xiao*, however, is that he did not simply conflate these three “fathers.” Rather, he carefully distinguished them by establishing a clear hierarchical order.

Ricci underscored that *xiao* directed toward God constitutes the foundation of *xiao* toward both one’s parents and one’s ruler. In this framework, *xiao* cannot be fully realized by merely complying with the will of one’s parents: its completion lies in

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A similar strategy appears in his engagement with Buddhism and Daoism. While Ricci refuted their central doctrines, he appealed to the Buddhist notion of heaven and hell to explain divine retribution, arguing that such beliefs were universally acknowledged in both Eastern and Western cultures.

11) Bo Yi and Shu Qi, brothers of the late Shang dynasty, refused to serve the new Zhou regime, retreating to Mount Shouyang and ultimately starving to death in defense of their principles. Bi Gan, a loyal minister of Shang, openly remonstrated with the tyrant King Zhou and was executed for his courage. While their stories are widely cited in Confucian tradition as examples of virtuous conduct, Ricci notes that they neither married nor left descendants.

obedience to the will of God. By emphasizing God as both the supreme Father and the ultimate King, Ricci further argued that neither *xiao* nor *zhong* can be properly established unless they are rooted in filial piety and loyalty toward God. Through this hierarchical reconfiguration of *xiao*, Ricci transformed a central Confucian moral concept into a framework for grounding filial piety and loyalty in obedience to God, thereby advancing the Christian message within a Confucian ethical order.

### 2.3 *junzi* (君子)

In the Chinese tradition, *junzi* represents the ideal figure that Confucianism aspires to cultivate. The *junzi* is not defined by social status or wealth, but by virtue, wisdom, ethical conduct, and a lifelong commitment to self-cultivation. As an ethical exemplar in Chinese society, *junzi* embodies the model of an ideal figure in his text TMLH. It is particularly noteworthy that he foregrounded the notion of *junzi* in the first sentence of the TMLH as follows.

(1) 夫修己之學，世人崇業。凡不欲徒稟生命與禽彙等者，必於是殫力焉。修己功成，始稱君子。(Ricci 1607, juan 1).

The study of self-cultivation is a task that all men deem noble. Anyone endowed with his life, determined to live a life unlike an animal, must exert himself in self-cultivation. Only when he has succeeded in

cultivating himself can a man be called a *junzi*.

Ricci said self-cultivation (修己) is a task of humankind that differentiates humans from animals. Furthermore, only after achieving this task can one be called *junzi*. By demonstrating *junzi* as an ideal figure in the first sentence of his text, TMLH, Ricci sought to introduce Christian doctrines through the notion of the *junzi* to a Chinese audience. Examples are as follows.

First, Ricci emphasized that *junzi* would recognize God as the Lord of all things.

(2) 邦國有主, 天地獨無主乎? 國統於一, 天地有二主乎? 故乾坤之原, 造化之宗, 君子不可不識而仰思焉。 (Ricci 1607, preface).

Every country has its own Lord, how could the universe not have a lord? A country united as one, how could the universe have two lords? Therefore, *junzi* cannot help but know the source of the universe and the Creator of all creatures and honor him.

(3) 君子知其然, 故不以死爲凶懼, 而忻然安之, 謂之歸于本鄉。 (Ricci 1607, juan 4).

*Junzi* understand this truth and do not view death as evil or something to be feared: rather, they accept it with comfort, saying that death is returning home.

Ricci links *junzi*'s wisdom to recognizing a single Creator who governs the world, just as a ruler governs a country. In (2), he stressed that *junzi* is wise and acknowledges that a country has one ruler, and the world also has one creature. So *junzi* worship

the Lord of Heaven as the source of all things. In (3), he extends this logic to the afterlife, portraying the *junzi* as one who understands death as a return to the divine source. Here Ricci overlays Christian doctrines of creation, heaven, and hell onto the Confucian framework of *junzi*.

