

## *Friendship among Literati. Matteo Ricci SJ (1552–1610) in Late Ming China*

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The Italian Jesuit Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) arrived in the Ming Empire in 1583 and joined his confrère Michele Ruggieri (1543–1607) to establish a mission. It was Ruggieri who had requested the Visitor to the missions to the East, Alessandro Valignano (1539–1606), to send Ricci as his companion for the China mission. Ruggieri had arrived a few years earlier; he had visited the Canton Province in April 1580 at the time of a Portuguese trade fair. He also went to the city of Zhaoqing, in the same province, a couple of times before he returned to Macao in 1582 to meet Ricci. It was in Zhaoqing that the Jesuits built a first residence and a church, which they finished constructing in 1585. The house, as Ricci said in a letter to Father Ludovico Maselli, was frequently visited by the powerful men—*tutti i grandi*—so it was useful for establishing friendship with them.<sup>1</sup> New friends—better still if they were powerful—were essential if the first Jesuits were to remain in the Ming Empire. They would probably not replace the friends that Ricci had left in Europe, who he missed so much, but, as he told his friend Girolamo Costa in Rome in a letter dated 14th August 1599, the dream of converting the Chinese was the main reason for leaving both his country and his dear friends.

Ruggieri went back to Italy in 1589, but Ricci stayed in China until his death in 1610. During that time, he made so many friends in China that his friendships, so we may assume, became rather time-consuming. As he told his brother, Anton Maria Ricci, in a letter from Peking in late August 1608, less than two years before his death,

I have friends everywhere, so many that they will not let me live,  
and I spend the whole day in living rooms answering different  
questions, apart from the tasks I have here.<sup>2</sup>

In sum, Ricci's letters reflect how his friends—old or new, more or less powerful and influential, distant in Italy or by his side in China—were present in his life. And friendship, as a theme, inspired Ricci to write his first treatise in Chinese, *Jiaoyou lun*, usually translated into English as

1 Pietro Tacchi Venturi SJ, *Opere Storiche del P. Matteo Ricci S.I.* Comitato per le onoranze nazionali con prolegomena (Macerata: Giorgetti, 1911–1913), 2 vols; II, 64.

2 Tacchi Venturi, *Opere Storiche*, II, 376.

“On Friendship,” to convey European notions of friendship to a Chinese audience. Ricci’s inspiration was to compose a first treatise on a subject that was common to, and could bring closer, the two cultures: Chinese and European. The *Jiaoyou lun* was written when Ricci had just begun immersing himself in an intense intellectual life upon his arrival in Nanchang in 1595, a city with a strong literary tradition.

Apart from holding a key place in pre-Christian philosophy, friendship had also served as the subject of a long-running debate among European authors as to its nature and ends, as I shall show later.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, friendship was also a topic of great interest to late Ming intellectuals. In the Confucian tradition, the “five cardinal human relationships” (*wulun*) were the five bonds that men in Chinese society were to observe and foster: the relationships of husband and wife; with parents; between elder and younger brothers; between ruler and subject; and between friends. Of the five relationships in Confucianism, the fifth, friendship, was unique. The others were overtly concerned with the maintenance of China as a *guojia*, literally a “state-family”. But friendship was the only bond in society that was freely chosen; and it could be dangerous on account of its potential to create a human relationship that was not hierarchical.<sup>4</sup> During the Ming period—especially in the last century of this dynasty—friendship appears to have been celebrated with unprecedented enthusiasm. In general terms, the commercialisation of the Ming economy, and the resulting enhancement of social and geographical mobility, created both new needs and new possibilities for friendship: the blurring of traditional social boundaries—such as those between literati and merchants—tended to make Ming society less hierarchical, and thus more conducive to the cultivation of friendship among different social groups. What qualifies the late Ming as the golden age in the history of Chinese male friendship was not the fact that late Ming Chinese males were necessarily more friendly or more willing to make friends than those of other historical periods, but that their sheer eagerness for discourse on friendship and their bold and innovative rhetoric elevated friendship to a moral high ground that it had never occupied before.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, for an educated male, who was supposed to distinguish himself by mastering Confucian learning, passing the government-sponsored examinations, and advancing a career in the

3 Reginald Hyatte, *The Arts of Friendship: The Idealization of Friendship in Medieval and Early Renaissance Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 1994), 5.

4 Norman Kutcher, “The Fifth Relationship: Dangerous Friendships in the Confucian Context,” *The American Historical Review* 105, no. 5 (December 2000), 1615–1629, 1615.

5 Martin Huang, ed., *Male Friendship in Ming China* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 17.

bureaucratic world, networks of friends remained indispensable.<sup>6</sup> Outside this minority of successful candidates, friends were equally if not more important for those excluded from the imperial bureaucracy, since they were one of the main sources of help in finding career alternatives.<sup>7</sup> Over time, Ricci learned about the examination system, which gave access to positions in the imperial administration as well as the training required for the candidates to master the Four Books and the Chinese Classics.<sup>8</sup> As he explained in his account, entitled by its editor Pasquale D'Elia SJ *Storia dell' Introduzione del Cristianesimo in Cina*, the literati grounded their knowledge on Confucian doctrine, which Ricci defined as a “good moral doctrine.”<sup>9</sup> But Ricci took his interpretation of Confucianism one step further and ascribed to it a non-idolatrous gentility—opposing it to an “idolatrous” Buddhism—corresponding to his idea of Confucianism as a moral system serving to govern the Empire wisely but lacking in metaphysical or supernatural foundations. Accordingly, he explained to the Vice-Provincial of Japan, Francesco Pasio (1554-1612), in a letter dated 15 February 1609, that “even though the sect of the literati does not talk about supernatural things, in moral issues it coincides with us.”<sup>10</sup> This rendered

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6 Excluding the masses of peasants, artisans, clerks, Buddhist and Daoist priests—not to mention all women—from the licensing stage of the selection process ensured that those in the competition were a self-elected minority of young men from *literati* or merchant families, lineages, or clans with sufficient linguistic and cultural resources to invest in their male offspring. See Benjamin Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China* (California: University of California Press, 2000), 248–249.

7 Huang, *Male Friendship in Ming China*, 2–3.

8 Among the Four Books, 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's disciple Zeng zi (505–436 BCE ?), while the *Mencius* (*Meng zi*) comprises dialogues by Mencius, another pupil. They were so grouped by the thinker Zhu Xi during the Song dynasty in the eleventh century. The Five Classics—the Odes, the Documents, the Rites, the Changes, and the Spring and Autumn Annals—can only be called Confucian, according to Michael Nylan, in two senses: Confucius and his followers may have used some—but not all—of them as templates for moral instruction. And, second, early traditions ascribe to Confucius the tasks of compiling, editing, and in a few cases composing the separate parts of this repository of wisdom, although modern scholarship generally disputes those pious legends. Until late in the Song period (960–1279), the Five Classics were generally considered more essential to Confucian learning than the collection of Four Books. See Michael Nylan, *The Five “Confucian” Classics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 1–10.

9 Matteo Ricci, *Storia dell' introduzione del Cristianesimo in Cina*, in *Fonti Ricciane. Documento originali concernenti Matteo Ricci e la storia delle prime relazioni tra l' Europa e la Cina (1579–1615)*, ed. Pasquale M. D'Elia (Roma: La Libreria dello Stato, 1942–1949), 3 vols.; 1:44. Ricci began writing the history of Christianity in China in Italian, between 1608–1610, on the request of Superior General Claudio Acquaviva. After Ricci's death on 11 May 1610, the Belgian Jesuit Nicolas Trigault, who arrived in Peking in 1611, completed Ricci's manuscript in Latin and published it in Augsburg in 1615 with the title *De Christiana Expeditione apud Sinas*.

10 Tacchi Venturi, *Opere Storiche*, II, 386–87.

Confucianism compatible with Christianity at both a moral and ethical level, with the latter able to provide Confucianism with a supernatural base.<sup>11</sup> After all, the humanist education in Europe—the same Ricci had received in his hometown, Macerata, and Rome—was aimed at governing elites; its training in eloquence and its programme in literature and rhetoric as the foundation for civic life were intended to produce both intellectuals and statesmen.<sup>12</sup> This harmonious relationship between letters and politics might have inspired Ricci to draw a parallel with Confucianism on Chinese soil.

