

Meynard, Thierry (2015). *The Jesuit Reading of Confucius: The First Complete Translation of the Lunyu (1687) Published in the West.* Leiden; Boston: Brill, 675 pp., 12 figs.

Luisa Paternicò
(Università degli Studi della Tuscia, Italia)

This book is the second episode of what will hopefully be Meynard's trilogy (or tetralogy, time will tell) dedicated to the *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus sive Scientia Sinensis Latine exposita* (Paris, 1687; CSP hereafter). The CSP was the book that first introduced Confucian thought in the West and that represented the apex of the syncretic effort between Confucianism and Christianity, started by Matteo Ricci more than one century before. The work, which included the first translations in a Western language of three of the Confucian *Four Books* (the *Great Learning* [*Dàxué* 大學], the *Doctrine of the Mean* [*Zhōngyōng* 中庸] and the *Dialogues* [*Lúnyǔ* 論語]) with selected commentaries, was extensively read and appreciated in the highest European cultural circles. Thanks to these Latin translations made by the Jesuits P. Intorcetta, F. Rougemont, C. Herdrtrich and P. Couplet, the thinkers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw in the far Chinese Empire, anchored on the law and on the government of the class of the literati, an admirable example that Europe should follow to begin a complete reform of the state and its economy. Even those who later on launched the French Revolution were all very enthusiastic admirers of China and Confucianism. Until recent times, however, the readership of this important work has been limited to those who knew Latin language. A Modern English translation was extremely longed for and is now truly welcomed.

Meynard, currently Professor of philosophy and religious studies at Sun Yat-sen University in Guǎngzhōu, comes as no stranger to working on this topic. Since 2005 he has published quite a few scholarly papers concerning the Latin translation of the Confucian Classics.¹ After publishing the book

1 See: Meynard, Thierry (2005). «Religion and its Modern Fate: The Shaping of the Concept between the West and China». *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 45 (4), pp. 483-97; Meynard, Thierry 梅謙立 (2008). «Zuichū xīwén fānyì de rùjiā jīngdiǎn» «最初西文翻译的儒家经典» (Early Translations in Western Language of the Confucian Classics). *Sun Yat-sen*

Confucius Sinarum Philosophus (1687), *The first Translation of the Confucian Classics* (Rome: Institutuum Historicum Societatis Iesu, 2011), with the trilingual version of the *Great Learning* included in the *CSP*, Meynard now engages in the same enterprise with the *Dialogues*, offering to readers from all over the world the possibility to access this text. He also translates the biography of Confucius as offered in the *CSP* into Modern English.

The book is opened by an extensive introduction (pp. 1-88) divided into six parts, which retraces all the steps leading to the version of the *Dialogues* included in the *CSP* and the compilation of the *Life of Confucius*.

In Part I, Meynard documents the genesis and development of the translation project of the Confucian *Four Books*, from the time of Michele Ruggieri and Matteo Ricci at the end of the sixteenth century, passing through the first printed versions made by Inácio Da Costa and Prospero Intorcetta in 1662 and 1667-69, and until the final version, published in Paris in 1687 thanks to the efforts of Philippe Couplet. The author provides valuable evidence to finally dispel any doubts concerning the attribution to Ruggieri – not to Ricci – of the first manuscript translation of the *Four Books*, which is today preserved in Rome's National Library.² Meynard also offers a new perspective on the history of the compilation of the *Sapientia Sinica*, the first printed translation of the *Dàxué* and the *Lúnyǔ* (first five books). He writes about an early 'translation team' composed of Da Costa, as a teacher, and Intorcetta, Couplet, Herdtrich and Rougemont as students. Da Costa would explain the Confucian texts orally to his students who, in turn, although in distant locations in China, would suggest different interpretations by mail or during seminars. Intorcetta would keep a written record of the discussions and finally edited the printed volume in Jiànchǎng in 1662. The translation team was then reconstituted during the Cantonese exile of all the missionaries in 1666, when the translations were revised, in order to make them less 'attackable' by the detractors of the Jesuits who were fuelling the Rites Controversy. Throughout this section, Meynard surely makes interesting, well-argued hypotheses that can stimulate further research on the subject.

Part II substantiates how the Jesuits interwove different Chinese interpretations of the Confucian classics and which commentaries they chose for the translation of the *Lúnyǔ*. Even though officially rejecting Neo-Confucian doctrines, the Jesuits very likely used Zhū Xī 朱熹's edition of

University Journal 中山大学学报, 48 (2), pp. 131-42; Meynard, Thierry (2008). «Reading the Classics in the Age of Globalization». *Chinese Cross Currents*, 5 (1), pp. 39-49; Meynard, Thierry (2010). «The First Translation of the Analects». *Chinese Cross-Currents*, 7 (2), pp. 99-111; Meynard, Thierry (2011). «La première traduction des *Entretiens* en Europe». *Études Chinoises*, 30, pp. 173-92.

