

Brill's Series in Church History

Edited by

Wim Janse, Amsterdam

In cooperation with

Theo Clemens, Utrecht/Antwerpen
Paul van Geest, Amsterdam/Tilburg
Alastair Hamilton, London
R. Ward Holder, Manchester, NH
Scott Mandelbrote, Cambridge, UK
Andrew Pettegree, St. Andrews

VOLUME 60

Religious History and Culture Series

Edited by

Joris van Eijnatten, Utrecht
Fred van Lieburg, Amsterdam

VOLUME 7

The titles published in this series are listed at brill.com/bsch

Devising Order

Socio-religious Models, Rituals,
and the Performativity of Practice

Edited by

Bruno Boute
Thomas Småberg



BRILL

LEIDEN · BOSTON
2013

Cover illustrations in clockwise order:

1. The Chief Warrior (d. *kuntigi*) leading the Sakaraboutou Parade at Boundoukou, Côte d'Ivoire (Photo by Karel Arnaut, Boundoukou, 13/03/1994)
2. A wonderful play: Dutch children playing the Catholic Mass in the Catholic Review *De Engelbewaarder*, 29 (1913), 734 (Katholiek Documentatiecentrum Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen)
3. Portrait of Gregorio Lopez (Luo Wenzao), Vicar Apostolic of China, in Louis Le Comte, *Nouveaux Mémoires de la Chine*, Amsterdam: Henri Desbordes and Antoine Schelte, 1698, vol. 2, plate following page 171 (Houghton Library, Harvard College Library. Ch 62.33.8*)
4. Modern pilgrimage at spring equinox at the Kuculkan pyramid, Chichen Itzá, Yucatán, in Mexico (Photo by Bodil Liljefors Persson, 21/03/2005)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Devising order : socio-religious models, rituals, and the performativity of practice / edited by Bruno Boute, Thomas Småberg.

p. cm. — (Brill's series in church history, ISSN 1572-4107 ; volume 60. Religious history and culture series ; volume 7)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-90-04-23674-5 (hardback : alk. paper)—ISBN 978-90-04-24003-2 (e-book)

1. Rites and ceremonies. 2. Ritual. 3. Religion and sociology. I. Boute, Bruno. II. Småberg, Thomas, 1970—

BL600.D48 2013

203'.8—dc23

2012033204

This publication has been typeset in the multilingual "Brill" typeface. With over 5,100 characters covering Latin, IPA, Greek, and Cyrillic, this typeface is especially suitable for use in the humanities. For more information, please see www.brill.com/brill-typeface.

ISSN 1572-4107

ISBN 978-90-04-23674-5 (hardback)

ISBN 978-90-04-24003-2 (e-book)

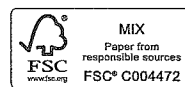
Copyright 2013 by Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, The Netherlands.

Koninklijke Brill NV incorporates the imprints Brill, Global Oriental, Hotei Publishing, IDC Publishers and Martinus Nijhoff Publishers.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, translated, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior written permission from the publisher.

Authorization to photocopy items for internal or personal use is granted by Koninklijke Brill NV provided that the appropriate fees are paid directly to The Copyright Clearance Center, 222 Rosewood Drive, Suite 910, Danvers, MA 01923, USA. Fees are subject to change.

This book is printed on acid-free paper.



CONTENTS

Notes on Contributors	vii
List of Figures	xi
Introduction: Devising Order. Socio-religious Models, Rituals, and the Performativity of Practice	1
<i>Bruno Boute and Thomas Småberg</i>	
The Priest, the Sexton, and the Weaver: A Flemish Dinner Play Performing Biblical Theology (c. 1539–1565)	19
<i>Wim François</i>	
Death as the Guest of Honour: The Social Constructions of Funeral Rites in Southern Sweden, 1880–1949	43
<i>Anna Stark</i>	
Giving Public Space a Face: The Agency of Monuments and Portraits, Thailand and the Netherlands Compared	61
<i>Irene Stengs</i>	
Making Space for Performativity: Publics, Powers, and Places in a Multi-Register Town Festival (Bondoukou, Côte d'Ivoire)	81
<i>Karel Arnaut</i>	
Place, Power, and Prophecy: Ritual Space and Speech among the Yucatec Maya from Colonial Time to Present Time	103
<i>Bodil Liljefors Persson</i>	
Reinventing the Apostolic Tradition: Transition and Appropriation in the Medieval Commemoration of the Apostles	123
<i>Els Rose</i>	
Affirming Papal Supremacy—Shaping Catholicism: The Readjustment of Symbolic Resources at the Post-Trent Roman Court	145
<i>Julia Zunckel</i>	

The Ritual Battle of Tournament: <i>Tornej, Dust, and Bohord</i> in Medieval Sweden ca. 1250–1320	165
<i>Thomas Småberg</i>	
European and Chinese Controversies over Rituals: A Seventeenth-Century Genealogy of Chinese Religion	193
<i>Eugenio Menegon</i>	
Engineering the Sacred: Perspectives for Research into Sacramental Practice and Conflicts over Sacraments in the Seventeenth Century	223
<i>Bruno Boute</i>	
The Jesuit Ordering: In Between the Imaginative Force of the Art of Memory and the Organizational Power of Accounting Practices	243
<i>Paolo Quattrone</i>	
Concluding Remarks: Rituality, Performativity, History, and Religion	265
<i>Joris Van Eijnatten</i>	
Bibliography	271
Index	297

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

KAREL ARNAUT, Ph.D. in Anthropology (2004), University of Ghent, is a researcher at the Max-Planck-Institut zur Erforschung multireligiöser und multiethnischer Gesellschaften at Göttingen, Germany. He studied at Ghent, Utrecht, and Oxford and taught at the Department of African Languages and Cultures (Ghent University, Belgium). He publishes on political, cultural, and religious performance by youth groups in Côte d'Ivoire or by Ivoirians in the diaspora. Some of his work is on the presentation and staging of Africans in Europe from the late nineteenth century until the present.

BRUNO BOUTE, Ph.D. in History (2003), Catholic University of Leuven, is a researcher at the Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster, Seminar für Mittlere und Neuere Kirchengeschichte, Germany. He publishes on religious history, history of the papacy, and the history of universities in early modern Europe.

WIM FRANÇOIS, Ph.D. in Theology (2004), Catholic University of Leuven, is a Research Professor at the Catholic University of Leuven, Research Unit History of Church and Theology, Belgium. He publishes on vernacular Bible reading and the Augustinian inspiration of the Louvain theologians' Bible commentaries in the Early Modern Era, in addition to the mission history of Leopold II's Congo (c. 1900).

BODIL LILJEFORS PERSSON, Ph.D. in History of Religion (2000), Lund University, is Associate Professor at Malmö University, Faculty of Education and Society, Department of History, Religious Studies, and Social Science, Sweden. She publishes on Maya religion and history from early Colonial times and contemporary times as well as on ritual studies, cultural encounters, religion, didactics, and citizenship education.

EUGENIO MENEGON, Ph.D. in Chinese History (2002), University of California at Berkeley, is Associate Professor at Boston University, Department of History, USA. He publishes and teaches on late imperial Chinese history, history of Chinese-Western relations, and world history.

EUROPEAN AND CHINESE CONTROVERSIES OVER RITUALS:
A SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY GENEALOGY OF CHINESE RELIGION

Eugenio Menegon

Introduction

The Reformation in Europe and the corresponding criticism of traditional religious rites and practices triggered a deep 'crisis of representation.' It is not just that Catholic and Protestant controversialists clashed over the meaning and workings of ritual as well as the relationship between faith and gesture, between orthodoxy and orthopraxy. The formation of the three great confessions—Catholicism, Lutheranism, and Calvinism—in Western and Central Europe went hand in hand with a thorough review and restyling *within* these confessions of ritual and religious practices that aimed at purifying them from heresy and superstition. The contribution of Julia Zunckel to this volume exposes not only that apparently unchanged papal ceremonies were actually profoundly reformed in the aftermath of the Council of Trent (1545–63), but also that this reform took shape in continuous debates even within the heart of Catholic Christendom.

As Catholicism became a truly global religion in the early modern period, encounters with overseas cultures influenced the development of 'ritual theories' as well. China is a case in point. When Catholic missionaries started arriving in the Middle Kingdom precisely at this historical juncture, ritual orthopraxy and efficacy were central concerns in Chinese religious life (as they are today). Elaborate discussions on ritual propriety had in fact occupied Confucian scholars since the days of Confucius himself. In turn, Catholic missionaries and Christian converts in late imperial China engaged in passionate debates over the *meanings* of native rituals and their relationship to Christianity. Their wrangling over fundamental concepts common both to the Chinese and the Christian European religious repertoires (e.g. 'sacrifice') contributed new elements to the nascent European understanding of what 'religion' and 'rites' were supposed to be. The diverging Jesuit and Dominican interpretations of the Chinese religious experience in late seventeenth-century China, with particular attention to family and Confucian rituals, eventually reverberated around 1700 in the theological faculties of European universities such as the Sorbonne,

as well as in Parisian salons, the anti-chambers of cardinals' palaces, and the Holy Office in Rome, and reflected different early modern readings of 'Chinese religion' within the context of what would become known as the 'Chinese Rites Controversy.' This controversy, in which European intellectuals became acquainted both with a culture that was much older than theirs and with intellectual traditions that wrested respect from them, dragged on for over a century (1635–1742). Unfolding around the questions of how to translate the name of God in Chinese and about the religious or civil nature of ancestral and Confucian rites, the 'Chinese Rites Controversy' exposed differences of opinion and approach among missionaries and Catholic authorities alike over the extent to which Christianity could be accommodated to other cultures and their rituality. The papal Bull *Ex quo singulari* of 11 July 1742 would eventually prohibit the participation of Christians in the so-called 'Chinese Rites,' a decision that was revised only in 1939.¹

However, here I do not dwell on the well-known *querelles* enacted in Paris and Rome, but rather focus my attention on some Christian manuscript sources in Chinese and European languages that, so far, have not been studied in depth. As should be expected, they reveal that missionaries who had lived in *China* for long stretches of time had a different understanding of Chinese religious reality (especially of ancestral rituals) than their contemporary interpreters in Europe. Missionaries based in China generally understood 'Chinese religion' and 'Chinese rites' not merely through their own European theological categories, but also through the interpretations of Chinese native scholars they interacted with. In keeping with most pre-modern exegetical modes of analysis prevalent both in China and Europe, however, authority and textual analysis prevailed over 'ethnographic' descriptions in these debates. Through an examination of some Chinese-Christian texts, we can discern the analytical categories employed by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century missionaries, and observe how European notions and native understanding interacted to produce Christian representations of Chinese religion and Chinese rituality that ultimately were transmitted to Europe. Bolstered in the course of the Chinese Rites controversies, these notions not only linger in scholarship

¹ For the purpose of this essay, the general term 'Chinese Rites' refers only to family rituals and the cult of Confucius. That was the expression that early modern missionaries used in their debates to cluster such rituals. For an introduction to the history of the Chinese Rites Controversy and related literature, see the contributions to Mungello ed., *The Chinese Rites Controversy*; and Standaert, "Rites Controversy," 680–8.

on Chinese culture and history, but continue to underpin much research in the field of ritual studies.

