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SHAPING VIRTUOUS FRIENDSHIP: THE JESUIT
MATTEO RICCI (1552-1610) IN LATE MING CHINA

Ana Carolina Hosne

EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTE, FLORENCE
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*Shaping Virtuous Friendship:
the Jesuit Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) in Late Ming China*

ANA CAROLINA HOSNE

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Abstract

Taking as a starting point his first treatise in Chinese, ‘On Friendship’ (*Jiaoyou lun*, 1595), this paper aims to analyze the process by which the Italian Jesuit Matteo Ricci (1583-1610) shaped the concept of virtuous friendship in late Ming China, specifically among the Confucian literati. ‘On Friendship’ is a treatise that reflects and is part of the Renaissance and humanist culture brought to China. It is, in part, a translation into Chinese of maxims by authors such as Aristotle, Cicero, Seneca, Plutarch, Herodotus, Augustine and Ambrose, juxtaposed with ideas derived from the Confucian tradition, especially those on virtuous friendship. In recent years, cultural historians have begun to recognize how important friendship was as a topic of great interest to late Ming intellectuals, which suggests that Ricci was attempting to participate in, and to benefit from, a discussion that was already taking place in China. This paper aims at analyzing the way Ricci shaped virtuous friendship in his *Jiaoyou lun* by taking both paths, the European and the Chinese, but also focusing on the more or less ‘winding’ nature of these paths. Indeed, Ricci’s treatise was nurtured from different sources, which in turn implied selections and omissions. In a first section I address the less problematic aspect of Ricci’s *Jiaoyou lun*: its humanistic hue; in a second section I focus on the adaptation to – but also the manipulation of – Confucian values and precepts; in a third section I address a key – and debatable – aspect, that is, the idea of Ricci’s treatise as ‘secular’. Last but not least, a fourth section is dedicated to concluding remarks.

Keywords

Matteo Ricci, Friendship, Jesuit, Ming China.

Ana Carolina Hosne

Max Weber Fellow, 2010-2011

Introduction

When the first Jesuit missionaries, Michele Ruggieri (1543-1607) and Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), managed to enter China in 1583, they found a prosperous country whose achievements in culture, education and the arts were remarkable, as well as its developments in urban and commercial life. In sum, in China the Jesuits encountered a culture that was relatively similar to their own in many ways, and aspects that usually would be considered essential components of the spread of the European Renaissance, like the printing press, had not been introduced into China, since there was already a widely available printing system¹. As the missionary he was, soon after his arrival in China Ricci described, in his correspondence with Europe, the *sects* he observed – Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism – presenting them as three watertight categories. But he always distinguished Confucianism from the other two, for it was not idolatrous. The non-idolatrous gentility Ricci implicitly ascribes to the Confucians also responded to his idea of Confucianism as a moral system that serves to govern the Empire wisely but is lacking in metaphysical or supernatural foundations. This is the basis of the synthesis he constructed between Christianity and Confucianism. According to Ricci, they are compatible at a moral and ethical level, and Christianity would provide Confucianism with a supernatural base. This compatibility the Jesuit was convinced of, lies at the core of what has been regarded Matteo Ricci's so-called 'accommodation' to Chinese culture, i.e. the attempt to adapt – or 'accommodate' – Christian teachings to Confucianism, the 'sect of literati'. He wrote:

That sect of literati is the oldest in China; that explains why it has always had control of the government, why it flourishes, why it has the most books and is the most esteemed. In this sect nobody is appointed by choice but by the study of the arts and no graduate or magistrate ever ceases to profess it. Its author or... authority has no idols. It only venerates heaven and the earth or the King of heaven...²

Ricci's interpretation was the result of his study of the *Four (Confucian) Books (Si shu)* by the end of the 1580s, which he then translated into Latin: the *Analects*, the *Great Learning*, the *Doctrine of The Mean* and *Mencius*, all basic books in the education of scholars trained to hold imperial posts³.

Ricci regarded Confucius, the Sage, as 'another Seneca' – *un altro Seneca* – and the Four Books as 'good moral works', *buoni documenti morali*. This perception served as an impulse for Ricci to compose humanistic writings proclaiming wisdom from the West, on the basis of sayings by 'ancient saints and sages'. The first writing of this kind Ricci produced was inspired by a theme that he saw was common to – and would bring closer – both cultures: friendship and, more specifically, virtuous friendship. Indeed, a proof of this insight is his first treatise in Chinese 'On Friendship' or *Jiaoyou lun*. And then, of course, it was just about seizing the opportunity to write about friendship or otherwise, as Ricci put it, it was about *creating* the opportunity. Indeed, Ricci invented a fictional situation to explain why he wrote 'On friendship'; it was to answer the Prince of Jian'an's questions – and curiosity – about European notions of friendship. In his account – entitled by Pasquale D' Elia

¹ With regard to the nature of the encounter with the Chinese, see Nicolas Standaert, *Methodology in View of Contact Between Cultures: The China Case in the 17th Century*, Hong Kong, Centre for the Study of Religion and Chinese Society Cheng Chi Collage, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, page 2. Similar reflections also in N. Standaert, "Christianity in Late Ming and Early Qing China as a Case of Cultural Transmission, in Stephen Uhalley Jr. and Xiaoxin Wu (Eds.), *China and Christianity. Burdened Past, Hopeful Future* (USA: M.E.Sharpe, 2001), pp. 81-116.