This article focuses on how friendship among the literati became one more characteristic that helped Ricci shape the portrait of the Chinese literatus that he would convey to his European audience. There is no doubt that the Jesuits—and Ricci among the very first of them—would disseminate, and act as the true interpreters of, all the information about China, of which learned Europeans made good use in the seventeenth century. The Jesuit missionaries to China often had direct and close contact with these savants—both on return visits to Europe and through correspondence from China. Breadth of learning, so prized by seventeenth-century minds, fostered the inclusion of what David Mungello calls a sometimes “exotic” interest in China within their range of interests without disrupting the non-sinological thrust of their work.<sup>13</sup> Matteo Ricci was among the first, if not *the* first, to understand the importance of ties of friendship among the Chinese literati, and this is how he communicated it to his potential European readers in his account:

It is noteworthy that these doctors, and also the bachelors, of the same year establish such a strong friendship among themselves that they become like brothers, and they help one another, and also their relatives, until their death.<sup>14</sup>

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11 This Confucian-Christian synthesis that Ricci forged was at the core of the so-called “accommodation” practiced by the China mission. In general terms, the term accommodation became central to missionology in the 1950s and 1960s, mainly based on the concept of cultural adaptation. Even though the term accommodation contributed to a great extent to Ricci’s “hagiography,” lay scholars provided different interpretations of this concept. For instance, David Mungello has described Ricci’s method of accommodation as “intellectually flavoured Christianity”, and part of this flavouring must be seen as Confucianism. See David Mungello, *Curious Land. Jesuit Accommodation and the Origin of Sinology* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1985), 73.

12 Anthony Grafton and Lisa Jardine, *From Humanism to the Humanities. Education and the Liberal Arts in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century Europe* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), xi-xiii; 4–28.

13 Mungello, *Curious Land*, 14.

14 Matteo Ricci, *Storia dell’introduzione del Cristianesimo in Cina*, 1:49. Translation by the author. By “doctors”—*dottori* in Italian—Ricci is referring to the *jin shi*, the highest degree that candidates could obtain through the civil service examination system.

As I aim to show in this article, Ricci regarded friendship as an attribute of the Chinese literati, and the importance of this male bonding helped him shape the notion of “literatus” in Ming China that he communicated to a European readership. Ricci introduced the “law” of the literati as the oldest in China and maintains that it “explains why it has always had control of the government, why it flourishes, why it has the most books and is the most esteemed.”<sup>15</sup> As for himself, his treatise *Jiaoyou lun*—“On Friendship”—became a first concrete step towards approaching and befriending the literati in various cities, for it opened the doors to belletristic circles and sophisticated debates. In a first section of this article, I will focus on a textual dimension, the treatise itself, as an initial—and well-aimed—approach to the literati elites, in which Ricci shaped and conveyed the notion of virtuous friendship in Chinese, in a Confucian register.

However, the networks and relationships that Ricci established with many influential scholars in the late Ming period were much more versatile, varied, and mixed than Ricci’s textual discourse on friendship would allow us to think. In order to examine this aspect, the focus of this essay’s second section lies on the relationships Ricci established with the Chinese literati and scholar-officials in different cities, who came from diverse intellectual traditions and scholarly backgrounds.<sup>16</sup> In turn, Ricci became a versatile friend to them, ably adopting “multiple identities” and roles.<sup>17</sup> Interestingly, regardless all these different experiences of friendship, Ricci shaped a very clear-cut definition of a Chinese literatus for a European audience. Indeed, as I will discuss in this article, Ricci’s network of friends, and the different types of friendship he established with learned men from different backgrounds in the late Ming period, did not stop him from portraying the Chinese literatus as strictly “Confucian.”

The third and last section of this essay is dedicated to some concluding remarks and reflections on Ricci’s notions and choices of friendship.

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15 Ricci, *Storia dell’ introduzione del Cristianesimo in Cina*, I, 115.

16 Simply put, the basic distinction between literati and scholar-officials was that, unlike the scholar-officials, the literati were those who had failed to pass the first level of examinations or refused to take it. However, they were erudite people, hence the attribute of “literati.” See Nicolas Standaert, ed., *Handbook of Christianity in China*, vol. 1, 635–1800 (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 389.

17 Here I quote Antonella Romano, who refers to the Jesuits’ “multiple identities” as the result of local mediations among diverse agents acting in different contexts, rather than the result of deliberately created internal policies, controlled from the upper echelons of the Society of Jesus. In sum, the learned missionary is more a product of permanent negotiations between individuals and their strategies in local contexts. See Antonella Romano, “Multiple identities, conflicting duties and fragmented pictures: the case of the Jesuits,” in *Le monde est une peinture. Jesuitische Identität und die Rolle der Bilder*, eds. Elisabeth Oy-Marra and Volker R. Remmert (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2011), 45–69.

### Literary friendship: Matteo Ricci's *Jiaoyou lun* (1595)

Many scholars agree that Ricci's *Jiaoyou lun* is based on Andreas Eborensis's *Sententiae et Exempla, ex probatissimis quibusque scriptoribus collecta et per locos communes digesta*. [Collected sayings and anecdotes by the most esteemed writers digested into common places.]<sup>18</sup> The *Sententiae* comprises a collection of aphorisms borrowed from Aristotle, Cicero, Seneca, Plutarch, Erasmus, Herodotus, Augustine, Ambrose and Chrysostomus, among others. However, they disagree on whether or not Ricci took this book with him to China.<sup>19</sup> The translator of the *Jiaoyou lun* into English, Timothy Billings, observes that non-Chinese scholars have tended to view Ricci's treatise as a Chinese translation of European originals, including works by such familiar authors as those mentioned above. Instead, Chinese scholars have focused on the content of this writing by also considering its connections with the ideas on friendship from the Confucian tradition, taking both paths—i.e. European and Confucian/Chinese—at once, or at least in turn.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, this could hardly apply to the Chinese scholar Fang Hao and his detailed analysis of Ricci's *Jiaoyou lun* and its western sources. Fang Hao has identified every maxim in Ricci's treatise with authors from western traditions, such as those of ancient Greece and Rome, and the first fathers of the Church. Among them are Cicero, Socrates, Diogenes, Seneca, Pliny, Plutarch, Saint Augustine, Saint Ambrosius, Erasmus and Casiodorus, all named in phonetic transcription in Chinese.<sup>21</sup>

One of the many works that influenced Ricci's writing is Cicero's *Laelius*, which places great stress on the bond between friendship and virtue.<sup>22</sup> Cicero played a leading

18 Andreas Eborensis (original name, Andrea de Rêsende, 1498–1573), born in Eborac, was a well-known Portuguese Latinist who had studied at various European universities and taught at Lisbon and Coimbra.

19 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 Resênde as a kind of "master text" for his treatise on friendship, for the following reasons. First, because De Resênde's work was in the Beitang Church in Beijing; second, its popularity is proven by its numerous reprints in the main European cities; and, finally, because of its prestige within the Society of Jesus. See Matteo Ricci, *Storia*, I, 368–69, note 1. Jonathan Spence is not so certain that Matteo Ricci could have taken De Resende's work with him, for the Beitang edition of the 1590 Paris version could be a subsequent import; see Jonathan Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* (New York: Penguin, 1984), 142; 295 note 27.

20 Matteo Ricci, *On Friendship: One Hundred Maxims for a Chinese Prince*, trans. Timothy Billings (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 19–20. All translations of Ricci's Chinese texts in this essay will quote from Billings's renderings unless otherwise indicated.

21 Fang Hao 方豪, *Liushi ziding gao* 方豪六十自定稿. [Collected Works of Maurus Fang Hao] (Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju 臺灣學生書局), 1969, 利瑪竇「交友論」新研, 下冊, 1857–1871.