1. *Religious Taxonomy by Early Modern European Missionaries in China*

Catholic missionaries who reached China in the late sixteenth century immediately proceeded to construct a taxonomy of the religious phenomena they encountered. But we should not assume that their taxonomy coincides in significant ways with the epistemological categories we have grown accustomed to. In fact, the first generation of missionaries did not even extensively employ the word 'religion' to classify the world of rituals and specialists they encountered. As is well known, 'religion' is a relatively late concept that acquired some of its modern meanings only starting in the sixteenth century.²

Moreover, as noted by Jonathan Z. Smith, when the concept of 'religion' was used in the context of early modern cross-cultural encounters and colonization of non-European peoples, it represented more an anthropological than a theological concept. For the Jesuit ethnographer of Peru, José de Acosta, for example, the 'religion' of the Andean peoples included what he labelled as 'rituals,' 'ceremonies,' 'superstitions,' 'idolatry,' 'sacrifices,' and 'feasts.' Religion was thus not so much a merely theological construct, but rather "an inventory of cultural topics that could be presented either ethnographically in terms of a particular people... or in a cross-cultural encyclopaedia under the heading of 'ritual' or religion."³

In order to understand religious phenomena in China, missionaries rarely employed in a systematic way the ethnographic grid foisted by their counterparts in Latin America on the natives there. In China, this conception of religion as a repertoire of practices was systematized and

² For a critique and a summary of recent scholarship on the concept of religion and the Chinese case, see Ford Campamy, "On the Very Idea of Religions (in the Modern West and in Early Medieval China)," 287–319.

³ Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious," 270. The term had a long history in the West, dating to classical times, but was debated and redefined especially at the time of the Reformation. Two major scholarly examinations of the term and concept of religion as discussed by a host of European theologians and thinkers are Despland, *La Religion en Occident*; and the monumental work by Feil, *Religio*; cf. also Idem, *On the Concept of Religion*. Only Feil, however, indirectly mentions in his discussion of the Spanish Late Scholastic School the impact that encounters with extra-European societies had on the concept of religion; see Feil, *Religio*, 117–48, esp. 120–6. For a more detailed treatment of this latter topic, see Bernard and Gruzinski, *De l'idolâtrie*.

comprehended by missionaries through two other interpretive grids: a Catholic theological grid and an interpretive grid borrowed from Chinese Confucian intellectuals, the so-called 'literati.' This was partly a consequence of the nature of intellectual inquiry in China, a society that displayed an even higher degree of literacy and more intense reliance on an approved written canon than contemporary Europe did. Moreover, debates on the nature of Chinese religion, as we will see, centred on the meaning of *specific* rituals within the 'Confucian' tradition, rather than on broad theological or anthropological categories. The main question the missionaries asked themselves was not 'are the Chinese religious?', but rather 'are Chinese family rituals and the rites to Confucius *civil* and *political*, or *superstitious* and *idolatrous* in nature?'

2. Attitudes towards the 'Three Teachings'

Why did missionaries concern themselves only with Chinese family rituals and the rites to Confucius, while they attacked the other important religious traditions of China, and mostly ignored their tenets and rituals? Although obviously they would not recognize our '-isms,' the product of the late nineteenth-century project of comparative religions, missionaries clearly recognized the presence of the three main religious traditions of Buddhism (the 'law of the idols' or of She-kia, Sakyamuni), Daoism (the practices of the *tausu* or *daoshi*, i.e. Daoist masters) and Confucianism (the 'law of the literati' or *ru*) as presented to them by the literati. However, they accepted only the *ru* as their legitimate interlocutors and combined orthodox literati scorn for Buddhist monks, Daoist priests, and their rituals, with their own Catholic censure of non-Christian religions.

Michele Ruggieri and Matteo Ricci, the first Jesuits to enter the Ming Empire in the 1580s, had initially dressed as Buddhist monks. But when they realized through their conversations with literati that an association with monks and Buddhism created a negative social image in the eyes of most elite Chinese, they quickly adopted the garb of literati and proceeded to embrace many of the prejudices of the literati towards Buddhism and Daoism, as well as literati readings of rituals, which to a large extent were enshrined in the canonical *Jiali* (Family Rituals) by the great neo-Confucian Zhu Xi of the Song period (twelfth century A.D.). Since, as observed by Patricia Ebrey "[n]one of the ceremonies described in [Zhu Xi's] *Family Rituals* departed very far from ordinary life..." and "involved no weird symbolisms or improbable juxtapositions, no dancing, trances, or

violence,"⁴ the Jesuits must have found them rather acceptable, subdued, and in fact devoid of what they saw as the hallmark of religious rituality, i.e. overt communication with divine beings or with demonic forces.

Chapter X in Book I of Matteo Ricci's chronicle of the beginnings of the China mission (compiled around 1609) is among the earliest and most unequivocal statements of the position of missionaries towards the various 'sects' of China. Entitled 'Di varie sette che nella Cina sono intorno alla religione' ('Of various sects that pertain to religion in China'), this chapter describes in broad strokes and in critical terms the 'Three Teachings.'⁵ Ricci also comments with contempt on the apparent unwieldy nature of the Chinese religious landscape: "Each of these [three main sects] has greatly multiplied in number and in masters through time. Thus, even if they are defined as three, in reality the sects of this kingdom are more than three hundred, and every day new ones appear, falling into even more corrupt habits. All these new masters pretend to offer ever longer lives [to their adepts]."⁶

For the Jesuits, 'false religions' like Buddhism or Daoism were outright idolatrous 'laws' or 'sects' and deserved little discussion.⁷ Missionaries rejected Buddhism for two main reasons. First, Buddhist rituals, devotional

⁴ Buckley Ebrey, "Introduction," xxvi.

⁵ The original Italian title of this chapter is somewhat ambiguous and ungrammatical, and thus my awkward English rendering; see *Fonti Ricciane 1*, ed. D'Elia, 110.

⁶ *Fonti Ricciane 1*, ed. D'Elia, 131.

⁷ As a matter of fact, China missionaries seem to have employed the word 'religion' (in a variety of European vernaculars) with increasing frequency only starting in the second half of the seventeenth century, and to have applied it to Christianity (e.g. in Italian: *religione Cristiana*), but almost never to Buddhism or other Chinese traditions. Rather, the words used by missionaries to define Buddhism were 'Idolatry' and 'Sect of the Idols/Idolaters,' while for Buddhist monks they used the terms *osciani* (和尚) or 'bonzes.' Conversely, for Daoist priests, they used the Chinese term *Taosi* (道士), or clustered them under the name of 'Sect of the *Taochiao* (道教),' sometimes translated as 'sect of the sorcerers.' See Gatta, *Il Natural Lume*, 104–5, quoting Bartoli; cf. also Standaert, "The Jesuits Did Not Manufacture 'Confucianism,'" 127. As noted by Standaert, the Jesuits also applied the term 'sect' to the Confucians (*ru* 儒). In early modern time, the word 'sect' did not have the negative connotations we attribute to it today: derived from the Latin *sequi* (to follow), it simply meant a group of followers of a particular philosophical or religious teacher or faith. Another common term, used interchangeably for *secta* and applied equally to Buddhists, Daoists, and Confucians (and also to Christianity), was *lex* or *legge* (lit. 'law'), as in 'the Law of the Idolaters' (=Buddhism), or 'the Law of the Literati' (=Confucianism). These terms can usefully be compared to the Chinese 'suffixes' *jia* 家 and *jiao* 教: Standaert suggests that *jiao* could be employed as an equivalent of *lex*, while *jia* seems to be an equivalent of *secta*. Christians too were a *lex*, and a missionary never called it a sect: Catholicism in Chinese was and is indeed called *Tianzhujiao* 天主教 (The *Teachings* [= *lex*] of the Lord of Heaven); see Standaert, "The Jesuits Did not Manufacture 'Confucianism,'" 120.

practices, and 'dogmas' were in their eyes too similar to the Catholic ones, so much so that missionaries posited that Buddhism was a corrupt form of Christianity, transformed by distance and time in India, and then imported to China. On this topic, the Jesuit historian of the Asian missions in Rome, Daniello Bartoli (1608–85), drawing on the extensive reports from the field kept in the Roman archives of the Jesuit order, concluded as follows:

Thus, [in China] there is no other Sect that is farther and more contrary to our faith than that [of the Osciani=Buddhism], which [nonetheless] appears to be the most intimately connected and similar [to Christianity].⁸

Secondly, missionaries shared the orthodox literati's condescension, if not outright opposition, towards Buddhism, in a spirit that has been broadly defined as 'Chinese anti-clericalism.'⁹ Daoism was given even scantier attention, and excoriated as demonic witchcraft.¹⁰

It is little surprise, then, that early modern Catholic missionaries in China showed little interest in ethnographic or even textual analyses of Buddhist, Daoist, or other religious texts of the popular traditions, concentrating instead on the Confucian classics and ritual texts. Their choice stemmed from an early strategic move made by Matteo Ricci, a move partly founded on his sincere belief in the existence of an ancient monotheistic tradition contained in the classics. These ideas of Ricci, later followed by many of his successors, and brought to philological paroxysm by the French missionaries called Figurists in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, were inspired by the so-called 'Ancient Theology,' popular among many European philosophers starting in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth century.¹¹ If it was possible to rescue from the classics

⁸ See Bartoli's *La Cina*, as quoted in Gatta, *Il Natural Lume*, 104.