² "Quella de letterati è la propria antica della Cina, e per questo sempre hebbe et ha oggidi il governo di essa nelle mani; per questo è quella che più fiorisce, tiene più libri et è più stimata. Questa legge pigliano loro non per elettione, ma con lo studio delle lettere la bevono, e nessuno graduato nè magistrado lascia di profesarla. Il suo autore o restatutore e capo é non tine idoli, ma solo riverisce el Cielo e la terra o il Re del cielo...". Author's translation; *FR*, I, p. 115.

³ The *Analects (Lun yu)*, and the *Doctrine of the Mean (Zhong Yong)* are attributed to Confucius, the *Great Learning (Da xue)* is attributed to Confucius' disciple Zeng zi (505-436 b.C.?), while the *Mencius (Meng zi)* comprises the dialogues by Mencius, Confucius' disciple, so grouped by philosopher Zhu Xi during the Song dynasty in the eleventh century.

Storia del Cristianesimo nella Cina – Ricci admits he pretended to have had such conversation, answering ‘with everything I could gather from our philosophers, saints and all both ancient and modern authors’⁴.

There is consensus among scholars on the fact that Ricci’s *Jiaoyou lun* is based upon Andreas Eborensis’ *Sententiae et Exempla, ex probatissimis quibusque scriptoribus collecta et per locos communes digesta*, a collection of aphorisms borrowed from Aristotle, Cicero, Seneca, Plutarch, Augustine and Ambrose, among other classical authors⁵. So Ricci’s treatise is, in part, a translation into Chinese of the maxims therein contained, juxtaposed with ideas derived from the Confucian tradition, especially those on virtuous friendship.

In the preface of his translation of ‘On Friendship’ into Italian, Filippo Mignini analyzes Ricci’s treatise focusing on its ‘Western side’, i.e. the Greek and Latin tradition. Mignini distinguishes six core themes: 1) the friend regarded as the other self; 2) Mutual help as the aim of friendship; 3) Happiness as the ultimate benefit of friendship; 4) Virtue as the foundation of true friendship; 5) Properties of friendship: earnestness, loyalty, selflessness and sharing; 6) Cherishing of friendship. Last but not least, according to Mignini, the model of friendship in the West Ricci exported to China is based on the Greek and Latin tradition, excluding the Christian notion of friendship, charity, since its inclusion would render its message uncomprehensible⁶.

In recent years, cultural historians have begun to recognize how important friendship was as a topic of great interest to late Ming intellectuals, which suggests that Ricci was attempting to participate in, and to benefit from, a discussion that was already taking place in China⁷. The types of male bonding as intellectual and elitist were fundamental to Ming men who pursued their masculinity as scholar-officials, and who would participate in the intellectual debates of the time in literati associations (*shishe* and *qinshe*), literary clubs (*wenshe*) and assemblies of philosophical debate (*jianghui*)⁸. This aspect serves as an explanation of why Ricci wrote on friendship. The translator of the *Jiaoyou lun* into English, Timothy Billings, claims that non-Chinese scholars have tended to view Ricci’s treatise as a Chinese translation of European originals from such familiar authors as Aristotle, Cicero, Seneca, Plutarch, Herodotus, Augustine, Ambrose and even Erasmus⁹. On the other hand, Chinese scholars, have mostly concentrated on the content of the essay, which they have tended to view as a personal expression of Ricci’s own ideas on friendship combined with other characteristically European or Christian notions that are then sometimes juxtaposed with – and in agreement with – those derived from the Confucian tradition. According to Billings, what makes reading this text so challenging and so intriguing is the necessity of taking both paths at once, or at least both paths by turns¹⁰. And such is the direction of this article as well. Here I am interested in analyzing the way Ricci shapes virtuous friendship in his *Jiaoyou lun* by taking both paths, the European and the Chinese, but also focusing on the more or less ‘winding’ nature of these paths.

⁴ ‘...et il Padre rispose con tutto quanto potette raccogliere de’nostri philosophy, santi e tutti autori vecchi e moderni’, writes Ricci in the third person. Author’s translation; *FR*, I, p. 368.

⁵ Andreas Eborensis (original name: Andrea de Rêsende; 1498-1573), born in Eborá, was a well-known Portuguese Latinist who had studied at different European universities and taught at Lisbon and Coimbra.