22 Among works that stress Cicero's influence on the *Jiaoyou lun*, see Joseph Dehergne, "Les Sources du Kiao Yeou Luen ou Traité de l'Amitié de Ricci," *Recherches de Science Religieuse* 72 (1984): 51–58. Dehergne mainly focuses on the similarity of the contents of Ricci's treatise and Cicero's *Laelius*. See also Jonathan Spence, "Matteo Ricci and the Ascent to Peking," in *East Meets West: The Jesuits in China, 1582–1773*, eds. Charles E. Ronan and Bonnie Oh (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1988), 3–18.

role in the curricula in the Jesuit colleges. Education in these schools, starting with the Roman College, was shaped according to the *Ratio Studiorum*—literally, Plan of Studies. As John O'Malley shows, perhaps the most important change the schools brought to the Society was a new kind and degree of engagement with culture beyond the traditionally clerical subjects of philosophy and theology, and much of what they taught related only indirectly to the Christian religion as such.<sup>23</sup> The *Ratio* included a systematic study of ancient Roman and Greek authors, and Ricci's emphasis on Cicero reflects the pre-eminence of this Latin author in the *Ratio*, which reached its final form in 1599. Cicero was the model of style and elegance; his eloquence and grace was expected to be emulated in the grammar classes at various levels, and in the rhetoric class.<sup>24</sup> Cicero's *Laelius* 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. As Laelius says to Scaevola, friendship—especially 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 exist.<sup>25</sup>

Ricci's treatise drew on various sources in order to shape virtuous friendship, a theme expressed in different maxims of his treatise.<sup>26</sup> Confucian tradition construed friendship as a relationship that would result in self-cultivation, a point of view epitomized in some of Confucius's *Analects*, the most famous statements on friendship, which we can see reflected in Ricci's *Jiaoyou lun*. Maybe no scholar could write on friendship in China without quoting the lines that open Confucius's *Analects*:

The Master said: Is it not pleasant to learn with a constant perseverance and application? Is it not delightful to have friends coming from distant quarters? Is he not a man of complete virtue, he who feels no discomposure though men may take no note of him? (1:1).<sup>27</sup>

23 John O'Malley, *The First Jesuits* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 241.

24 Robert Maryks, *St. Cicero and the Jesuits: The Influence of the Liberal Arts on the Adoption of Moral Probabilism* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 89–93. See also Andrea Battistini, "I Manuali di Retorica dei Gesuiti," in *La "Ratio Studiorum": modelli culturali e pratiche educative dei Gesuiti in Italia tra Cinque e Seicento*, ed. Gian Paolo Brizzi (Rome, Bulzoni Editore, 1981), 77–120.

25 Marcus Tullius Cicero, *Cicero de Amicitia (On Friendship) and Scipio's Dream. Translated with an introduction and notes by Andrew P. Peabody* (Boston: Little Brown, 1884), 17. <http://www.archive.org/details/cu31924074466651> [Accessed on 01. September 2011].

26 See, for instance, maxims 18, 30, 46, 61, 70, and 90.

27 *The Chinese Classics*, ed. James Legge, vol. 1, *Confucian Analects* (Project Gutenberg, 2003), 2. [http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/readfile?fk\\_files=1235955&pageno=2](http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/readfile?fk_files=1235955&pageno=2) [Accessed on 07. December 2013].

Ricci indeed gained insight into the connections between friendship and learning, and friendship and self-cultivation. Furthermore, he artfully captured key elements of the Confucian moral universe, i.e. the difference between the *jun zi*, which can be translated as gentleman, and the *xiao ren*, which can be translated as petty man, both so-conceived in a moral sense. The *jun zi* is a moral man searching for virtue, as opposed to the petty man's aim of satisfying his physical needs and desires, as in the *Analects*:

The Master said: the superior man thinks of virtue; the small man thinks of comfort. The superior man thinks of the sanctions of the law; the small man thinks of favours which he may receive (4:11).<sup>28</sup>

Ricci composed a maxim which, we may think, reflects two different kinds of friendship, by directly using the language from the *Analects*. According to his nature, the gentleman is always motivated by virtue, unlike the petty man:

The honourable 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 ease.<sup>29</sup>

Flattery, and the figure of the flatterer, became another point of confluence that Ricci saw in both traditions. On the European side, we may hear the voice of Plutarch, who reflects on how to distinguish between a flatterer and a true friend. The flatterer does not apply himself to virtue, and his affection is insincere; without regard to doing those he flatters any good, he only aims to please them. Moreover, the flatterer turns vice into virtue in that

...he uses his frank reprehension in vain and frivolous things, and never in those sins and gross faults which are indeed blameworthy: so that this manner of reprehension is a kind of soothing them [men] up and lulling them asleep in their notorious vices.<sup>30</sup>

28 *Confucian Analects*, 12. The terms chosen by James Legge, “superior man” *jun zi* 君子—always understood in a moral sense—and “small man” *xiao ren* 小人, are kept for the sake of consistency in his English translation of this work, but in the body text the translations “gentleman” and “petty man” have been used.

29 *Jun zi zhi jiao you nan, xiao ren zhi jiaou you yi. Nan he zhe nan san, yi he zhe san ye* [君子之交友難，小人之交友易。難合者難散，易合者散也]. Ricci, *On Friendship*, 117, maxim 62.

30 *Plutarch's Moralia: twenty essays*, trans. Philemon Holland (London: Dent, 1911), 36–37. <https://archive.org/stream/plutarchsmoralia00plutuoft#page/36/mode/2up> [Accessed on 01. May 2014].

Let us now see what Ricci's says on the subject in his *Jiaoyou lun*:

These days, since friends do not speak up and flatterers are glib, only by keeping my enemies am I able to hear sincere words.<sup>31</sup>

Clearly, the flatterer is not a true friend:

Flattering a friend is no friendship, but merely thievery, stealing its name and usurping it.<sup>32</sup>

And the flatterer is also devious:

The intention of the doctor is to use bitter medicine to cure a person's sickness; the goal of the flattering friend is to use sweet words to seek a person's wealth.<sup>33</sup>

Confucius's *Analects* also make reference to the figure of the flatterer as someone "crafty" and skilful with words, unlike the sincere friend:

The Master said: there are three friendships which are advantageous, and three which are injurious. Friendship with the upright; friendship with the sincere; and friendship with the man of much observation [...] these are advantageous. Friendship with the man of specious airs, friendship with the insinuatingly soft; and friendship with the glib-tongued: [...] these are injurious (16:4).<sup>34</sup>

Ricci avoided the Christian notion of "flattering" as sin, more specifically as in Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*, II—II, *quaestio* 115, Art. 2, "Whether Flattery is a mortal sin?"<sup>35</sup>

31 *Jin ye you ji mei yan, er chanyu zhe zhe wei ning, ze wei cun chouren, yi wo wen zhen yu yi* [今也友既沒言，而諛諛者為佞，則惟存仇人，以我聞真語矣]. Maxim 38, translation by the author.

32 *Chanyu you, fei you, nai tou zhe, tou qi ming er jian zhi er* [諛諛友，非友，乃偷者，偷其名而僭之耳]. Maxim 82, translation by the author.

33 *Yi shi zhi yi, yi ku yao chou ren bing chan you zhi xiang, yi gan yang gan ren cai* [醫士之意，以苦藥瘳人病諛友之向，以甘言干人財]. Ricci, *On Friendship*, 126, maxim 85.

34 "Glib-tongued" is Legge's translation of *ning* 佞. *Confucian Analects*, 60. [http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/readfile?fk\\_files=1235955&pageno=60](http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/readfile?fk_files=1235955&pageno=60) [Accessed on 01. May 2014].

35 Flattery can be a mortal sin when it is contrary to charity, and flattery is contrary to charity—and mortal sin—in three ways: 1) When a man praises another man's sin; 2) By reason of the intention, as when one man flatters another, so that by deceiving him he may injure him in body or soul; 3) By way of occasion, as when the praise of a flatterer, even without his intending it, becomes to another an occasion of sin. If, however, one man flatters another from the mere craving to please others, or again in order to avoid some evil, or to acquire something in case of necessity, this is not contrary to charity. Consequently it is not a mortal but a venial sin. See Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica*, trans. English Dominican Province (Westminster: Christian Classics, 1981), II-II, q. 115. <http://www.egs.edu/library/thomas-aquinas/articles/summa-theologica-part-ii-ii-secunda-secundae-translated-by-fathers-of-the-english-dominican-province/treatise-on-the-cardinal-virtues-qq-47-170/question-115of-flattery/> [Accessed on 02. May 2014].