⁹ Cf. Goossaert, *L'anticléricalisme en Chine*.

¹⁰ See e.g. Bertuccioli, "Matteo Ricci and Taoism," 41–50.

¹¹ 'Ancient Theology' had its roots in late antiquity and was based on the apocryphal writings of the hermetic tradition of Neo-Platonism. It became popular again within the attempt of Renaissance philosophers to combine Neo-Platonism with Christianity, and one of its main proponents among the Jesuits was the polymath Athanasius Kircher (1602–80). Ricci was educated in Rome at a time of great interest for 'Ancient Theology' and although he remained rather orthodox in his theological outlook based on Thomism and Aristotelianism, he also seems to have accepted some ideas regarding ancient monotheism from the Ancient Theologians. Ricci thought that he was recovering the true meaning of the original classics, devoid of commentarial detritus, and that *Shangdi* and *Tian* were in fact nothing else but the Christian God. This clearly smacks of Ancient Theology. It was only later on, however, that other China Jesuits explicitly made the connection with Ancient Theology in their published writings, for example in the Latin translation of some Confucian classics published in Paris in 1687. D.P. Walker has convincingly shown that debates in the second half of the seventeenth century in France influenced a group of French Jesuits in

the idea of an ancient monotheistic god (the ancient deities *Shangdi*, the Lord on High, or *Tian*, Heaven), identifiable with the Christian God, then literati in search of the most profound meaning of the classics devoid of Song period commentarial layering would be convinced of the truth of the missionaries' message. The next step for the missionaries—a strategic one in gaining social acceptance in China—was to de-sacralise family rituals and the cult of Confucius, and label them as 'civil/political ceremonies.' Thus, while Christianizing the classics and denigrating the neo-Confucian 'modern' commentaries, the Jesuits were taking away any *religious* meaning from the so-called 'Chinese Rites.'

Yet, until the arrival of the Dominicans and Franciscans in China in the 1630s, the Jesuits showed little concern for the participation of Christian commoners, gentry, and officials in the 'Chinese Rites,' i.e. ancestral rituals—including rites at the family shrine and at funerals—and the rites to Confucius, and did not discuss them. Probably, having *implicitly* accepted the fact that these rituals should be subsumed under the category that they would later call 'civil/political ceremonies,' the Jesuits simply went on to accept them in daily practice without specific reflection until the 1640s. In the period following the death of Ricci in 1610 up to the 1640s, rather, the Jesuits concentrated on questions of terminology, discussing with great passion among themselves the best way to translate Catholic concepts into Chinese, such as the name of God.¹²

3. Catholic Theological Categories for Rituals and Religion

The missionaries saw Chinese religions through a theological grid that they carried in their minds to China. This grid mainly derived from the theological systematization of Thomas Aquinas. Travel to places like Goa, Mexico, the Philippines, and finally residence in China, doubtless affected the missionaries' frame of mind through new perception of the local societies they interacted with and through contact with 'missionary knowledge,'

China. Based on their study of the Chinese classics, they devised a 'Chinese Ancient Theology,' elaborating in great detail the initial idea of Ricci. See Walker, "The Survival of the Ancient Theology in Late Seventeenth-Century France, and French Jesuit Missionaries in China," 194–230; cf. also von Collani, "Figurism," 668–79.

¹² No scholar has been able so far to uncover early discussions of 'Chinese rites' among the Jesuits: polemical writings and studies on the topic all seem to have sprung up only after the concerted effort of Dominicans and Franciscans against Jesuit evangelical practice in China, starting in the mid-1630s.

accrued in long years of work in the field by previous generations of missionaries. Working in China, in particular, required flexibility and sophistication, as all missionaries observed. The Jesuits, in particular, were most affected by what they experienced in China, and tried to employ Catholic theology in innovative ways to accommodate to the new reality. Theological categories continued to constitute an important framework in missionary understanding of China. Here I will concentrate on three of them: 'superstition,' 'idolatry' (a species of superstition), and 'atheism.' These were terms often invoked in the debates on the Chinese Rites.

3.1. Superstition

The etymology of the Latin word *superstitio* is uncertain, and according to Cicero it most likely derives from *supersisto*, i.e. "to stand in terror of the deity" (Cicero, 'De Natura deorum,' I, 42, 117). Aquinas defines it as "a vice opposed to religion by way of excess; not because in the worship of God it does more than true religion, but because it offers divine worship to beings other than God or offers worship to God in an improper manner" (*Summa Theologica*, II-II: 92:1). Aquinas goes on to classify superstition under four categories or species:

1. improper worship of the true God (*indebitus veri Dei cultus*);
2. idolatry;
3. divination;
4. vain observances, including magic and occult arts.¹³

¹³ On Aquinas's definitions, see the lemma by Wilhelm, "Superstition." Thomas Aquinas distinguishes species of superstition as follows: "Accordingly the species of superstition are differentiated, first on the part of the mode, secondly on the part of the object. For the divine worship may be given either to whom it ought to be given, namely, to the true God, but 'in an undue mode,' and this is the first species of superstition; or to whom it ought not to be given, namely, to any creature whatsoever, and this is another genus of superstition, divided into many species in respect of the various ends of divine worship. For the end of divine worship is in the first place to give reverence to God, and in this respect the first species of this genus is 'idolatry,' which unduly gives divine honour to a creature. The second end of religion is that man may be taught by God whom he worships; and to this must be referred 'divinatory' superstition, which consults the demons through compacts made with them, whether tacit or explicit. Thirdly, the end of divine worship is a certain direction of human acts according to the precepts of God, the object of that worship: and to this must be referred the superstition of certain 'observances.'" See *Summa Theologica*, II-II: 92:1, in *Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas*, transl. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province; online edition at <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/>.

While the first category of 'improper cult' applies to an approved Christian ritual gone awry, the other three forms of superstition seem to belong more squarely within the world of 'false religion,' under which Buddhism, Daoism, and other popular cults would be grouped by missionaries. China missionaries forbade to their Christians all those practices that clearly defied the Church prohibitions.¹⁴ Apologetic catechisms, in particular, attacked practices such as idolatry (worship of images of gods), use of non-Christian scriptures and prayers, geomancy (*fengshui*), divination, spirit-possession, burning of paper money at funerals and temples, and other similar practices. While these phenomena were clearly demarcated as unacceptable, however, the two categories of ancestral rituals and the official cult of Confucius would eventually raise a problem of interpretation, and in turn provoke a fragmentation in missionary practice.¹⁵ The issue of 'idolatry' seems to have been one of the major sticking points within the discussion of the 'Chinese rites.'

3.2. Idolatry

Catholic theology considers idolatry (Greek *eidololatria*) as a species of superstition. It etymologically denotes divine worship given to an image, but has been more broadly extended to mean all forms of worship towards anything but the Christian God. Catholics, however, were not immune from accusations of idolatry themselves. Protestants attacked them because they prayed in front of images of Christ, the Virgin, and the saints. In response, the Council of Trent specified that while 'idolaters' credit the images they worship with divine powers, orthodox Catholics believe:

That in images there is *no divinity or virtue on account of which they are to be worshipped, that no petitions can be addressed to them, and that no trust is to be placed in them*. That the honour which is given to them is referred to the objects (*prototypa*) which they represent, so that through the images which we kiss, and before which we uncover our heads and kneel, we adore Christ and *venerate* the Saints whose likenesses they are.¹⁶

¹⁴ The 1912 online edition of the *Catholic Encyclopaedia* supplies a long list of practices that historically fell under the Catholic orthodox category of 'superstition,' including astrology, chiromancy, geomancy, idolatry, Devil-worship, spiritism, charms, omens of future events, witchcraft and magic, lucky and unlucky days, etc.

¹⁵ On the fragmentation of missionary policy, see Gatta, *Il Natural Lume*, 85.

¹⁶ *Concilium Tridentinum*, Sess. XXV, "De invocatione Sanctorum," as quoted and translated in the 1912 online edition of the *Catholic Encyclopaedia*, under Wilhelm, "Idolatry." Italics are mine.

Unlike Catholics, in missionary eyes worshippers of Buddhist, Daoist, or other popular deities were guilty of idolatry. But apart from the rather clear-cut category of Buddhist, Daoist, and popular religious worship, idolatry in the China mission became a contentious issue connected to the use of ancestral tablets and images in family rituals, as well as in Confucian rituals. According to some authoritative literati and to the texts they recommended to the Jesuits, ancestral rituals and the cult of Confucius did not entail any superstitious element in the sense expressed by the Catholic understanding of idolatry. Literati assured the Jesuits that no favours (*fu* 福) were expected from ancestors, that no true sacrifices were offered to them, that no prayers were directed at them to obtain favours, and that, in sum, they were not the object of worship, but rather of respectful remembrance. Similarly, the Jesuits were told that Confucius was venerated as a sage, not adored as a divine being. In particular, the *Liji* (Book of Rites) and the *Zhuzi Jiali* were used as the main authorities in the learned and mainly manuscript treatises written on the subject by the Jesuits to prove these points, as I will discuss below. In fact, some of these literati went so far in their denial of spiritual forces that the missionaries labelled them as 'atheists.'