⁶ Matteo Ricci, *Dell’Amicizia*, A cura di Filippo Mignini, Macerata, Quodlibet, 2005, pp. 20-23.

⁷ Matteo Ricci, *On Friendship. One Hundred Maxims for a Chinese Prince*. Translated by Timothy Billings, New York, Columbia University Press, 2009, Introduction, p. 5.

⁸ Joseph S.C. Lam, “Music and Male Bonding in China”, in Martin Huang (Ed.), *Male Friendship in Ming China*, Leiden, Brill, 2007, ps. 70 – 110, p. 84.

⁹ Among the works which follow this direction, I mention Joseph Dehergne, *Les Sources du Kiao Yeou Luen ou Traité de l’Amitié de Ricci*, in *Recherches de Science Religieuse*, Tome 72, Année 1984, Paris VII, ps. 51-58. Dehergne mainly focuses on the similar contents of Ricci’s treatise and Cicero’s *Laelius*. Jonathan Spence also place stress on the Ancient Greek and Roman authors in Ricci’s works; see Jonathan Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci*, Penguin books, 1985, chapter 5, and also in Jonathan Spence, “Matteo Ricci and the Ascent to Peking”, in Charles E. Ronan y Bonnie Oh (Eds.), *East meets West: The Jesuits in China, 1582-1773*, Chicago, Loyola University Press, 1988, pp. 3-18.

¹⁰ Matteo Ricci, *On Friendship. One Hundred Maxims for a Chinese Prince*. Translated by Timothy Billings, Introduction, pp. 19 – 21.

Indeed, Ricci's treatise was nurtured from different sources, which in turn implied selections and omissions to shape virtuous friendship in late Ming China. In a first section I address the less problematic aspect of Ricci's *Jiaoyou lun*: its humanistic hue; in a second section I focus on the adaptation to – but also the manipulation of – Confucian values and precepts; in a third section I address a key – and debatable – aspect, that is, the definition of Ricci's treatise as 'secular'. Indeed, both systematic studies, by Mignini and Billings, stress one important aspect of Ricci's *Jiaoyou lun*. Billings characterizes Ricci's *Jiaoyou lun* as 'secular', since he mentions 'God' in only two of the one hundred maxims on friendship (maxims 16 and 56). And this idea is present in Mignini's preface, stressing the absence of the notion of Christian friendship, i.e. charity, within it. My contention is that both claims need further examination, as I aim to prove that conveying the notion of 'God' was part of this process of shaping virtuous friendship by Ricci, thus disregarding characterizations of his treatise such as 'secular'¹¹. Last but not least, a fourth section is dedicated to concluding remarks.

Matteo Ricci's *Jiaoyou lun* (1595) and its undebatable humanistic hue

As I mentioned above, many scholars agree on the fact that Ricci's *Jiaoyou lun* is based upon Andreas Eborensis' *Sententiae et Exempla, ex probatissimis quibusque scriptoribus collecta et per locos communes digesta*, a collection of aphorisms borrowed from Cicero, Seneca, and many other classical authors. Pasquale D'Elia SJ, editor of the *Fonti Ricciane*, was among the first to point out that Ricci might have used the compendium of maxims by De Resénde as a kind of 'master text' for his treatise on Friendship, for the following reasons. First, because De Resénde's work was in the Beitang Church in Beijing; second, its popularity was proved in its numerous reprints in the main European cities; and, finally, because of its prestige within the Society of Jesus¹². However, even if De Resénde's work might have refreshed Ricci's memory of ancient Greece and Rome as well as the patristic traditions on friendship, and worked as a master text at first, it is clear that Ricci then coined his own style to approach friendship in such a way that would please different readers.

The opening maxim of Ricci's *Jiaoyou lun* is clearly based on Aristotle's Ethics. Let's remember that in this work Aristotle dedicates two books – VIII and IX – to friendship. In the fourth chapter of the ninth book, Aristotle focuses on the virtuous man and the relationship he establishes with himself. He is at peace with himself,

Both his joys and his sorrows are respectively consistent with themselves, since they invariably proceed from fixed and regular causes; for he does not delight at one time in what will excite his repentance at another...he is similarly affected towards his friend, whom he considers as a second self...¹³