It seems that in his search for agreements with the Confucian tradition regarding flattery, Ricci avoided these further references to the *adulatio*, which he mainly translated into Chinese as *chanyu* 諂諛 or *ning* 佞.<sup>36</sup>

The *ning ren* 佞人 were actually not advisable as entourage of rulers because, unlike true friends, they are obsequious and repeat exactly what the prince says so as to gain advantages.<sup>37</sup>

What we can definitely confirm is how wisely Ricci combined the themes and topics regarding friendship found in both traditions, as well as his omission of those that were not so easy to share, translate and explain. In this regard, on the Confucian side, in his treatise the Jesuit omitted the five relationships and the way in which friendship fitted into that broader picture. It was his friend, the Chinese literatus—and convert—Feng Yingjin (1555–1601) who made reference to the five basic human relationships (*wulun*) in the preface he penned to *Jiaoyou lun* in the reprint of 1601.<sup>38</sup> And, actually, one of the most serious criticisms against the Jesuits was that they did not enter into the *wulun*: they did not marry, therefore they neglected the relationship of husband and wife (*fu fu*); they left home, and thus their relationships with their parents (*fu mu*) and brothers (*xiong di*) were broken; and by leaving their country they lost their relationship with their ruler (*jun chen*), so that only relationships with friends (*peng you*) remained.<sup>39</sup> Of course, Ricci knew about the *wulun*, the five cardinal relationships in China, and referred to them in his account as part of the “law” of the literati, i.e. Confucianism. Here we may think of two reasons

36 I consulted the following version of Ricci's *Jiaoyou lun* in Chinese: 交友論, *Jiaoyou lun*, in Li Zhizao 李之藻, *Tianxue chuhan* 天主初函 [1629], vol. 1, (Taipei shi 臺北市: Taiwan xuesheng shuju 臺灣學生書局, 1965). Even though there are other maxims and characters used by Ricci to translate “flattering” and “flatterer,” I believe that in Ricci's treatise *chan yu* 諂諛 and *ning* 佞 are used when indirectly conveying the idea of “flattery”—*adulatio*—as mortal sin. In other maxims, like 71: “If you cannot rely on me as a friend, then we are both flatterers.” *Er bu de yong wo wei you, er jun wei wu mei zhe* [爾不得用我為友，而均為嫵眉者], Timothy Billings translates *wu mei zhe* 嫵眉者 as “flatterers,” but I think that here the characters are chosen to refer to words that are charming and sweet without being *adulatio*. See Ricci, *On Friendship*, 122, maxim 71. In any case, this translation is valid in the sense that it is hard to find a different term in English.

37 This can be observed in Zhang Juzheng 張居正's *The Emperor's Mirror*, *Dijian Tushuo* 帝鑑圖說, completed in 1573. The Senior Grand Secretary Zhang (1525–82) created this illustrated textbook on rulership for the nine-year-old Wanli emperor (r. 1572–1620), who had succeeded to the Ming throne in 1572. Zhang was the boy's chief tutor. Zhang refers to *ning ren* 佞人 under the Tang-dynasty Emperor Taizong 康太宗 (r. 626–649), typically considered to be one of the greatest emperors in Chinese history. 張居正, 帝鑑圖說, Japanese reprint of 1605, *Teikan zusetsu*, 3 冊, 前一百二十一. I thank Rudolph G. Wagner for pointing this work out to me.

38 For a translation of Feng Yingjing's Preface into Italian see Matteo Ricci, *Dell'amicizia*, ed. Filippo Mignini (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2005), 54–55.

39 Nicolas Standaert, *Yang Tingyun, Confucian and Christian in Late Ming China: his life and thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 158.

for this telling omission of the five relationships in Ricci's treatise. The first, the Jesuit did not hesitate to express his scepticism when presenting them as "typically" Chinese:

They [the literati] care so much for these five relationships which they regard as proper to men, i.e. father and son; husband and wife; lord and vassal; elder and younger brother; and between friends, thinking that the foreign kingdoms do not pay attention to these relationships.<sup>40</sup>

Moreover, one of the maxims Ricci composed for his *Jiaoyou lun* places friendship above the relationship between family members, which undermines core values of the Confucian tradition. In maxim 50, Ricci claims that

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?<sup>41</sup>

In this sentence, friendship potentially overrules the natural relationship between parents and children, and its corresponding virtue, through which any individual belongs to the world as well as mankind: filial piety. Filial piety, a virtue that contains respect for parents and ancestors, also grounds the political relationship between ruler and subject. This leads us to the second—and maybe most important—reason why Ricci might not be eager to refer to the five relationships, which is also connected to an apparently (non)"religious" aspect of the treatise. Indeed, Ricci's *Jiaoyou lun* has been regarded as a "secular" work by his translators, mainly for two reasons. 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—according to Filippo Mignini—not very "efficient" for Ricci's purposes in the China mission.<sup>42</sup> Let us remember that the notion of Christian charity refers to men's love of God, which then leads to love of others. Friendship provides, for Aquinas, the paradigm through which the theological virtue of charity can best be conceptualised. Charity is a friendship involving love towards God and all rational beings capable of

40 Ricci, *Storia dell'introduzione del Cristianesimo in Cina*, I, 120.

41 *You yu qin, wei ci chang yan, qin neng wu xiang aiqin. You zhe fou, gai qin wu ai qin, qin lun you zai* 「Chu ai hu you, qi youli yan cun hu」? [友於親，惟此長焉，親能無相愛親。友者否，蓋親無愛親，親倫猶在「除愛乎友，其友理焉存乎」]。Ricci, *On Friendship*, 111, maxim 50.

42 Ricci, *Dell'Amicizia*, 24.

loving him. In turn, among different reasons, Timothy Billings underscores the secular essence of Ricci's treatise, as he mentions the Christian God in only two of the one hundred maxims on friendship—maxims 16 and 56.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, a qualitative rather than quantitative criterion should be applied when analysing their contents. 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* 上帝—whom he saw in the Chinese Classics as proof of an ancient Confucian monotheism. Moreover Ricci construed the Confucian books as a means to convey doctrine. In a letter to the Superior General Claudio Acquaviva, Ricci explains that students have to master the Four Books in order to pass the exams to become imperial officers. The candidates do not have to know them all, he explains, but choose one, and thus are asked questions on the chosen topic they know very well. But, as Ricci says, someone had to recite them all to the Jesuits, because “we want to prove all things of our doctrine with their books.”<sup>44</sup>

Apart from the proof of monotheism in the Lord on High or *Shang di*, in one of the two maxims—number 16—in which he mentions “God,” i.e. the Lord on High, Ricci introduces friendship as a mandate from 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 run to ruin.<sup>45</sup>

In short, the idea that men have to be friends and help each other because the Lord on High so commands cannot be underestimated.