3.3. *Atheism*

Ricci observed at the end of his brief examination of China's Three Teachings:

The current opinion most common among those who think to be the wisest ones is to say that these three sects are just one, and that all of them can be respected at the same time. By doing so they deceive themselves and others in a disorderly manner, as it seems to them that in this matter of religion, the more opinions there are, the better it is for the kingdom. But in the end they achieve the contrary of what they wish, because, as they want to follow all the [religious] laws, they are left without any, since they do not follow any with dedication. And thus some clearly confess their disbelief, while some others delude themselves with a false persuasion in some belief, and most of these people end up in a deep atheism (*nel profondo dell'ateismo*).¹⁷

Here Ricci is not so much describing the attitude of the vast majority of the population, but rather the more sophisticated (he defines them as "the wisest") among the literati, whom he calls atheists, based on the Christian

¹⁷ *Fonti Ricciane* 1, ed. D'Elia, 132.

understanding of atheism at the time. The successor of Ricci as head of the Jesuit mission, Nicoló Longobardo, went even further, labelling as atheists both ancient and modern followers of the *Rujiao* (*Jukiao*; i.e. the teachings of the *Ru*), and justifying his position through the reading of Chinese philosophical texts as well.¹⁸ 'Atheism' remained one of the concepts that muddled the debate on the Chinese Rites, especially because, as scholars have observed, early modern orthodox Christianity employed it to characterize a great variety of skeptical or irreligious positions that we today would not necessarily call atheistic. Sometimes, it was even used to mean 'non-Christian' *tout court*.¹⁹ In the end, these missionary readings of Chinese thought and practices as 'atheistic' offered further ammunition to Deist thinkers and the Enlightenment's critique of organized religion. If Chinese literati and officials performed civil-political ceremonies that embodied family and state virtues, and did not expect or pray for any divine favours, then China was a perfect polity run by philosophers, with no need for priests or the Christian God. What need for religion at all?

4. *The Debates on the 'Chinese Rites' after the Arrival of the Friars in Fujian from the 1640s to the 1680s*

The supposed atheistic nature of the Confucian elites, however, was not one of the major themes of debate in the Christian communities of China during the seventeenth century. It was, rather, rituality. The quarrels became heated only starting in the 1640s, when Philippine-based friars of the Dominican and Franciscan orders—mainly Spaniards—finally reached Taiwan and Fujian, bypassing the Portuguese entrepôt of Macao. They did not like what they saw happening among local Christians converted by the Jesuits in Fujian: lineage masters of ceremonies ('priests' or 'deacons,' in their eyes), some of them Christians, were celebrating grand ancestral ceremonies and 'sacrifices' in halls that the friars labelled as 'chapels.' To the newly arrived missionaries, this was clearly all idolatry.

¹⁸ *Fonti Ricciane* 1, ed. D'Elia, 132 n.2.

¹⁹ On the early modern conceptions of 'atheism' and unbelief, see e.g. the review essay by Wootton, "Lucien Febvre and the Problem of Unbelief in the Early Modern Period." On the China missionaries' view of Chinese 'atheism' (what we would probably see more as a kind of 'pantheism'), see Meynard, "Chinese Buddhism and the Threat of Atheism." I would like to thank Isabelle Duceux for discussing this problem with me and offering bibliographic suggestions.

The existing Jesuit policy of toleration of local family rituals and Confucian ceremonies was based on a long-standing position inaugurated by Ricci, and had been allegedly authorized by the Jesuit Visitor of the East Asian Missions, Alessandro Valignano, in the latter part of the sixteenth century, in a document entitled 'Summarium admonitionum.' This set of instructions not only dealt with the problems of appropriate Christian terminology in East Asia, but also "with the eradication of evil and superstitious abuses, with the *prudent toleration* of communal rituals and civil cult according to the customs of the people, and in particular of the deceased ancestors and of the grateful veneration for the master Confucius...".²⁰ But this early policy apparently did not involve any in-depth study of the 'Chinese rites.' Only as a reaction to the friars' accusations did a Jesuit apologetic response develop.

The dislocation provoked by the Ming-Qing wars into the 1670s and the Calendar Case of 1664–70,²¹ however, focused most of the energies of the missionaries on survival and the tending of their flocks. It was only during the forced 'pause' of the Calendar Case that missionaries of various religious orders (Jesuits, Dominicans, and Franciscans), banned from Canton by the Regents, could finally take advantage of their common residence in the south to discuss their different positions in a 1667 conference.²² The position taken at this time by the Franciscan Antonio Caballero de Santa Maria (1602–69) is indicative of the anti-Rites front: Confucius and the ancestors, he said, are adored as gods, like the Buddhist and Daoist gods, and thus these ceremonies are religious in nature. In the final analysis, Caballero de Santa Maria relies on what Rule calls a "naïve, but not un-Chinese theory of language," where "all ceremonies which share the same name are essentially the same."²³ Another participant in the Canton conference, the Dominican Domingo Navarrete (1618–89), rather than engaging in linguistic analysis, dedicated himself to the compilation of rather inflammatory writings, published in Madrid after his return to Europe in 1679. Navarrete's mixture of gossip, theological speculations,

²⁰ "Summarium admonitionum" by Valignano, cited in Bernard, "Un dossier bibliographique de la fin du XVII^e siècle sur la question des Termes Chinois," 65. That document, however, has never been found, and there are even doubts about its existence.

²¹ The Jesuit astronomers at the Qing court were ousted after the attacks by Muslim astronomers and Confucian scholars, and almost all missionaries in China sent in confinement to Canton during the Oboi regency, only to be freed and reinstated by the young Kangxi Emperor in 1670.

²² Rule, *K'ung-Tzu or Confucius?*, 102–11.

²³ Rule, *K'ung-Tzu or Confucius?*, 105.

and anti-Jesuit venom eventually escalated the controversy, revealing to a wider public the extent of the quarrels dividing the missionaries in China. Navarrete simply defined the Chinese Rites as superstitious and idolatrous, although he also held that Confucian literati performing them were 'atheists,' that is, in our religious parlance, irreligious or skeptical. In spite of these diatribes, however, a working compromise was reached among the church leaders in China in the 1670s, and a prudent policy of 'purification' of existing rites was pursued. For example, Christians had to eliminate the character referring to the spirit of the deceased (*shen* or *ling*) in the ancestral tablets they planned to use. It was only in the late 1670s and early 1680s that debates flared again on the Chinese Rites. The publication of Navarrete's treatise in Madrid reignited the conflict on a grand scale. But Navarrete's work, produced for a European public, only reflected an accumulation of previous writings and discussions on the topic by anti-Rites missionaries in China. Even before the Jesuits reacted forcefully to the position of their opponents in the 1680s, especially in response to Navarrete's salvo, the Dominicans Francisco Varo (1627–87) and Juan Bautista de Morales (1597–1664) had produced some Chinese writings condemning the Rites. These early writings became contentious in the 1680s. A sense of the key issues being discussed in those years can be gathered from an examination of the claims and counterclaims contained in the treatises authored in the 1680s. The Dominican Varo, in the anti-Rites group, and the Jesuit Francesco Saverio Filippucci (1632–92), on the pro-Rites front, were the main European missionaries involved. The Chinese Bishop of Nanjing Gregorio Luo Wenzao 羅文藻 (1615–91, a Dominican and a native of Fuan, Fujian), and the Chinese Christians of Fujian, on the other hand, were the Chinese voices in the debate, and sided mostly with the pro-Rites camp.²⁴

Chinese language texts, as well as several lengthy manuscripts in European languages, reveal that in the 1680s the questions under discussion were grounded in the serious study of Chinese ritual texts and entailed the participation of both missionaries and Chinese Christians. After the involvement of the church hierarchy in Rome and of the theological circles in Paris in the late 1690s, however, the debate took a different direction. Philological research done in China was substituted by literature penned

²⁴ Rosso, "Morales, Juan Bautista de;" Menegon, "Varo, Francisco;" Idem, "Luo Wenzao;" Masini, "Filippucci, Alessandro."

by professional polemicists in Europe, with little or no direct knowledge of China. Paul Rule observes that, “[p]erhaps, if the Chinese Rites controversy had been thrashed out in China where statement and counter-statement could be assessed against experience and actual observation, it might have been possible to resolve the question definitively, at least in the form of a working compromise or common policy, although the actual course of the debate even within China makes one hesitate to claim this.”²⁵ The nature of the debate, even in China itself, was so acrimonious that no compromise was in sight: philological arguments, experience, and dialogue with Chinese literati did not ultimately sway the contenders from their hardened positions. Here I will concern myself only with a few representative titles from this 1680s ‘Chinese’ phase of the controversy. I will start with Francisco Varo.