Second, Ricci presented *that junzi* have faith in God, which is necessary for becoming a *junzi*.

- (4) 西士曰，不信有上帝，其君子人歟？否歟？中士曰：否。詩曰：維此文王，小心翼翼，昭事上帝，孰謂君子而弗信上帝者。西士曰，不信上帝至仁至公，其君子人歟否歟。中士曰，否。上帝爲仁之原也，萬物公主也，孰謂君子而弗信其至仁至公者耳。(Ricci 1607, juan 6).

The Western scholar states: “Who does not believe in Shangdi still be called a *junz*? Or not?” The Chinese scholar replies: No. The Book of Poetry says, “King Wen, who, with utmost care and reverence, faithfully served Shangdi.” Who could be called *junzi* if he does not believe in the Lord of Heaven? The Western scholar states: If one does not believe that the Sovereign Lord is supremely *ren* and just, can he be called a man of virtue? The Chinese scholar responds: No. The Sovereign Lord is the source of *ren* and the Lord of all things. How can one be called a *junzi* when he refuses to believe that the Sovereign Lord is supremely *ren* and just

- (5) 且夫天堂地獄之報，中華佛老二氏信之，儒之智者亦從之，太東太西諸大邦無疑之，天主聖經載之，吾前者揭明理而顯之，則拗逆者必非君子也。(Ricci 1607, juan 6).

Moreover, as for the retribution of Heaven and Hell, the Buddhists and Daoists of China believe in it, the wise among the Confucians also follow it, and the great nations of both the East and the West hold no doubt about it. It is recorded in the Holy Scriptures of the Lord of Heaven. Since I have previously elucidated this principle and made it manifest, those who obstinately resist it can by no means be regarded as *junzi*.

The rhetorical formulations “Who could still be called a *junzi* (孰謂君子)” and “not a *junzi* (非君子)” emphasize that without faith, one cannot be regarded as a *junzi*. Ricci described *junzi* as someone who possesses faith in the Lord of Heaven and further argued that such faith is a requirement for becoming a *junzi*. He emphasized faith in the Lord of Heaven, asserting that the *junzi*, the ideal figure in Confucianism, must believe in God, the source of *ren* and the Lord of all things. He thus framed belief in the Lord of Heaven—the source of *ren* and the ruler of all things—as a defining prerequisite for recognition as *junzi*. By doing so, Ricci effectively redefined the *junzi* from a purely Confucian moral ideal into a theistic category grounded in Christian faith.

Ricci drew on *junzi* to support his critique of Buddhism, Daoism, and Neo-Confucianism, arguing that a true *junzi* would not adhere to such doctrines.

(6) 吾國君子亦痛斥二氏，深爲恨之。(Ricci 1607, juan 2).

In my country, *junzi* repudiate and despise Buddhism and Daoism.

- (7) 西士曰，余雖末年入中華，然竊視古經書不怠，但聞古先君子敬恭于天地之上帝，未聞有尊奉太極者。(Ricci 1607, juan 2).

The Western scholar explains: Though I came to China only in my later years, I have never ceased to consult the ancient classics diligently. However, I have heard *junzi* in old times respected the Sovereign Lord of heaven and earth, but never heard of them paying respect to the Supreme Ultimacy.

- (8) 中士曰：夫人魂能爲禽獸者，誠誑語也，以欺無知小民耳。君子何以信吾所騎馬，爲吾父母，兄弟，親戚，或君，或師，朋友乎？(Ricci 1607, juan 5).

The Chinese scholar inquires: “The claim that the human soul can be transformed into animals is indeed deceptive, intended to mislead the ignorant common people. How could *junzi* possibly believe that the horse I ride could have been my parent, brother, relative, or even my ruler, teacher, or friend?”