¹¹ I consulted two manuscripts of Ricci's On Friendship (*Jiaoyou lun*). The first from 1595-1596 held in the British Library (BL. Location Add. 8803), written in Ricci's own hand, which includes both the Chinese text and Ricci's own Italian translation. The other manuscript consulted is the one at the Pontificia Università Gregoriana (Location: MSS, APUG 292, ff.189-200). Filippo Mignini draws attention to the fact that this is an anonymous manuscript, probably an Italian translation of the BL manuscript. Cf. Filippo Mignini, Matteo Ricci, *Dell'Amicizia*, A cura di Filippo Mignini, pp. 30-33. There is a recent translation of these 76 maxims from Italian into English. Cf. Christopher Shelke, SJ and Marielle Demichele (eds.), *Matteo Ricci in China. Inculturation through Friendship and Faith*, Roma, Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 2010, pp. 47-63. Both manuscripts have 76 maxims, not 100. Sometime between 1596 and its republication in the edition of 1599 (now lost) or 1601 (the earliest extant), according to Billings, Ricci decided to add twenty-four new maxims in order to bring the total up to a perfect one hundred. In the process, he seems to have returned to his copy of Eborensis's *Sententia et exempla* for another dozen aphorisms and to have pillaged his memory for the rest. Cf. Matteo Ricci, *On Friendship. One Hundred Maxims for a Chinese Prince*. Translated by Timothy Billings, New York, Columbia University Press, 2009, Introduction, p. 15. For practical reasons, here I quote the maxims according to Billings's translation into English, and I include between brackets the transcription to *pinyin* of all the quoted maxims from Ricci's *Jiaoyou lun* in Chinese.

¹² FS, I, pp. 368-69, note 1. See also Matteo Ricci, *Dell'Amicizia*, A cura di Filippo Mignini, pp. 17-18.

¹³ Aristotle, Aristotle's *Ethics and Politics, comprising his Practical Philosophy, translated from the Greek. Illustrated by introductions and notes; the Critical History of His Life; and a New Analysis of his Speculative Works; by John Gillies*,

So Ricci made use of this maxim, and translated it into Chinese:

My friend is not another, but half of myself, and thus a second me – I must therefore regard my friend as myself¹⁴.

One of the works that clearly influenced Ricci's work is Cicero's *Laelius*, as it places great stress on the bond between friendship and virtue. It is a dialogue on friendship that takes place after the death of Scipio, between Gaius Laelius – Scipio's closest friend – and his two sons-in-law, Quintus Scaevola and Gaius Fannius. Friendship among the sages is the result of virtue:

Those, indeed, who regard virtue as the supreme good are entirely in the right; but it is virtue itself that produces and sustains friendship, nor without virtue can friendship by any possibility exist¹⁵.

It is impossible here to quote all the maxims in Ricci's treatise that relate friendship to virtue, so I pick just one, among the concluding ones:

A lasting virtue is the ideal nourishment for a lasting friendship. There is nothing that people do not eventually grow sick of over time. Only a complete virtue will fully stir our humane sensibilities even after a long period. Virtue is admired even by our enemies. How much the more so by our friends!¹⁶

Ricci's resort to the Western classics is an undebatable aspect of his *Jiaoyou lun*. It is also the less 'winding' aspect that informs this work. Scholars can argue whether one ancient author has a more-or-less strong influence in this treatise, but there is not much to debate about, apart from that. We cannot know how many maxims he remembered from De Resende's works, from his learnings in the Roman College and if the maxims translated into Chinese were retained in his good memory, as Jonathan Spencer suggests¹⁷.

The important aspect to place stress on here is the craftsmanship with the sources and texts that allowed Ricci to import the humanistic culture to China. In this direction, Howard Goodman and Anthony Grafton stress the fact that Ricci was above all a humanist and a scholar. That is, he worked with texts: Confucian classics that he mastered as the price of entrance to conversations with the Chinese elite, and Western classics that gave him the authority to offer an alternative to Confucianism. He interpreted both with flair and individuality, but he also applied many established philological and hermeneutical methods that he did not devise but inherited from his teachers and their long humanist tradition.

In sum, as Nicolas Standaert points out, Ricci compared Chinese traditions with frameworks that were familiar to his European audience, who had received the same humanistic grounding as he had. And this comparison was the impulse for other humanistic writings by Ricci which proclaimed wisdom from the West on the basis of sayings by 'ancient saints and sages', explicitly written for a

(Contd.)

LL.D., in *Two volumes*, London, Printed for A. Strahan; and T. Cadell Jun. And W. Davies, in the Strand, 1797, Eighteenth Century Collections Online. Gale.

<http://ofind.galegroup.com/biblio.eui.eu/ecco/infomark.do?&contentSet=ECCOArticles&type=multipage&tabID=T001&prodId=ECCO&docId=CW3322398633&source=gale&userGroupName=europeo&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE>>.
[Consulted on 29 Aug. 2011], Book IX, p. 363.

¹⁴ Matteo Ricci, *On Friendship. One Hundred Maxims for a Chinese Prince*. Translated by Timothy Billings, Maxim 1, p. 91. (In Chinese: *wu you fei ta, ji wo zhi ban, nai di er wo ye: gu dang shi you ru yi yan*).

¹⁵ Cicero, *Cicero de Amicitia (On Friendship) and Scipio's Dream*. Translated with an introduction and notes by Andrew P. Peabody, <http://www.archive.org/details/cu31924074466651>, Cornell University Library, 1994, [Consulted on 1 September 2011] 4, p. 14.