2 Michele Ruggieri, *China, seu humana institutio*, Biblioteca Nazionale v. Emanuele II di Roma, Fondo Gesuitico (FG) 1185 (3314).

the Classics, *Sishū jízhù* 四書集註, for their translation and Meynard skilfully reconstructs the reasoning behind this choice. The main commentary used to help the interpretation of the text was that of Zhāng Jūzhèng 張居正 (1525-1582), the Imperial Tutor of Wànlì 萬曆, who used the Confucian classics with the purpose of reinstating morality at the court and in the whole empire. Meynard makes a complete portrait of Zhāng's life and thought.

Part III is focused on the editorial choices made by the Jesuits to present the text of the *Dialogues* to the European readers, given the different layers of interpretations that had been added to the original text through the centuries. The first choice concerned the rendering of *Lúnyǔ* in Latin and the title to give to their whole translation work, highlighting the philosophical content of both. Through the study of the manuscript of the *CSP* preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France,³ Meynard also shows the original intentions of the Jesuits: 1. to keep the original text with Chinese characters; 2. to use the Chinese typesetting to clearly distinguish the original text (written in a bigger font) from the commentaries (in a smaller font). However, this was not feasible and the *CSP* was printed without Chinese characters and no difference of font size, even though superscript numbers were kept on those words that literally translated the original.

Part IV concentrates on the Jesuit reading of the *Lúnyǔ*, on their interpretation of the person of Confucius, mainly as a philosopher but also as a saint (*shèngrén* 聖人), and of some key-concepts of the Confucian and Neo-Confucian doctrines. Meynard critically analyses these themes, presenting a variety of extracts from the text and proving his comprehensive knowledge of both the European and Chinese philosophical systems. His conclusion is that «the Jesuit translations tend to transform Confucianism into universalist ethics» in order to make the message closer to Christianity and more acceptable for European readers. Meynard also stresses that the Jesuits' translation not only included passages from Chinese commentaries, but also words of Ignatius of Loyola himself, concluding that they had found similarities between the conception of politics of their own order and the Chinese imperial system, which they proposed as a model for all of Europe.

In Part V, Meynard makes a very interesting comparison of Confucius' biography as it appeared in the earlier versions of the translations (*Sapientia Sinica*, 1662, and *Sinarum Scientia Politico-Moralis*, 1667-1669) and in the *CSP*, also confronting it with the Chinese sources. Meynard provides the keys to read the three Latin biographies: in the first one (by Da Costa, as Meynard assumes) the stress is placed on Confucius not being idolatrous; in the second one (by Intorcetta) the focus is on Confucius not being an atheist; in the third one (by Couplet) Confucius is presented

3 Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France (BNF), Fonds Latin 6277, 2 vols.

as a political model, whose importance was emphasized also by the inclusion of his portrait.

In the last section of the introduction, Part VI, Meynard discusses how two works, which were abridged French versions of the *CSP*, fought against the 'moral pessimism dominating the intellectual scene in Europe at the time', proposing Confucianism as a model to be followed: *Lettre sur la morale de Confucius, Philosophe de la Chine* (1688) and *La Morale de Confucius, Philosophe de la Chine* (1688). Meynard describes these two works, their authorship, their content and the main purpose of the compilers. He proves that the focus of the former was on Confucius' practical philosophy, whereas the focus of the latter was more on Confucius' morality.

In the conclusion, Meynard points out that even though the Jesuit reading of the *Lúnyǔ* was not always adhering to the Chinese interpretations, it helped western readers access the text, thus allowing two different cultures to communicate.

The core of the book (pp. 93-602), which is the trilingual version of the *Lúnyǔ*, is preceded by a brief explanation of the methodology Meynard used in his own translation work, which provides the reader with the correct tools to access the following pages. The trilingual text follows. For each verse of the *Lúnyǔ*, Meynard offers the Chinese text, its Latin translation with commentaries as in the *CSP*, and the translation in Modern English, which is based on the Latin. The translation is enriched by a useful apparatus of footnotes that aim to clarify the choices of the Latin version or to indicate its commentary sources. The translation of Confucius' biography into Modern English, with annotations on the sources, followed by the Latin original, closes the volume.

The book in its entirety is of high scholarly value and proves Meynard's command of the matter as well as of the three languages involved. It notably advances our knowledge in the field, with its balance of historical research, philosophical interpretation, critical analysis and source edition. Even some of Meynard's assumptions, which might appear bold at times - mainly those concerning the authorship of the translations and of the biography of Confucius in the *Sapientia Sinica* -, are nothing but important stimuli for further research.