Last but not least, we must not forget that Ricci was presenting his first attempt at writing, translation and composition in Chinese. 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 aimed to transmit 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 the one and only Christian God, and used that of the Lord on High (*Shang di*) and men being friends, helping each other, according to *Shang di*'s commands. What is more, Ricci himself regarded his *Jiaoyou lun* as “an

43 Ricci, *On Friendship*, 11.

44 Tacchi Venturi, *Opere Storiche*, II, 247.

45 *Ge ren bu neng quan jin ge shi, gu shangdi ming zhi jiaoyou, yi bici xu zhu, ruo shi chu qi dao yu shi zhe, ren lei bi san huai ye* [各人不能全盡各事，故上帝命之交友，以彼此胥助，若使除其道於世者，人類必散壞也]. Ricci, *On Friendship*, 96, maxim 16.

exercise of translation,” as he expressed it to General 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 king.<sup>46</sup>

Resuming the analysis on the omission of the five relationships, it might be related to Ricci’s need to alter hierarchies and position the *Shang di* 上帝 or Lord on High at the apex, for it is Him that demands that men cherish these relationships. This is something that we can appreciate more clearly in his catechism *Tianzhu shiyi*, usually translated into English as *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*. Even though it was published in 1603, Ricci was already working on its revision in 1596.<sup>47</sup>

To sum up, in this section we have focused on a textual dimension of Ricci’s notion of friendship. As Howard Goodman and Anthony Grafton have pointed out, Ricci was a humanist and a scholar who knew how to work with texts: Confucian classics, which he mastered as the price of entrance for conversations with the Chinese elite; and western classics, which gave him the authority to offer an alternative to Confucianism.<sup>48</sup> In this sense, as Nicolas Standaert states, Ricci compared Chinese traditions with frameworks that were familiar to his European audience, who had received the same humanistic grounding as he. This comparison was also the impulse for other humanistic writings by Ricci which proclaimed wisdom from the West on the basis of sayings by “ancient saints and sages,” written explicitly for a general non-Christian readership.<sup>49</sup> Ricci also chose open literary forms to shape his notions of friendship on Chinese soil, such as the classical authors, whose writings can be characterized by an open style, essay-like texts, aphorisms or, in Ricci’s case, maxims.<sup>50</sup> Ricci’s counterparts in China were also experts in handling China’s rich textual tradition, and—as Ricci might have preferred

46 Tacchi Venturi, *Opere Storiche*, II, 226.

47 Matteo Ricci, *Tianzhu Shiyi* 天主實義, in *Tianxue chuhan* 天主初函, ed. Li Zhizao 李之藻 (Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shuju 臺灣學生書局, 1965), 589, columns I-II.

48 Howard L. Goodman and Anthony Grafton, “Ricci, the Chinese, and the Toolkits of Textualists,” *Asia Major*, Third Series 3, no. 2 (1991): 95–148, 102.

49 Nicolas Standaert, “The Transmission of Renaissance Culture in Seventeenth-Century China,” *Renaissance Studies* 17, no. 3 (2003): 367–391; 368–375.

50 Tanja Zeeb, “Moralist Concepts of Friendship: An Interplay of Stability and Dynamism,” in *Varieties of Friendship: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Social Relationships*, eds. Bernardette Descharmes, E.A. Heuser et al. (Gottingen: V&R Unipress, 2011), 77–96; 78–79.

to ignore—they were not exclusively dedicated to the exegesis of Confucian texts. In the late Ming period, Chinese scholars were very interested in Chan Buddhist texts and many of the Confucian scholars exerted a great influence on Chan Buddhism; they also had the necessary authority over the interpretation of Chan's textualized past.<sup>51</sup>

As for a definition of friendship, there is no single unanimously accepted definition of perfect friendship among the ancients in the West, and Ricci would not make an exception by providing one. While they generally agreed on its fundamental qualities of virtue, wisdom, and beneficence, they often disagreed on the definition of each of these and their value with respect to one another. Yet they generally agree on the following fundamentals: perfect friendship exists only between virtuous men who love virtue in one another for its own sake; true friends—*amici veri*—are like a single soul in two—or, sometimes, more—bodies; they have all possessions in common, and their affection is reciprocal; their characters, tastes, and opinions are in complete agreement; while growing closer to one another in intimacy, they also grow in virtue and wisdom, which benefit others besides themselves.<sup>52</sup> However, it is important to stress here that the western tradition conveyed an ideal of virtuous friendship directly connected to wisdom, which could be related to the concept Ricci found circulating in China. And Ricci did not miss the opportunity to write about it. Indeed, writing such an essay, and at such a time, was the perfect way to make friends among the literati and in belletristic circles. Last but not least, friendship was vitally necessary to the Jesuits for the printing and circulation of their works. In the Ming literary world, the reputation and circulation of books increased in proportion to the reputation of the scholars who penned prefaces and postscripts, and Ricci enhanced the scholarly reputation he gained through his Chinese publications with the assistance and contributions of prestigious literati.<sup>53</sup>

### Friendship among (the many kinds of) literati

Ricci's friendship with the princes of the *Le'an* and *Jian'an* commanderies motivated the composition of one of the most valued gifts the Jesuit could offer: his treatise *On Friendship* (*Jiaoyou lun*), the first of his works written in Chinese. That encounter was about seizing an opportunity to write about

51 Jiang Wu, *Enlightenment in Dispute: The Reinvention of Chan Buddhism in Seventeenth-Century China* (Oxford: Oxford Scholarship online, 2008), doi: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195333572.001.0001. See especially Chapter 2 "The literati and Chan Buddhism".

52 Hyatte, *The Arts of Friendship*, 9. Translation by the author.

53 Ronnie Po-chia Hsia, *A Jesuit in the Forbidden City: Matteo Ricci, 1552–1610* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 141.

friendship or, as Ricci put it, it was about *creating* the opportunity. Ricci invented a fictional situation to explain why he wrote *On Friendship*; it was to answer the Prince of Jian'an commandery's questions—and curiosity—about European notions of friendship. It was first published without Ricci's knowledge in 1595. He explained this episode in a letter to the General of the Society of Jesus, Claudio Acquaviva (1543–1615). The literati were very interested in his *De Amicitia*, and they would ask him to show it to them, so he always had some copies at hand, however...

...one who pretended to be a friend transcribed them and, taking them to his land, a city near here, printed them under my name without telling me about it.<sup>54</sup>

Ricci arrived in late June 1595 in Nanchang, one of the centres of late Ming intellectual life and mandarin power. Soon after his arrival, Ricci noted the strong presence of private academies. Indeed, in Jiangxi province, where Nanchang is located, there were more private academies than in any other province, a total of 294 out of the 1,946 in the Ming dynasty; it supplied one of the highest numbers of *jinshi* (doctor's) degree holders.<sup>55</sup> And in Nanchang Ricci was also introduced to the world of discussion circles, where he began to appreciate that Confucianism was not a monolithic orthodoxy but a living doctrine with a variety of conflicting tendencies.<sup>56</sup> He narrates several experiences in his *Storia*. In fact, in addition to the friendship Ricci established with a prince, shortly afterwards in his account he claims to have established friendship with “another type of literati,” “the satraps of that land”—*i satrapi di quella terra*—who were devoted to spreading the true law—*la vera legge*—in their confraternities.<sup>57</sup> Such was the case of a man in his seventies, Zhang Huang (1527–1608), who taught many disciples in the city of Donghu, currently Hebei. In 1592 Zhang Huang was elected president of the famous Academy of the White Deer (*Bailudong shuyuan*). He was impressed by Ricci's virtue and earnestness. Indeed, even though Ricci was always exhausted by the never-ending flow of guests he received at his residence, with no time left for study, he did not take up Zhang Huang's suggestion to order his servants to say that he was not at home. Ricci rejected lying as “not virtuous” and forbidden for men of God.<sup>58</sup> He must

54 Tacchi Venturi, *Opere Storiche*, II, 226.

55 Hsia, *A Jesuit in the Forbidden City*, 149.

56 Paul Rule, *K'ung-tzu or Confucius? The Jesuit Interpretation of Confucianism* (Australia: Allen and Unwin, 1986), 22.