¹⁶ Matteo Ricci, *On Friendship. One Hundred Maxims for a Chinese Prince*. Translated by Timothy Billings, maxim 90, p. 129 (*Yong de, yong you zhi mei er yi, fan wu wu bu yi shi jiou. Wei ren suo yan, wei de er jiou, er gan ren qing ye. De zai chou ren you, ke ai, kuang zai you zhe xing*).

¹⁷ Jonathan Spencer, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci*, USA, Penguin Books, 1985, chapter V.

general, non-Christian readership. We must not forget that, in the concluding maxim, Ricci introduced himself as a ‘philosopher’, a ‘*filosofo*’ as in the Italian version, from the Western mountains¹⁸.

In more general terms, Standaert states that Ricci started a ‘spontaneous’ transmission of Renaissance culture in China in the first thirty years of the mission¹⁹. And undoubtedly, his *Jiaoyou lun* is one of its results.

Ricci’s treatise on Friendship. Adaptation to and ‘manipulation’ of Confucian tradition

I have already drawn attention in the introduction to a very well-known characteristic of Ricci’s treatise, i.e. both the presence of the Confucian tradition and, especially, the presence of Confucian themes that certainly inform it, like the notion of virtuous friendship. Indeed, Confucian tradition construed friendship as a relationship that would result in self-cultivation, a point of view epitomized in some of Confucius’ *Analects*, the most famous statements on friendship, that we might see reflected in Ricci’s *Jiaoyou lun*²⁰. There is possibly no scholar who could write on virtuous friendship in China without quoting the lines that open Confucius’ *Analects*:

The Master said: “To learn and to practise what is learned time and again is pleasure, is it not? To have friends come from afar is happiness, is it not? To be unperturbed when not appreciated by others is gentlemanly, is it not? (1:1).

So friendship and learning, and friendship and self-cultivation are intimately connected. Furthermore, Ricci artfully captured key elements of a Confucian moral universe, i.e. the difference of the gentleman (*jun zi*) and the petty man (*xiao ren*), so conceived in a moral sense. The *jun zi* is a moral man searching for virtue instead of the petty man’s aim to satisfy physical needs and desires, as in the *Analects*:

The Master said: the gentleman sets his heart on virtue; the petty man sets his heart on the physical gain. The gentleman sets his heart on law; the petty man sets his heart on privilege (4:11).

Ricci composed a maxim that, we may think, reflects two different kinds of friendship according to the nature of the gentleman, always motivated for virtue, and the petty man:

The honorable man makes friends with difficulty; the petty man makes friends with ease. What comes together with difficulty comes apart with difficulty; what comes together with ease comes apart with ease²¹.

So Ricci knew very well that friendship was rooted in Confucianism. Still, he decided to leave out one of its core values. The ‘five cardinal human relationships’ (*wu lun*) were the five bonds that men in Chinese society were to observe and promote through the virtues related to those bonds: between husband and wife; between parents and children; between elder and younger brothers; between ruler and subject; between friends. Of the ‘five relationships’ in Confucianism, it was the fifth, friendship, which was unique. The others were overtly concerned with the maintenance of China as a *guojia*,

¹⁸ “*Nell’anno 23 del Re Vanlie’ s’anno che si chiama Devi, nella 3 luna un filosofo delli monti dell’Occidente Matteo Ricci da Macerata pose insieme queste cose*”, MSS, APUG 292, f. 200 (maxim 78). Billings sheds light into the two variants (*xiou shi* and *shan ren*) of Ricci’s self-introduction in the Chinese version. See Matteo Ricci, *On Friendship. One Hundred Maxims for a Chinese Prince*. Translated by Timothy Billings, Introduction, pp. 13-22.

¹⁹ Nicolas Standaert, “The transmission of Renaissance culture in seventeenth-century China”, *Renaissance Studies*, Vol. 17 No. 3, ps. 367-391; pp. 368 to 375.

²⁰ Norman Kutcher, “The Fifth Relationship: Dangerous Friendships in the Confucian Context”, p. 1622.

²¹ Matteo Ricci, *On Friendship. One Hundred Maxims for a Chinese Prince*. Translated by Timothy Billings, p. 126, maxim 62 (In Chinese: *jun zi zhi jiao you nan, xiao ren zhi jiao you yi, nan he zhi nan san, yi he zhe yi san ye*).

literally a 'state-family'. But friendship was the only bond in society freely chosen; it was a very powerful relationship and the most dangerous in its potential to create a human relationship that was not hierarchical²². However, in his treatise Ricci omitted the five relationships and the way in which friendship was inserted in that broader picture. It was his friend, the Chinese literatus – and convert – Feng Yingjin (1555-1601) who made references to the *wu lun* in the preface to *Jiaoyou lun*, in the reprint of 1601 he penned. But Ricci did make reference to the five cardinal relationships in China in his account, edited and entitled by Pasquale D'Elia SJ as *Storia dell' Introduzione del Cristianesimo in Cina*, regarding them as part of the law of the literati, i.e. Confucianism. However, the Jesuit did not hesitate to express his skepticism when presenting them as typically Chinese:

They [the *letterati*] care so much for these five relationships that they regard proper of men, i.e. father and son; husband and wife; lord and vassal; elder and younger brother; between friends, thinking that the foreign kingdoms do not pay attention to these relationships²³.