In (6), Ricci asserted that *junzi* rejects both Daoism and Buddhism, arguing that the notions of voidness and nothingness cannot be upheld. Based on the *junzi*'s disapproval of these two religions, Ricci builds a logical critique against their tenets. Similarly, to criticize neo-Confucianism, Ricci mentioned that *junzi* revere *shangdi* 上帝, not the *taiji* 太極 in (7). In (8), he also criticized the Buddhist notion of reincarnation, arguing that while common people may be deceived by it, a *junzi* would not. Thus, he denounced the doctrines of Daoism, Buddhism,

and Neo-Confucianism based on the concept of *junzi*.

Since Ricci knew that directly opposing Buddhism, Daoism, or Neo-Confucianism would inevitably arouse resentment among the Chinese, he indirectly critiques these religions without confronting them plainly—thus using the *junzi* to deliver his polemics.

Fourth, Ricci referred to Western clergy and priests as *junzi*. For example, he stated, “A true *junzi* does not fear the initial hardships of cultivating virtue(君子修德,不憚初苦, Ricci 1607, juan 8).” It is to cast celibate missionary life as a Confucian path of self-cultivation and moral perseverance. Ricci’s portrayal of Christian clergy in the image of the *junzi* suggests that he sought to present them positively and to highlight the ultimate congruence between the goals of Confucianism and Christianity. This intention becomes even clearer in the following passage:

(9) 是以君子之本業，特在于神，貴邦所謂無形之心也……故君子以仁義為重焉……故君子之學又以仁為主焉……故吾曰學之上志，惟此成已，以合天主之聖旨耳，所謂由此而歸此者也。(Ricci 1607, juan 8).

(The Western scholar explains): Therefore, the fundamental vocation of the *junzi* lies mainly in God, whom your esteemed nation refers to as the “formless mind.” … Hence, the *junzi* regards *ren* and *yí* as of utmost importance. … Hence, the *junzi*’s learning also takes *ren* as its guiding principle. … Therefore, I say

that the highest aim of learning is nothing other than self-completion to conform to the holy will of the Lord of Heaven. This is what is meant by “from this returning to this.”

In this passage, Ricci redefined the *junzi*'s vocation as conforming to the will of God, equating with the Confucian notion of the “formless mind (無形之心).” By linking *ren* and *yi* to the pursuit of God, Ricci construed moral cultivation as a theocentric endeavor. He concluded that the ultimate task of *junzi*'s learning—self-completion (成己)—can be attained only when it conforms to the divine will, thereby redirecting Confucian ideals toward Christian faith.

The *junzi* is also portrayed as an ideal moral figure in TMLH. Ricci argued that, by virtue of wisdom, the *junzi* is able to recognize the existence of God and the afterlife, and to discern the errors of Buddhist theories of reincarnation as well as doctrines such as the *taiji*. Moreover, Ricci emphasized that belief in God is an essential requirement for becoming a *junzi*, and that the ultimate goal of *junzi* self-cultivation lies in conforming to the will of the Lord of Heaven. In this way, Ricci reinterprets the Confucian ideal of the *junzi* by integrating it into a Christian framework.

### 3. Conclusion

This study has examined Western perceptions of Confucian thought through an analysis of Matteo Ricci's TMLH, focusing on his use of the key Confucian concepts. Drawing on the Jesuit accommodation strategy, Matteo Ricci advanced the theory of *bu ru* (補儒論), asserting that Christianity could complement, rather than oppose, Confucianism. Ultimately, his aim was to demonstrate the compatibility of Christianity with Confucian thought. Ricci employed a dialogical format between Chinese and Western scholars and strategically drew on Confucian concepts—such as *ren*, *xiao*, and *junzi*—as persuasive rhetorical tools, through which Christian doctrines were presented in familiar ethical terms.