5. *Francisco Varo’s Approach to the ‘Chinese Rites’*

Among the Dominicans in Fujian, the most accomplished linguist and expert of Chinese rituals was no doubt Francisco Varo (1627–87; Wan Jiguo 萬濟國). A brief examination of his life offers a sense of Varo’s accomplishments, both as a linguist and an observer-actor in the religious landscape of south China. After a novitiate in the convent of San Pablo in his native city of Seville (Spain), Varo travelled at a young age to the missions of the Philippines and China. As was customary, he first worked in 1648–49 among the Minnanese residing in the *Parian de los Sangleyes* (Manila’s ‘Chinatown’), and then sailed to the Dominican mission of Fuan in northeastern Fujian, where he remained for most of his life (from 1649 to 1687, a total of around 34 years, minus a period of exile to Canton and Fuzhou in 1671–74 during the Calendar Case). Having reached Fujian in his early twenties, he soon became fluent in Mandarin (i.e. southern *guan-hua*), as well as in at least two northern Fujianese dialects (Funing dialect, spoken in the region of Fuan, and Fuzhou dialect). He probably also had a working knowledge of Minnanese. His linguistic competence is reflected in a large manuscript ‘Vocabulary’ of the Mandarin language that he compiled, as well as the pioneering *Arte de la Lengua Mandarina* (‘Grammar

²⁵ Rule, *K’ung-Tzu or Confucius?*, 97.

of the Mandarin Language’; printed in Canton, 1703), which is the earliest published description of any spoken form of Chinese.²⁶

During the years 1649–51, he collaborated with his superior Juan Bautista de Morales on the Chinese translation of a famous 1645 pontifical decree condemning the Chinese Rites allowed by the Jesuits. Later on he also wrote, with the assistance of some Fuan literati, a treatise analysing the meaning of sacrifice (*ji* 祭) according to Thomistic theology, entitled [*Fuan*] *bianji* [福安] 辯祭 (A critique of ‘sacrifice’).²⁷ In 1661, as Provincial Vicar of his Order in China, he presided over the Dominican missionary conference of Lanqi in Zhejiang (the so-called ‘Junta de Lanki’), setting a common Dominican policy on rituals. On that occasion, he also interviewed some local literati on the meaning of the disputed Chinese Rites. In 1677, Varo completed the draft of his catechism *Shengjiao mingzheng* 聖教明證 (Clear proofs of the Holy Teachings), posthumously published in 1719–20, and containing excerpts from his earlier treatise on sacrifice. In both his *Bianji* and *Shengjiao mingzheng*, Varo constructed a critique of the Chinese Rites which was fundamentally based on a Thomistic reading of some key concepts: false vs. true religion, idolatry, and sacrifice.

We do not know when the [*Fuan*] *Bianji* was written exactly (possibly in the 1670s), but it became a source of heated debate only in the 1680s in Fujian, when its existence became known to the Jesuits by accident. Discovery of this tract started a serious debate in China, involving both foreign missionaries of the pro- and anti-Rites parties (Jesuits and Dominicans in the main), as well as a select number of Chinese literati

²⁶ See Coblin, *Francisco Varo’s Glossary of the Mandarin Language*; and Varo, *Francisco Varo’s grammar of the mandarin language*.

²⁷ Varo’s text is preserved within a refutation of it, commissioned in 1681 by the Jesuit Simão Rodrigues (1645–1704) to the Fujianese literatus Leontius (良爵) Li [i.e. Li Yifen 李奕芬]. A copy is kept in the Roman Archives of the Society of Jesus, Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (ARSI), *Japonica Sinica I*, (38/42), 40/5, and published in *Yesuhui Luoma dang’anguan Ming Qing tianzhujiao wenxian 10*, ed. Dudink and Standaert, 363–438. Cf. also Standaert, *The Fascinating God*, 11. The title of Varo’s work could be translated in different ways, as Francesco Saverio Filippucci SJ observes in his *De Sinensium ritibus politicis acta*, 117: “The pamphlet of Fr. Francisco Varo is entitled *Pien Ci* [*Bianji*]. According to the intention of the aforementioned Father, this title should be translated as *A dispute on sacrifice* (*Disputatio de sacrificio*), but according to a [more] appropriate Chinese understanding, according to which we foreigners talk with the Chinese—since we must by all means be correctly understood by them—this title translated into Latin expresses this meaning very precisely as follows: *Dispute over the character (littera) Ci and its meaning, i.e. dispute over sacrifices, offerings and in general gifts received.*”

in Fujian and southern Zhejiang.²⁸ The treatise opens with a discussion of the failure to properly revere God, by either using false rituals to honour the true God, or using genuine rituals to honour a false god (these are Thomistic descriptions of superstitious rituals, as we have seen). Varo categorizes Buddhist and Daoists within this second category (using genuine rituals to honour a false god), and offers as analogy the experience of the ancient Hebrews, who made images of their forefathers, and then worshipped them using the rituals initially only reserved for the Lord of Heaven. Similarly, Buddhists and Daoists use rituals to worship people as gods rather than to worship the Lord of Heaven, and Varo sees this as "an enticement of the devil" (*xiemo suo yin* 邪魔所引, p. 371). Apparently, the similarity of some Buddhist and Daoist rites to Catholic ones, and the missionary theories on the origins of Buddhism as a deception of the devil and a corrupted vestige of Christianity, might have justified this interpretation.

The Catholic conception and practice of sacrifice were used as the litmus test of proper worship. Varo suggests that only the highest form of sacrifice (*jisi* 祭祀, which he does not define) can be considered worthy of the Lord of Heaven. Moreover, such sacrifice should never be directed to other entities, such as the ancestors. Obviously, for a Catholic the highest form of 'sacrifice' is the Mass, which is a ritual where God himself is sacrificed.²⁹ Varo writes:

Sacrifice can be directed only to the Lord [...]. However, people have a wrong idea of the true origin of good and evil, and therefore they sacrifice to heaven, the earth, the mountains, the rivers, the spirits, the ancient sages and the ancestors, hoping that they will bestow fortune and keep away misfortune. Being such the case, then [people] ask this from [entities that are] not their true lord, and pay homage to [entities that] have not bestowed grace on them [as the Lord does]. This is like asking for medicine from someone who is not a doctor. Is not this utmost confusion?³⁰

Varo also refers to the grading of rituals (*li* 禮) adopted in China, and tries to establish that the rites to the Lord differ from those to the earthly overlords and the people in authority:

²⁸ For a reconstruction of some of the elements of this debate and its historical context, see Standaert, *The Fascinating God*, 11–12.

²⁹ For a concise analysis of the Chinese and Western terminology for sacrifice, see Zito, *Of Body and Brush*, 228 n.2.

³⁰ *Yesuhui Luoma dang'anguan Ming Qing tianzhujiao wenxian 10*, ed. Dudink and Standaert, 380.

If the most respected position is not honoured by the most exalted ritual, then the order between high and low is lost. [...] Therefore the ritual (*li* 禮) honouring the Lord of Heaven is not the ritual of respect for the king, and the ritual to the king is not the ritual employed for masters, elders, relatives, and friends. All rituals are being performed in a certain way because of the [difference] between exalted and humble, and thus must be descending [in degree]. The Holy Teachings forbid sacrifice (*jisi* 祭祀) to a false lord on the basis of the necessary nature of the order of the five relationships and of the five rituals. [...] Thus, although the Holy Teachings respect the exalted position of the Holy Mother, the powers of the angels and the virtue of the saints, nevertheless the Teachings do not have rituals [to honour them], and this is precisely the reason for it.³¹

Therefore, rituals are not only graded according to social hierarchy, but also distinguished according to their object of veneration. Varo here touches on a point that the Dominicans had found objectionable in Jesuit Christian communities since their arrival in Fujian in the early 1630s. In 1635, one of the Christian leaders of the Fuan community baptized by the Jesuits in Fuzhou, Guo Bangyong 郭邦雍 (Joaquín, ca. 1582–1649), was asked to explain in his own terms the meaning of ancestral rituals. Interestingly, he chose to make a comparison between ancestral rituals and the devotion to the Virgin Mary, the angels, and the saints:

The prayers and invocations [introduced by] the ancients to pray and give offering in the rituals of sacrifice to the ancestors in most of China signify that we recognize the virtue and merits of the ancestors as sufficient to place them adjoined to Heaven.³² Their spirits usually are located to the right and left sides of Shangdi. Thus, [although] it is true that there are invocations to pray to the ancestors so that they reward [humans] with corresponding favour for innumerable generations, [the fact is that] the ancestors are loved and esteemed by Shangdi, and therefore [He] looks at their merits and virtues and rewards with favour the sincere respect of their descendants, in

³¹ *Yesuhui Luoma dang'anguan Ming Qing tianzhujiao wenxian 10*, ed. Dudink and Standaert, 385.

³² Italics are mine. The expression used by Guo for 'adjoined' is *pei* 配. *Pei* can have the meaning of *peixiang* 配享, a compound used in ancient texts pertaining to Shangdi and to the order of precedence in sacrificial matters, and meaning "to have one's tablet adjoined in the temple of Confucius or of the emperors, and take part in their sacrifices: [i.e.] sages of second order and meritorious ministers." Thus here the meaning is that the ancestors are spirits of second order *adjoined*, but not equal, to Heaven.

order to repay them. *It is exactly like in the West, where the Holy Mother, the angels and the saints are asked to intercede [in front of Shangdi].*³³

Obviously, some Chinese Christian literati held this position, and the Jesuits, while not upholding it openly, allowed the celebration of ancestral rituals on the premise that ancestors were probably intercessors, an idea that in fact was widely diffused in early modern Europe too. Varo's cautionary statement that "The Holy Teachings respect the exalted position of the Holy Mother, the powers of the angels, and the virtue of the saints, but they do not have rituals [to honour them]" seems to be a direct response to the kind of thinking that the Jesuits encouraged among their Christian literati like Guo Bangyong. This way the Jesuits could transform ancestral cults, and even the cults to Confucius and the City God, into innocuous local variations of practices already approved in Europe.

The [*Fuan*] *Bianji* was compiled for a Chinese readership, and circulated as a manuscript within a limited circle of literati and missionaries. The summation of Varo's understanding of Chinese rituals, however, is a famous and extensive treatise in Spanish on the meaning of ancestral rituals and the rites to Confucius, entitled 'A Treatise in which is contained the foundations upon which the Dominicans have prohibited to their Christians certain ceremonies that the gentiles perform in veneration of their master Confucius and their deceased ancestors' (*Tratado en que se ponen los fundamentos que los Religiosos Predicadores tienen para prohibir a sus cristianos algunas ceremonias que los gentiles hacen en veneración de su maestro Confucio y de sus progenitores difuntos*).³⁴ This Spanish treatise was written for a select readership of fellow missionaries and members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy in China, Manila, and Europe. It reflects the climate of debate that characterized the 1680s in China, especially in Fujian. It is important work, since after reading it, the rabidly anti-Jesuit Vicar Apostolic of Fujian, Charles Maigrot MEP (1652–1730), decided in 1693 to issue in his jurisdiction a famous Mandate against the Chinese Rites that precipitated a new, bitter phase of the Chinese Rites Controversy, involving the Papacy and the Kangxi Emperor himself.