This is one aspect that points that adaptation in Chinese soil was a winding path, with its contradictions, and far from linear. But there is more to follow. Ricci's maxims on friendship may differ from or, what is more, attack precepts of Confucian orthodoxy in such a way that is too noticeable to overlook. As mentioned above, Ricci not only did not place the relation between friends within the Confucian five relationships, but he also composed maxims that could undermine core values of the Confucian tradition. An example will serve to prove my hypothesis. In maxim 50, Ricci claims:

Friends surpass family members in one point only: it is possible for family members not to love one another. But it is not so with friends. If one member of a family does not love another, the relationship of kinship still remains. But unless there is love between friends, does the essential principle of friendship exist?²⁴

This sentence is extremely subversive as here friendship potentially overrules the natural relationship, between parents and children, and its correspondent virtue, through which any individual belongs to the world as well as manhood: filial piety. Filial piety, a virtue that holds respect for parents and ancestors, also grounds the political relationship between ruler and subject.

I have mentioned before that *Jiaoyou lun* was Ricci's first treatise in Chinese, written when he had just begun his immersion in an intense intellectual life upon his arrival in Nanchang in 1595. In this city with a strong literary tradition, Ricci entered deeply into the corridors and chambers of Ming society, experiencing the heartland of the late Ming intellectual revival, meeting leading Confucian scholars, attending sessions at private academies and gaining a scholarly reputation with his first Chinese publications. Moreover, Ricci penetrated further into the circles of power, establishing relationships with high-ranking mandarins. However, at the same time, he also established relationships with controversial figures of the time, such as the thinker Li Zhi (1527-1602), who became a friend of the Jesuit and who also composed pieces on friendship. Li Zhi's 'Treatise on friends' (*You lun*) and Matteo Ricci's 'On Friendship', each established different models of friendship, even though they shared many things in common²⁵. Li Zhi was accused of pursuing friendship with no regard for his family and kinsmen (*qi renlun*). When he felt he had fulfilled his family duty, he sent his family to another city and concentrated on the learning of the Way. Still surrounded by literati friends

²² Norman Kutcher, "The Fifth Relationship: Dangerous Friendships in the Confucian Context", *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 105, No. 5 (Dec., 2000), pp. 1615-1629, p. 1615.

²³ *FS*, I, p. 120.

²⁴ Matteo Ricci, *On Friendship. One Hundred Maxims for a Chinese Prince*. Translated by Timothy Billings, p. 111, maxim 50 (In Chinese: *you yu qin, wei ci chang yan, qin neng wu xiang ai qin. You zhi fou, gai qin wu ai qin, qin lun you zai. Chu ai ping you. Qi you li yan cun ping?*).

²⁵ On the different theories that both Ricci and Li Zhi framed on friendship, also considering the common aspects to be found in them, see Huang Wenshu, 黄文树, 李贽与利玛窦的友谊及其 [友论] 之比较, 玄奘佛学研究, 民国 95 年 07 月 第 127 - 152 页.

and enjoying their patronage, Li Zhi longed to travel across the land, enjoying nature, friendship, and intellectual companionship. Li Zhi, ascribing to controversial and, most importantly, ‘subversive’ ideas – so regarded by an orthodox Confucianism opposed to a strong influence of Buddhism – from the Wang Yangming school, became a dangerous character. Confucius was not the only sage, he would say, but every man could be a sage as ‘all men are Buddha’²⁶. Condemned as ‘heterodox’ and a creator of chaos (*luan*), Li Zhi’s thought was undoubtedly a threat to orthodox Confucian doctrine²⁷. In sum, it was the interplay of ideas, praxis, personal grievances, and local power struggles that determined the course of Li Zhi’s persecution²⁸.

Ricci and Li Zhi shaped different concepts of friendship, even if both coincide in the idea of help and mutual support²⁹. Could Li Zhi also serve as an inspiration for Ricci’s *Jiaoyou lun*, especially for Ricci’s reflection on friendship and kinship quoted above? Suffice it here to say that accommodation to Confucianism is just one side of the story. Omissions and contestation of core Confucian precepts and values can also be found in Ricci’s *Jiaoyou lun*, to prove that its connection with Confucianism goes along a winding path.

How was Christianity involved in Ricci’s conception of ‘virtuous friendship’?