First, Ricci described God as the embodiment of *ren* and, on the basis of this virtue, introduced the doctrines of original sin as well as heaven and hell. He further emphasized that love for God constitutes the origin of *ren*, from which humans are obliged to love God and others. At the same time, he employed the concept of *ren* to critique Daoism, Buddhism, and Neo-Confucianism, arguing that discerning right and wrong is superior to mere criticism and applying this reasoning to a logical critique of other religions. Second, Ricci associated the Christian God with both the father of the family and the ruler

of the state as objects of *xiao*. This reasoning parallels his discussion of *ren*: however, in his treatment of *xiao*, he does not simply conflate these three “fathers.” Rather, by establishing a clear hierarchical order, he underscores obedience to God’s will as the ultimate fulfillment of filial piety. Third, the *junzi* is portrayed as an ideal moral figure in TMLH. Ricci argues that, by virtue of wisdom, the *junzi* is capable of recognizing the existence of God and the afterlife, as well as of discerning the erroneous nature of Buddhist, Daoist, and Neo-Confucian doctrines. Moreover, Ricci emphasized that belief in God is an essential prerequisite for becoming a *junzi*, and that the ultimate goal of *junzi* self-cultivation lies in conforming to the will of the Lord of Heaven. In this way, Ricci reinterprets the Confucian ideal of the *junzi* by integrating it into a Christian framework.

Ricci framed Christianity not as a foreign imposition but as a system harmoniously aligned with Confucian moral philosophy. This perspective is echoed by Li Zhizao in his preface, where he states that “Indeed, the East and the West share the same mind and the same principle (東海西海, 心同理同),” and “The only difference lies merely in language and writing (所不同者, 特言語文字之際).”

Ricci’s extensive use of Confucian terminology in TMLH—more pronounced than in his other catechisms—demonstrates the adaptability of Confucian discourse and its potential as a

medium for cultural and religious exchange. Thus, the work is a milestone in transmitting Christianity to East Asia, bridging Western Christian thought and the Confucian intellectual tradition.

This study has examined Ricci's engagement with three key Confucian concepts within TMLH. Future research may broaden this scope by analyzing additional texts and concepts, as well as the doctrinal writings of other missionaries before and after Ricci. Examples include Michele Ruggieri's *The True Record of the Lord of Heaven* (*Tianzhu Shilu* 天主實錄), François Noël's *First Introduction to the Study of Heaven* (*Tianxue Chuhan* 天學初函), and Giulio Aleni's *The True Record of the Holy Doctrine* (*Shengjiao Shilu* 聖教實錄). Further investigations will contribute to tracing the historical evolution of Western perceptions of Confucianism and to deepening understanding of the dynamics of Sino-Western intellectual exchange.

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## Abstract

# Utilization of Confucian Concepts in *Tianzhu Shiyi* (天主實義, The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven)

Kim, Hae-young\*

This study examines Matteo Ricci's engagement with Confucian thought through an analysis of *Tianzhu Shiyi* (天主實義, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*), focusing on his use of key Confucian concepts. Drawing on the Jesuit strategy of accommodation, Ricci recognized the central role of Confucianism in Chinese society and sought to introduce Christianity by employing Confucian values. He engaged with the concepts of *ren* (仁), *xiao* (孝), and *junzi* (君子) to present Christianity as compatible with Confucian moral ideals.

First, Ricci portrayed God as the embodiment of *ren* and, on the basis of this virtue, introduced the doctrines of original sin as well as heaven and hell. Second, Ricci associated the Christian God with both the father of the family and the ruler of the state as objects of *xiao*. At the same time, by establishing a clear hierarchical order among three "Fathers", he underscored obedience to God's will as the ultimate fulfillment of filial piety. Third, the *junzi* is presented as an ideal moral figure, capable of recognizing the existence of God and the afterlife, as well as of discerning the erroneous nature of other religious doctrines.

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\* Researcher, the Institute of Youngnam Culture Research at Kyungpook National University / haeyoungkim44@gmail.com

## Key Words

*The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, Jesuit missionaries, Confucian philosophy, Matteo Ricci, Accommodationism

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