57 Ricci, *Storia dell'Introduzione del Cristianesimo in Cina*, I, 371.

58 Wenshu Huang, 黃文書, 陽明後學於利瑪竇的交往及其函義, 漢學研究第27卷第3期 (民國98年9月), 131.

have found this anecdote significant enough that he told it to the General of the Society of Jesus, Claudio Acquaviva, in a letter of November 1595, explaining to him that the old Zhang Huang acknowledged that in that land “they would tell a lie at every step—*ad ogni passo*—without scruples.”<sup>59</sup> Ricci often made reference to the Chinese habit of telling lies, and he actually saw it as an obstacle to true friendship, as he expressed in his account:

There is no doubt of [...] how blossoming insincerity and lies are in this kingdom, even among learned and noble men, as well as literati. It is because of this that nobody trusts anyone here, it being a realm of suspicion, not only among friends but also among close relatives, between brothers, father and son, and nobody can be trusted. And everything among them is about an external politeness, and beautiful words, without true friendship and love coming from inside.<sup>60</sup>

In 1598 Ricci left Nanchang and stopped at Nanjing. He arrived in Beijing, the capital city of the Empire, that same year. But it was a bad time because hostilities had broken out in Korea, so Ricci returned to Nanjing, where he set up a residence in February 1599. A very influential man in that city, Zhu Shilu, helped the Jesuits to settle down there, providing them with a licence. As Zhu himself said, he was a very sick man, for “of all the ailments, I have had them all.”<sup>61</sup> As Ricci narrates in his *Storia*, Zhu liked the *Jiaoyou lun* very much. He was very active in the literary and philosophical debating assemblies, the *jiang xue*, where the literati would discuss “things of virtue.”<sup>62</sup> In sum, in this city Ricci acquired a new group of friends and students, and was warmly greeted by the mandarins. It was also here that Ricci came into contact for the first time with sophisticated exponents of Buddhist philosophy, some of them literati who belonged to the Wang Yangming School.<sup>63</sup> Zhu himself had composed a booklet, *Zhuzi Xiaoyan*, under the influence of thinker Wang Yang Ming.

59 Tacchi Venturi, *Opere Storiche*, II: 212.

60 Ricci, *Storia dell'introduzione del Cristianesimo in Cina*, I, 101. Translation by the author.

61 Huang, 黄文書, 陽明後學於利瑪竇的交往及其函義, 139.

62 Ricci, *Storia dell'introduzione del Cristianesimo in Cina*, II, 46.

63 Neo-Confucianism has traditionally been divided into two branches. One is the Cheng-Zhu tradition, after its leading exponents Cheng Yi (1033–1107) and Zhu Xi (1130–1200), which is often described as “rationalistic”; it is also called the School of Principle. The second tradition or school is “Lu-Wang Neo-Confucianism,” named after its two leading representatives: Lu Xiang Shan (1139–1193) and Wang Yangming (1472–1529), also called the *xin xue* or School of Mind. Ricci was familiar with the Cheng-Zhu school, but seemed to show little awareness of the Lu-Wang branch. It is worthwhile mentioning that the term “Neo-Confucianism” does not exist in Chinese; it is derived from a phase of regeneration from the fount of Confucius referred to in the term *Dao tong*, i.e. “transmission of the true way.” See Mungello, *Curious Land*, 60.

In Nanjing, Ricci befriended literati who belonged to this school, such as Jiao Hong (1541–1620). In his *Storia*, Ricci introduced him as a *zhangyuan*—one who had obtained the first position among three hundred candidates to become doctors in his year—’who was engaged in preaching the three sects in China, which he himself practised.’<sup>64</sup> Here, Ricci is referring to the Three Teachings, the *Sanjiao*, i.e. Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism, all in one, which attracted some of the late sixteenth-century intellectuals associated with what became known as the Taizhou School. The goal of their philosophical efforts was to their way into an inner essence, which, once attained, rendered the distinctions between Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism insignificant.<sup>65</sup> However, over time, Ricci would grow hostile to these intellectual traditions; but his rejection was less based on a profound knowledge of its main tenets than in the “idolatrous” nature he ascribed to them, especially to Buddhism.

In Jiao Hong’s view, learning cannot be a lonely quest. Jiao Hong’s emphasis on the role of friends in learning embodies both the traditional Confucian concern for friendship and the heightened importance that it received in the *Taizhou* school. Seemingly quoting Matteo Ricci, Jiao Hong said: “Friends are my second self.”<sup>66</sup> Indeed, this is the opening maxim of Ricci’s *Jiaoyou lun*, clearly based on Aristotle’s *Ethics*. Let us 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 a second self.<sup>67</sup>

64 Ricci, *Storia dell'introduzione del Cristianesimo in Cina*, II, 65.

65 Timothy Brook, “Rethinking Syncretism: The Unity of the Three Teachings and their Joint Worship in Late-Imperial China,” *Journal of Chinese Religions* 21, no. 1 (1993):13–44; 19–20.

66 According to Edward Chien, even though the mere emphasis on teachers and friends is not necessarily Confucian, Jiao Hong’s evaluation of teachers and friends is different from that of the Buddhists. In Jiao Hong’s frame of reference, the teacher does not command as much authority as a Chan (Buddhist) master. Moreover, he bears a relationship to the student which, although highly personal, may or may not be informal. In fact, according to Jiao Hong, the teacher need not be any person in particular, but can be anybody anywhere. He said “The passers by in the streets are all my teachers.” As Chien states, such a concept of the teacher contains a strong element of egalitarianism, which had been growing in the Wang Yangming school of Mind, especially among Jiao Hong’s fellow members of the *Taizhou* school. And it can also be traced to Confucius, who declared in the *Analec*s, 7:2, “When I walk along with two others, they may serve me as my teachers.” See Edward T. Ch’ien, *Chiao Hung and the Restructuring of Neo-Confucianism in the Late Ming* (New York: Columbia University Press), 228.

67 Aristotle, *Aristotle’s Ethics and Politics, comprising his Practical Philosophy, translated from the Greek. Illustrated with introductions and notes; the Critical History of His Life; and a New Analysis of his Speculative Works; by John Gillies, LL.D., in two volumes* (London: printed for A. Strahan; and T. Cadell jun. and W. Davies, 1797), 363. <https://archive.org/stream/aristotlesethics01aris#page/362/mode/2up> [Accessed on 20. June 2011].

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 myself.<sup>68</sup>

And here lies one of the features of the classical concepts of friendship, i.e. the impact of friendship on identity formation and self-knowledge. For Aristotle, this otherness of the other/friend is exactly the factor that contributes to one's self-knowledge.<sup>69</sup>

Resuming our story, Ricci narrates that Jiao Hong was hosting one of the “most famous men of our times,” Li Zhi (1527–1602), who “shaved his head and lived like a *he shang*,” i.e. Buddhist monk. And, “because he was of great erudition in their letters and science, and he was 70 years old, he had earned great fame and had many disciples.”<sup>70</sup> Ricci narrates that these two literati welcomed him warmly, especially Li Zhi, who had an arrogant attitude, not receiving high mandarins nor paying visits to them. But Ricci says in the third person that:

when the Father, according to their customs, paid a visit to him, he [Li Zhi] received him together with literati of his entourage and discussed many things about the law [he preached], even though [Li Zhi] did not want to confute nor contradict the Father; on the contrary, he said that their law was true.<sup>71</sup>

Li Zhi was accused of pursuing friendship with no regard for his family and kinsmen. When he felt he had fulfilled his family duties, he sent his family to another city and concentrated on the learning of the Way. Still surrounded by literati friends and enjoying their patronage, he longed to travel across the land, enjoying nature, friendship, and intellectual companionship. He subscribed to controversial and, most importantly, “subversive” ideas—from the viewpoint of orthodox Confucianism opposed to a strong influence of Buddhism—from the Wang Yangming school, and became a “dangerous character” in late Ming society.<sup>72</sup> Li Zhi had made some copies of Ricci's

68 *Wu you fei ta, ji wo zhi ban, nai di er wo ye: gu dang shi you ru ji yan* [吾友非他，即我之半，乃第二我也；故當視友如己焉]. Ricci, *On Friendship*, 91, maxim 1.

69 See Zeeb, “Moralist Concepts of Friendship,” 88.

70 Ricci, *Storia dell'introduzione del Cristianesimo in Cina*, II, 67.

71 Ricci, *Storia dell'introduzione del Cristianesimo in Cina*, II, 68.

72 Jiang, Jin, “Heresy and Persecution in Late Ming Society: Reinterpreting the Case of Li Zhi,” in *Late Imperial China* 22, no. 2 (December 2001): 1–34; 15–29.