My contention here is related to the conception of Ricci’s *Jiaoyou lun* as a secular work, as stated by his translators. But where does this idea come from? It stems from two aspects. On the one hand, it is based on Ricci’s omission of the Christian notion of friendship, i.e., charity, since he was not able to transmit the Revelation to the Chinese. A notion that, indeed, was possible in Europe, but not very ‘efficient’, according to Mignini, for Ricci’s purposes in his mission to China³⁰. Let’s remember that the notion of Christian charity refers to the love of God, which then leads to love of others. Friendship provides, for Aquinas, the paradigm through which the theological virtue of charity can be best conceptualized. Charity is a friendship involving love towards God and all rational beings capable of loving him³¹. On the other hand, the connotation of ‘secular’ comes from Ricci’s treatise’ humanistic hue and the resort to the Western classics. In this direction, it is worth citing Jack Goody and his reflections on the ‘uniqueness’ of the Italian Renaissance (unique from a historical standpoint, not sociologically). According to Goody, the feature of the European Renaissance that marks it out is that, in looking back, it did so to texts from the classical period, which were certainly not in the Christian nor even Abrahamistic tradition but were often more secular, certainly pagan. In other words, by looking back they were not conserving medieval culture but jumping over the restrictions placed upon them by the earlier religious creed to one with a very different emphasis³². But we have to apply a circular reasoning here. Ricci’s leap backward to the Western classics leads us to the fact that his attempt to adapt Christianity to Confucianism was not motivated by the religious values of the latter but by its non-religious character. And this is absolutely true. If Confucianism is defined as a ‘secular

²⁶ Furthermore, questioning the distinction between ruler and subject, Li Zhi, among others, would address the common people as his audience, thus threatening the social and political order as a whole; See Jacques Gernet, ‘Gli ambienti intellettuali cinesi all’epoca del Ricci’, in *Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi Ricciani*, Macerata, Roma, 22-25 Ottobre 1982, ps. 101-121, ps. 109-110.

²⁷ Huang Wenshu, 黄文树, 李贽与利玛窦的友谊及其 [友论] 之比较, 玄奘佛学研究, p. 130-131.

²⁸ Jiang, Jin, “Heresy and Persecution in Late Ming Society: Reinterpreting the Case of Li Zhi”, *Late Imperial China*, Volume 22, Number 2, December 2001, pp. 1-34, pp. 15-29.

²⁹ Huang Wenshu, 黄文树, 李贽与利玛窦的友谊及其 [友论] 之比较, 玄奘佛学研究, p. 137.

³⁰ Cf. Filippo Mignini, Matteo Ricci, *Dell’Amicizia*, A cura di Filippo Mignini, p. 24.

³¹ Cf. Daniel Schwartz, *Aquinas on Friendship*, Birmingham, Aston University. Print publication date: 2007. Published by Oxford Scholarship Online: May 2008 [consulted on 1 September 2011], p. 5. The autor stresses the fact that Aquinas is not the first theologian to treat charity as a form of friendship, yet it does seem that it is his original contribution to bring charity firmly into the Aristotelian understanding of friendship.

³² Jack Goody, *Renaissances: the one or the many?* Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2010, p. 255.

religion', Ricci was among the very first ones to forge such a definition³³. But he conceived the Confucian books as a means to convey doctrine. In a letter to Father General Claudio Acquaviva, Ricci explains that students have to master the Four Books in order to pass the exams to become imperial officers. He refers to those books as *tetrabiblio*. The candidates do not have to know them all, but choose one, and thus will be asked questions on the chosen topic he has to know very well. But, Ricci says, someone had to recite them all to the Jesuits, because

...we want to prove all things of our doctrine with their books³⁴.

Timothy Billings underscores the secular essence of Ricci's treatise, as he mentions 'God' in only two of the one hundred maxims on friendship (maxims 16 and 56). Following David Mungello, he states that this is part of Ricci's strategic accommodation, which adapts the practices and teachings of Christianity as much as possible to local cultures without losing the essence of the doctrine. But, still, this is not enough to define Ricci's *Jiaoyou lun*, especially when such a definition seems to follow a quantitative criterion, i.e. how many maxims address the notion of 'God'. Here I state, and this is my contention, that these views overlook core aspects of the historical context of the early Jesuit mission in China. In his search for a terminology suitable enough to bring Christianity and Confucianism together, Ricci manages to introduce in this first treatise the omnipresent Lord on High (*Shang di*) he observed in the Chinese Classics, as proof of an ancient Confucian monotheism. And some of the convert literati closest to him eventually accepted Ricci's thesis that the doctrine he expounded, the doctrine of the Lord of Heaven was, in its foundations, no other than the true doctrine of the old Confucianism³⁵.