³³ Chinese text in Archivo Provincia Santo Rosario (APSR) (Avila), *Ritos Chinos*, vol. 1, n.l., ff. 226r–v; cf. Menegon, *Ancestors, Virgins, and Friars*, 271–3.

³⁴ Varo started working on the treatise in 1669 and completed it only in 1680. In 1685, he had two copies of the *Tratado* made: one for the Dominican archives in Manila, and one for the new Vicar Apostolic of Fujian, Charles Maigrot MEP. Varo's original copy was eventually brought to Rome, where it is today preserved in the Biblioteca Casanatense, Ms. 1070. It consists of 153 recto-verso folios of minute writing, with Chinese quotations and citations, and this is the copy I have used.

In the introduction to his *Tratado*, Varo explained in clear terms his approach to the problem:

The foundation of our understanding of these matters is reduced to three points: First and most important, [our understanding is based on] the authorities [contained in] the *classical books* that are current in the entire Kingdom [of China], and [on] the *interpretation of the most influential doctors of our times, and of the classical commentators*; Second, [our understanding is based on] what we have *seen and experienced* in the places where we have been; Third, [our understanding is based on] what we have *heard from the Christians as well as the gentiles* regarding the aforementioned matters. When these two latter [i.e. what we have seen and heard] are in accordance with the first [the Chinese classics and commentaries], it cannot be claimed that we have seen and heard such things only in a specific place.³⁵

Clearly, for Varo and his coreligionaries *textual authority* came first, and could be corroborated, but not substituted, by the interpretative matrix of missionaries and the oral opinion of Chinese Christians and 'gentiles.' The secondary status of personal experience and of oral testimonies by native informants should not surprise us: in early modern times, both in Europe as well as in China, textual authority still retained primacy over experience (although a 'scientific critique' based on more stringent philology and experimentation was starting to have an impact both in Europe and in China). This was especially true of Catholic theology, and to a large extent, of orthodox, state-endorsed Confucianism.³⁶

In China, however, another issue was behind Varo's methodological note. The Jesuits had accused the Dominicans of misinterpreting the Chinese Rites. The friars, according to their opponents, were observing local practices in Fujian and Zhejiang that were not representative of the most culturally advanced areas of the empire and of the capital, and thus their interpretations could not be applied to China as a whole. For Varo Chinese, textual authority was the way to authenticate fieldwork observation and native informants and to generalize them for the whole empire. In this he did not differ from Jesuit authors such as Filippucci, as explained below. Varo's reliance on textual authority, however, did not mean that he was inclined to theorize on theological issues. He would rather examine practices as described in texts, and he planned to use Chinese opinions (textual-commentarial, philological, and oral) rather than Catholic

³⁵ Varo, *Tratado*, 2v.

³⁶ See Henderson, *Scripture, Canon, and Commentary*; and Idem, *The Construction of Orthodoxy and Heresy*.

theological categories, to discriminate the meaning attributed to the Chinese Rites by the Chinese themselves:

Since what I wish to do in this treatise is to probe and to prove practice (*hecho*) rather than legal points (*derecho*), I will not supply proofs based on [Christian] authority, nor theological reasons, as it has been done in other treatises. [This latter strategy is usually adopted] to prove the major [premises], while to prove the minor ones we can only utilize the aforementioned three methods.³⁷ We will not quote all the statements of their [Chinese] authorities that prove our understanding, since they are so many that it would become a nuisance. We will only use the clearest ones, simply citing other books that say the same without a word-by-word quotation. The priests who want to check those authorities in [Chinese] characters will be able to do so by using the citations, since these statements are found in common books that are available in the house of any Christian literatus.³⁸

Thus the approach to the Chinese Rites reflected in the 'Tratado' did not differ from that of the Jesuits. The attempt, rather, was to use the same evidence towards an opposite end, as the first part of the treatise shows. The first part offers an explanation of characters/concepts linked to the Chinese Rites, and a critique of the Jesuit understanding of those concepts: *ji* 祭 and *si* 祀 ('sacrifice,' according to Varo), *fu* 福 ('fortune/favour'), *miao* 廟 ('temple'), *citang* 祠堂 ('shrine'), and *shen* 神 ('spirit'). These are all terms that pertain to the ancestral rituals, and their translation into the Catholic theological terminology, using as guidance Chinese dictionaries, classical texts and commentaries, and experience can either transform them into 'religious' (the Dominican position) or 'civil-political' (the Jesuit position) terms and phenomena. Entire sections of the manuscript concentrate on a particular concept, the way it has been explained by Jesuit commentators using the classics (especially the *Liji*), and Varo's critique, followed by his own interpretation, that he claims is closer to the original meaning of the Chinese.

The second part deals extensively with the cult performed to Confucius. Varo tries to demonstrate that the Chinese consider him a 'saint,' that Confucius resides in heaven, that they venerate his images in 'temples' such as the *Wenmiao* (the temple to the God of Literature, which is a

³⁷ Here 'major' and 'minor' premises refer to the philosophical-theological steps in the Aristotelian syllogistic method to prove an argument. We can interpret this as an opposition between fundamental theological categories (e.g. proving that the Chinese are idolatrous in general, a major premise) as opposed to philological arguments of a specific nature (minor premises).

³⁸ Varo, *Tratado*, 2v-3r.

religious site, and not what the Jesuits call a 'political hall'), and that all literati who have passed the exams give him offerings during ceremonies accompanied by music and special liturgical vestments.

The third and last part focuses on funerals and ancestral cults, their origins, the ritual practices performed, the shapes and meanings attributed to offerings, tablets, and the meaning of some concepts attached to ritual objects, such as the term *ling* 靈 (soul) found in words like *lingyi* 靈衣 (funerary clothes) or *lingche* 靈車 (funerary bier). Again, Varo's focus is to show the religious dimension of these rituals.

One of Varo's general rules is adherence to the Chinese texts:

We Europeans, when translating the Chinese authoritative texts should not behave like commentators, since we have no authority whatsoever, and we have not passed the literary examinations like them. Rather we have merely to limit ourselves to translate faithfully the Chinese language [...] and if by chance one or two words must be added for clarity, they should be put in parentheses, or identified as additions, and not part of the text.³⁹

Whether this approach truly produced a better understanding of the texts, or rather, as the Jesuits and some Christian literati accused, was simply an elaboration on quotations translated literally and considered out of context, is an open question.⁴⁰ Only a close reading of pro- and anti-Rites interpretations in a number of manuscripts in Spanish, Latin, and Chinese, and a comparison of those texts with traditional and modern exegesis of the Chinese classics quoted in them, could give a full answer. But already a quick examination of the arguments of pro-Rites authors, studied in part by other scholars, can help us get a sense of the general arguments advanced by the historical actors, and of their approaches.

6. *The Reactions to Varo: Yan Mo, Gregorio Luo Wenzao, and Francesco Saverio Filippucci*

Among the opponents of Varo's approach, we find a coalition that we can loosely call 'pro-Rites.' As I mentioned, these commentators included Jesuits, Chinese Christians, and even a Chinese Dominican who late in

³⁹ Varo, *Tratado*, 13r.

⁴⁰ See the observations by Paul Rule on the Latin version of the Confucian classics published in Paris in 1687, in Rule, *K'ung-tzu or Confucius?*, 119-20.

his life became the first native Catholic bishop. The basic approach of these authors was not methodologically different from that of Varo. They all gave primacy to textual analysis of the Classics over ethnographic observation of the rituals. This was certainly part of a strategic move, but was as well the effect of ingrained interpretive habits. Strategically, it was important to establish an acceptable meaning of the Rites, based on a non-religious reading of the sources. This could be accomplished both through a 'Christian' interpretation of the language of the Classics (explaining therefore that a certain rite or concept did not correspond to a *truly* religious ritual or a spiritual entity), and through native commentarial traditions that would serve that aim. Moreover, it was necessary to transition from the level of localized and fragmented practice to a level of abstract uniformity supported by a canonical and empire-wide textual tradition. Indeed, this latter strategy was necessary to convince a learned Chinese audience. Finally, Chinese-language treatises on the controversial Rites had to fit within the venerable Chinese tradition of careful linguistic commentary on classical quotations. Also European missionaries accepted this approach in their Western-language treatises, being very much in harmony with their scholastic training. In this, they were still within a European tradition of theological and philosophical commentaries, and yet they were also becoming participants in a Chinese philological-commentarial tradition as well.