*Jiaoyou lun* for his disciples, and had in fact himself composed a piece on friendship. But he was at odds regarding the true purpose of Ricci's visit to China, declaring:

I have met three times with him [Ricci] already and I am still not sure what he came for. Maybe to study the Book of Changes, or Confucius, but I am afraid those are not the reasons.<sup>73</sup>

Li Zhi also composed a poem for Ricci, included in his "A book to burn," *Fen Shu*, in which he characterizes Ricci as a "mountain recluse," a *shanren*.<sup>74</sup> The term *shanren* refers to a Daoist sage, usually living in seclusion or poverty, often against the Confucian norm. As Haun Saussy has pointed out, the language used by contemporary and near-contemporary Chinese to describe Ricci has definite patterns of its own, to which nothing on the European side corresponds. Ricci was a social man; he enjoyed his conversations with Chinese intellectuals, and discreetly boasted in his journals of the poems dedicated to him by his learned friends. One such piece of occasional verse has been preserved in Li's *Fen shu*.<sup>75</sup> As for the different—quoting Saussy—"Chinese Ricci," the English translator of the *Jiaoyou lun*, Timothy Billings, draws attention to an essential difference between the two extant manuscripts of Ricci's *Jiaoyou lun*. One of these is conserved in the archives of the Pontificia Università Gregoriana, apparently dating to the late sixteenth century; it contains an Italian translation of only seventy-six of the full one hundred maxims, all written in a single unidentified hand that is certainly not Ricci's. A second manuscript was discovered in Frederick North's—Earl of Guilford—collection at the turn of the millennium, and currently forms part of the British Library manuscript collection (BL). This one is written in Ricci's own distinctive hand, and it includes both the Chinese text and Ricci's own Italian translation.<sup>76</sup> Unlike the manuscript at the Pontificia

73 Huang, 黄文書, 陽明後學於利瑪竇的交往及其函義, 27.

74 Li Zhi zhu 李贄著, *Fen shu* 焚書. Xu Fen shu 續焚書, (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中華書局, 1975) 二四七.

75 Saussy makes various references to the "Chinese Ricci," like the identification that Li Zhi establishes with a fish that turns into a bird, travelling from one end of the world to the opposite, inspired by the opening lines of the *Zhuangzi*, one of the foundational texts of the Daoist tradition. Saussy views the echo of the *Zhuangzi* as "strategic," in that it might help Ricci establish himself in the world of Chinese letters; see Haun Saussy, "Matteo Ricci the Daoist." (Paper presented at the Conference *Matteo Ricci Four Hundred Years After*, City University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, October 2001).

76 I have consulted these two manuscripts of Ricci's *On Friendship (Jiaoyou lun)*. The first from 1595–1596 held in the British Library (Add. 8803), and the manuscript at the Pontificia Università Gregoriana (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. See Ricci, *Dell' Amicizia*, 30–33.

Università Gregoriana, it contains one hundred maxims. Sometime between 1596 and its republication in the edition of 1599—now lost—or 1601—the earliest extant, Ricci decided to add twenty-four new maxims to bring the total up to a perfect hundred. As Billing states, the most fascinating single feature of the BL manuscript as an early draft of the essay is the way that Ricci identifies himself in the colophon, which reads “Compiled by the mountain recluse *shanren* from the kingdoms of the Far West, *Li Madou*”. From the references to this term on the previous page, *shanren* also refers to a particular type of sage and enjoyed great popularity as a self-designation among freethinking literati in the late Ming.<sup>77</sup> In the copy belonging to one of Ricci’s closest friends, Feng Yinjing, and in the edition of 1601 that he penned, later used by Li Zhizao for the standard 1629 collection of *First Writings of Heavenly Studies*, the colophon reads “Compiled by the moral scholar *xiu shi* from the Great Western Ocean, *Li Madou*,” where the term *xiu shi* suggests a scholar—a Confucian scholar—in training who is devoted to moral self-cultivation, thus revealing two slightly different versions of Ricci’s identity. Indeed, the BL manuscript of 1595–96 records Ricci’s short-lived attempt to fashion his public identity as a *shanren*, or the popular late Ming version of a Daoist sage, before his self-fashioning as a Confucian scholar. However, I should observe one last thing: in the Italian translations in both manuscripts, Ricci introduces himself as a “philosopher.”

Over time, Ricci became acquainted with literati who were not satisfied with the current Neo-Confucianism, since they considered it had become too impregnated with Buddhism. These dissenting literati became part of Ricci’s closest circle until his death in 1610. They rebuked the Neo-Confucian tradition, which reinterpreted the Classics through moral intuition rather than through learning. Among these literati we can find those prominent scholar-officials who came to be called “the pillars of the Church”: Xu Guanqi (1562–1633), baptized in 1601, Li Zhizao (1557–1630), baptized in 1610, and Yang Tingyun (1557–1627), baptized in 1611. They offered Matteo Ricci patronage, protection and friendship. Xu is well-known for working with Ricci on the translation of the first six books of Euclid’s *Elements*. Admitted to the Hanlin Academy, where scholars were given training for the highest offices within the empire, Xu remained in Beijing and gave very important support to the Jesuits.<sup>78</sup> Li collaborated with Ricci on various publications, including the definitive edition of the European world map and translations of European astronomy and geometry texts. Yang Tingyun was an active member of the Donglin Academy—from which a Donglin movement opposed to Emperor

77 Ricci, *On Friendship*, 13.

78 See Gregory Blue, “Xu Guangqi in the West. Early Jesuit Sources and the Construction of an Identity,” in *Statecraft and Intellectual Renewal in Late Ming China: The Cross-Cultural Synthesis of Xu Guangqi (1562–1633)*, eds. C. Jami, P. Engelfriet and G. Blue (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 19–71.

Wanli sprouted—which proclaimed a return to an “orthodox” Confucianism. The Donglin movement in general was a manifestation of a considerable crisis that Neo-Confucianism went through in late Ming China and it had a close relationship with the Catholics.<sup>79</sup>

In this section I have focused on some of the friends Ricci made, in different cities, and from different intellectual traditions and schools. And, in turn, these interactions had an effect on the way Ricci would introduce himself to—or was seen by—the Chinese literati over the years. We know by now that Matteo Ricci experienced different kinds of friendship with different types of literati. Indeed, Ricci was well aware of the complexity of the Confucian tradition itself, not to mention its diversity of practices. However, over time, he would narrow the category of “literati” to that of “Confucian,” never Buddhist or Daoist. In his account of the Jesuit mission to China, Ricci defined Confucianism as the “sect” of the literati:

That [law] 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 is Confucius [...]. This law has no idols, but only venerates heaven and the earth or the King of heaven.<sup>80</sup>

Ricci’s insight into the diversity of the intellectual world in Ming China did not divert him from this tight definition of the Chinese literatus as Confucian. To shape this definition, Ricci brought together two characteristics he observed in the Chinese literati: first, their status as scholars, well-learned men who were—among other things—dedicated to literary activities and debates; second, their duty to contribute to good stable government. However, Ricci merged and brought together two characteristics that, in imperial China, were not always harmoniously embodied in the literati: sometimes they could be in conflict; sometimes there were contradictions between the cliques of the strict officials and the literati types.<sup>81</sup> Last but not least, Ricci must certainly

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79 Erik Zürcher states that Yang Tingyun observed both differences and similarities between Confucianism and Christianity. Despite the differences, the basic assumption is that the relationship between the two doctrines is one of congruity and complementarity, provided that Confucianism is cleansed of Neo-Confucian speculations. See Erik Zürcher, “Jesuit Accommodation and the Chinese Cultural Imperative,” in *The Chinese Rites Controversy: Its History and Meaning*, ed. David Mungello (Sankt Augustin: Monumenta Serica Monograph Series XXXIII), 45. See also Standaert, *Yang Tingyun, Confucian and Christian in Late Ming China*.