Apart from the proof of monotheism in the Lord on High, in one of the maxims – 16 – of the two in which he mentions 'God', i.e. the Lord on High or *Shang di*, Ricci introduces friendship as a mandate of the Lord on High, something I interpret as a first attempt to introduce Christian charity into Chinese culture, i.e. in a Confucian register. According to this maxim,

Each person cannot fully complete every task, for which reason the Lord on High commanded that there be friendship in order that we might render aid to one another. If this Way were eradicated from the world, humankind would surely disintegrate into ruin³⁶.

The idea that men have to be friends and help each other because the Lord on High so commands cannot be underestimated. We must not forget the fact that Ricci regarded his *Jiaoyou lun* as 'an exercise of translation' as he so expressed it to the General Father Claudio Acquaviva in a letter from Nanchang:

Last year I wrote some sayings from *De Amicitia* in Chinese as an exercise; and chose the best of our books; and, as they were taken from several eminent authors, the literati were amazed, and in order to give it more authority I wrote a preface and gave it as a present to one of the king's relatives, who also has a title of king³⁷.

³³ It is beyond the scope of this article to address the essence of Confucianism in this direction. Cf. Julia Ching, *Confucianism and Christianity. A Comparative Study*, Tokyo, Kodansha International, 1977, Chapter one.

³⁴ "...noi vogliamo provar le cose della nostra santa fede per suoi libri ancora", Matteo Ricci to Father Acquaviva in Rome, Nanchang, 4 November, 1595, p. 207; P. Tacchi Venturi, Pietro, SJ, *Opere Storiche del P. Matteo Ricci S.I., edite a cura del Comitato per le onoranze nazionali con prolegomeni note e tavole dal P. Pietro Tacchi Ventura S.I.*, (Macerata: Stab. Tip. Giorgetti, 1911-1913), 2 vol. Hereafter *OS*.

³⁵ Jacques Gernet, *China and the Christian Impact. A Conflict of Cultures*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985, p. 109 onward.

³⁶ Matteo Ricci, *On Friendship. One Hundred Maxims for a Chinese Prince*. Translated by Timothy Billings, p. 96, maxim 16 (In Chinese: *ge ren bu neng juan gai ge shi. Gu shang di ming zhi jiao you. Yi bei ci xu chu. Ruo shi chu qi dao yu shi zhe. Ren lei bi san huai ye*).

³⁷ Matteo Ricci to Father Acquaviva in Rome, Nanchang, 13 October, 1596, *OS*, p. 226.

Consequently, considering that Ricci was offering up his first steps into writing, translation and composition in Chinese, a quantitative analysis offers nothing but misleading results. And, with regard to concepts such as ‘God’ or ‘charity’, as well as their absence in the treatise, it is a well-known fact that Ricci transmitted Christianity in a Confucian register, so we cannot define his work as secular because of their absence.

Ricci was searching, he was experimenting with a terminology to convey the idea of an only ‘God’ expressed in the Lord on High (*Shang di*) and men being friends, helping each other, according to *Shang di*’s commands. And this is one more way Ricci found to shape virtuous friendship.

Conclusion

I conclude by saying that the shaping process of virtuous friendship in Matteo Ricci’s work still welcomes further analysis of unexplored aspects: it is itself a space of confluence, not only of different traditions, but also of the process of search and adjustments the Jesuit experienced in the intense intellectual life in late Ming China.

This study focused on the complexities, using the metaphor of a winding path, of the two sides of the confluence: the European-Christian and the Chinese-Confucian. Ricci managed to forge and shape virtuous friendship in such a way that his treatise ‘On Friendship’, escapes from assessments such as ‘secular’, ‘religious’ or ‘accommodated to Confucianism’, as they stop short of capturing the essence of the piece. Historian Martin Huang states that friendship was an ambiguous concept in late imperial Chinese culture³⁸. In this vein, we could think that Ricci sharply captured this ambiguity and lack of clear-cut definition of what virtuous friendship was in Ming China.

Writing such an essay, and at such a time, was the perfect way to make friends among the elite. Matteo Ricci in particular shared a love of books with the Chinese literati, which helped to gradually expand his – as well as other missionaries’ – enterprise on the basis of a Chinese network of publishing, friendship and patronage³⁹. But Ricci was also a missionary who could not help relate – somewhat shyly – virtuous friendship with an omniscient Lord on High. When examining missionary strategies in his study on conversion, Lewis Rambo pays attention to the modes of contact involved: public, private, personal and impersonal. And friendship is regarded as one of the most personal and successful forms of contact for conversion⁴⁰. So the treatise *On Friendship* was a tool for conversion itself, and Ricci was surely aware of that fact, as he gained converts from the literati with whom he discussed friendship.

³⁸ Martin Huang, “Male Friendship in Ming China: An introduction”, in Martin Huang (Ed.), *Male Friendship in Ming China*, p. 2.

³⁹ Nicolas Standaert (ed), *Handbook of Christianity in China*, Leiden, Brill, 2001, Vol. I: 635-1800, pp. 476-77.

⁴⁰ Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, USA, Yale University Press, 1993, p. 80 onward.

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