The adoption of this philological-commentarial style is obviously not surprising among Chinese Christian literati. This is the case, for example, of Yan Mo 嚴謨 (Christian name Paulus, mid 1640s–?), a native of Longxi (Zhangzhou) who became a *gongsheng* degree-holder in 1709.⁴¹ Born in a Christian family, Yan belonged to an old Jesuit community. However, by the late seventeenth century the small community of Zhangzhou had been deserted by the Jesuits, and had *de facto* become part of Dominican territory. For this reason, members of the Yan family came into contact with the Dominicans, and became entangled in the ritual controversies of the 1680s centring on Varo's [*Fuan*] *Bianji*. According to Varo, the father of Yan Mo, Yan Zanhua 嚴贊化, a venerable old man and leader of the Zhangzhou community, apparently admitted to the Dominicans that their interpretation of the Rites in fact coincided with the understanding of

⁴¹ For biographical details, see Fang Hao, *Zhongguo Tianzhujiào shi renwu zhuàn*, 105–7; Standaert, *The Fascinating God*, 10–2; Menegon, *Ancestors, Virgins, and Friars*, 234–6 and 287–9.

the Rites he had held *before* his conversion at the hands of the Jesuits. This was a vindication of the Dominican position: in other words, most non-Christian literati would have probably subscribed to the Dominican idea that ancestral rituals and the cult of Confucius did involve communication with the deceased and sacrifices to obtain favours, that is, superstition and idolatry by Catholic standards.⁴² What Yan Mo wanted to demonstrate, however, was that the Jesuit interpretation was in fact textually sound. He energetically set out to write a series of treatises in Chinese on the Rites, and one of them is polemically entitled *Bianji* (辨祭 Discerning sacrifices), a direct response to Varo's [*Fuan*] *Bianji* (辯祭 A critique of 'sacrifice'). In the end, Yan challenged the use by Varo of out-of-context quotations, and tried to nuance ('discern') the layering within important concepts like *ji*.⁴³

Yan's writings and the surrounding debate likely had an influence on Luo Wenzao, also known as Gregorio Lopez, the first native Chinese bishop. In an important manuscript work on the Rites, in spite of membership of the Dominican order, Luo chose to side with the Jesuit interpretation.⁴⁴ Luo opens the treatise with a very brief introduction on the state of religion in China:

Several sects and religions (*sectae ac religiones*) have so far occupied the Chinese empire. The first and most ancient flourished four thousand years ago, and utilized terms that indicated God, the angels and the rational soul. But, as it is said in the *Li-ky* [= *Liji*; *Book of Rites*], from times immemorial they also venerated and offered *chi* [= *祭*] to the five spirits, i.e. the Custodian of the First Small Gate, the Custodian of the Second Large Gate, the Custodian of the Hearth, the Custodian of the Window, and the Custodian of the Road, when they were travelling. They also venerated and did *chi* to

⁴² See Standaert, *The Fascinating God*, 11–2.

⁴³ Yan Mo, *Bianji*, early 1680s?, two original copies in ARSI, *Japonica Sinica* I (38/42), 40/6a and 41/1c, published in *Yesuhui Luoma dang'anguan Ming Qing tianzhujiào wenxian* 11, ed. Dudink and Standaert, 37–59.

⁴⁴ *Tractatus Ill[ustriss]mi D[omi]ni Gregorii Lopez Dominicani*, Archivio Propaganda Fide, Scrittura riferite nei Congressi (SC), *Indie Orientali e Cina* 1681–1684, vol. 3, 74r–84v other copies in ARSI, *Fondo Gesuitico*, 726 (with amateurish Chinese characters); and in the Lisbon Biblioteca d'Ajuda, *Jesuitas na Ásia* 49-V-18. Originally written in Chinese in Zhangzhou (Fujian) and completed on December 12, 1681, the treatise was then translated into Spanish by the Jesuits of Manila in 1683–84. Later on, after his ordination as a bishop in 1685, Luo ordered his secretary Giovanni Francesco Nicolai OFM (1656–1737) to translate the Chinese text into Latin. The translation was accomplished on August 18, 1686 in Shanghai and, on this occasion, the text was also modified. An official copy, including Chinese quotations, was sent to Rome, and that text is today preserved in the archives of the Congregation of Propaganda Fide. The Chinese original text has apparently disappeared.

the spirit of that person who died without an heir who could perform *chi* to him [...]. This went on until forty years after the Incarnation of Our Lord, when the Idolatric Sect of Fur or Foe [Fo = Buddhism] arrived in China. At the same time, also the Sect of Tao became more and more important.⁴⁵

This is a compressed and distorted presentation of the development of different traditions in ancient China, and reflects the Jesuit agenda of recovering monotheism and Christian concepts in the ancient 'Confucian' Classics and the practices of pre-Buddhist China, while attacking Buddhism and Daoism. Luo then continues, explaining the emergence of 'atheism' and materialism among the literati since the Song period (eleventh century A.D. onward):

The most distinguished among the literati, such as Master Ching [=Cheng Yi] and Master Chu [=Zhu Xi], who flourished during the Song dynasty, i.e. 715 years ago, saw this situation, and in order to resist those sects, denied that there is an afterlife. As a consequence, they also did not admit the existence of an immortal rational soul, of angels and of God. And they went so far in their stand against those two idolatric sects, which admitted an afterlife and a prize for the good deeds and a punishment for the evil ones after death, that they have [also] been opposed to the true religion, the Law of God (*vera religio ac Lex Dei*), and have degenerated into atheists. Among them some admit the existence of God, others deny it, so much so that all matters that pertain to God are ambiguous among them, and especially so among the more recent [literati]. [They remain ambiguous] even in those matters that they have opposed and still oppose, as well as those that they do not explore, and have not explored.⁴⁶

This explanation of the emergence of 'neo-Confucian' ideas coincides very much with that of Ricci, and of most European missionaries, as well as some Chinese scholars of the late Ming and early Qing who converted to Christianity (such as Xu Guangqi or Yang Tingyun). Then Luo launches himself into a summary exploration of terminology, starting with the character *ji* for sacrifice. Here we recognize the familiar philological-textual approach. Following the same kind of thinking pursued by Yan Mo, Luo 'discerns' the various layers of meaning in the concept of *ji*: there are different forms of veneration that fall under the all-catching category of *ji*, and they must be distinguished into simple ceremonies of respect to the king or the tutelary spirits protecting the cities and the country

⁴⁵ Luo and Nicolai, *Tractatus*, transcription of original in APF, courtesy of Dr. Miguel Angel S. Roman OP (Taiwan).

⁴⁶ Luo and Nicolai, *Tractatus*.

(i.e. civil ceremonies), and the *true sacrifices* (*verum sacrificium*) that in antiquity were offered to *Shangdi* alone. As a matter of fact, according to the Classics and the most authoritative dictionaries, *ji* simply means 'pertingere seu pervenire,' i.e., 'to extend or to reach' towards the world of the deceased. It is thus a neutral term that needs to be explored and explained. The "naïve theory of language" of Varo and his followers—as Paul Rule put it—is here exposed: *ji* is not simply 'sacrifice.' The discussion continues with an examination of other terms, such as *miao* (*aula*, hall, rather than temple). The bulk of the treatise deals in greater detail with the idea of *ji*, the ancient interpretations and the Song commentaries, the use of ancestral tablets during *ji* (mainly based on the *Liji* and the *Zhuzi Jiali*), the veneration of Confucius, and finally Luo's own opinion ('Ultimus: Mea Opinio'). In this latter part, Luo makes a crucial distinction among different understandings of the ancestral rites in China itself:

I distinguish among three kinds of people: The first group is that of the eminent literati; the second group is that of the literati of lower level and of the honored and prudent men; the third is that of the plebeians and the peasants. I say that in the first group of literati, some follow the [ritual] books and the ancient institutions and customs, and are not falling in error regarding the oblation *chi* [= *ji*] and the tablets of the deceased ancestors. But others (already for a thousand years now, a time when some of the commentators started to give a wrong interpretation of these matters) follow and believe in the errors I mentioned. This [split occurs] also in the second group. But in the third group, almost all believe [in these errors].⁴⁷

The 'errors' Luo refers to are the belief that the soul of the ancestors descend into the tablet during *ji* to consume the food offerings, and that the ancestors have the power to bestow favours or to cause harm unto their descendants. Luo, in other words, recognizes that only the high elites are aware of the 'true' civil-political nature of the Chinese Rites and of 'sacrifices.' 'Plebeians,' and even large chunks of the lower elites, on the other hand, are mired in idolatric attitudes towards their ancestors and Confucius.

Finally, Luo unequivocally states that ancient, modern, and contemporary literati did not ask or hope for any benefit in the Confucian cults. Only the lowest among the literati, mainly those who worked as local teachers, would write the name of Confucius on a piece of paper, and put it in front of their students to exhort them, and to let them 'petition'

⁴⁷ Luo and Nicolai, *Tractatus*.

the Master for help in learning the classics and passing the examinations. While in Fuzhou, Luo himself had heard that Daoist practitioners there included among the 'idols' of their temples also an image of Confucius, and burnt petitions to him, like they did for other gods. But these kinds of people represented to him the lower rungs of society, not the opinions of the 'eminent literati' that Luo cared for.

Luo did not engage directly in a critique of Varo's position as Yan Mo had done.⁴⁸ Rather, it was the Jesuit Francesco Saverio Filippucci who spent great efforts in doing for his European audience of missionaries and ecclesiastical authorities what Yan Mo had done in Chinese for his fellow Christian literati and the missionaries in China. His voluminous work on the Chinese Rites, compiled mostly while he served as superior of the Jesuit residence of Canton in the early 1680s, consists of a series of detailed rebuttals of the philological arguments of Varo and companions, mainly based on Chinese dictionaries and the Classics. For example, in his extensive *Tractatus* on the Chinese Rites, Filippucci lists a number of dictionaries he employed to check the usual incriminated terminology (*ji*, *miao*, etc.; see f. 116r): *Zhengzhitong* 正字通, *Zihui* 字彙, *Zengpu zihui* 增補字彙, *Xiao zihui* 小字彙, *Yutang zihui* 玉堂字彙, *Pianhai* 篇海, and *Guwen zikao* 古文字考.⁴⁹ He then punctiliously and with a great profusion of Chinese quotations goes on to rebut the philological arguments of his

⁴⁸ Luo did not directly attack Varo, although the latter was opposed to the episcopal ordination of Luo, formerly one of his subordinates. Racism (that Varo coached in terms of 'theological ignorance' on the part of Luo), as well as the awareness that Luo was more sympathetic to the Jesuit position, were probably behind this opposition.