80 Ricci, *Storia dell’introduzione del Cristianesimo in Cina*, I, 115. Translation by the author.

81 See Sun Weiguo, “Different Types of Scholar-Official in Sixteenth-Century China: The Interlaced Careers of Wang Shizhen and Zhang Juzheng,” *Ming Studies* 53, no. 1 (Spring 2006): 4–44.

have grasped that in imperial China no educated layman, however devoted to Buddhism, could forsake his Confucian persona, and his definition as a male depended on it. Confucianism was thus both his gender identification and his mark of social power.<sup>82</sup> In turn, Ricci expected the same recognition from his peer-group, and never lost his perspective of how far his own status as a European-educated Jesuit should take him on Chinese soil, as he narrated in a letter to the Superior of the China mission, Duarte de Sande, dated 29th August 1595 from Nanchang:

As suggested by the Visitor [Alessandro Valignano] and by Y. P., it has been determined that [...] in order to slowly secure and expand this mission, we make the most of any opportunity to establish a residence in another city, located in the interior part of China and, Our Lord be served, an opportunity presented to us in April 1595. A very important mandarin was passing by Shaozhou, where he was the former governor[...]. He is now based in Peking, as one of the highest authorities in the Ministry of War [...]. He brought his sick son with him [...] and when in Zhaoqing, he learned through another mandarin friend of ours about our residence in this city and [...] he told him he regarded us to be men of great virtue with knowledge of diverse sciences, so it would be easy for us to help his son recover [...]. With this information, the mandarin later called us[...]. And I went to meet with him [...] he asked us if we could give his son some medicine [...]. In this I saw a great opportunity for us to approach such a powerful mandarin, and replied to him that it could not be done in one day [...] for he was about to leave [...]. I myself wanted to go with him, because, beyond the desire to serve him and cure his son, those were also days in which I wanted to change places and go to the court in Peking, because I did not find myself well in Shaozhou [in the Canton Province], for it was an unhealthy environment, but also because, being literati ourselves, who came from such a long distance to stay in China, we wished to see the nobility of the imperial court [...]. The mandarin replied that he would take us with him.<sup>83</sup>

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82 Timothy Brook, *Praying for Power: Buddhism and the Formation of Gentry Society in Late-Ming China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press and Harvard-Yenching Institute Monograph, 1993), 188 onward. As Susan Mann has pointed out, historical studies of Chinese men “as men” have been few, at least until the last decade, which is surprising, since bonds among men in China were the key to success and survival for both rich and poor, elite and commoners. The question is: what sorts of homosocial bonds did these various sex-segregated social networks give rise to, or how they might be understood. See Susan Mann, “The Male Bond in Chinese History and Culture,” *The American Historical Review* 105, no. 5 (December 2000): 1600-1614.

83 Tacchi Venturi, *Opere Storiche*, II, 127–128. Translation by the author.

Consequently, Ricci wished to go as far as the imperial court in Peking, and so he did. An excellent reputation among the literati achieved through a mix of politics, diplomatic relations and years of study could lead him to the imperial court. In this regard, Ricci cannot be dissociated from another role that the Jesuits could play: that of the *cortigiano*, trained in the art of conversation and refined rhetoric, when reputation at court was an essential premise for the success of the Society of Jesus and its members, be it in a European court or in Peking.<sup>84</sup> Last but not least, as a missionary, Ricci was surely convinced that friendship was one of the most personal forms of contact for conversion.<sup>85</sup>

### **An Italian Jesuit and his literati friends in Ming China. When worlds do not collide.**

This article has aimed to show how friendship became one more component of the notion of the Chinese literatus that Ricci shaped throughout his years in China. Writing a treatise on friendship was a first and very important step. Indeed, the *Jiaoyou lun* embodies a textual dimension of Ricci's insight into friendship and how he formulated it on Chinese soil. As we have seen, in his treatise the Jesuit artfully matched views and notions of friendship that the European tradition shared with the Chinese/Confucian tradition, placing virtuous friendship, closely connected to wisdom, at the core of his treatise. Without being quoted, Confucius' *Analects* served as an inspiration and provided Ricci with the terminology he needed to unite the two traditions. But Ricci also found common ground regarding the negative sides of friendship, like those expressed in flattery and the figure of the flatterer as a false, self-interested friend; the opposite to true virtuous friendship. In turn, certain omissions, paradoxically, shed light on the contents of the treatise, like the five Confucian relationships — which comprise friendship—, proving how Ricci was trying to establish a different hierarchy, with the Lord on High at the apex. In this direction, the present article has also analysed how Ricci tentatively introduced certain Christian notions of friendship into his first work in Chinese, and it has made a case against scholars who have defined it as “secular.” We should always bear in mind that, in this first treatise, Ricci was experimenting with words, terms and translation. So we should not expect a polished notion of charity as Christian friendship in the treatise, but rather should observe how subtly Ricci introduces it. Discourse on friendship enabled Ricci to

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84 See Flavio Rurale, “Che sia ‘persona eminente per prudenza e grazia di conversare’” in *I Gesuiti e la Ratio Studiorum*, eds Manfred Hinz and Roberto Righi, Danilo Zardin (Rome: Bulzoni, 2004), 5.

85 Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 80.

access different networks and circles of literati and become part of them. As I have shown in this article, this textual dimension would not reflect Ricci's real experiences of friendship in China, as well as its diversity. We have also seen how Ricci might have enjoyed his "multiple identities" through the portrayals given by his friends, as in the case of Li Zhi and his *Fenshu* shows. Ricci was a scholar, who undoubtedly enjoyed participating in the intellectual debates of his time in literati associations, literary clubs, and philosophical debating assemblies. His treatise *Jiaoyou lun* confirmed his identity as a western scholar addressing the "true" Confucian literati. However, we know that this treatise did not reflect Ricci's life experience and the diversity of friendship that he cultivated. He also saw himself as a "philosopher," as per his signature in his *Jiaoyou lun* in the Italian version, but also as a mountain recluse *shanren* or a scholar *xiu shi* as in the different Chinese versions of the treatise. He could also be a *cortigiano* who wanted "to see the nobility in the imperial court in Peking." Last but not least, Ricci was a missionary, and as such he would have regarded friendship as one of the most personal forms of contact for conversion. Ironically, the more integrated Ricci became in the various networks of literati, gaining insight into their different intellectual backgrounds and traditions, the more clear-cut a definition of his main interlocutors, the literati, he would convey in his accounts and letters to his superiors, friends, confrères, and relatives in Europe. We may ask why Ricci did not opt for communicating to his European peer-group how varied, rich, and complex the intellectual world in the late Ming period, of which he was a part, really was. Instead, Ricci chose the opposite direction. It is possible that Ricci selected and combined the elements of the Chinese reality, which his potential European readership could relate to. One aspect of these elements deserves special mention: Friendship as an intellectual and elitist type of male bonding would not have been new to Ricci when he encountered it in China. Indeed, he himself came from a male universe in Europe, that of Jesuit colleges. The Society of Jesus very quickly attracted the cultural elite and their male offspring from every country in Europe to study in its schools.<sup>86</sup> Once in China, Ricci understood that Confucianism was both a gender identification and a mark of social power of the learned man.<sup>87</sup> And here we may find one reason why this Confucian essence would not only overshadow but also inspire Ricci to leave out all the nuances and complexities of the coexisting intellectual

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86 In this regard, Alan Bray has pointed out how in the West, or some parts of the West, friendship, as masculine friendship, has been no less asymmetrical than gender itself, with women entering the picture just at the margins of friendship. See Alan Bray, *The Friend* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 10–11.

87 Brook, *Praying for Power*, 188.

trends and schools in the late Ming era in his portrayal of the Chinese literatus. As we have seen throughout this article, Ricci's interpretation of Confucianism was based on his definition of it as a good moral system, meant to serve the Empire wisely but lacking in supernatural foundations. Good moral works, letters and good government were all the result of the Confucian training the literati had to go through to hold posts within the Empire. Ricci combined these elements and—we could go a step further here—turned them into a formula. And friendship and mutual help were also an attribute of the “Confucian” literati, becoming part of that formula as well. This is the kind of friendship that Ricci wanted to write about in Chinese, in his treatise, and simultaneously convey to a European audience. As for himself, Ricci adapted and redefined the political element of friendship on Chinese soil, for in his case this intellectual bonding was not related, for example, to the pursuit of an official post within the empire, to mention but one of the purposes of friendship. Instead, it was about receiving protection in order to establish and expand Jesuit residences and, more importantly, to provide stability to the ambitious enterprise of a Jesuit mission in the Ming Empire. Regardless of the complexities and contingencies of the China mission, they never deflected Ricci's attention from the things that he and the “Confucian” literati had in common: knowing about who to make friends with, and how.