⁴⁹ While some are well-known dictionaries and vocabularies (such as the *Zihui* by Mei Yingzuo, completed in 1615), some might be very rare, and are not generally known; personal communication with Prof. South Coblin. The *Tractatus* (post-1683), whose full title includes the provenance, *Tractatus Patris Francisci Filippucci de Ritibus Sinicis quem in suo Praeludio promittit. Hunc Tractatum in Archivio Macaensi obtulimus anno 1707. Liber primus etiam manu Patris Philippucci descriptus, sed minus legibilis relictus est in eodem Archivio macaensi. Gasparus Castner SJ*, is preserved in Biblioteca Nazionale Centrale di Roma (BNCR), *Fondo Gesuitico* 1248/3, 115r–302r. Other relevant works by Filippucci are: *Praeludium ad plenam disquisitionem an bona vel mala fide impugnentur Opiniones, et Praxes Missionariorum Societatis Jesu in Regno Sinarum. Ad Cultum Confucii et defunctorum pertinentes. De statu questionis, [A prelude to a full disquisition whether the opinions and practices of the Jesuit missionaries in the kingdom of China pertaining to the cults of ancestors and of Confucius are being attacked in good or bad faith. On the state of the question]*, Macao, 23 March 1683 (2 copies, 40 ff./38 ff.) in BNCR, *Fondo Gesuitico*, 1249/7, partly published under the title *De Sinensium ritibus politicis acta, seu R. P. Francisci Xaverii Philippucci, Missionarii Sinensis è Societate Jesu, Praeludium ad plenam disquisitionem, an bonâ vel malâ fide impugnentur opiniones et praxes Missionariorum Societatis Jesu in regno Sinarum ad cultum Confucii et defunctorum pertinentes*, Paris: Apud Nicolaum Pepie, 1700; and *Sagitta retorta, seu sagittae in innocentes gratis intortae in ipsos jaculantes defensionis gratia retortae*, in

opponents for hundreds of folios, where half the page is reserved for the Chinese text, and half for the Latin. A mere translation of the titles of his 'Books' shows what the thrust of his approach is:

Book 1: 'Explication of several Chinese characters, from the true meanings of which depends much in the resolution of the Chinese controversies' (*Quam plures sinicae literae explicatur, ex quarum genuino sensu Sinensium controversiarum solutio admodum dependet*, ff. 115r–181v). A long section in six articles is spent on the meaning of *ji*, 'sacrifice.'

Book 2: 'On the intention of the Chinese in the cult of the ancestors and the deceased masters' (*De Sinarum intentione in cultu progenitorum ac magistrorum defunctorum*, ff. 183r–236v).

Book 3: 'The Chinese do not hope nor ask anything from the deceased and Confucius' (*Sinenses nihil sperant aut petunt a defunctis et Confucio*, ff. 238r–267).

Book 4: 'The Chinese do not believe that the spirit of the deceased comes down into the tablets of the dead and resides there' (*Sinenses non credunt Spiritus defunctorum in tabellas sibi descendere, ibique residere*, ff. 268–286).

Book 5: 'The Chinese do not believe that the spirit of the deceased eat the food offered to them' (*Sinenses non credunt Spiritus defunctorum oblatos sibi cibos comedere*, ff. 287–303).

Only a closer analysis of the extensive manuscripts by Filippucci can flesh out his points in detail, something that reasons of space prevent here. Suffice it to say for now that some keywords alert us to one important aspect of the missionary debates: *meaning*, *intentions*, and *beliefs* are scrutinized and derived from textual authority, and sometimes from oral interviews. If, as it is often said, Chinese rituality seems to be more concerned with practice than belief, then the Western obsession with meaning, intention, and belief seems to emerge as one of the salient features of the Chinese Rites debate.

7. Conclusion

The analytical categories employed by early modern missionaries differ in important ways from those used by the modern Chinese state and by modern scholars to categorize religions in China. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Chinese state adopted in its legislation and policies

BNCR, *Fondo Gesuitico*, 1247/8, 223r–31r [with signature of author]; and 1247/9, 316r–424v [second copy].

the Western taxonomy of acceptable 'religion' versus potentially dangerous 'superstition.'⁵⁰ That categorization still informs religious policy in China today. On the other hand, scholars, especially in the West, have been concerned with the issue of unity vs. diversity in Chinese religious culture. Did the standardized rituals and cults blessed by the imperial state work as the cultural and political unifying glue of China, or were ritual diversity and contestation between local actors and the state the common denominators of religious and social life? My examination of the seventeenth-century Catholic debates on Chinese rituality not only uncovers the early modern missionary methodologies employed to understand the nature of Confucianism and family rituals within the context of that time, but also helps illuminate the genealogy of certain views of Chinese religion that we still partly entertain. Some issues emerging from the manuscripts I briefly examined can indeed be seen as ancestral habits that continue to condition modern state policies and methodologies in the study of Chinese religions.

Proper literal translation of Chinese ritual terms into European languages was the first issue missionaries faced. When European and Chinese priests had to translate Chinese terms into Latin or Spanish for European audiences they had to decide how to render them: as terms charged with Christian religious meaning ('priest,' 'chapel,' etc.), or as neutral 'political' terms ('master of ceremonies,' 'hall,' etc.). They employed glosses and dictionaries to elucidate classical quotations, and to convince their opponents of a certain interpretation. Foreign priests and Chinese Christians, moreover, also spent considerable effort in explaining the broader meaning of the terms in context. Varo favoured a literal rendering (albeit tinged with Christian preconceptions), based on the understanding derived from contemporary usages of the terms by the vast majority of the people, rather than only by the elites. The Jesuits and Luo Wenzao, instead were more concerned with contextualizing their translations, and following agnostic elite interpretations. They used the same dictionaries and sources employed by Varo, but interpreted them differently, either trying to show the diversity and layering in concepts like *ji*, or by pointing to the fact that different social classes had different readings of the same rituals. Both positions were to a certain extent pre-conceived, and predicated on different theories of translation (direct correspondence of terms vs. contextual translation), as well as on diverging agendas (proving

⁵⁰ See e.g. Rebecca Nedostup, *Superstitious Regimes: Religion and the Politics of Chinese Modernity*.

the religious or 'civil' nature of the rites). In some respect, these intra-Catholic linguistic debates reflected the emergence of the new modern taxonomy of religion vs. superstition. In late imperial China these two categories were meaningless: state and elites preferred to use the labels of orthodoxy (*zheng* 正) and heterodoxy (*xie* 邪), both relative to state-sponsored teachings and values. Through the invention of 'civil rituals' by the Jesuits, and their opponents' rebuttals, 'Chinese religion' was born in the Western mind, a piece in the broader creation of 'religion' as a separate intellectual entity. Unacceptable religions were labelled as 'false religion' or 'superstition,' this latter a category that has become part of religious policy debate in Chinese government circles to this day.

Another issue missionaries and Christians faced was that of textual authority versus practice. The debates examined here were almost exclusively dominated by *textual evidence*. Rather than being anthropologists interrogating native informants, missionaries in early modern China preferred the role of historians and philologists, and remained obsessed with finding a uniform *textual* version of Chinese rituality. In this enterprise—especially in the pro-Rites camp—they freely borrowed from the rich tradition of native philology of the Classics. In some rare cases, as for Yan Mo, Chinese Christians participated in the debates with their own expertise, and created a synthesis of their traditional training with the theological knowledge of Christianity transmitted to them in translation. European missionaries, while writing for an audience of theologians and clerics in Europe with a common cultural and theological background, became strongly influenced by the Chinese commentarial tradition, both in the pro- and anti-Rites camps. This suggests that the understandings of Chinese rituality and religion that reached Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were not simply fashioned by pre-existing theological categories, but that native grids strongly contributed to their creation. This missionary perception of an underlying ritual unity warranted by Confucian textual authority partly reflects the terms of the modern debate over unity vs. diversity in Chinese religion and culture. Scholars have recently noted that the Confucian written discourse over rituality concealed variation and change, "because writers were caught up by canonical models and associated terms and concepts, and they had vested interests and lifelong practices in replicating them."⁵¹ Missionary debates transferred that concealment to Europe, and planted a question over the

⁵¹ See Sutton, "Introduction to the Special Issue. Ritual, Cultural Standardization, and Orthopraxy in China," 10.

'Confucian' standardization of rituals that still influences contemporary scholarly debates.

A final issue, highlighted in particular by Filippucci's approach, is that of the relationship between belief and ritual practice. If Max Weber was the thinker who most influentially affirmed that ideas precede action, this assumption has a long history, rooted in the Protestant charge of 'empty rituals' levied against Catholics during the Reformation. Scholars in the field of Chinese religions have debated the utility of upholding this distinction, especially when dealing with popular religion. As a matter of fact, Confucians were concerned with 'sincerity' (*cheng* 誠) in the performance of ritual, a component vital to assure efficacy. But, as Donald Sutton notices, in China "There is no great conflict between the peasant who says doing the correct ritual is what matters and his neighbour who says a good heart is needed for success. We see a contradiction; our informants do not. . . . We are focused on a problematic duality; they look to the efficacy of the ritual result."⁵² Filippucci was himself a ritual master, and celebrated Catholic rites that were centred on efficacy within his own Chinese congregations. In all likelihood, he and his Christians did not separate 'sincerity' or 'belief' from performance. But in his own theorizing about the Chinese Rites, for polemical reasons, Filippucci tended to underline the primacy of intention and belief, and the concept that ideas come before action. Contemporary scholars have suggested that contextualizing the performance of rituals, while rejecting the European-style dichotomy between belief and practice, are the best strategies to go beyond ingrained epistemological habits, and to uncover the complex interplay of orthodoxy and heterodoxy, orthopraxy and heteropraxy, standardized and local, elite and popular. Missionaries in seventeenth-century China were facing similar analytical dilemmas, and groping for solutions to these dichotomies that remain unresolved to this day. Their intellectual and religious aims were to understand in order to convert, and this sets them apart from most modern scholars. But contemporary anthropologists and historians may nevertheless recognize shadows of themselves in the faded pages of these old debates, perhaps become acquainted with their own 'ancestors,' and discover a forgotten page of their own genealogy.

⁵² Sutton, "Introduction to the Special Issue. Ritual, Cultural Standardization, and Orthopraxy in China," 14.